

**THE ART OF SCREEN ADAPTATION: RECOGNIZING SEMIOTIC DIFFERENCES OR  
THINKING OUTSIDE THE PAGE**

All adaptations are equal, but  
some are more equal than others

PAUL WELLS

"Adaptation may come second, but that doesn't make it secondary"

LINDA HUTCHEON

Дослідження присвячене феномену адаптації - процесу трансформування літературних творів у кіноверсії (включаючи римейки), що трактується як специфічний синтетичний тип взаємодії дискурсу художньої літератури та дискурсу кіно. Проаналізовано існуючі у межах сучасної теорії адаптації підходи до трактування екранізації літературних творів.

Ключові слова: адаптація, інтердисциплінарне перехрестя, екранізація, медіум-середовище, мова кіно, мова літератури.

*This research highlights the phenomenon of adaptation that stands for the process of transforming literary pieces into screenversions (including remakes) and is interpreted as a specific synthetic type of interaction of fiction discourse and cinema discourse. The existing approaches to the interpretation of adapting literary pieces to the screen have been analyzed within a modern theory of adaptation.*

Key words: *adaptation, interdisciplinary crossroads, screen version, medium, the language of cinema, the language of literature.*

A lot of insightful recent research has centered on the phenomenon of *adaptation* that is broadly interpreted as a process in which an original work of art is *reshaped* into another. G. Raitt [40] in his attempt to define the nature of the adaptation phenomenon brings about the notion of *ekphrasis* [39] illustrating the relation of one medium of art to another medium, the latter defining and describing the essence and form of the former with a view to appealing more directly to the audience. The reshaping involves an acquisition of a certain degree of "rhetorical vividness" by a chronologically subsequent medium that enhances the prior original work of art and proceeds with the life of its own. Virtually any type of artistic medium may be the *agent* of *ekphrasis*. Raitt claims [40] that the concepts of *ekphrasis* and *adaptation* are similar in nature as precursors are not replaced, but remain accessible and can be read or viewed together. Therefore, while investigating adaptations, we deal with the synchronic reception of representations (and differences) which have been diachronically created [40]. The described process of the emergence of synthetic forms of art seems inherent in the established post-modernist era, which stipulates the expediency of this paper.

Dealing with adaptation, we are invariably puzzled by the complexity of the concept in question as adaptation juxtaposes various forms of art (sculpture and photography, painting and poetry, poetry and music, literature and sculpture, music and ballet, literature and ballet, literature and film, film and film, architecture and film, etc.) and different sets of disciplines such as linguistics, literary studies, literary criticism, film and visual studies, culture studies, theory of

interpretation, philosophy, etc, basically "having a finger in every pie" [29, p. 3], and we rightfully refer to it as *an interdisciplinary crossroads* in this paper. Consequently, it follows that the scope of adaptive variation can vary substantially in the course of the *semiotic balancing* (in basic terms "balancing" from one semiotic system to another) between different target art forms and source art forms of adaptation and can be quite large. With regard to this, L. Hutcheon [27] proposes to view "adaptations both as formal entities or products and also as processes of creation and reception". Within the restricted scope of analysis in this paper we are attempting to investigate the somewhat narrowed concept of adaptation, namely the adaptation of literary texts to the form of a scenario/screenplay, then – a multimedia film and a subsequent remake, if any, which outlines this paper's objective. The object-matter of this paper is, therefore, the phenomenon of literature-screenplay-film adaptation and its nature, the subject-matter being the theoretical interpretations of screen adaptation as well as the existing approaches to its decoding suggested by different schools that we are attempting to taxonomize. The corpus of the research was constituted by the abundant theoretical bulk of papers produced on the subject of adaptation in the previous years.

The attempts to define screen adaptation have not been multiple: thus, L. Hutcheon [27, p. 15] pioneered a definition holding adaptation process as involving "both production and reception" that basically could broadly be applied to any kind of artistic endeavor. In this paper, following G. Raitt [39], we have adopted the concept of "representation of representation" from the field of ekphrasis to illustrate adaptation of literature to film, as it focuses the "non-reiterative nature" of adaptation. The latter means viewing adaptation as a *work of art, no less significant than its literary precursor* and forming with it a cluster of *culturological meaning*, or rather, a *culturological construct* (it seems to embrace what G. Raitt terms "an intertextual cluster" [40]). We also share L. Hutcheon's understanding of adaptation process as "repetition without replication" [27, p. 16] emphasizing change and difference brought about by the adaptation process and being supported by a group of the like-minded researchers [1; 11; 12; 13; 17; 35; 36; 40; 44].

