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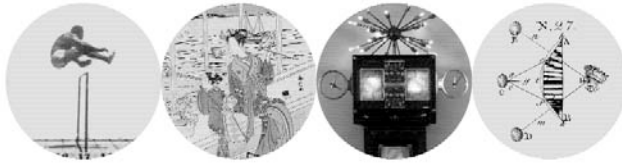
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Adaptation, Translation, Critique

Lawrence Venuti

Abstract

Translation theory advances thinking about film adaptation by enabling a more rigorous critical methodology. The relation between such second-order creations and their source materials is not communicative but hermeneutic, depending on the translator's or filmmaker's application of an interpretant. The hermeneutic relation can be seen not only as interpretive, fixing the form and meaning of the source materials, but as interrogative, exposing the cultural and social conditions of those materials and of the translation or adaptation that has processed them. The critic in turn applies an interpretant, whether a critical methodology or specific interpretation, to formulate the hermeneutic relation and its interrogative effects.

Keywords

critique • fidelity • film adaptation • ideology • interpretation • intertextuality • reception • translation

Communicative vs Hermeneutic Models

The study of film adaptation has long been impeded by the lack of a rigorous methodology that enables the examination of adaptations as cultural objects in their own right, distinct both from the materials they adapt and from films that do not make the adaptation of prior materials central to their signifying process. This methodological lack has been due to a variety of factors, but two in particular seem to be decisive, one conceptual, the other institutional (for a survey that aims to be exhaustive, see Stam, 2005a: 3–8). The literary texts that are usually considered in studies of film adaptations are assigned a greater value that reflects not only the assumption of a romantic concept of original, self-expressive authorship and hence the marginalization of

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second-order creations like adaptations, but also the disciplinary sites to which film studies was most often affiliated in its emergence, particularly academic departments and programs of literature, where romantic assumptions about authorship continue to hold sway. As a result, the film adaptation has generally been described and evaluated on the basis of its adequacy to the literary text, whereby it tends to be judged as an unfaithful or distorted communication of the author's expressive intention. Such a judgement, however, routinely involves the unwitting application of a third term, a dominant or authoritative interpretation of the text, which the critic applies as a standard on the assumption that the film should somehow inscribe that and only that interpretation (for examples, see Orr, 1984). In adaptation studies informed by the discourse of fidelity, the film is not compared directly to the literary text, but rather to a version of it mediated by an interpretation.

This critical practice is perhaps most evident with adaptations of canonical literary texts around which a substantial body of commentary has accumulated and a limited range of interpretations has achieved authority. Yet the communicative model on which the practice depends can also be detected in studies that pay closer and more sophisticated attention to aspects of film form. Brian McFarlane (1996) construes the film version of a novel as effectively a complicated act of communication, an interplay between the 'transfer' of 'narrative' (story, setting, character) and the 'adaptation' of 'enunciation' (plot, tone, point of view). He argues that narrative is 'transferable because [it is] not tied to one or other semiotic system', whereas the 'effects' of enunciation 'are closely tied to the semiotic system in which they are manifested' and therefore 'involve intricate processes of adaptation' (pp. 19–20). Although McFarlane acknowledges that a film can put the novel it adapts to diverse uses (following such previous theorists as Andrew, 1984: 98–104), he ignores the fact that even a seemingly invariant narrative element like setting is transformed when it moves from a novelistic description to a filmic representation (McFarlane, 1996: 14). Given the multiple dimensions of film, at once verbal, visual and aural, filmmakers must make numerous choices that are never entirely specified in or capable of being inferred from a text. Robert Stam (2005a) neatly makes this point by analyzing a scene from a 'fairly straightforward adaptation' of a 'realist novel', John Ford's 1940 version of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, where 'the very processes of filming – the fact that the shots have to be composed, lit, and edited in a certain way – generates an "automatic difference"' (p. 18).

Subsequent developments in film studies have abandoned the communicative model by considering adaptation as essentially a form of intertextuality. Here the film is viewed as necessarily transformative of prior materials and therefore demands analytical tools designed specifically to describe and assess the significance of the transformations. Stam argues that a film version of a novel should be seen as performing various operations on both the formal and thematic features of the literary text so as to recast it in characteristically filmic terms. These operations may include 'selection, amplification, concretization, actualization, critique, extrapolation, popularization,

reaccentuation, transculturization' (p. 45; see also Stam, 2000: 68). The film adaptation is thus treated as relatively autonomous from the materials it adapts because its relationship to those materials consists of a simultaneous resemblance and difference, mimetic but never an identity. For Stam, an adaptation is most productively seen not as communicative, but as hermeneutic, as an interpretation of prior materials that is inscribed by the transformative operations in accordance with various factors peculiar to the medium of film (the screenplay, elements of film form, intertextual or intersemiotic relations to film and other cultural traditions and practices, and the institutional and social conditions of film production). The interpretation, furthermore, is overdetermined by the cultural situation and historical moment in which the adaptation is produced, so that in interpreting prior materials the adaptation intervenes in a specific conjuncture of social relations and developments, regardless of whether the filmmaker intends to intervene in political struggles or to take sides in social divisions.

