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THE STUDY OF FILM ADAPTATION: A STATE OF THE ART AND SOME 'NEW' FUNCTIONAL PROPOSALS

Patrick CATTRYSSE

Universidad Católica de Bruselas

INTRODUCTION

Film adaptation can hardly be considered any longer as a marginal phenomenon in the field of film studies. Its importance becomes clear when one considers the long history of its practice, the large number of film adaptations that have been produced, and the impressive amount of studies that have been published on the subject.

Film adaptation is as old as cinema itself. In his study *Die Verfilmung Literarische Werke*, Estermann (1965:15) cites one example of an adaptation of (motives of) Goethe's *Faust* dating from 1895. The first adaptations may have been often difficult to understand without the previous knowledge of the source material, but they represent nevertheless types of film adaptations that have evolved during time.

The study of film adaptation is almost as old as cinema itself. In his bibliographical study, Welch's (1981) first publication is dated 1909. It is an article by a certain W.P. Eaton called *The Canned Drama*. Since 1909, many studies have been published about the film adaptation in particular and about the relations between literature and film in general[1].

It is therefore all the more surprising that despite the large number of film adaptations and the enormous amount of studies, one has not succeeded in developing and applying a coherent and theoretically founded method for studying film adaptation.

In what follows, I deal with three topics. First, I present a brief state of the art. Then I give a short presentation of an approach that could possibly lead to the development of a theory of film adaptation. And finally, I refute one particular point of attack that has repeatedly been formulated against system analysis. This point concerns the false dilemma between the study of system and the study of individuality.

I STATUS QUESTIONIS

A typology of studies can be diachronic or synchronic. Since space is limited, I approach the discourse on adaptation in a synchronic way. Generalising

grossly, one can distinguish six groups of study:

- the study of the adaptation of one literary work
- the study of the relations between one author and film
- the historical study of film adaptation
- the study of the relations between the two, media film and literature
- the study of film adaptation in manuals on screenwriting
- the meta-theoretical studies on film adaptation

Rather than presenting an ontological classification of studies, the purpose of a distinction between six groups is to structure my presentation of the common characteristics of the study of film adaptation.

1. The adaptation of one literary work

These studies generally concentrate on the comparison of an isolated literary text with an isolated filmic text[2]. More often than not, these studies are normative: they *prescribe* how a 'good' adaptation should proceed instead of *describing* how adaptations have presented themselves in a particular historical context. They concentrate mostly on high brow literature[3] and on the fidelity of the adaptation towards the original. This source text oriented approach generally debates in terms of 'loss' of literary elements. The concept *adaptation* is even defined on the basis of the fidelity towards the original. If an adaptation adapts too freely, it is not considered an adaptation, and therefore, falls out of the range of adaptation studies. This approach clearly reduces the phenomenon of film adaptation to the Literary film.

2. The relations between an author and film

These studies shift the focus from the film adaptation to the writer and his or her literary works ('oeuvre')[4]. The attention given to the film adaptation varies from one study to another. This approach takes the analysis out of the textual isolation and places the film adaptation in the larger context of the works of a writer. Many of these studies pay more attention to the contribution of other collaborators of the crew (screenwriters, actors, producers, ...). Still the approach remains often normative and source text oriented (cf. Millichap 1983).

3. The historical study of the film adaptation

A third group of studies examines the film adaptation from a historical perspective. The number of studies applying this approach is very limited[5]. These studies focus directly on the film adaptation and they enlarge their analytical perspective to a particular historical context: one specific historical period and one national type of cinema. Again, the studies limit themselves to the so-called

'canonical' literature and they are generally normative. In fact, this normative approach renders impossible a real historical point of view since it always leads to the same conclusion: the adaptation did not do justice to the original.

Furthermore, these studies do not always specify the corpus of adaptations they have worked upon. Conclusions drawn on the basis of a limited number of film adaptations may therefore represent generalizations that do not characterize the whole period or the whole cultural context.

4. The relations between film and literature

The methods applied in the study of the relations between film and literature are as many as diverse. Some studies analyse the respective language possibilities or restrictions of both media[6], film and literature. Others examine the influence of literature on film[7] or the influence of film on literature[8] (rarer), or the interdependence of both media[9]. Other recurring topics are the origin of filmic techniques in literature of the nineteenth century and the use of cinematic techniques (like the flashback, the dissolve, the close up, parallel montage, ...) in literature of the first half of the twentieth century. Generally, these studies do not deal with the problem of the filmic or literary *specificity* of the techniques. If they do, the specificity is considered in an ontological, a-historical way. Also, the studies dealing with the cinematic techniques in literature often use these concepts in a vague metaphorical way (cf. especially Murray 1972).

