

Beyond the Boundaries of the Medium

In a time of crisis when Comparative Literature is not only being asked to re-define its field and justify its intellectual approach but must radically legitimize itself (cf. Dimić), inter- and multidisciplinary and cross-media approaches gain even greater prominence. To survive in a time of perpetual budget cuts and constant appeals for a profit-generating orientation, the present stage of scholarship in the humanities must be all the more integrated within an interdisciplinary framework (cf. also Tötösy de Zepetnek). The boundaries between the autonomous fields of inquiry have become increasingly blurred in favour of one vast interrelated plane. Presently, one of the most prolific areas of research in comparative and film studies is the investigation of the different relationships between the written and the cinematic media. From an institutional point of view, it is interesting to note that Film Studies programmes are often incorporated within Comparative Literature departments and/or programmes. At a time when cyberspace is redefining the concept of text into hypertext and when there is a tendency to view literary studies as part of the broader field of media studies (cf. Schmidt), the connection literature-film acquires almost axiomatic validity.

This topical issue of the *CRCL* is intended as a forum to discuss different aspects focusing on the relationship literature-film. Several perspectives have been adopted: from the historical inquiry into early silent film adaptations and classical narratological models to the application of translation theory and broader culturological approaches to the transposition of literature onto the screen. In most of the articles presented theoretical considerations are intricately intertwined with actual "case studies" of literary works and their cinematic adaptations. The bulk of the articles included in this publication were presented at special sessions and round tables devoted to the relationship between literature and film at the XIVth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association which took place at the University of Alberta in August 1994. A few of the essays were not presented at the Congress but were independently submitted to the journal for consideration (Thornton, Bourassa, Zakharieva, Banks). They were included in the thematic volume after a joint decision by the guest editors, given the pertinent subject matter they deal with.

The thematic volume opens with Alicja Helman's and Wacław M. Osadnik's "Film and Literature: Historical Models of Film Adaptation and a Proposal for

a (Poly)System Theory." This presentation merits its leading position not only due to the fact that it presents a historical glimpse of the theory of adaptation since the early beginnings of the cinematic art. The article is equally important in that it puts forward additional problems which must be tackled by contemporary humanist scholarship. It offers an interdisciplinary approach to film adaptation as a form of intersemiotic translation and integrates the model within the framework of polysystem studies. In addition, the authors raise the issue of empirical verification as a method of validating research in the humanities, and propose a formal methodological procedure with a defined logical apparatus which ensures a degree of scientific precision seldom encountered in traditional disciplines in the humanities.

In the next essay Eduard Vlasov concentrates on the early stages in the evolution of cinema and discusses some parallel developments in Bakhtin's and Eisenstein's theoretical endeavours. Vlasov highlights the fact that Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope in literature "pushes the visual potential of the verbal medium to its limits" and further suggests how the field of film studies can benefit from a Bakhtinian approach. While Bakhtin's global concepts of carnival and dialogism have been extensively applied to film studies, the more technical notion of chronotope has been disregarded so far. Vlasov emphasizes the importance of the concept both from a poetical and an ideological perspective and provides an stimulating illustration of his claims with examples from German Expressionist cinema.

The early period in the history of cinema is also the topic of Bohdan Nebesio's article. The author discusses the connection of literature and film via intertitles in silent cinema. By focussing on Alexander Dovzhenko's Ukrainian trilogy, Nebesio traces the emergence and evolution of intertitles and forcefully concludes that we need to redefine functionally the role of intertitles in silent films. He views intertitles not as "a compromise [of film] with literature" but as "a function of montage," "as cinematographic material to be utilized in the synthetic art of motion pictures." He appeals for a further in-depth study in this area since it is crucial for the construction of a poetics of silent film.

Several of the subsequent articles approach film adaptations from a broad theoretical perspective in the framework of cultural studies and address various ideological and poetical aspects of literary source and film product. William H. Thornton's article aims at reconceiving film historiography in relation to cultural studies. He contextualizes his analysis within the Bakhtinian framework of carnival and through it reconciles the notions of popular and elite under the heading "post-modernist realism." The idea of "redescriptive aesthetics" as an offspring of Foucault's "discursive circulation" underlies his analysis of Steven Spielberg's adaptation of *Schindler's List*. Carlo Testa also questions the foundations of traditional realist poetics and postulates the paradigm of "post-realist poetics." He discusses Maurizio Nichetti's *Ladri di saponette* from the

theoretical perspective presented in André Gide's *Les Faux-monnayeurs* which suppresses the representational world view in favour of a non-hierarchically structured open-ended plot. The result is the blurring of the boundary between text and metatext, narration and commentary, reality and fiction. Testa claims that within the metanarrative storyline of the film Nichetti thematizes Gide's idea about (neo)-counterfeiting in the course of transition from the old to the new epistemic age.

