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Abstract: Filmmakers started to adapt works of literature from the beginnings of cinema. For decades, many scholars who wrote about film adaptations considered them to be an inferior cultural product. It was not until the 1950s that a new perspective in adaptation studies appeared. Unlike previous decades, film and literature started to be perceived as different media with their own idiosyncrasies. Since then, several methodological approaches were developed, with the aim of providing a methodology that is suitable to study film adaptations. However, many scholars found them unproductive. From the beginning of the 21st century, new perspectives in adaptation studies have emerged and several methodological approaches have been developed. This article describes the most influential ones, emphasizing the intertextual dialogic approach and the most recent theoretical frameworks.

Keywords: Film and Literature, Adaptation, Intertextuality, Dialogism, Cultural Context

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Literature and Film Adaptation Theories: Methodological Approaches

0. Introduction

Filmmakers started to adapt works of literature from the beginnings of cinema. It is remarkable that by 1900, short adaptations of literary works had been already filmed in several countries. For instance, in Germany, Oskar Messter directed *Hänsel und Gretel* based on Brothers Grimm tale in 1897. In the United Kingdom, Walter Pfeffer Dando and William K. L. Dickson filmed Shakespeare's *King John* in 1899. In Japan in 1899, Shibata Tsunekichi directed *Momijigari*, based on a famous *kabuki* play.[1] In 1900 in France, Clément Maurice filmed Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, and in the same year in the United States, Arthur Marvin directed *Sherlock Holmes Baffled,* based on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's character.

Soon, many intellectuals began to criticize film adaptations and cinema itself. For them, literature was a genuine art – a high culture product – while film was considered as low-class mass entertainment. Cartmell and Whelehan remark that "writers and literary critics considered film adaptations as abominations, crude usurpations of literary masterpieces that threatened both literacy and the book itself" (2). Perhaps the best-known example of this hostile reaction to films is Virginia Woolf's essay *The Cinema*, published in 1926,[2] which she wrote after watching the 1920 German expressionist film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.[3] In her essay, Woolf portrays the spectators as modern barbarians when stating that:

> People say that the savage no longer exists in us, that we are at the fag end of civilization, that everything has been said already, and that it is too late to be ambitious. But these philosophers have presumably forgotten the movies. They have never seen the savages of the twentieth century watching the pictures (Woolf 160).

Besides, she describes cinema as a predator medium that destroys the essence of the literature, which becomes 'the victim' of the film's covetousness. Thus, for her, cinema and literature are incompatible, so film adaptations are a kind of unnatural perversity:

> All the famous novels of the world, with their well-known characters, and their famous scenes, only asked, it seemed, to be put on the films. What could be easier and simpler? The cinema fell upon its prey with immense rapacity, and to this moment largely subsists upon the body of its unfortunate victim. But the results are disastrous to both. The alliance is unnatural (Woolf 168).

[1] *Kabuki* is a classical Japanese dance-drama which dates from the early 17th century, with singing and dancing performed in a stylized manner. It combines music, dance, mime, and staging and costuming.
[2] Virginia Woolf's essay *The Cinema* was first published in the 3 July 1926 issue of the political weekly newspaper *The Nation and Athenaeum*. It was released along with other essays in 1950 in the volume *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays* (Hogarth Press), pp.160-171.
[3] Directed by Robert Wiene, this silent horror film is considered the quintessence of the German expressionism. It had a strong influence on the films produced worldwide during the 1920s.