Since the relations between literature and film represent virtually a limitless field of study, scholars reduce their scope. Either the approach is typological and diachronic evolutions are ignored. This is especially the case with studies comparing film with a literary genre (theatre, poetry, prose), or with studies analysing the possibilities and limitations of film and literature. These studies generally ignore the fact that for example in African or Asian cultures, cinema does not function in the same way as in European or American cultures, or they overlook the fact that the possibilities and limitations of cinema in the late 1890's or early 1910's differ considerably from those of the 1980's or the 1990's.

Other studies adopt a historical approach, but restrict themselves to the first years of film history or the decades immediately preceding the birth of cinema. Therefore, research on the more recent part of film history, say from the 1930's on, remains largely to be done.

Like the studies of the second and especially the third group, those analysing the relations between film and literature transcend the isolated Text1 - Text2 level. However, unlike the studies of the first and the third group, they generally do not focus directly on the phenomenon of film adaptation. Although the film adaptation represents a symptom of the relations between film and literature, they prefer to analyse these relations through the use of (so-called) *filmic* and *literary* techniques[10].

5. Manuals on screenwriting

Many manuals on screenwriting deal also with the problem of adapting literary texts onto the screen. Since they are manuals, their point of view is normative. They prescribe a mode of adaptation: respect the original[11] or avoid slavish adaptation[12]. However these manuals are interesting for several reasons.

1. They sometimes present a descriptive approach, be it in a superficial way. Generally, they propose a tripartite classification[13]. Thus Swain (1987:187ff.) distinguishes three types of film adaptation: You can follow the book and try to translate every singular literary characteristic but, Swain adds, this procedure is almost certain to disappoint the audience; you can work from key scenes 'shuffling the book's pages in search of scenes which appeal (...) as colourful, dramatic, and at least indicative of the author's concept and story line' (Swain 1987:188); and you can construct an original screenplay based on the book. Superficial as they are, these classifications at least admit that film adaptations can be and have been more or less faithful to the original.

2. However these manuals are especially interesting because of their teleological approach. For example, Greene (1952:141ff.) deals with some problems that do come up when writing a screenplay for specific types of sixty minute television programmes. In these circumstances, Greene adds, adapting is selecting and compressing. Field (1958:289ff.) explains that while considering film adaptations, one should ask questions about the function of the adaptation and about its public. He analyses how an NBC adaptation by Robert Esson of Robert L. Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was determined by the specific public and genre conventions of the 'Matinee Theatre'. The 'Matinee Theatre' was a specific genre with specific requirements: it was a live TV registration of a theatre play; its audience was almost entirely composed of women; the cast was to number a maximum of eight, the play had to open with a teaser of about a minute and a half in length, the scenes had to be planned so that they fit into the cameo technique[14], the drama was to be divided into three acts and to run some forty-seven minutes.

This teleological point of view has hardly been adopted by any literary scholar until the present day. One can suppose that the predominant choice of literary prestigious source material and the fidelity discourse on adaptation have prevented such a point of view.

3. Screenwriting manuals are also interesting because of their trans-textual approach, which transcends again the isolated Text1 - Text2 comparison.

4. And finally, studying those manuals can reveal itself very instructive just because of the normative approach. The manuals present many norms and techniques (plant and pay off, red herring, ...). It may be interesting to study whether in practice, filmmakers have followed these prescriptions or selected other solutions.

6. Meta-theoretical studies

Serious interest in a theory of film adaptation dates only from the end of the 1970's and the beginning of the 1980's[15].

These studies are mainly interested in the problem of a *tertium comparationis*, that is a comparative scheme enabling the scholar to compare a literary text with a filmic one on a pertinent level. Unlike most studies of the preceding categories, these theoretical studies do explicit their methodological a priori's. However, again, scholars focus mainly on the comparison of isolated source texts with target texts and on the adequacy relations between the former and the latter. The theoretical eclecticism becomes even more manifest when film adaptations are defined on a priori aesthetic or artistic criteria. An illustration of this restrictive attitude can be found in Schneider (1981:119):

> Es geht um die Umsetzung einer literarischen Vorlage in filmische Bilder, bei der *intentionale Analogien*[16] zum literarischen Text fest-stellbar sind, *die es verbieten, die literarische Vorlage als puren Stoff-lieferanten zu bestimmen*. Der Prozeß der Verfilmung selbst wird als einen *ästhetische* Arbeit verstanden.

Schneider declares that a film adaptation should present intentional similarities with the literary text, and that it should eventually offer an aesthetic surplus value. If the adequacy conditions are not fulfilled, Schneider considers the film a *Bebilderung* falling out of the range of adaptation studies:

> Ein solches verfahren (die Bebilderung; p.c.) verfehlt m. E. die Chancen von Literaturverfilmung, *da es weder die Möglichkeit der filmischen Übersetzungsarbeiten nutzt*[17] noch dem Rezipienten neue oder einführende Erfahrungen über einen literarischen Text vermittelt (Schneider 1981:293).