Alan Bourassa's analysis of the *Last of the Mohicans* is presented in the context of Adorno's critique of pop culture as escapism. The author demonstrates the hidden significance of Michael Mann's *The Last of the Mohicans* and suggests that the film in fact may be viewed as a "third term" in Adorno's negative dialectic — in other words, it is a kind of empowerment which as such obliterates the bipolar model of exploitation versus powerlessness. An adjacent treatment of power relations, this time along the lines of gender, is presented in Bouriana Zakhariyeva's reading of Kenneth Branagh's *Frankenstein* as a post-modern adaptation of Mary Shelley's masterpiece. Zakhariyeva examines the refraction of post-modern body politics in the film by means of the idea of the composite body. On a symbolic level, the composite aspect can be found in the "hermeneutical circle" of social and cultural factors which determine aesthetics underlying the work. For the author, the film's finale ultimately reasserts the philosophical issues of *being* which must be faced by men alone, excluding the presence of women.

Several of the articles focus on more technical aspects of the transposition of the literary text onto the screen. In my own essay, I address the transformation of spatial forms in the course of screening a literary work. In the study of Coppola's loose adaptation of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* into *Apocalypse Now*, I apply Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope and investigate specifically the chronotopic changes which take place in the film. My conclusion is that the tremendous ideological reorientation of the film can be linked directly to the radical substitution of the chronotope of the road in Conrad's novella for the qualitatively new chronotope of the river in Coppola's film. One of the indirect corollaries of my analysis is that an artistic product, as a complex semiotic construct, cannot be segmented easily into the traditional form-content dichotomy and must be approached as a structure of simultaneous polysemic activity.

Spatial forms in film and literature are the topic of Emma P. Marciano's contribution, as well. For her, space — actual and symbolic — is the principal parameter which determines the Dostoevskian presence in Akira Kurosawa's adaptation of *The Idiot*. Once again, Bakhtin's concept of the (literary) chronotope — especially the threshold — finds a broad application in the author's discussion. Marciano also incorporates some aspects of Japanese architecture which provide additional illumination to Kurosawa's spatial transposition of the literary setting, an appropriate illustration of interdisciplinarity in practice.

Kurosawa's interest in adapting Western texts is the focus of the article by Thais Flores Nogueira Diniz which deals with his *Ran* as a film version of *King Lear*. The author approaches the notion of adaptation from the perspective of translation studies and the ideas of André Lefevere, especially the concept of refraction. In her discussion, Diniz touches upon various aspects in the recent history of Japanese literary evolution and film. She establishes a strong politico-cultural context which determines the impact of the adaptation of Western sources on the Japanese literary and/or cinematic scene.

The classical myth of Orpheus and its various interpretations is the topic of two articles in the volume. Sabine Hillen and Nathalie Roelens present a comparative study of several adaptations of Orpheus on the screen. Specific attention is paid to Jean Cocteau's fascination with the subject in his dramatic script *Orphée* and the two subsequent cinematic works, *Orphée* and *Le Testament d'Orphée*. The authors devote the first part of their article to the peculiarities in transition from theatre to cinematic space, while the second part focusses on some relevant contrasts in the poetics and aesthetics between Cocteau's interpretations of the theme as compared to Marcel Camus's directorial effort of *Orfeu Negro da Conceição*, based on Vinícius de Moraes's poetic drama, and Alain Corneau's "contemporary" version *Tous les matins du monde*. Jared Banks's contribution also presents an application of Formalist methodology to Camus's award-winning yet controversial adaptation of the Brazilian rendition of the ancient Greek myth. He offers a "close reading" of the film in relation to the literary source and demonstrates how particular elements of the dramatic text are translated into the cinematic medium by the specific use of visual images, rhythmical parallelism, and montage.