Still, in examining the recent work in which Stam and his collaborators have deployed this hermeneutic model – a monograph (Stam, 2005b) and two edited volumes (Stam and Raengo, 2004, 2005) – it becomes clear that another set of methodological blinders has appeared. Despite the enormous theoretical sophistication of this research, the studies show a strong tendency to privilege the film adaptation over the literary text it adapts, thereby reversing the implicit evaluation found in the critics who assume the communicative model. 'A filmic adaptation is *automatically* different and original due to the change of medium', Stam (2005a) asserts, and 'by revealing the prisms and grids and discourses through which the novel has been reimagined, adaptations grant a kind of objective materiality to the discourses themselves, giving them visible, audible, and perceptible form' (pp. 17, 45, original emphasis). Yet if an adaptation is by definition a second-order creation, if it consists of numerous intertextual and intersemiotic relations to prior materials, not just the literary text it adapts, in what sense can it be called 'original'? And how can the 'discourses' that the critic articulates in the adaptation ever assume 'a kind of objective materiality' when those discourses are seen as ideological and the critic's interpretation of them more often than not consists of an ideological critique, mounted from a specific political position that may not be shared by the film?

'Many of the changes between novelistic source and film adaptation', states Stam (2005a),

have to do with ideology and social discourses. The question becomes whether an adaptation pushes the novel to the 'right,' by naturalizing and justifying social hierarchies based on class, race, sexuality, gender, region, and national belonging, or to the 'left' by interrogating or leveling hierarchies in an egalitarian manner. There are also 'uneven developments' in this respect; for example, in adaptations which push the novel to the left on some issues (e.g. class) but to the right on others (e.g. gender or race). (pp. 42–3)

With few exceptions, Stam and his collaborators treat the 'ideology and social discourses' in film adaptations as if they were readily available, 'perceptible' in an unmediated form, as if the critics themselves had not selected which 'changes' between novel and film enable them to describe the ideological standpoint of the film and to evaluate it as a progressive or reactionary interpretation of the novel (or other prior material). In their hands, the hermeneutic model involves the deliberate but usually unremarked application of a third term, if not always a dominant or authoritative interpretation of a novel or film, then at the very least a dominant critical methodology based on a political position (broadly democratic, although capable of further specification according to various social categories), which the critic applies as a standard on the assumption that the film should somehow inscribe that and only that ideology. In adaptation studies informed by the discourse of intertextuality, the film is not compared directly to the literary text, but rather to a version of it mediated by an ideological critique.

Stam's approach to film adaptation, admittedly 'something less than a grandly ambitious theory yet more substantive than a methodology' (pp. 31–2), remains the most advanced in the field, and his trilogy of books demonstrates how productive it can be. Yet even though I share his politics, I find the lacunae in his methodological exposition not only limiting to the study of film, but potentially damaging to the political position he wishes to bring to it. And I want to suggest that translation theory can be useful in addressing the problems. In fact, if my discussion so far has at all clarified the differences between the two theoretical discourses that prevail in adaptation studies, fidelity and intertextuality, this must be attributed to my reliance on translation research, on a basic distinction between different concepts of language and the translation theories to which they give rise: an instrumental concept of language as expressive of thought and representing reality leads to a theory of translation (and adaptation) as the communication of a univocal meaning inherent in the source text, whereas a hermeneutic concept of language as constitutive of thought and determining reality leads to a theory of translation (and adaptation) as an interpretation that fixes a form and meaning in the source text in accordance with values, beliefs and representations in the translating language and culture (Venuti, 2004: 6; Kelly, 1979: Ch. 1).

Adaptation as Translation

The choice of translation theory as a source of concepts for adaptation studies is far from arbitrary. The analogy between adaptation and translation frequently recurs in the literature, but it is usually applied without comment, rarely examined in any detail (see, for instance, Stam, 2000: 62). When the analogy is explored, the understanding of translation turns out to be hampered by the very communicative model that the critic aims to banish from adaptation studies. 'As a trope', states R. Barton Palmer (2004), 'translation is useful because it emphasizes the (at least normally) shared

identity of source and adaptation. But translation is also distorting, for it postulates a “carrying over” of some irreducible set of features or qualities from one text to another’, so that ‘translation makes it difficult to theorize any adaptation as a separate entity’ (pp. 262, 263). For Palmer, a translation, unlike a film adaptation, is an untroubled communication of an invariant in the source text. Yet this view betrays an ignorance of developments in translation studies over the past three decades (see Venuti, 2004).

Today, to be sure, translation and adaptation are carefully distinguished by publishers and translators, filmmakers and screenwriters, even if copyright law classifies both cultural practices as ‘derivative works’. Contemporary translators are required by their publishers, often explicitly in contracts, to render the source text without any deletions and with only such additions as might be necessary to make that text intelligible in the translating language and culture. An adaptation, in contrast, might depart widely from its prior materials, submitting them to various kinds of manipulation and revision. Nonetheless, a translation can never simply communicate in whole or in part the text that it translates; it can only inscribe an interpretation that inevitably varies the form and meaning of that text. Translation can be regarded as intercultural communication only if we recognize that it communicates one interpretation among other possibilities. This is not to suggest that no formal or semantic correspondences can exist between the source and translated texts, but rather that any such correspondences are subject to the exigencies of an interpretive labor that is decisively determined by the translating language and culture.

