

Editorial

Literature and cinema. History of a fascination

María José Fresnadillo Martínez

Departamento de Medicina Preventiva, Salud Pública y Microbiología Médica. Facultad de Medicina.
Universidad de Salamanca (Spain).

Correspondence: María José Fresnadillo Martínez. Facultad de Medicina. Alfonso X El Sabio s/n. 37007 Salamanca (Spain).
e-mail: jofrema@usal.es

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The art works split into two categories: those that I like and those that I do not like.

Antón Chejov (1860-1904).

The versions, adaptations, movements, translations, transferences, transcriptions, inspirations, recreations, fusions and finally, such worn and taken cultural diversions have a long tradition establishing an authentic cobweb of relations and “artistic” influences: from the theater to the theater (*Antígona* of Sofocles and the modified version of Bertol Brecht), from the novel to the theater (*Hopscotch* of Cortazar and the theatrical version of Jaime Kogan), from poetry to sculpture (*The flowers of the evil* of Baudelaire and *The thinker* of Rodin), from painting to poetry (*Christ of Velázquez* de Unamuno or *A the Painting* of Rafael Alberti), from painting to cinema (*Ofelia* of Millais recreated in *Hamlet* of Laurence Olivier, the aesthetics of Edward Hopper in the cinema of Robert Altman or *The young woman of the pearl* of Vermeer taken shape of the cinema for Peter Webber through the novel of Tracy Chevalier), from music to literature (*The sonata of Kreutzer* of Beethoven and the short novel of shame title of Leon Tolstoi or *The Consecration of the Spring* of Igor Stravinsky from the homonymous novel of Alejo Carpentier), from literature to music (the loves of Paolo and Francesca at *The Divine Comedy* of Dante recreated in *Francesca de Rimini* of Tchaikowsky, the symphonic poems of Strauss from literary origin like *So spoke Zaratrusta* or *The Quixote* or the operas *Macbeth*, *Otelo* or *Falstaff* of Verdi proceeding from Shakespeare), from the architecture to the cinema (*Metropolis* of Fritz Lang), from television to cinema (*X Files* of Rob Rowman or *The fugitive* of Andrew Davis), from theater to cinema (*The dog of the*

market gardener of Lope de Vega and the homonymous of Pilar Miró; *Tirano Banderas* of Valle-Inclan re-interpreted by Jose Luis Garcia Sanchez or *The house of Bernarda Alba* of Federico Garcia Lorca adapted by Mario Camus), from the novel to the television (*The Regent's wife* of Clarin and the television version of Fernando Mendez-Leite or *Fortunata and Jacinta* written by Benito Perez Galdos and filmed by Mario Camus), from cinema to novel (*The third man* of Carol Reed with script of Graham Greene and re-written like a novel by himself), from cinema to theater (*Between darkness* of Pedro Almodovar and Fermin Cabal), from cinema to cinema (reiterated remakes)...¹⁻⁵

From all of them, is probably on cinema where more connections converge. Not in vain Riccioto Canudo, the responsible that the cinema were considered the Seventh Art since 1911 (*Manifesto of Seven Arts*), considered the cinema like a synthesis of the arts. This definition, dangerous by its own, must not be interpreted as an artistic impurity but as an integration capacity that, in all its possible diversity and largeness, defines and it is inherent to the proper cinema, going beyond its artistic nature. Cinema agglutinates space and time, image and word, reality and fiction, knowledge and feelings. Besides this, cinema is also an authentic “empire of senses”. You can see and heard on it, and its capacity of re-memorizing makes you can also smell it, you taste it, and finally you feel it. Cinema swamp us, it is not only a window we can look at the world through and to ourselves. Cinema penetrates in our soul and allows the lame person to dance, to paint the quadriplegic, to sing the dumb one, to go to Miami to the inpatient.

On having tackled the relation literature/ cinema,

the normal thing is to refer to the thematic influence, to the adaptation of literary texts to the cinema - deliberately excluded from the previous examples since the history of the cinema is infested of movies based on literary works and it would be unjust to quote only one or two - although in order to make a complete analysis there must not be lost of sight the technical, methodological and structural influences.

Literature and cinema are narrative arts, and consequently, a pretext to tell stories from the first oral transmissions or *The watered watering* (1896). It is obvious that the literary language and the cinematographic language are two different and specific systems of communication, although they share structures and have convergence zones. The first one uses words and the second one images, but the goal is the same: the told story, which comes out of the language to turn into a source of emotions and of feelings. There is no a forced contrast between image and light and plastic arts and the art of the word. Moreover, the cinematographic script in itself is only the materialization of the relationship between literature and cinema or cinema and literature. The script is literature *per se*, a "special" literature thought about images and, in this way, at any movie, words are the keystone of the image. Besides there is no cinema without word (cinema, dumb on its beginning, was conceived like sonorously but it collided with technical problems and even on it there is word, communication) and without physical space, without image, there is no literature (after reading *The Regent's wife*, would we be able of taking shape Vetusta on images?). In some way, on the cinema stories are seen with opened eyes and in literature with closed ones.