The intentional analogies and the aesthetic surplus value suggest two conclusions concerning Schneider's approach:

1. Schneider is less interested in the actual transformational behaviour of film adaptations than in the narrative possibilities of both media, film and literature. On this point, she joins the approach of the fifth group of studies (cf. supra). She considers film and literature as two ontological and homogeneous communication systems, and she ignores their spatial and temporal evolutions[18].

2. The requested aesthetic surplus value suggests a preference for canonical literary texts which is confirmed by the choice of her examples. Here she joins André Bazin's attitude in his famous article Plaidoyer *pour l'Adaptation:*

> Bazin (...) unterscheidet zwischen den Adaptationen, die *allein* aus ökonomische Motiven erklären lassen und die sich wie ein roter Faden durch die Geschichte des Films ziehen, und solchen, die sich auf dieses Erklärungsmuster nicht reduzieren lassen. (...) In der erster Gruppe der

Literaturverfilmungen fällt z.B. die Verfilmung von Sandra Parettis Unterhaltungsroman 'Der Winter, der ein Sommer War' (1976), in die zweite z.B. Eric Rohmers Verfilmung von Heinrich von Kleists Novelle 'Die Marquise von O...' (1976) (Schneider 1981:14).

The chosen examples make it clarify which film adaptations are 'worthwhile' being studied, and which are not.

7. Some conclusions

On the basis of this short overview, some conclusions can be drawn.

1. A real interest in a theoretically founded method for studying film adaptation is a recent phenomenon which has not yet influenced practical research in an efficient way. Descriptive semiotic applications to the study of film adaptation date only from the end of the 1970's (cf. Schneider 1979 and 1981). And as I explained, the fidelity discourse and the source text oriented, a-historical approach remain predominant also in these studies.

For almost ten years, several film scholars have criticized the inefficiency of the fidelity-discourse[19]. However, these scholars have not developed an alternative way of working, and consequently, their criticism has not received much response in practical research. One has only to read the studies of the last two years of a specialized magazine like *Film/Literature Quarterly* to note the lack of any methodological coherence and the fact that scholars continue the fidelity discourse and the source text oriented approach.

The dominant attitude among scholars is still that the discussion of film adaptation requires no special qualifications, no expertise. In this respect, the scholarly attitude towards film adaptation joins the one described by Toury (1984:73) ten years ago in the field of translation studies. Paraphrasing Toury, the common practice is to regard an academic training in literature or film studies, with one field of specialization or another, as sufficient ground for annexing film adaptation to one's subject. What is more, film adaptation is hardly ever considered a legitimate object of study and scholars only concern themselves with it from time to time. Consequently, a sort of dilettantism has established itself in the scholarly treatment of film adaptation, of a kind that would not be tolerated in any other domain of literary or film studies. The results for any meeting of students of film and/or literature devoted to problems of film adaptation are obvious: a highly heterogeneous group of approaches, wanting in terms of common background and shared goals, and presenting gaps as well as serious overlapping.

Before going any further on the road towards a theory of film adaptation, two important questions have to be answered: Do we recognize the legitimacy of film adaptation as a more or less autonomous scholarly branch, having goals and methods of its own and thus, requiring its own professional specialization?

And if we do, how can we achieve significant results and make real progress in the study of film adaptation? How can we accumulate knowledge in an optimal way? Again, the answer to that question is already given by Toury (1984:73):

> Some effective dialogue is to ensue (...) only by tentatively establishing some points of agreement, and going on to build on those points, even if only to expose their shakiness and clear the way for better and sounder ones.

Before establishing some 'points of agreement' that could eventually lead to a more coherent and theoretically founded method of study, I present some gaps that have been left unnoticed in the field of film adaptation studies.

Film adaptation has mostly been reduced to the faithful adaptation of a canonical literary text. As a consequence, film adaptations of popular literary texts, which are much more numerous, have hardly been studied. The study of the adaptation of non-literary texts like radio plays, police files, newspaper files, etc., has not yet even started. The focus on the source text and on the fidelity of the adaptation process has generally ignored other factors (than the source text) that may have determined the production and reception of the film adaptation. Film adaptations which were not faithful to the original have been given another label and have not been studied for this reason. The film adaptation has hardly been examined as a proper type of *text*, and neither have the possibly systematic relations between the functioning of a group of film adaptations and their respective adaptation process. It is on the basis of a lack of methodological coherence leaving too many gaps unnoticed in the field of adaptation studies, that the following theoretical considerations have taken shape.