Translation enacts an interpretation, first of all, because it is radically decontextualizing. The structural differences between languages, even between languages that bear significant lexical and syntactical resemblances stemming from shared etymologies or a history of mutual borrowing, require the translator variously to dismantle, rearrange, and finally displace the chain of signifiers that make up the source text. Three source-language contexts are lost. The first is intratextual and therefore constitutive of the source text, of its linguistic patterns and discursive structures, its verbal texture. The second is intertextual yet equally constitutive since it comprises the network of linguistic relations that endows the source text with significance for readers who have read widely in the source language. The third, which is also constitutive but both intertextual and intersemiotic, is the context of reception, the various intermedia through which the source text continues to accrue significance when it begins to circulate in its originary culture, ranging from book jackets and advertisements to periodical reviews and academic criticism to editions and adaptations, depending on the genre or text type. By ‘constitutive’, I mean that this triple context is necessary for the signifying process of the source text, for its capacity to support meanings, values and functions which therefore never survive intact the transition to a different language and culture.

A film adaptation similarly initiates its inscription of an interpretation by detaching its prior materials from their contexts. These contexts are also multiple, both originary and subsequent, and they determine the meanings, values and functions of the materials, whether the latter consist of literary,

dramatic or musical texts such as novels, plays, operas and songs, nonfiction texts, such as memoirs, biographies, histories and archival documents, or visual forms, such as other films, television programs, paintings and comic strips – even the screenplay that a director might take as a point of departure. In contrast to contemporary translation practices, however, an adaptation is likely to decontextualize these materials in a much more extensive and complex way, not only because of the change in medium, but because of the license routinely taken by filmmakers. Portions of the prior materials might be eliminated or altered because a filmmaker has chosen not to incorporate them in the film at all or in the same form, including subplots and plot twists, scenes and dialogue, characters and descriptions of settings, images from visual art, and historical figures and events.

The interpretive force of a translation also issues from the fact that the source text is not only decontextualized, but *recontextualized*. These two processes occur simultaneously, as soon as a text is chosen and the translator begins to render it. Translating rewrites a source text in terms that are intelligible and interesting to receptors, situating it in different patterns of language use, in different literary traditions, in different cultural values, in different social institutions, and often in a different historical moment. The recontextualizing process entails the creation of another network of intertextual relations established by and within the translation, a receiving intertext, and the process continues in the emergence of another context of reception, whereby the translation is mediated by promotion and marketing strategies, various kinds of commentaries, and the uses to which diverse readers put it. When translated, then, the source text undergoes not only various degrees of formal and semantic loss, but also an exorbitant gain: in attempting to fix the form and meaning of that text, the translator develops an interpretation in the translating language that ultimately proliferates cultural differences so that the translation can signify in the receiving situation. Although these differences undoubtedly relate to features of the source text, they work only in the translating language and culture and therefore release different effects.

A film adaptation likewise recontextualizes its prior materials, but once again the process is much more extensive and complex because of the shift to a different, multidimensional medium with different traditions, practices and conditions of production. Not only do aspects of film form (*mise-en-scène*, montage, soundtrack, genre) contribute to the construction of a different context that creates a substantially different signifying process, but they are further inflected by distinct styles of acting, directing and studio production, by the trajectory of a particular actor's, director's or screenwriter's career, by economic and political factors, and by the hierarchy of values, beliefs and representations in the cultural situation where the adaptation is produced. Working within these parameters, filmmakers might add to or alter the prior materials, creating or substituting different plots and characters, settings and scenes, and establishing different intertextual and intersemiotic relations. Because of the multidimensionality of the filmic medium, the interpretation inscribed by an adaptation can be so powerful as to compete against and forever complicate the viewer's experiences of the adapted materials.

The Interpretant

Yet what exactly is the mechanism of interpretation at work in translating? What principles guide the choice of a source text and the verbal choices made by the translator and editors of the translated text, principles of selection that always constitute interpretive moves? An interpretation is inscribed through the application of a category that mediates between the source language and culture, on the one hand, and the translating language and culture, on the other, a method of choosing the source text and transforming it into the translation. This category consists of *interpretants*, which can be either formal or thematic. Formal interpretants may include a relation of equivalence, such as a semantic correspondence based on dictionary definitions or philological research, or a particular style, such as a lexicon and syntax characteristic of a genre. Thematic interpretants are codes: an interpretation of the source text that has been articulated independently in commentary; a discourse in the sense of a relatively coherent body of concepts, problems, and arguments linked to a genre and housed in a social institution; or values, beliefs and representations affiliated with specific social groups. Interpretants are rooted primarily in the receiving situation even if in some cases they may incorporate materials specific to the source culture. It is the translator's application of interpretants that guides the process of decontextualizing and recontextualizing the source text, replacing intertextual relations in the source language and culture with a receiving intertext, with relations to the translating language and culture which are built into the translation.

The interpretant is a category that has yet to receive sufficient attention in adaptation studies, although it has led an active but clandestine life there. It is what I called earlier the implicit 'third term' in the competing discourses of fidelity and intertextuality, a dominant interpretation or critical methodology applied without reflection by many critics in their analyses and critiques. But it is absent from most efforts to theorize the hermeneutic relation between an adaptation and its prior materials. Two exceptions repay closer examination by helping to develop further the analogy between adaptation and translation.