V. Shklovsky [12], investigating into the methods and procedures of adapting classic literature to screen, feels that the adapted version is an utterly different form of art. Shklovsky states that a process of creating a screen adaptation, if undertaken by a writer himself, would involve the "doubling" of the original literary piece [12], therefore, adaptation is to be performed by a *different* author rather than the original one, screenwriters being the ones who should preoccupy themselves with adapting a literary piece to the screen and using a totally different language of cinema and the whole set of artistic cinematographic techniques to create a genuinely new form of art.

### **Content and Form**

Recognizing semiotic differences between the literary and cinematographic media, as well as practising the ability to think "outside the page", one cannot help admitting that variation in semiotic systems that is to be overcome in the process of adaptation of literature to screen can become quite a challenge for the team of authors, screenwriters and film directors. The timidity to face the challenge of shifting from one semiotic system (literature) to another (film) largely accounts for the fact that the *content* analysis has been privileged over *form* in the analysis of screen adaptations for decades. The idea of content preference was associated with yet another notion illustrating novel-film relations – the notion of *fidelity*.

### **Comparative Approach or Novel-to-Film Fidelity**

T. Corrigan [21] remarked that the battle "to rescue film from the clutches of literature" has led to opposing and polarizing Film Studies and Literary Studies, with film adaptation ending up "in the gap". Fidelity, as defined by T. Corrigan [21, pp. 31-32], is "a differential notion that purportedly measures the extent to which a work of literature has been accurately recreated (or

not) as a movie". Thus, fidelity-based approach seeks to proclaim the supremacy of a literary source over all of its subsequent adaptations [23, p. 67; 33, p. 153] shaping itself into a vigorous battle for dominance between a literary source and a screen adaptation establishing the grounds for what came to be known as *comparative* approach [19; 23]. L. Hutcheon observes that "the rhetoric of comparison has most often been that of faithfulness and equivalence" [27, p. 16]. Similarity between the original literary piece and its adaptation seems central to fidelity advocates who, stressing out literary supremacy, suggest various adaptation taxonomies based on the degree of fidelity principle [23]. The inexplicable striving for taxonomies received its feedback in Cartmell and Whelehan's paper [19, p. 2]: "what fascinates us here is not so much the taxonomies themselves, which reflect disciplinary preferences and often the privileging of one medium over another, but this will to taxonomize, which is symptomatic of how the field has tried to mark out its own territory".

The fidelity issue has been largely frowned upon by much of the recently produced adaptation criticism [19; 21; 27; 33; 34; 35; 36; 42; 43] that pronounced it fallacious to fall into the cascading waterfall of novel-to-film direct comparativism in search of fidelity issues. Thus, T. Leitch [33, p. 161] claims that fidelity - "whether it is conceived as success in re-creating specific textual details or the effect of the whole - is a hopelessly fallacious measure of a given adaptation's value because it is unattainable, undesirable, and theoretically possible only in a trivial sense ... [The] source texts will always be better at being themselves", whereas still in 1948 Bazin claimed that 'faithfulness to a form, literary or otherwise, is illusory: what matters is the equivalence in meaning of the forms' [14, p. 74]. Cartmell and Whelehan [19] also encouraged researchers "to free our notion of film adaptations from this dependency on literature so that adaptations are not derided as sycophantic, derivative, and therefore inferior to their literary counterparts".