II POLYSYSTEM METHOD AND FILM ADAPTATION

The method I am referring to finds its inspiration in some particular theories of translation called the *polysystem* theories of translation. Some ideas originate from Russian Formalism and Czech Structuralism, but it is only since the 1970's that Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury, two scholars of the Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics in Tel Aviv, developed these ideas into a real theory of translation. Since then, many scholars all over the world have contributed to the development of what is commonly called the *polysystem* (henceforth PS) approach. It is only since the late 1980's that the approach has been applied to film adaptation studies.

The method as well as some preliminary results have already been described in other publications. I therefore kindly refer the reader to those previous publications[20] and I shall only repeat here the general outline of the approach.

1. Norms, systems and models

A PS approach considers film, literature, and other forms of human comunication as *organized* in some ways, as determined by intersubjective rules, norms and conventions. A PS analysis examines precisely those rules, norms and conventions in order to be able to describe and possibly to explain why semiotic practices have been produced and perceived the way they have.

To suppose that filmic, literary or other semiotic practices are determined by norms is to accept the hypothesis that one can distinguish systemic coherences in these practices, i.q. that one can study cinema, literature, and other artistic or non artistic forms of communication as *systems* or complexes of *systems*. If norms are defined as non idiosyncratic principles which determine one or more semiotic practices, systems (or systemic coherences) can be seen as the very symptoms of these principles. Norms and systems indicate therefore both sides of the same coin. If cinema is studied as a system, it means that, unlike the encyclopedic accumulation of names and titles in the traditional survey studies, cinema is no longer considered as a set of isolated facts. On the contrary, it is studied as a more or less organized complex of phenomena, as a set of relations between elements.

What is more, in recent years, new theories of communication have developed which accept that all systems of communication do overlap or interfere at least to a certain extent with other kinds of communication. Semiotic practices function as *models* for other semiotic practices. These models may be imitated, they may provoke an inversed reaction, and between the two extreme attitudes, countless intermediate types of attitudes may present themselves.

2. A functional approach

In English as in other languages, the term film adaptation refers to a process as well as to its final result. This implies that film adaptation studies have at least two objects of study: the adaptation process and its final product. As a matter of fact, previous research has indicated that a third object of study may also reveal itself to be interesting, namely the relations between the finished film and the adaptation process (cf. infra).

The PS approach substitutes a descriptive, functional attitude for a normative one. This means that film adaptation is no longer defined on the basis of a predefined faithfulness towards an 'Original'. Instead, a functional definition is adopted: a film adaptation (as a final product) is redefined as any phenomenon that functions as such, that is *any phenomenon that presents itself and/or is perceived as a film adaptation in a particular historical context.*

3. Film adaptation as a final product

The study of film adaptation as a final product deals with questions like what position does a particular group of film adaptations take in a particular genre, or a particular socio-cultural, historical, filmic (or other) context? What is its function? Does it renew old genres or does it continue existing and successful ones? Does it occupy a central or peripheral position in film production? Etc.

The functional and somewhat tautological definition of film adaptation brings about a number of epistemological consequences I have dealt with in the above mentioned publications. The most important consequence is probably that a functional redefinition enlarges considerably the scope of film adaptation studies. Many films may *function* as a film adaptation without being a faithful adaptation of a canonical literary text. The functional approach also solves a number of classical terminological problems. Concepts like *film noir, musical, western,* are no longer defined a priori by the scholar. They are redefined in a functional, historical way: a *film noir* is that phenomenon which has functioned as such in a particular historical context.

4. Film adaptation as a process

The adaptation process is no longer seen in the perspective of the faithful reproduction of one source text. As stated earlier, semiotic practices are considered to be determined by other semiotic practices in an intersubjective way. As a consequence, film adaptations are studied as phenomena which may have been determined by several models at the same time. A film adaptation may have been 'inspired' by a novel for a particular story, but at the same time its production and reception may have been determined by a certain trend in photography, or *mise en scène*, or acting style, or musical composition, etc. In other words, many source elements are usually adapted simultaneously at different levels. The modeling function of some of those practices may be made explicit (e.g. the name of the source novel and/or its author), while the same function of other practices may be left implicit (e.g. the adaptation of a previous film, the 'influence' of contemporary photography fashions). In striving to describe and explain why film adaptations have functioned the way they have, a PS approach attempts to find out what semiotic practices have functioned as a model during the production and reception of the film adaptation in question, and in what way these practices have fulfilled their modeling function. It goes without saying that the study of norms and modeling practices does not limit itself to filmic or artistic communicative practices. It also tackles the larger socio-cultural, economical, political and historical surroundings.