The three final articles in the volume are case studies of film adaptations based on best-selling novels. What is worth considering in all three instances, however, is the fact that the best-selling status of the primary literary sources was achieved only *after* and *because* of the screening of the film adaptation. Two more recent examples of the same phenomenon are Winston Groom's *Forrest Gump* and Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, both of which are on the way to canonization thanks to the highly acclaimed, award-winning film adaptations. This type of inverse effect suggests that the relationship between the verbal and the cinematic media is far from unequivocal or unidirectional. Applying Lotman's most recent theorizing on relations within culture, we are justified in claiming that the diversity of cultural artefacts which form the various layers of the semiosphere should not be approached in terms of well-defined binary oppositions, but, rather, they enter into intricate intersemiotic interactions and often result in unexpected "explosive" outcomes.

Maria Cristina Rodriguez discusses some narratological considerations regarding the narrator's function in literary and filmic texts. She anchors her analysis on Ruth Praver Jhabvala who is both the author of *Heat and Dust* (1975) and

later the script writer of the 1983 film adaptation. She demonstrates the different roles a diegetic narrator can perform in the two distinct media. Marek Haltof investigates the depiction of the spirit of Australia in Peter Weir's film version of Joan Lindsay's *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. For him, the success of the film, in particular, and of contemporary Australian cinema, in general, is to a great extent due to the foregrounding of the spatial parameter and the centrality of the "bush." The exotic landscape becomes the main technique for mythologization of the primordial energy and spirit which defines Australia as a distinct cinematic topos. Finally, William Beard's comprehensive article concentrates on "the fascination and influence of the writings of William S. Burroughs on the films of David Cronenberg." He presents an interpretation of "insect poetics" as Burroughs's central aesthetic stance not only in *Naked Lunch* but in his overall *oeuvre*. Beard demonstrates how the writer's artistic position is taken up and post-modernly reconceptualized by director Cronenberg in the course of his succession of intentionally transgressive films. The place of *Naked Lunch* in this series is "a spectacle of transgressive 'extremeness' ... a narrative puzzle to be solved."

The thematic volume ends with a selection of bibliographical sources about the vast area of literature and film. To claim exhaustiveness would be a self-defeating undertaking. Only the most recent publications from the past decade have been included and even there preference was given to more general and/or comparative works, as well as to less known or marginalized cultural semiospheres.

The variety of approaches and methodologies exemplified in the offered selection of articles and the following selected bibliography on the relationship between the verbal and the cinematic media provides ample evidence to the vitality of comparatism as a method (cf. also Holquist). In an age which has overtly defined itself as one of "multiculturalism," "integration," and "globalization," pluralism and disciplinary openness can be the only viable route for contemporary academic scholarship.

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Film and Literature: Historical Models of Film Adaptation and a Proposal for a (Poly)System Approach

Studies on film, although a diverse body of writings, may be reduced to a common methodology that limits itself to discussing the adaptation of literary works for the medium of film as a model of the relationship between two forms of art. Concurrently, such a theoretical approach guarantees practical efficiency. In other words, if one manages to establish correctly what is in fact an adaptation, or what kind of procedure it is, it should be possible to acquire some clue(s) regarding the method(s) of adapting. However, opinions vary with regard to the aim of such procedures. Since this question arose, a fundamental difference in viewpoints has repeatedly appeared in all theoretical and critical debates. This is expressed either in the strong conviction that the literary material should be adapted in order to make an excellent film, or without giving up the claim for quality, "to adapt" may mean to transfer faithfully an original work from literature to the screen with maximum piety.

In the first part of our article we present an overview of the development of film adaptation as a theoretical problem and discuss adaptation as a semiotic phenomenon. In the second section we focus on some issues pertaining to the question of correspondence between literary source and film adaptation. Our analysis is contextualized in a historical framework which follows the transformation of literature-film relations in the course of the technical and artistic evolution of the cinematic medium. Finally, in the last section, we offer an alternative approach to film adaptation founded on the theoretical postulates of polysystem studies in literature and translation. The proposed model not only takes into account the previous stages in film adaptation, but, by virtue of its strictly formalized logical methodology, it attains a degree of abstractness which makes it applicable to any particular instance of the transposition from one artistic medium into the other.

I.

Perhaps our discussion of the topic should begin with an answer to a question which is older and more fundamental than those sought to be answered by the