But, we must not deceive ourselves. The language differences are real and, besides defining literature and cinema, they are fundamental not only in the genesis, in the conception of a literary adaptation but also in the quality of the final score, in the "perfection" of the movie. It is not a question of "tracing" the story replacing the words by images, but of realizing an interpretation of the story, a movement of the essence of the literary text to the film story so that "the stamp of factory" is recognized but allowing the movie to get proper life. The adaptation is not a matter of loyalty - understood as literality - or treachery to a literary work. Let's reflect: do we all think the same of *The Quixotic*, *Hopscotch*, *The tunnel*, *Hundred years of solitude*, *The tree of the Science* or the *Magic Mountain*? Do we all read the same book? Is "my reading" better than the others one? Would we all do the same movie if we

were film directors? In another more graphic, more visual area: Does Picasso loose genius on adapting *The Meninas* of Velazquez to the cubism? Does Velazquez loose anything on being interpreted by Picasso? Techniques, languages and possibly the affectivity change, but it is impossible to avoid the beautiful thing, the brilliant thing, and both works have capacity in this universe.

Also we cannot avoid the tyranny of the adaptation skill as well. The step from the literary text to the film one supposes the transformation of the literary space and time into a film space and time. And, something so banal in quality terms as the extension turns into a topic of vital importance that forces to select, to condense, to group, to suppress or to unify, of course respecting the order and the succession of the expressed in the original work. Miguel Delibes says: "*Adapting a novel of normal pagination to the cinema forces inevitably to synthesize it, because the image is unable to absorb the wealth of life and tones that the narrator has put in his book*".

So far, we agree in a theoretically way. We all accept the legitimacy of the director as reader but: Do we accept that "he imposes on us" his reading? Mostly not, and it obeys basically that at the time of judging an adaptation, we all or almost all do the reading from the literature, and the big error rests on there, since we judge the cinematographic story from a literary perspective (Are we qualified for this?). Whenever there is a released movie based on a literary work, even more when it is considered a summit of the Universal Literature, there are repeated attacks; the disappointment and the common places (loss of tones and characters, inaccuracies ...).

We all feel authorized to establish comparisons losing of sight, in most of the occasions, that adaptation is not a synonymous of movement, because, Is there anything to compare? What is the sense of comparing? Do the perfect adaptations exist? Why is an adaptation, at first, and from our prism, good or bad? Is it determinant in our perception of the quality of an adaptation the one coincides with "our" reading, with "our" interpretation?

A movie, from an aesthetic, non commercial point of view, is good or bad on itself, with independence of the material that has served it as a base. A few good props are, undoubtedly, important (*The good thing is never reached if it is not by means of the best* Victor Hugo) although sometimes the quality of the original one can

be a “poisoned sweet” especially speaking in terms of loyalty. Before a masterpiece of the literature, the ambition is usually the loyalty and any attempt of adaptation can be vain or disastrous. On the other hand, the adaptation of a mediocre work allows the director to play with the original text improving it up to achieving a masterpiece. Pere Gimferrer says: ... *the cinematographic history of love novels adaptations offers an eloquent collection of samples of sterile loyalties, infidelities and even fertile betrays.*

Neither we can avoid the prejudices, the “hierarchy of artistic prestige”. Will not we be considering to the literature “more” art than cinema? Will not we “feel” more educated applauding literature and insulting cinema? Since there is no an infallible recipe to distinguish the educated persons from those who are not: Will not we be behaving as the courtiers of *The new suit of the emperor* (Hans Christian Andersen) when we analyze the relation between literature and cinema? Will not we fit to an imposed aesthetics and will not we be capable of seeing further away? Undoubtedly, the simplest thing is following the advice of Chejov and enjoy the good literature and the good cinema, forgetting impositions, shames, taboos and erudite boastings.

In this number we analyze two movies with which the spectator can enjoy himself and that translate the respect to the literary work spirit at the expense of the literal translation, of loyalty. In *Arrowsmith* of John Ford, based on the homonymous novel of Sinclair Lewis, the adaptation supposed the exclusion of passages and aspects of the novel but it does not detract neither the essence of the characters, nor takes interest away to the movie, nor reduces its values.

Another studied movie is *La Traviata* of Zeffirelli. Here the things change because we enter in the myths field. Carmen, Mr. Juan, Lolita or even the Lady of the Camellias. The loyalty to the original text loses importance. The loyalty here goes to the proper character, who is a part of the collective memory and of the culture common harsh.

Finally, considering the character of the *Magazine of Medicine and Cinema* and the topic of this number, is adequate to transcribe the words of the film director Nicholas Philibert: “*If we do movies it is so we all could see something that we had not seen till then, that we could not see, or we could not read. It is so that the things reveal us in ourselves* “. In this sense the literary adaptation is an enrichment on contrasting two different visions from a literary work, it incites to read (to meet the model or to judge it?) and it offers to the cinema innumerable opportunities of use in teaching and formation.

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Translated by: Antonio Santos Iglesias

tono@usal.es