One important consequence of this approach is that virtually every film production represents some kind of adaptation, since it is always determined by

several models. Thus, the functional redefinition of *film adaptation* implies the redefinition of the concept of *original*: How original is an original film?

5. The relations between the adaptation process and its final product

Finally, it is important to study adaptation (the selection process as well as the actual transfer process) in relation with the function and the position of the adaptations as films within their proper context. To illustrate this, I repeat some results obtained from previous research in the field of American film noir adaptations. Again, a more detailed description of these results can be found in the above mentioned publications. However, I repeat the general conclusions more extensively because the third part of this article presents itself in the light of these conclusions.

A brief look at the evolution of the selection and the adaptation policies of one particular series of films noirs, namely the private eye film noir, shows that genre norms and the position of the respective literary and cinematographic genres can play a very important role in the selection as well as in the adaptation process. When the importing genre holds a stable and successful position, the function of film adaptations tends to be conservative. However, when the stability of the film genre is endangered, the function of film adaptations becomes innovative.

The conservative or innovative function of the film adaptation seems to determine the selection policy as well as the adaptation process of the source elements. If the function of a film adaptation consists in sustaining and preserving a stable and successful genre, the selection policy consists in selecting source material which corresponds maximally to the dominant film genre conventions. When exceptionally, a source text is selected which does not correspond to the filmic conventions, the conventions of the literary genre are abandoned and the source material is largely modified to meet the cinematographic genre needs. But when the function of the film adaptation consists in renewing a petrified film genre which is on the verge of decay, both selection and adaptation policy are reversed: source texts are selected which are different from the dominant cinematic genre conventions, and, instead of being modified, those different source characteristics are imported as they are into the film adaptation, in order to revitalize the used up film conventions.

6. Some conclusions

It is too early to give a full-scale evaluation of the application of the PS method to the study of film adaptation. However, it is clear that the approach shows a number of advantages, most of which have already been mentioned in the preceding paragraphs. It is also clear that this approach does not present a miracle solution to all problems. Many questions remain undoubtedly unsolved.

Nevertheless, in what follows, I want to refute one particular objection that has repeatedly been formulated against system analysis, namely that a systemic approach can not study the individual.

III SYSTEM AND INDIVIDUALITY

A PS approach starts from the premise that the individual can *only* be analysed on the background of the non-individual. It is only after having studied the common characteristics of a group of film adaptations that one is able to determine what is special or typical of one particular film adaptation or one particular author.

To illustrate this, I examine some characteristics of one particular film adaptation, namely *Mildred Pierce*. The film was made by Warner Brothers and released in 1945. It is based on the James M. Cain novel, which was published in 1941. The novel begins as follows:

> In the spring of 1931, on a lawn in Glendale, California, a man was bracing trees. It was a tedious job, for he had first to prune dead twigs, then wrap canvas buffers around weak branches, then wind rope slings over the buffers and tie them to the trunks, to hold the weight of the avocados that would ripen in the fall. Yet, although it was a hot afternoon, he took his time about it, and was conscientiously thorough, and whistled. He was a smallish man, in his middle thirties, but in spite of the stains on his trousers, he wore them with an air. His name was Herbert Pierce.

After the work is done, Pierce goes into the house, drops off his clothes, and takes a bath. He then dresses again and goes into the kitchen where his wife is icing a cake. He explains he is going for a walk and won't be home for dinner. Mildred asks him if he is seeing that Mrs. Biederhof again. She tells him that if he is, he might as well pack his things and stay there for good. So Herbert packs his things, puts them in the car, and leaves.

The beginning of the film is quite different from the novel. The film starts with the credits that are washed away by the waves of the sea. Next we see a beach house at night. Inside, Monte Beragon, Mildred's second husband, is shot by an unseen assailant. Deadly wounded, Monte falls down and whispers 'Mildred'. In the following shot, a car drives away, presumably with the murderer. Subsequently, we see Mildred Pierce walking at the pier. When she is on the point of jumping over the bridge into the water, a police officer confronts her and tells her to go home, before 'they both take a swim'. Going back, Mildred sees Wally Fay, an old friend and former business associate. Mildred lures Wally into the beach house to take the rap. When Wally realizes he is caught in a trap, he panics and runs out of the house, and right into the arms of the police. Even-

tually, everybody is summoned by the police that same night. When Mildred enters the office of Detective Peterson, she starts her narration with a flashback. She goes back to the time when Wally and Bert, her first husband, split up their real estate business; when Wally remained in the business and Bert was out. Then follows a quarrel between Bert and Mildred about Bert not being able to support his family, about Mildred spending too much money on the children, especially on Veda, and finally about Bert playing too much gin rummy with Mrs. Biederhof. When it comes to Mrs. Biederhof, the discussion much resembles the one in the novel: Mildred tells Bert that if he is seeing that Mrs. Biederhof again, he might as well stay with her. Thereupon Bert packs his things and leaves.