Mikhail Iampolski (1998) uses the term 'interpretant' in his suggestive treatment of intertextuality in film. For him, the interpretant is a 'third text' that the viewer introduces in order to understand the relation between a film and its 'intertext', which in Iampolski's terminology is defined as a text that exists prior to the film but is explicitly present in it, such as the references to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem 'Kubla Khan' in Orson Welles's 1941 film *Citizen Kane* (pp. 42–4). This notion of the interpretant, however, does not clarify or explain the interpretation that the film inscribes in the intertext. On the contrary, it opens up a potentially interminable range of other intertexts, bound only by the viewer's memory of cultural forms. In fact, Iampolski describes the interpretant as 'a term to be understood very broadly to mean a whole field of artistic creation, a kind of "superarchitext"' (p. 57). This open-ended quality effectively limits the explanatory power of the term in

Iampolski's critical discourse, although he does make clear that his interest lies elsewhere. In taking up Welles's film, Iampolski wants to show 'how structural isomorphism between intertextually connected texts can create meaning as an enigma or mystery, and how the interpretant is involved in the creation of this enigma', and so his analysis simply multiplies 'parallels' to the basic plot details by citing other, similar literary texts (pp. 43, 45). The methodological lack in his discourse is caused by his privileging of non-narrative elements in film: 'The enigmatic literary subtexts', he states, 'destroy the clarity of the narrative *mode* and create a structure that allows for a slippage from the diegetic level (the level of narrative) to the discursive level (the level of the formal organization of the story)' (p. 47, original emphasis). The interpretant that enables Iampolski's own critical acts is a poststructuralist concept of indeterminacy, an endless proliferation of interpretive possibilities that produce the sublime effect of escaping the viewer's cognitive mastery. 'In this struggle for meaning', he concludes, 'the real victory belongs to the characters in the film, since they are the ones who know that there is in fact no real solution' (p. 47).

The open-ended quality of Iampolski's terms highlights the restrictedness of Patrick Cattrysse's unique application of translation theory to the study of film adaptation. Central to Cattrysse's synthesis is Gideon Toury's concept of norms, the values that govern cultural practices like translation. 'Whereas adherence to source norms determines a translation's *adequacy* as compared to the source text', Toury (1995) states, 'subscription to norms originating in the target culture determines its *acceptability*' (pp. 56–7, original emphasis; see also Toury, 1980). As a result, equivalence is reconceptualized as a dynamic category that functions solely in the translating culture: criteria of acceptability may be either source-oriented or target-oriented, and standards of equivalence can vary according to different cultural constituencies and different historical moments. Cattrysse (1990) develops these concepts for adaptation studies by distinguishing between norms that are 'semiotic', specific to the signifying processes of literature or film, and norms that are 'pragmatic', defined as 'socio-communicative determinations' that are exemplified by style or genre or by economic and political factors, among other possibilities (pp. 40–1, my translation here and later). To formulate the norms in a 'corpus' of film adaptations, according to Cattrysse, the films must be compared to their prior materials (his corpus is American film noir between 1940 and 1960) so as 'to locate divergences and resemblances, shifts and non-shifts'; the comparison ultimately reveals 'the equivalence [that] is realized through the compromise between the norms of adequacy and the norms of acceptability' (pp. 38–9).

The concept of norms would seem to do the work of the interpretant for Cattrysse. Yet in setting equivalence as the goal of the analysis, his application of translation theory devolves into a more flexible and sophisticated but nonetheless recognizable version of the discourse of fidelity. Not only are norms too narrowly defined and too simply applied to encompass the multiple factors that enable and constrain film production, but the emphasis on equivalence stops short of describing the hermeneutic relation between

an adaptation and its prior materials. Cattrysse (1992) later realized some of these limitations when he observed that shifts are complex in their effects and cannot be reduced to a specific norm (pp. 56–7). Nonetheless, his work has the virtue of reinstalling the concept of equivalence in adaptation studies since it has been treated too dismissively in the discourse of intertextuality. Equivalence is definitely one relationship into which a film can enter with its prior materials, however that concept may be defined.

I want to suggest that the interpretant is an essential category for studying adaptation. Interpretants enable the film to inscribe an interpretation by mediating between its prior materials, on the one hand, and the medium and its conditions of production, on the other – by providing, in other words, a method of selecting those materials and transforming them into the adaptation through the multimedial choices made by the filmmakers. As in the case of translation, the interpretants in adaptation can be either formal or thematic. Formal interpretants may include a relation of equivalence, such as a structural correspondence maintained between the adapted materials and the film (cf. Iampolski's 'structural isomorphism' between plot details), a particular style, such as a distinctive set of formal features that characterize the work of a director or studio, or a concept of genre that necessitates a manipulation or revision of the adapted materials (cf. Cattrysse, 1992: 57, where a 'norm of suspense' typical of noir is cited to account for narrative divergences between novels and films). Thematic interpretants are codes, values, ideologies. They may include an interpretation of the adapted materials that has been formulated elsewhere, a morality or cultural taste shared by the filmmakers and used to appeal to a particular audience, or a political position that reflects the interests of a specific social group.

Given the complexity of the medium, a number of interpretants will be applied in any adaptation, even if in the long run they might be grouped into more general categories as the analysis proceeds and the field is articulated in an overall interpretation. To analyze the interpretants, as Cattrysse's work has hinted, the critic would need to focus on shifts, on the additions, deletions and substitutions that come to light in the adaptation when it is compared to its prior materials. This procedure can avoid the unwitting or automatic introduction of an interpretation of the materials themselves: the aim is to elucidate the interpretive operation performed by the film, allowing it to expose significant formal and thematic features of the materials, both those features that the filmmakers have chosen to adapt in some way and those that they have omitted or replaced. The shifts can therefore be useful in indicating a concept of equivalence, among other kinds of interpretants. Yet it must not be thought that a shift is somehow neutral, immediately perceptible without any critical processing. Locating a shift between an adaptation and its prior materials assumes some effort to fix the form and meaning of those materials in order to establish that a resemblance or divergence exists in the adaptation and reflects a specific interpretant applied by the filmmakers. Locating a shift, then, reveals the critic's own application of an interpretant, which may be thematic (an interpretation of the prior materials) or formal (a critical methodology). The critic's interpretants

enable the inference of interpretants in the adaptation by singling out specific features and operations for analysis and by processing them according to the critic's own methodology.