Also, over decades, for many scholars who wrote about film adaptations, a movie derived from literature works was considered as an inferior cultural product, often defined using pejorative terms such as "infidelity, betrayal, deformation, violation, and desecration, each accusation carrying its specific charge of outraged negativity" (Stam, "Beyond Fidelity" 54). There existed a "binary, hierarchical view of the relationship between literature and film, where the literary work was conceived of as the valued original, while film adaptation was merely a copy, and where fidelity emerged as the central category of adaptation studies" (Aragay 12). According to Stam, there exist several prejudices that can explain the perception of literature as a superior medium and the consequent spread of animosity towards adaptations:

> Although the persuasive force of the putative superiority of literature to film can be partially explained by the undeniable fact that many adaptations based on significant novels are mediocre or misguided, it also derives, I would argue, from deeply rooted and often unconscious assumptions about the relations between the two arts. The intuitive sense of adaptation's inferiority derives, I would speculate, from a constellation of substratal prejudices (Stam "The Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation" 4).

Stam identifies certain biases that explain the hostility towards film adaptations. First, he considers that there is a "valorization of historical anteriority and seniority,' that forms 'the assumption that older arts are necessarily better arts" ("The Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation" 4). Second, there is an assumption that there exists a "dichotomous thinking that presumes a bitter rivalry between film and literature," in which film adaptations are perceived as the "enemy." Stam also indicates as reasons for the animosity to film the cultural "iconophobia" and "logophilia," which are defined as "a deeply rooted cultural prejudice against visual arts," and "the exaltation of the written word as the privileged medium of communication" respectively. Another source of the hostility towards adaptations is the assumption that films are "anti-corporeality", which creates "distaste for unseemly 'embodiedness' of the filmic text." The "myth of facility" – that is, "the complex uninformed and somewhat puritanical notion that films are suspectly easy to make and suspectly pleasurable to watch" – is another powerful assumption that explains the hostility towards movies. In the same way, there exists a class or elitist prejudice, since the cinema is often "seen as degraded by the company it keeps – the great unwashed popular mass audience, with its lower-class origins in "vulgar" spectacles like slideshows and carnivals." Finally, an additional source of hostility towards adaptation is the charge of parasitism, since adaptations are "seen as parasitical on literature" (Stam "The Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation" 4)

It was not until the 1950s that a new perspective in adaptation studies appeared. Unlike previous decades, film and literature started to be perceived as different mediums with their own idiosyncrasies. Since then, several methodological approaches have been developed, with the aim of providing a methodology that is suitable to study film adaptations.

1. The Fidelity Approach

The first scholar to study film adaptation as a medium with its own formal characteristics was Bluestone. His method of analysis, based on the evaluation of additions, deletions, alterations, and deviations from the literary source, has been criticized, since it "perpetuated a reliance on fidelity as a primary criterion for judgment" and "unwittingly defines an adaptation's scope and quality in terms of its allegiance to the primacy of the source text" (Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins 12). Bluestone's approach has also been criticized for assuming the superiority of the literature: "his subject matter and entire approach tend to confirm the intellectual priority and formal superiority of canonical novels, which provide the films he discusses with their source and with a standard of value against which their success or failure is measured" (Naremore 6).

Throughout the next decades, still with the concept of fidelity in mind, many researchers have compared film adaptations, mostly from the Anglo-American literary canon, usually judging them as "successful" or "unsuccessful" according to the degree to which the director kept the "meaning" and maintained the "essence" of the literary work. As Whelehan points out:

> For many people the comparison of a novel and its film version results in an almost unconscious prioritizing of the fictional origin over the resulting film, and so the main purpose of comparison becomes the measurement of the success of the film in its capacity to realize what are held to be the core meanings and values of the originary text. These commentators have already charted the problems involved in such an exercise and the pitfalls created by the demands of authenticity and fidelity – not least the intensely subjective criteria which must be applied in order to determine the degree to which the film is 'successful' in extracting the 'essence' of the fictional text (3).