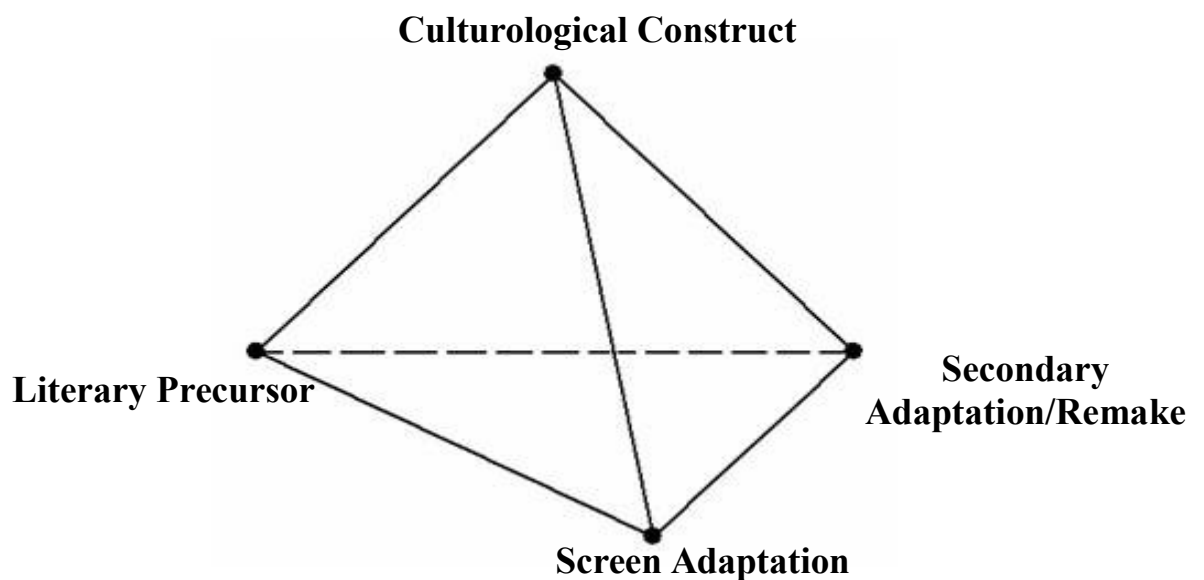
Fidelity-centered adaptation has been consensually criticized [16; 19; 21; 27; 33; 34; 35; 36; 42; 43], B. McFarlane obviously producing the straw that broke the donkey's neck of fidelity-focused film-literature connections: "... it shouldn't be necessary after several decades of serious research into the processes and challenges of adaptation to insist that "fidelity" to the original text ... is a wholly inappropriate and unhelpful criterion for either understanding or judgment. It may be that, even among the most rigorously high-minded of film viewers confronted with the film version of a cherished novel or play, it is hard to suppress a sort of yearning for a faithful rendering of one's own vision of the literary text...that every reading of a literary text is a highly individual act of cognition and interpretation; ... every such response involves a kind of personal adaptation on to the screen of one's imaginative faculty as one reads. And how is any film version, drawing on the contributions of numerous collaborators, ever going to produce the same responses except by the merest chance?" The misconceptions [36] fired by McFarlane against the supporters of fidelity approach in adaptation consecutively focus: 1) no lesser demand of imagination on the part of the viewer in perceiving a screen version than that of the reader in perceiving a literary one (McFarlane's voice [36] is echoed by L. Hutcheon with her idea of "storytelling imagination" crucial for the adaptive process [27]); 2) evident failure of fidelity-focused comparativists to recognize the peculiarities and possibilities of a *semiotically-different* system of film, leading them to the erroneous idea of the solely "voice-over" function of cinema and neglect of the "specificities of the two semiotic systems involved...", the newer art form being capable of "finding ways of replicating the achievements of the earlier. Complex and difficult novels and plays are not amenable to film adaptation, but require the most intelligent and resourceful talents to address the task" [36].

Refuting the claims that there exists "a class of literature, by its very nature, not adaptable to the screen" produced by Helen Garner, a novelist from Australia, McFarlane [35] advocates the distinction between the directly *transferable* (observable) (in his terms - the

narrated) and what has to be *adapted* (in his terms – the narration). Other authors stick to the terms *the enunciated* and *the enunciation* [29]. McFarlane goes as far as to say that "mediums share narrative and are contrasted by narration" [35; 36], by "narrative" he means "a series of events, sequentially and/or consequentially connected by virtue of their involving a continuing set of characters", by "narration" he implies "all the means by which the narrative has been put before the reader or viewer". Thus, united by the narrative, the two mediums – literature and film – are contrasted by narration.