Consider an example from a close adaptation of a novel, Paul Schrader's 1991 version of Ian McEwan's *The Comfort of Strangers*. The very beginning of the film presents a rapid sequence of images, all of Venice. The first image, coinciding with the last credit, is a blazing sunset on the Grand Canal which evokes J.M.W. Turner's luminous, atmospheric paintings of comparable Venetian scenes; the next images show the skyline and smaller canals, evoking conventional Italian postcards. This montage has no direct counterpart in McEwan's novel, which plunges immediately into a description of a British couple on a summer holiday at an unnamed seaside resort. The peculiar absence of any explicit reference to Venice throughout the novel would be noticed by an attentive reader, but it becomes even more conspicuous when the film is juxtaposed to the text because the visual images cannot but show the Italian city. In the first chapter, the setting is no more than implied through a succession of markers that gradually become identifiable: 'the iron barges', 'the hotel café pontoon', 'the clouded, late afternoon heat', 'the fine old churches, the altar pieces, the stone bridges over canals', 'the crowds who swarmed over the canal bridges and down every narrow street' (McEwan, 1981: 9, 10, 12). The absence of the word 'Venice' in the text triggers the reader's identification of the setting, foregrounding its sheer recognizability. A similar effect, I would argue, is produced by the intersemiotic relations I have cited in the opening montage of the film, its evocation of paintings and postcards that exceed a mere indication of the setting and convey a sense of familiarity, even conventionality. Although the film actually deviates from the novel here by inserting images that do not conform to any extended descriptions in the text, a formal interpretant can still be inferred, a relation of equivalence – but only if the critic interprets the lack of any mention of Venice in the novel as well as the visual allusions in the montage that opens the film.

As a rule, shifts show the film altering its prior materials so as to signify a particularly strong interpretation of them. This can be seen in two controversial film biographies of 17th-century Italian painters which adapt the historical record by revising it: Derek Jarman's *Caravaggio* (1986) and Agnès Merlet's *Artemisia* (1998). Jarman takes a figure whom in contemporary accounts Caravaggio is reported to have fought and killed, Ranuccio Tomassoni, and turns him into a violent motor mechanic for whom the painter develops a homoerotic attraction (for the biographical details, see Hibbard, 1983). The shift reveals a thematic interpretant, an ideology that is at once aesthetic and sexual: Jarman characterizes a canonical figure in art history as bisexual in order to enlist him in a queer cultural politics that associates the avant-garde with sexual transgression. Merlet departs from the transcript of Artemisia Gentileschi's rape trial by representing her relationship with the painter Agostino Tassi as consensual rather than coerced (the transcript is presented in the appendix to Garrard, 1989). This shift likewise reveals a thematic interpretant that can be read as political, a

gender ideology: although feminist art historians have seen the rape as a brutal form of male oppression, Merlet's own feminist agenda connects Artemisia's sexual awakening to her artistic coming-of-age, so that her affair with Tassi becomes a bid to wrest her sexuality as well as her art from her father Orazio's control. 'You want everything for yourself', Merlet's Artemisia tells Orazio after the trial, 'me and the frescoes'. In Merlet's adaptation, the rape is a trumped-up charge that conceals the commercial rivalry between two male painters vying for commissions.

Complaints that Jarman and Merlet have wrongly introduced historical inaccuracies apply a rather rigid critical interpretant, an empiricist concept of history that effectively preempts any understanding of the revisionary moves made by the filmmakers. Such complaints are also likely to rest on sexual and gender ideologies that are inimical to the cultural political agendas of the films. In treating adaptations as interpretations of their prior materials, it is important that, at least initially, the critic apply an interpretant that does not disallow the interpretants applied by the filmmakers. Just as no translation can be judged through a simple comparison to the source text it translates because of the manifold losses and gains that necessarily result from the translation process, so no film adaptation can be judged merely through a comparison to its prior materials because of the extensive and complicated ways it processes them. The contexts in which the translation or adaptation was produced and received, the traditions and practices of translating and filmmaking as well as the social conditions of reading and viewing, must be taken into account to avoid rendering essentialist judgements that ignore historical contingencies (for a historical survey of adaptation, see Corrigan, 1998).

Aesthetics of Production and Reception

The interpretants deployed in a film adaptation may be complementary, mutually reinforcing an overall interpretation inscribed in the prior materials, or disjunctive, resulting in opposing and even contradictory interpretations that may in turn be perceived differently by different audiences. The viewer's interpretant thus becomes a central factor in assessing the significance of an adaptation, raising the question of whether an academic critical discourse can or should take precedence over other, more popular forms of reception. A particularly illuminating example is offered by Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, where two thematic interpretants seem to figure in the filmmakers' choices: on the one hand, a dominant idealization of the heterosexual love between the two leads; on the other hand, a recurrent homoeroticism in the treatment of the male characters.