Taking up the traditional approach towards film adaptation, the film *Mildred Pierce* (or at least the first fifteen minutes) could not be studied as a film adaptation because there is no equivalence (in the traditional sense of the word): the murder scene, the suicide scene, the scene where Mildred lures Wally into the beach house and the scenes where, subsequently, Mildred and the other characters are convoked by the police, do not occur in the novel. A PS approach considers *Mildred Pierce* as an adaptation because it *functions* as one, and thereupon it tries to explain why this adaptation has been produced and perceived the way it has.

However, the point I want to illustrate here concerns the particular and the more common nature of some characteristics of this specific adaptation. To illustrate this, I compare *Mildred Pierce* with twenty nine other film noir adaptations of the same period[21]. Moreover, the film noir adaptations are compared with the literary genres that inspired most of the American films noirs and with some other contemporary classical Hollywood genres.

The adaptation of the James M. Cain novel represents several characteristics which are clearly typical of the whole group of (thirty) films noirs, and probably of the classical Hollywood cinema of that period in general. I refer to deletions of actions and characters determined by narrative pertinence or redundancy, the omissions linked to censorship, etc. In what follows, I limit my discussion to two specific items: the combined use of a voice-over narration with flashbacks and the addition of a murder with a police story.

1. A voice-over narration with flashbacks

The use of a homodiegetical voice-over narration, usually introducing and accompanying a flashback (or a series of flash backs) is generally considered one of the most characteristic *noir* narrative strategies[22]. What do the words 'most characteristic *noir*' mean? I suggest that a systematic comparative (PS) approach permits us to refine this statement. In order to do this, one has 1. to describe an explicit corpus of films on which the statement is based, and 2. to explain fully the comparative points of view.

For example, a brief comparison with the twenty-nine film noir adaptations mentioned in footnote 21 indicates that a homodiegetical narration is hardly the dominant mode of narration. Considering the adaptation of the literary mode of narration more in detail, one notices that:

- seventeen take over the heterodiegetical narration of the novel
- five change the homodiegetical narration of the novel into a heterodiegetical narration in the film
- only six take over the homodiegetical narration of the novel
- one film operates a transfer from a heterodiegetical narration to a succession of (first and partially) homodiegetical narration and then a heterodiegetical narration.
- and only one changes the heterodiegetical narration of the novel into a homodiegetical narration in the film, namely *Mildred Pierce*.

Therefore the dominant mode of narration in film as well as in literature is the heterodiegetical mode. This hypothesis is confirmed by a check up of more than eighty novels selected by film noir adaptations[23]. This check up shows that more than sixty-five percent of the novels present a heterodiegetical narration, while only thirty-one percent offer a homodiegetical one. The remaining 3.6% show a combination of both narrative modes.

Compared with the other film noir adaptations of the corpus, the homodiegetical narration in *Mildred Pierce* is not the common mode of narration. The adaptation becomes even more exceptional when considered on the level of the transfer process: *Mildred Pierce* is the only adaptation which changes the heterodiegetical narration of the novel into a homodiegetical one in the film.

The same nuancing applies to the addition of flashbacks. A comparison with the literary sources shows that the general adaptation practice consists of three common procedures:

1. the deletion of the flashbacks (which is the most common practice)
2. the combination of several shorter flashbacks into a longer one
3. the insertion of the flashback into the chronological order of the narration

Compared with the twenty-nine film noir adaptations, the addition of a flashback structure in the film *Mildred Pierce* is very exceptional. As a matter of fact, in the selected corpus of thirty films noirs, *Mildred Pierce* is the only film to add a flashback structure to a literary story told in a straightforward narrative line. One may object of course to the selected corpus being arbitrary. One may also throw in that scholars like Telotte (1989) and Turim (1989) refer to more than forty or fifty films noirs presenting a flashback structure. However, compared with the total of more than six hundred films noirs assembled in Cattrysse (1992b), fifty films noirs represent not even ten percent.

The point I want to make is that the question of whether or not the use of voice-over narration and flashback is typical of film noir can not be answered

with a simple yes or no. Again, the more or less common versus particular nature of a characteristic depends largely on the selected corpus of films and on the comparative point of view. Compared with the selected corpus of thirty films noirs, the homodiegetical narration and flashback in Mildred Pierce represents a deviant rather than a dominant practice. Compared with the literary sources, the use of flashbacks in films noirs is exceptional, since adaptations generally delete the flashbacks, and prefer a more straightforward narrative line. However, _and this is probably what Telotte (1989) and Turim (1989) meant without making it explicit -, compared with other film genres in the previous and contemporaneous classical Hollywood cinema (e.g. the western, the musical, the comedy, ...), the use of voice-over narration and flashbacks, even though not more than ten percent, does represent a considerable percentage in the film noir series.