Nowadays, this approach is considered unproductive and inappropriate for several reasons. One of them is the assumption that an adaptation is a copy that should be "loyal" to the literary work, so the fidelity approach "has coded adaptation as a form of artistic reproduction rather than production" (Cobb 108). Another reason is the fact that the fidelity theoretical- methodological approach is based on the presupposition that a literary work has only one possible interpretation, which the film-director should seek to transfer faithfully and correctly in the film to guarantee a "successful" adaptation. In this sense, McFarlane remarks that:

> Fidelity criticism depends on a notion of the text as having and rendering up to the (intelligent) reader a single, correct 'meaning' which the filmmaker has either adhered to or in some sense violated or tampered with. (…) Since such coincidence is

unlikely, the fidelity approach seems a doomed enterprise and fidelity criticism unilluminating (8-9).

Furthermore, some scholars question this approach, asking whether fidelity itself is possible or even desirable:

> The shift from a single-track, uniquely verbal medium such as the novel (…) to a multi-track medium such as film, which can play not only with words (written and spoken), but also with theatrical performance, music, effects, and moving photographic images, explains the unlikelihood – and I would suggest even the undesirability – of literal fidelity (Stam "Beyond Fidelity 55).

It is remarkable that, although this approach has been considered unproductive and has hence been rejected since the 1980s, several scholars, such as Desmond and Hawkes, still follow a methodological approach based on a "re-conceptualized" idea of fidelity. They assert, for instance, that they use the concept of fidelity "not as an evaluative term that measures the merit of films, but as a descriptive term that allows discussion of the relationship between two companion works" (Desmond and Hawkes, 2-3).

2. The Taxonomies/Categorization Approach

Several scholars, aware of the limitations of methodology based only on fidelity, developed methodological approaches that involved categorizing adaptations by establishing lists of taxonomies according to the "degree of proximity to the 'original' (Hutcheon 7) that "seek to measure how closely the film follows the book" (Leitch 70). The most well-known are the categorization approaches of Wagner, Andrew, and Klein and Parker. McFarlane remarks that "there is nothing definitive about these attempts at classification, but at least they represent some heartening challenges to the primacy of fidelity as a critical criterion" (11). Wagner's approach differentiates among three categories of adaptations. The first, "transposition," is a type of adaptation "in which a novel is given directly on the screen with a minimum of apparent interference" (222). The label "commentary" is given to the adaptations "where an original is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect," so that it is possible to observe that there was a "different intention on the part of the film-maker, rather than infidelity or outright violation" (223-224). The third type, called "analogy", refers to adaptations that take the literary work "as a point of departure (…) for the sake of making another work of art" (226). Andrew and Klein and Parker also established lists of three taxonomies similar to Wagner's. Andrew labelled his categorization of adaptations as "Borrowing, intersection, and fidelity of transformation" (Andrew 10). On the other hand, Klein and Parker classified adaptations as those that show "fidelity to the main thrust of the narrative," adaptations that "retain the core of the structure of the narrative while significantly reinterpreting or, in some cases, deconstructing the source text," and

adaptations that treat "the source merely as raw material, as simply the occasion for an original work" (9-10).

Recent researchers point out the limitations of these types of approach. Cartmell and Whelehan, for instance, observe that:

> The danger of posting such a model of approach is whether such taxonomies risk privileging the notion of 'closeness to origin' as the key business of adaptation studies; additionally, the boundaries between the various classifications are impossible to define and an adaptation can fit into a number of categories at once (6).

Aragay also warns against this approach, especially Wagner's work, considering that a methodology "that relies on the centrality of the literary source or the original" has "limited theoretical and practical validity," and maintains the assumption that literature is a superior medium, being "still trapped by an unspoken reliance on the fidelity criterion and a concomitant (formalist) focus on the literary/filmed adaptation binary pair" (16). Moreover, as Constandinides remarks, "classification systems tend to ignore the form and aesthetic criteria of the cinematic medium where the operations of its technical elements are not simply invisible but become meaningful through a dynamic interaction with the story" (13) and "omit the possibility of multiple generic intertexts involved in an adaptation process" (15).