McFarlane's fourth attempt to undermine literature-film adaptation misconceptions seems of great value for this paper as it not only stresses out the specificity of literature and film as the two media of different semiotic nature, but also brings about culturological value of adaptations as McFarlane invites us to investigate into "how far the works of earlier centuries might be made to seem relevant to later generations in settings and times far removed from those in which they had their origins". Following this direction we are attempting to pioneer **a culturological construct** of *layered meanings* that arises in the course of the two kinds of interaction: the interaction between the literary precursor, its adaptation and secondary adaptations (or remakes – if present) as well as the interaction between the culturological contexts of the emergence of the three (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.



Though it was felt by many that the comparative approach [27; 35; 36], overestimating the content at the expense of the form and ignoring the semiotics of the media analyzed was on shaky ground (L. Hutcheon, for instance devalues comparative case studies for they "rarely offer the kind of generalizable insights into theoretical issues" [27, p. 13].), it still boosted a trend of undeniable productivity by outlining the *medium specificity* [18]: thus, S. Cardwell justifies the expediency of comparative studies in adaptation field for "comparison of texts in different media" to gain "a fuller and more complex understanding of the specificity of the media themselves" [18, p. 56].

Cartmell and Whelehan [19] also claim that comparative studies may have "relevance to the wider study of adaptation as a process", whereas A. Bazin feels [16, p. 136] that "the effect of their juxtaposition is to reaffirm their differences" and that "...film tended to substitute for the novel in the guise of its aesthetic translation into another language. Fidelity meant respect for the spirit of the novel, but it also meant a search for necessary equivalents..." [16, p. 141]. By regarding sameness and difference to be both present in adaptation, it is evident that Bazin is referring to something more than just "a successful intersemiotic transposition that merely duplicates and so replaces its source" [24].

We feel that overstressing fidelity underpins the very idea of the heritage genre that is central to this paper as "... no matter how good a copy it is, however, it is qua "copy" inevitably doomed to be inferior to its original" [19]. We offer to view adaptations not as plain copies but as separate works of art in constant interaction with the original. To get an accurate description of such kind of interaction the specificity of the two media needs to be established. With a view to restore the balance and outlining the nature of the literature and film media *specificity* approach was adopted.

### **Specificity Approach or the Dialogue of the Two Media**

B. McFarlane observes [36, p. 28] that "literature-film connection may be closer than any of the others: and the most helpful discourse surrounding this may be the one which, respecting the specificities of each, is concerned with exploring how they deal with each other, rather than which came first and which is "better" than the other". This view is shared by G. Raitt [40] as it is through *difference* from the original rather than similarity that the researcher perceives adaptation proposing his own method of reading/viewing mediated by difference. Until recent times there has been a strong tendency to recognize the specificity and complexity of the verbal medium (literature in our case), but not those of the film. The language of film went largely underprivileged, as its components, such as *mis-en-scene*, cinematography (camera distance and angle, etc.), sound and narration were not treated as equal or equivalent to their literary counterparts [35; 36]. Even the term "reading" was adopted from literary studies to film analysis [36], probably in the hope of implying the dominance of the former.

In this paper we view literature-film relations as a constant dialogue/interaction of the media with different semiotic systems, which naturally presupposes specificity of each of the "interactants". The validity of this dialogical or interactive approach is supported by our practice of treating adaptation as a separate work of art without constant literature-film comparative "oscillating experience" from the verbal medium into the visual screen medium [27]. As such, screen adaptation is characterized by its particular semiotic system and its own cinematic techniques which are meant to differentiate it from those of the literary precursor. The language of adaptations has its own methods of decoding largely different from the literary ones. Alongside, the juxtaposition of the two media in the course of their dialogical interaction invariably involves the juxtaposition of *culturological* contexts of their creation bringing about additional *culturological* meanings (layered meanings, absorbed meanings, etc.) and finally leading to the birth of a *culturological construct* (see Figure 1).