2. The addition of a murder story

In the selected corpus of thirty films noirs, only two films add a murder to the story of the novel: *Mildred Pierce* and *Hangover Square*. Generally, the film noir adaptations of the selected corpus diminish the violence of the novel. Again, in this respect, the film *Mildred Pierce* offers a deviant type of adaptation behaviour.

However, also generally, the source novels contain a lot of violence and many murders. And here is where an enlarged point of view reveals a different picture: if one considers the adaptation process in relation with the selection process, what is striking is not the non adequate adaptation of (the beginning of) *Mildred Pierce* and the addition of a murder, but rather the selection of a non-criminal novel for a film noir adaptation. As a woman's story without a real crime element, the novel by James M. Cain certainly sticks out among the rest of the selected literary works. Enlarging the perspectives even more and referring back to the general conclusions in paragraph II.5., one may conclude that in view of this particular selection, the adaptation process follows the 'normal' procedures. The situation is to be compared with the one described in the above mentioned paragraph: there is the dominant and successful genre of the film noir. The 'different' source text is selected by way of exception and it is to fulfil a conservative function. With reference to this conservative function, La Valley (1980:18ff.) stresses the importance of producer Jerry Wald as shaping force, but adds that

> If Wald was a strong producer and controlled his writers by forceful directives, he was also anchored in the Warners world and its studios, both genre and film production (La Valley 1980:19).

Filmmaking was more a collaborative effort at Warners than at Paramount for example, and Jerry Wald did not have the pioneering talent of a Billy Wilder:

> Unlike Wilder, he (= Wald; p.c.) was not ready to upset studio traditions. Instead, he saw himself as working within them, giving them a new direction, combining crime and the women's movie[24], and pushing the treatment up to big budget glamour (La Valley 1980:20-21).

As a consequence of the dominant position of the target film genre and the conservative function of the adaptation, the source genre norms are largely abandoned and the literary material is modified to meet the filmic genre needs.

IV CONCLUSION

The brief state of the art hopefully makes it clear that if we are to develop a science of film (adaptation) studies, we are first to take seriously the object of study and the need for a systematic and efficient *modus operandi*.

As I stated above, it is too early to evaluate the PS propositions on a full scale. However, previous research indicates already that a PS approach could lead film (adaptation) studies in a good direction. Besides some advantages mentioned earlier, the method presents another strong asset: it does not imply a *tabula rasa*. Previous studies and results can be integrated in the general approach, and sometimes, well known topics can be described in a more refined way. These last two points are hopefully made clear in the *Mildred Pierce* analysis. The system approach does not prevent an analysis of the individual artistic values of artists and their works of art. On the contrary, a diversified comparative approach permits one to indicate 1. the particular versus common nature of the characteristics, and 2. the relativity of this particular versus common nature. Proceeding in this way, the approach shows that what seems ordinary (e.g. the selection of a non-crime novel) may be exceptional, and what seems exceptional (e.g. the non-adequate adaptation) can be considered rather conventional.

NOTES

[1] To get an impression of the number of studies that have appeared in this field, one has only to look at some bibliographies like Welch (1981), Albersmeier (1978), Wicks (1978), De Marco (1975), Ross (1975), Ross (1987), and the special numbers of the bibliographical periodical Film Theory: *Bibliographic Information and Newsletter*, 1984 (4-7) and 1988 (19-20), and

[2] Typical studies of this type can be found in (e.a.) Bluestone (1957:65ss.), Peary-Shatzkin (1978), Miller (1980) and Klein-Parker (1981).

[3] Miller (1980) is one of the rare exceptions studying also the film adaptation of popular literary authors like James M. Cain, Daniel Fuchs and Horace Mc Coy.

[4] Examples of this approach can be found (e.a.) in Kawin (1977), Luhr (1982), Millichap (1983) and Syniard (1986).

[5] Examples of this approach can be found (e.a.) in Asheim (1949, 1951 and 1952), Bluestone (1957), Estermann (1965), and Verdaasdonk (1986).

[6] Cf. Jinks (1974), Chatman (1980:121-140), Peters (1980). See also several narratological film studies such as Chatman (1983), the special 1984 edition of the French journal *Communications (Communication et énonciation*; n° 38), Branigan (1984), Jost (1987),...

[7] See for example Jinks (1974), Murray (1972), Spiegel (1976), Albersmeier (1985). The question of *influences* has been criticized by (e.a.) Eidsvik (1978:151). See also his article in *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 1973 (1):114-115.

[8] Cf. Fell (1974), Cohen (1979), Clerc (1983), Albersmeier (1985).