3. The Narratological Approach

The work of McFarlane and his narratological approach provided a new perspective in adaptation studies, since it unsettled "the primacy of fidelity as a major criterion for judging film adaptations" (Aragay 23). With this method, consisting in comparing narrative strategies "in order to better establish what key shifts are made in the process of transition" (Whelehan 9) from novel to film, McFarlane presented a methodology:

> for studying the process of transposition from novel to film, with a view not to evaluating one in relation to another but establishing the *kind* of relation a film might bear to the novel it is based on. In pursuing this goal, I shall set up procedures distinguishing between that which can be transferred from one medium to another (essentially, narrative) and that which, being dependent on different signifying systems, cannot be transferred (essentially, enunciation) (McFarlane vii).

In order to pursue the objective of distinguishing the narrative features that can or cannot be transferred from one medium to another, McFarlane follows Barthes' distinction of narrative functions.[4] Barthes identified two main groups: distributional (named functions

[4] Barthes's classification is described in 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives' in Rolland Barthes' *Image-Music-Text*, edited by Stephen Heath, (Fontana/Collins: Glasgow, 1977), pp. 89.

proper, which refer to actions and events) and integrational (labelled as indices, which refer to information about characters, space, time, and so on). At the same time, he subdivides functions proper into cardinal functions (which refer to the main actions that sustain the development of the story, its structure and the sequence of the narration) and catalyzers (secondary actions that complement the cardinal functions). McFarlane considers that "the most important kinds of transfer possible from novel to film are located in the category of functions proper, rather than that of indices, though some elements of the latter will also be seen to be (partly) transferable" (13).

Thus, for him, it is essential to distinguish between "transfer" (that is, the narrative elements that are transferable) and "enunciation", (that is, the elements which cannot be transferred) (McFarlane 23), without a complex process of adaptation, which McFarlane calls "adaptation proper." In sum, to analyse the "transfer" of an adaptation, McFarlane suggests following several "strategies," such as distinguishing between story/plot and distributional and integrational functions, identifying character functions and fields of action, and identifying mythic and/or psychological patterns. On the other hand, to analyse enunciatory matters – that is, "adaptation proper" elements – he suggests distinguishing between conceptual (print) and perceptual (audio-visual), novel linearity and the film's spatiality, and codes (language, visual, non-linguistic, and cultural).

This methodological approach has been criticized as "narrowly formalistic," since it privileges questions of "narrativity to the detriment of other aspects such as cultural conditions" (Aragay 23) and leaves out intertextuality or contextual factors (Stam "The Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation" 5). McFarlane himself is aware of the limitations of his approach and admits that he has "marginalized" other "potentially productive" approaches to adaptation, such as "the influence of the industrial and cultural context in which the film is made on how the original novel is adapted" (McFarlane viii).

4. The Intertextual Dialogism Approach

During the 2000s, several scholars have argued that it is necessary to broaden the field and abandon the idea of adaptation as a one-directional transformation of one form to another. Stam develops this idea and advocates considering adaptation as a dialectical process, not just a product. He borrows Genette's intertextuality classification, described in *Palimpsests,* to develop the idea of a "grammar of transformation." Genette described five types of transtextuality. The first type, intertextuality, refers to a text segment present in another text in the form of quotation, plagiarism, or allusion. The second category, paratextuality, refers to the relation between the text and its "paratexts," such as titles, dedications, footnotes, prefaces, epigraphs, illustrations, and so forth. The third type, metatextuality, refers to texts that evoke or comment explicitly on other texts; meanwhile architextuality, the fourth type, refers to the text being positioned directly or indirectly into a generic category due to its title. Genette's fifth type, hypertextuality, can be defined as the relationship wherein a text alludes to or derives from a previous text. Stam suggests that the concept of hypertextuality is the most suitable to study film adaptations. According to him, the film adaptation should be seen as dialogic-transformation between a "hypotext" (the

literary work) and/into a "hypertext" (the film), in which different processes intervene, each mediated by a series of filters:

> One way to look at adaptation is to see it as a matter of a source novel hypotext's being transformed by a complex series of operations: selection, amplification, concretization, actualization, critique, extrapolation, analogization, popularization, and reculturalization. The source novel, in this sense, can be seen as a situated utterance produced in one medium and in one historical context, then transformed into another equally situated utterance that is produced in a different context and in a different medium. The source text forms a dense formational network, a series of verbal cues that the adapting film text can then take up, amplify, ignore, subvert, or transform. The film adaptation of a novel performs these transformations according to the protocols of a distinct medium, absorbing and altering the genres and intertexts available through the grids of ambient discourses and ideologies, and as mediated by a series of filters: studio style, ideological fashion, political constrains, auterist predilections, charismatic stars, economic advantage or disadvantage, and evolving technology (Stam "Beyond Fidelity 68-69).

Furthermore, applying Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism, Foucault's ideas of anonymity of discourse, and a Derridean deconstruction of the hierarchical relationship between original and copy, he proposes an intertextual dialogism approach to analysing adaptations. Stam's intertextual dialogism approach advocates studying the transformations of the source hypotext in the film hypertext through analysis of the permutations in locale, time, language, and the transmutations of plot, characters, point of view, focalization, changes in novelistic events and narrative sequencing due to ideological reasons and aesthetic innovations. According to Constandinides, the "intertextual dialogism approach not only breaks away from the conservative discourse of early adaptations studies," but also "enables an analysis of a film adaptation to be liberated from a comparative study based strictly on evaluative judgments" (17).

5. New Approaches

Other researchers also highlight the importance of studying the context and the process of the adaptation itself. Aragay suggests that "the literary source need no longer be conceived as a work/original holding within itself a timeless essence which the adaptation must faithfully reproduce, but as a text to be endlessly (re)read and appropriated in different contexts" (18). Moreover, she argues that, since adaptation is a cultural practice, it is necessary when analysing adaptations to take into consideration the "particular era's cultural and aesthetic needs and pressures" (Aragay 19). On the other hand, Hutcheon argues that there is a need to use an approach that sees the adaptation as a process wherein the film is the adapter's creative interpretation/interpretive creation, in which the cultural and historical contexts have a crucial role (18). For her, adaptation analysis should include the context, time, and place of production, as well as the elements of presentation and reception which

determine the changes in setting and style. These ideas are also defended by Geraghty, who suggests that studying an adaptation should involve both textual and contextual analysis (4), and by Bruhn, who argues that it is also necessary to describe, analyse, and interpret the process of adapting (73). More recent scholars, such as Schober, also point out that it is important to study the cultural context in which adaptations take place. Schober asserts that media are always bound to their particular aesthetic, cultural and production contexts: that is why "to discuss adaptations means to acknowledge their complex textual environment, their cultural implications, and their multi-layered process of signification" (91).

6. Conclusions

To understand the phenomenon of adaptations, it is necessary to analyse the intertextual relation between text and film and also to describe the historical and cultural context in which literary works and adaptations are produced and consumed. Thus, methodological approaches developed during the 20th Century are not applicable to study adaptations.

Regarding the fidelity approach, it is important to remark that the concept the fidelity itself ignores the idea that a text is interpreted and re-interpreted infinitely according to the time and place in which it is read. That is even more significant when a text is adapted for the screen in a different cultural sphere, such that the text itself and the *mise-en-scène* are transformed in a way that the audience can understand.

With regard to the categorization/taxonomies methodological approach, many scholars found it unproductive since a taxonomy itself does not describe important issues such as the cultural context of the adaptation.

Furthermore, the narratological approach has also remarkable limitations: describing what can and cannot be transferred is not a useful methodology to analyse for instance cross-cultural adaptations and to describe the process of cultural transformation.

Stam's intertextual dialogic approach and the most recent theoretical frameworks mentioned previously became the most suitable to study the relations between cinema and literature.

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