The screenplay initiates the idealization by making two revealing deletions from the beginning of the play. The first is the opening dialogue between Capulet's servants, which is filled with double entendres that link sexual aggression to violence. The second is the extended dialogue between

Benvolio and Romeo, in which the latter shows himself to be not just enamored of a woman who will not requite his affection, but frustrated that she will not have sex with him – even if he pays her for it. In Romeo's words, she will not 'ope her lap to saint-seducing gold' (I.i.206). In the film, the first deletion is supplied to some extent by costumes and camera movements that emphasize the servants' genitals. They wear brightly colored tights and codpieces, and when they are introduced, the camera pans from toe to head so that the viewer is forced to look at their bulging crotches before they pick a quarrel with the Montagues. Here the filmmakers' choices are guided, at least partly, by a formal interpretant of equivalence, although the critic needs to interpose a gender-oriented reading of the play to draw this conclusion. As Peter Donaldson (1990) observes, admittedly influenced by a 'generation of feminist Shakespeareans' in the academy, 'a central feature of the sex-gender system in place in Shakespeare's text is the obsessive verbal equation of erect penis and sword', and the camera works to 'replicate the verbal texture of anxious phallic wordplay' (pp. 153, 154). Yet the deletion of both the servants' coarse language and Romeo's questionable desire for another woman points to a thematic interpretant that is more significant in its impact: the film romanticizes the representation of love and sexuality in the text, removing it from any language that would taint its ideal purity, and this romanticization coincides with a rehabilitation of Romeo, a suppression of any questions about his integrity as a lover. The film carries out the rehabilitation most strikingly in its first depiction of Romeo. In Donaldson's careful description,

[Romeo's] entrance, in a long shot accompanied by a lyrical musical cue followed by a lingering close-up, shows him carrying a mint blossom plucked on his morning walk, a delicate spike of tiny white florets [which] connotes nonaggressive, pacific masculinity. (p. 156)

Whereas in the play Romeo uses the elevated language of Petrarchan love poetry to mystify his lustful designs, in the film he enters as the sincere, sensitive lover.

Juxtaposed with this idealization of heterosexual love, however, is a strain of homoeroticism. This second interpretation, in Donaldson's metaphor, 'hovers at the edges of the film' (pp. 145–6), although we can better understand how the filmmakers' choices support opposing interpretations of Shakespeare's text if we employ Roland Barthes' (1978) concept of the 'third meaning'. Take the provocative codpieces. This costume detail contains what Barthes calls an informational level of meaning, communicating a sense of historicity, even historical authenticity, that indicates the 16th century as the period in which the action is set. As Donaldson's gender-oriented reading makes clear, the codpieces also contain a symbolic level, signifying a theme of masculinity as phallic aggression which finds its counterpart in the text. Yet they release still another meaning that Barthes would describe as 'obtuse' or 'discontinuous', resisting easy assimilation to the other levels of signification, possibly unintentional because clearly subversive, 'indifferent to the story', in

fact 'the epitome of a counternarrative' (pp. 61, 63). With the panning that focuses on the codpieces, the film can also be seen as transforming the male actors into objects of homoerotic desire, especially insofar as that particular camera movement has been often used to signify a male heterosexual gaze directed towards female characters. In *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (Dir. Tay Garnett, 1946), for example, when the drifter Frank Chambers first encounters his employer's wife, the seductive Cora, the camera represents his eye movements by panning across the floor from the lipstick holder that rolls towards him to a shot of her legs cropped at the knees. No such point-of-view shots are used in Zeffirelli's film when the viewer is presented with homoerotic images. They appear repeatedly and take various forms: the dramatic panning at Tybalt's appearance in the opening scene, the effeminate handsomeness of the youthful male actors, the physical affection that Romeo shows for Mercutio during his increasingly distraught delivery of the Queen Mab speech, and the long shots of Romeo's buttocks, clad in tights when he weeps hopelessly in Friar Laurence's cell and naked in the love scene with Juliet. Donaldson's (1990) typically careful description indicates the peculiarity of this scene: 'Romeo is on screen naked for more than seventeen seconds in three shots, during which he is the sole object of attention; Juliet's nude "scene" lasts less than a second' (p. 169).

The opposing interpretations that Zeffirelli's film inscribes in Shakespeare's text can be viewed as different aesthetics of production that appeal to different aesthetics of reception or different audiences. Here Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) distinction between elite and popular taste can prove helpful. For Bourdieu, elite taste rests on the application of specialized knowledge in the detached formal appreciation of a cultural object, drawing the boundary between art and life, whereas popular taste aims to erase that boundary through a vicarious participation in the object, a sympathetic identification with characters as real people which often leads to the inference of moralistic lessons for conduct. Hence some adaptations cater to elite taste by building an intertextual and intersemiotic network and thereby assuming a broad familiarity with cultural traditions and practices as well as a willingness to pay critical attention to forms and themes that may be discontinuous or unconventional. Other adaptations cater to popular taste by deploying formal and thematic features that solicit identification, such as editing for narrative continuity, modelling scenes on popular film genres, and treating familiar themes in conventional ways. These distinctions are certainly not hard-and-fast: both elite and popular elements can function in the production and reception of the same film, just as elite filmmaking might appeal to popular taste and vice versa. The aesthetic categories 'elite' and 'popular' are heuristic devices that need to be specified according to various factors – formal and thematic, cultural and social – when applied in the analysis of a film.