### **Discursive Approach or Screen Adaptation As a Multimodal Text**

The adherents of a *discursive* approach to film adaptations [13; 14; 20; 37] share the idea of specificity by claiming that adaptations are semiotic objects and "acts of discourse" when viewed within a wider semiotic perspective as textual objects [37, p. 14]: "Le seul principe de pertinence susceptible de définir actuellement la sémiologie du film est [...] la volonté de traiter les films comme des *textes*, comme des unités de discours, en s'obligeant par là à rechercher les différents *systèmes* (qu'ils soient ou non des codes) qui viennent informer ces textes et s'impliciter en eux. Si on déclare que la sémiologie étudie la *forme* des films, ce doit être sans oublier que la forme n'est pas ce qui s'oppose au contenu, et qu'il existe une forme du contenu, tout aussi importante que la forme du signifiant".

The research focus on screen adaptations until recently has been placed exclusively on the language largely disregarding other meaning-producing semiotic systems interacting with the language or functioning parallel to it. Thus, the multimedia mode of screen adaptation discourse [2; 4; 7; 8; 9; 5; 6; 10] as well as its heterogeneous multimodal nature have rarely been subjected to analysis due to the absence of the respective interdisciplinary methodology and the evident obstacles entailed by the research of the kind. It is this kind of research that we aspire to carry out. Refuting the monomodal traditional discourse analysis of screen adaptations

we follow the researchers [8; 9; 10; 38; 31;] who pioneered [29, p. 4] "extending the conception of language as an isolated phenomenon to include other semiotic, meaning-making, resources".

### **Complementary or Extended Intertextual Approach**

This kind of approach suggests viewing adaptation as a form of intertextuality [19; 26; 37; 40; 42; 43], though more detailed interpretations of it vary from one paper to another. Viewing film adaptations as parts of a continuing dialogical process and referring to them as "readings", R. Stam [42; 43] finds them involved in an intricate interchange with other texts, relying on Genette's "transtextuality", or rather its fifth type – hypertextuality – as a key to decoding adaptations [26].

D. Cartmell and I. Whelehan hold [19, pp. 17-18] that that reading/viewing is a process of "continual journey". G. Raitt observes that literature – film relations are those of *difference* [40], resulting from screen adaptations being in an intertextual field, and "provide a way of conceiving screen adaptations in a symbiotic relationship with source works and other works of art and, consequently, of reading//viewing them informed by differences and switching between new interpretations made possible by differences" [40, pp. 3]. Raitt's term "intertextual cluster" suggests that there is more to a screen adaptation than just reading/viewing procedure: "oscillating" between the adaptation and its source, or rather "flipping back and forth" [27, p. 69, 121] the viewers of a screen adaptation are involved in the process of reading/viewing together with the literary precursor and other works of art in the intertextual field.

It is recognized by some researchers, though not universally admitted that a screen adaptation and a literary precursor can be complementary in giving birth to "a kind of third text that has greater complexity than either of its two components alone" [41, p. 236; 43, p. 11; 34, p. 240]. R. Flanagan suggests that "to really know the story you have to go to both" [25, p. 346]. Sharing the idea of a complementary approach and following Raitt's global vision of intertextuality (a broader view than the study of sources [15, p. 160; 32, p. 60; 22, p. 114]) in this paper we purport to show the mechanism of how placing a screen adaptation as a separate work of art in a particular culturological context (different from the one it was conceptualized and created in) may stimulate an interaction of semiotically distanced media (novel-script-film). Thus, our approach presupposes conceptualizing a screen adaptation as a specific separate art form involved in a dialogical interchange and complementary relations with its literary precursor and script as well as secondary adaptations and is aimed at producing new insights into the process of shaping new culturological meanings crystallized in culturological constructs.

The research priorly performed into the field of adaptation does not seem sufficient to us as, despite the fact the the phenomenon of adaptation has been largely tackled within the framework of different disciplines and paradigms, the actual mechanism of performing an adaptation has not received an interdisciplinary full-fledged description involving the symbiosis of linguistic and cinematographic repertoire; what is more crucial, the view of adaptation as a form of art co-existing in time with its literary precursor and script as well as echoing with secondary/prior adaptations in the form of a constant culturological dialogue and contributing in this way to the emergence of a new culturological meaning has also been continuously neglected.

The prospects of the research comprise a detailed decription of literary piece-screenplay-film-remake adaptation mechanism from cognitive and language perspectives.

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