[9] See for example Richardson (1969), Wagner (1975), Eidsvik (1978) and Paech (1988).

[10] As usual, exceptions confirm the rule. See for example Fuzellier (1964:123ff.) who dedicates one chapter to the phenomenon of film adaptation, and Wagner (1975) who distinguishes three types of adaptations: *the transposition, the commentary* and the *analogy* (cf. infra).

[11] See e.g. Hilliard (1976:403).

[12] See e.g. Vale (1980:263-264).

[13] See Wagner (1975:219ff.), Baby (1980:12) and Cucca (1986:46ff.).

[14] The 'cameo technique' was a cheap mode of production started by producer Albert McCleery in the early 1950's. To cut production costs of TV drama, full sets and expensive backdrops were avoided by using close shots and medium shots instead of long shots.

[15] See e.g. Braun (1981), Kanzog (1981), Renner (1981), Schneider (1981), Schönfeld (1981), and Paech (1984).

[16] Italics are added by this author.

[17] Italics are added by this author.

[18] Towards the end of her book however, Schneider (1981) admits that historical, contextual agents can determine the production of an adaptation, but she fails to develop these superficial observations in a theoretical way.

[19] See e.g. Andrew (1984) and Orr (1984).

[20] Cf. Cattrysse 1992a, 1992b and 1993.

[21] These films noirs adaptations are: *The Maltese Falcon* (Warner Brothers; 1941) - id. (Dashiell Hammett; 1930); *Suspicion* (RKO; 1941) - *Before the Fact* (Francis Iles; 1932); *Street of Chance* (Paramount; 1942) - *The Black Curtain* (Cornell Woolrich; 1941); *This Gun for Hire* (Paramount; 1942) - id. (Graham Greene; 1936); *Christmas Holiday* (Universal; 1944) - id. (W. Somerset Maugham; 1939); *Double Indemnity* (Paramount; 1944); id. (James M. Cain; 1936); *Laura* (Twentieth Century-Fox; 1944) - id. (Vera Caspary; 1942); *Murder My Sweet* (RKO; 1944) - *Farewell My Lovely* (Raymond Chandler; 1940); *Phantom Lady* (Universal; 1942)- id. (Cornell Woolrich; 1942); *Confidential Agent* (Warner Brothers; 1945) - *The Confidential Agent* (Graham Greene; 1939); *Hangover Square* (Twentieth Century-Fox; 1945) - id. (Patrick Hamilton; 1941); *Mildred Pierce* (Warner Brothers; 1945) - id. (James M. Cain; 1941); *Ministry of Fear* (Paramount; 1945) - *The Ministry of Fear* (Graham Greene; 1943); *The Big Sleep* (Warner Brothers; 1946) - id.

(Raymond Chandler; 1939); *Black Angel* (Universal; 1946) - *The Black Angel* (Cornell Woolrich; 1943); *Deadline at Dawn* (RKO; 1946) - id. (Cornell Woolrich; 1944); *Dragonwyck* (Twentieth Century-Fox; 1946) - id. (Anya Seton; 1943); *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (MGM; 1946)- id. (James M. Cain; 1934); *The Brasher Doubloon* (Twentieth Century-Fox; 1947) - *The High Window* (Raymond Chandler; 1942); *Dark Passage* (Warner Brothers; 1947) - id. (David Goodis; 1946); *Lady in the Lake* (MGM; 1947) - *The Lady in the Lake* (Raymond Chandler; 1943); *Out of the Past* (RKO; 1947) - *Build My Gallows High* (Daniel Mainwaring; 1946); *Ride the Pink Horse* (Universal-International; 1947) - id. (Dorothy B. Hughes; 1946); *The Big Clock* (Paramount; 1948) - id. (Kenneth Fearing; 1946); *The Lady from Shanghai* (Columbia; 1947) - *If I Die Before I Wake* (Sherwood King; 1938); *Pitfall* (United Artists; 1948) - *The Pitfall* (Jay Dratler; 1947); *In a Lonely Place* (Columbia; 1950) - id. (Dorothy B. Hughes; 1947); *On Dangerous Ground* (RKO; 1952) - *Mad with Much Heart* (Gerald Butler; 1945); *Sudden Fear* (RKO; 1952) - id. (Edna Sherry; 1948); *The Big Heat* (Columbia; 1953) - id. (William P. McGivern; 1951)

[22] See e.g. Kozloff (1988:34), Telotte (1989:14), Turim (1989:143).

[23] For a list of those novels, I refer the reader to the titles marked with a * in Cattrysse (1992b:230-245).

[24] Even the combination of a woman's story with a murder story was not new since the year before, *Laura* (Twentieth Century-Fox; 1944) had already tried out this formula.

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