For the most part, Zeffirelli's film presents a popular interpretation of the text through its idealization of heterosexual love. The romanticizing screenplay, the casting of two leads who were unknown as actors and relatively close in age to Shakespeare's characters, a scene suggestive of Hollywood

musicals with dances and a theme song (which became a hit according to *Billboard*'s charts) all invite the audience to identify with the images, to take the actors as the real incarnations of Romeo and Juliet, and to participate in the representation of their emotional lives. Other popular elements include the jerky, hand-held camera movements in the fight scenes, which generate suspense by immersing the viewer in the violence, and the deletion of Paris's death in the tomb scene, a detail that could limit the tragic impact of the lovers' deaths. The effectiveness of the filmmakers' popularizing choices was proved at the box office: the film earned over \$50 million on an investment of \$1.5 million (Zeffirelli, 1986: 229). Yet reviewers also attested to its popular appeal: *Newsweek* remarked that 'while it takes the Ph.D.-ism out of Shakespeare, [the film] jams back in as much idealism, sex, love, hate, desire, recklessness, passion as the human mind, body, heart and soul can contain' (Plate, 1968: 102).

Nevertheless, the homoeroticism signifies a more elite interpretation that in effect opposes the popular aesthetic governing much of the film. This aspect should be considered elite not only because it reflects the interests of a sexual minority, but because it requires the viewer to pay attention to film form, to be distanced from the narrative and open to discontinuities that may actually subvert it. Donaldson's reading demonstrates that an academic critical discourse, informed by developments in feminist and gay/lesbian studies may also be necessary to perceive the homoeroticism, although viewers familiar with gay visual culture might see it immediately. The importance of these kinds of knowledge to an elite appreciation of Zeffirelli's film was also made evident in its popular reception. In a rare comment on camera movement, the *Newsweek* reviewer confessed a telling ignorance: 'it is hard to know what to make of the camera's occasional introduction of a character by panning from toe to head' (Plate, 1968: 102). Yet not only were the homoerotic images generally invisible when the film was released, but some of them could also function as supports for the heterosexual desire of popular viewers. Leonard Whiting, the actor who played Romeo, became a heart-throb among teenage girls.

Adaptation as Critique

In recontextualizing prior materials, a second-order creation like a translation or adaptation submits them to a transformation that changes their significance – even as an effort is made to maintain a resemblance. As a result, the application of an interpretant in establishing the new context is never simply interpretive, but potentially interrogative: the formal and thematic differences introduced by the translation or adaptation, the move to a different language and culture or to a different cultural medium with different conditions of production, can invite a critical understanding of the prior materials as well as their originary or subsequent contexts, the linguistic patterns, cultural traditions and social institutions in which they were positioned. Yet once an interrogation is set going, it need not stop at the

prior materials; they may in turn be used to probe the translation or adaptation, along with the cultural forms and practices that constitute it as well as the traditions and institutions to which it is affiliated. It is essential to recognize, however, that any interrogation is no more than potential: not only does it assume the translator's or filmmaker's application of interpretants that allow the second-order creation to be construed as a critique, but it once again requires the critic's own application of interpretants that specifically emphasize interrogative effects.

These points can be developed by turning again to translation theory, particularly Philip Lewis's (1985) concept of 'abusive fidelity'. Lewis challenges the communicative model of translation that tends 'to privilege the capture of signifieds, to give primacy to message, content or concept over language texture', and he instead articulates a new formal interpretant, a concept of equivalence 'that requires attention to the chain of signifiers, to syntactic processes, to discursive structures, to the incidence of language mechanisms on thought and reality formation' (p. 42). The application of this interpretant in a translation zeroes in on whatever in the source text 'abuses' or deviates from normal patterns of linguistic usage, 'points or passages that are in some sense forced, that stand out as clusters of textual energy – whether they are constituted by words, turns of phrase, or more elaborate formulations' (p. 43). Thus a stylistic feature or node of intertextuality is abusive in Lewis's sense insofar as it resists the direct communication of a signified and demands a fairly aggressive interpretation of the signifier. For Lewis, a translation should seek to recreate source-text abuses analogically by deviating from linguistic norms in the translating culture. In so doing, however, the translation will also abuse or deviate from the source text, exposing linguistic and cultural conditions that remain implicit or unstated in it. The abusively faithful translation possesses a double interrogative

function – on the one hand, that of forcing the linguistic and conceptual system of which it is a dependent, and on the other hand, of directing a critical thrust back toward the text that it translates and in relation to which it becomes a kind of unsettling aftermath. (p. 43)

Yet a third interrogative function might be located here: the source text can be seen as equally abusive of the translation. A comparison between them will always uncover shifts or deviations that indicate the limitations of the translation, not merely of its mimetic aim, but of the interpretation that it inscribes during the recontextualizing process. Only the most skeptical critic will stage this sort of dialectic, in which source text and translation submit each other to a mutual interrogation. And the precise nature of the interrogative effects will be determined by the very choice of forms and themes on which to focus the analysis.

Stam (2005a) glances at a filmic analogue to this critical dialectic when he observes that in an adaptation 'a source work is reinterpreted through new grids and discourses', and 'each grid, in revealing aspects of the source text

in question, also reveals something about the ambient discourses in the moment of reaccentuation' (p. 45). Yet his emphasis on ideological critique displaces attention from the adaptation itself to the 'ambient discourses' in its historical 'moment'. This move limits not only the analysis of the adaptation as a critique, but also the critique of the adaptation that can be drawn from its prior materials. Moreover, the critic's application of interpretants is elided, removing the possibility that they too might be submitted to a searching critique. A more productive starting point, as Lewis's work suggests, would be to consider what formal and thematic features of the prior materials stand out as 'clusters of textual energy' vis-à-vis the film and can therefore be useful in bringing to light the interpretants that guided the filmmakers' recontextualization of those materials through various multimedial choices.

Zeffirelli's adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* shows a keen interest in the gender relations depicted in Shakespeare's play. Yet the recurrent homoeroticism runs counter not only to the romanticizing treatment of heterosexual love in the film, but to the homosocial relations that prevail in the text, underpinning the violent feud as well as the male domination of women. These disjunctions between film and text constitute the bases of a critique: the homoeroticism in Zeffirelli's adaptation can be viewed as a demystification of the male rivalry in the text, an implicit indication that homosociality may in fact mask homoerotic desire. Yet the text also comes back to worry Zeffirelli's film by revealing that the homoeroticism is linked both to violence, as in the phallic aggressiveness symbolized by the codpieces, and to the exclusion of women, perhaps most obvious in the love scene where Juliet's body is visually marginalized. The discourse of fidelity that informs Donaldson's (1990) analysis, resting on feminist and queer interpretations, leads him to praise the film for 'extend[ing] Shakespeare's critique' of 'patriarchal values' and for 'bringing to the surface homoerotic aspects of Shakespeare's art' (pp. 153, 145). Yet this optimism effaces the many differences between film and text, particularly Zeffirelli's idealization of heterosexuality against Shakespeare's ambivalent treatment, as well as the gender hierarchy that is reinstalled through the homoeroticism. Donaldson has not allowed these differences to probe the limitations of his own ideological critique.

The double interrogation that adaptation makes possible is perhaps more readily seen in films that push their manipulation of prior materials to a revisionary extreme. Jarman's *Caravaggio* and Merlet's *Artemisia* fasten on key figures and events to facilitate their own political agendas in representing the painters' lives and thereby question the very reliability of the historical record, implicitly treating it as incomplete or prejudiced, as official accounts that do not make clear the degree of falsification they contain. Yet the record of course remains to throw into high relief the filmmakers' ideologically loaded interpretations, demonstrating that their presentations of the past answer to present contingencies, current political struggles. The critic or viewer who possesses the pertinent historical data is thus compelled to take sides with these films, to decide whether to accept the historical record at

face value or to doubt it and join the queer or feminist struggles in which the filmmakers aim to intervene. Once this question is posed, however, a critical self-awareness has been forced upon the analysis, and the contradictions in such political filmmaking have been made explicit.

The intertextual or intersemiotic relations that a film establishes in adapting prior materials must also be figured into its interrogative potential, since the cultural forms introduced through those relations are altered as well. The visual allusions at the start of Schrader's *The Comfort of Strangers* (1991) not only construct an equivalence to the unnamed setting in McEwan's novel through their shared familiarity or conventionality; they also point to the heterogeneous cultural conditions of the text. On the one hand, McEwan's descriptions stress the popular attractions of Venice, referring repeatedly to the crowds of camera-toting tourists, lingering on the most frequented sites that would be covered in tour guides, and even mentioning kiosks 'with tiers of postcards showing famous views', while on the other hand passages incorporate largely verbatim quotations of what has become a most elite literary work, John Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* (McEwan, 1981: 19; d'Elia and Williams, 1986: 233–6). Schrader's opening montage, the decision to follow a Turner-esque sunset with postcard shots of domes and canals, evokes a similar combination of elite and popular cultural forms (knowledgeable viewers may also recall that Ruskin was one of Turner's strongest champions). Yet because the filmic images are so different in composition and color, their juxtaposition intensifies their heterogeneity, allowing the postcards to defamiliarize Turner and vice versa, producing an unsettling strangeness even with such 'famous views'. Nonetheless, the subtlety of McEwan's intertext, his uncredited use of a canonical author, can work as a reminder that Schrader's visual effects will not be perceptible to every audience: they require both a specialized knowledge of art (and possibly literary) history and a sophisticated analytical technique. The formal interpretant I located in Schrader's adaptation, the equivalence between the filmic images and the novelistic descriptions, enables the articulation of a critical dialectic between film and novel on the basis of a thematic interpretant, cultural taste, ultimately calling attention to the social or institutional limits of my own analysis – which is obviously an academic reading.

I have argued that translation theory can advance thinking about film adaptations by contributing to the formulation of a more rigorous methodology for studying them. If we abandon the communicative model of translation and instead consider its relation to a source text as hermeneutic, the interpretant can assume crucial importance in analyzing both translations and adaptations as well as the critical act that performs the analysis. The hermeneutic relation can be seen not only as interpretive, fixing the form and meaning of the prior materials, but as interrogative, exposing the cultural and social conditions of those materials and of the translation or adaptation that has processed them. The critic's application of an interpretant, whether a particular interpretation or critical methodology, finally determines the formulation of the hermeneutic relation and its interrogative

effects. But the critical dialectic that might be located in these effects can also help to avoid privileging either the prior materials or the second-order creation and to turn the critic's work into an act of self-criticism. At a moment when ideological critique remains the most prevalent move in literary and cultural studies, all too ready to foreclose interpretive possibilities by reducing them to political positions, it seems urgent that the critic's position not be put beyond interrogation. A critical methodology that presents itself as democratic or emancipatory cannot afford to let its own hierarchies and exclusions go unexamined.

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