

**LANGUAGE TECHNIQUES OF BUILDING IMAGERY IN THE
CONTEMPORARY US NOVELISTIC SETTING OF FILM ADAPTATIONS***Alexandra SUDNIȚINA**Catedra Filologie Engleză*

În prezentul articol ne-am propus să stabilim care sunt legăturile dintre reprezentarea spațio-temporală a evenimentelor în romanul american și expunerea personajelor principale prin intermediul verbal-literar și cel audiovizual cinematografic. Este efectuată analiza comparativă și contrastivă a mijloacelor lingvistice care contribuie la reprezentarea personajelor literare în sursa inițială și în varianta ei adaptată. Sunt tratate unele aspecte stilistice și discursive care formează imaginea personajelor reprezentate în opera literară și adaptarea filmică a acesteia.

One of the ultimate goals of a literary work is to bring out the definitive and meaningful pattern of consistent narrative stratagems that enhance and particularize the unique vision of the literary world re-enacted by its creator. The purpose of the adaptors and the result of their craftsmanship, i.e. the film version, is to recapture, translate and visualize the alleged literary scheme, with the deviations and necessary restructuring urged by the requirements of the audio-visual and verbal media involved in the adaptation process. The focal changes are usually those that appeal to the readers' systematic or occasional perception of the imagery formed in the process of reading a literary piece.

The commonly accepted classification of literary imagery urges for the subdivision into the literal and figurative patterns, which therefore makes the process of identifying the first subgroup less challenging at first glance. However, in spite of the obvious narrative shaping and identification, literal imagery, explicit as it may be, also puts forward a number of questions owing to its intrinsic complexity, which becomes evident whenever the task of defining the character effigy is set before a film translator or a literary critic. It is therefore relevant to be aware of the possibilities and the limitations of both the genres involved in revealing the imagery of the focal and secondary characters in the works of contemporary novelists.

The primary reason is that of the social relevance that a character may bear or acquire as the plot of the novel unravels; the other might relate to the linguistic methods of decoding the image; some further reasons might be attributed to either identifying or reversing the usually accepted archetypal imagery in the contemporary social background. Apparently, while the novel is capable of reflecting the alleged features, the film version should, by definition, serve as the medium of either decoding the covert traits of the character only implied by the writer or narrator, or re-attributing the figure certain properties and shapes that one can omit reading the novel as the primary source.

The broadest definitions of film, naturally implying adaptation, which aims at translating the verbal discourse into its audio-visual verbal version, is very often determined as privileging the concept of the narrative to a high degree, yet transforming the tradition verbal representation mode to evince what the author calls 'the logic of the visible', to which the logic of the audible and the perceptible might as well be added [1]. Apart from giving obvious preference to narrative of the audio-visual, yet still, not discarding the relevance of the primary source, a film, as viewed by P. Pesson, is part and parcel of the humanities, which often focuses on the modifying and revolutionizing capacity of either a work of literature or a film to shape individual permanent or temporary experience realms, which may finally lead to introducing novel motifs into overall cultural climate of a medium [2]. Further the writer asserts that the reverse effect of an adaptation may go as far as transform the way in which a reader or a narratee accepts and comprehends a work of literature.

With the amount of cinematic adaptations gaining cultural acclaim and infusing the daily perception of life with a wide array of variegated culturally determined and socially grounded characters, the aforementioned process has long become a casual phenomenological attribute. Thus, the film adaptation imagery, apart from being represented directly on the screen, also tends to reflect specific character background which helps to apprehend a literary figure with greater precision and adequacy. The book as the primary source in this case appears as an impetus for the further image development and sophistication. In this case the hard and fast definition of images, simplistic as it may seem and covering the general term of the descriptive language,

serves to represent these as equated with pictures, and broadens to include the possibility of reassessing that which is verbalized [3]. The reassessment becomes the primary step in the process of individualizing a work of fiction, with the further procedure reflected in the adaptation itself. As S. Cole suggests, image in itself, reflected in literature as a privileged medium, can help the readers share their personal vision of the character. The act of sharing a vision or imparting a modicum of the novel's unexpected, or the unforeseen, should be developed in a film adaptation, given the natural intersection of the two media.

In addition, any literary image emerges in specific conditions both in a book as the starting character shaping environment and in the film adaptation, which offers a deeper perceptive insight into its nature. The acceptability of a literary or any other image refers to its consistent development within a particular locale, or a spatial narrative field where the actions of the work are set. E. Roberts identifies the setting of a narrative as an environmental unit pertaining to either naturalness or artificiality where the actions evolve, keeping the actants in motion [4]. The idea develops further to encompass the minute details of the place where the story is set, for instance the temporal limits, the specifics of lighting, the auditory impressions, as well as the floristic and faunistic elements, with the climate and olfactory sensations included. The critical assumption therefore is that the setting acquires the central role in showcasing narrative figures and their images, since it represents the integrity of temporal and physical references to the place of the action.

It becomes quite obvious that the truth of the observation gains ground with reference to the character development, since the concept of the setting in time and space mainly imparts specific tokens of social and physical identity to the character. Hence the overlapping of time and locale, which is given a more specific reference than a mere literary setting, and is termed the chronotope. As defined by J. Wolfreys, a chronotope covers both the aspects of time and spatial environment, envisioning the subject, or the character, geometrically and temporally, or generating a chronotopic space [5]. The alleged spatial and temporal medium within the fictitious universe of a novel serves as the character generator in its turn.

It is owing to the particulars of a specific period and territorial span that the characters in a narrative evolve and shape themselves, being incorporated into the canvass of either the telling or the showing mode with the accuracy required by both the reader and the spectator. An example of suchlike character representation, emerging within a specific chronotopic environment, is represented in K. Stockett's award-winning novel "The Help", exposing the narrative figures with distinctive personalities which reveal themselves owing to the particularities of the telling techniques and subsequent image representation strategies. The cinematic adaptation coming out two years after the novel's publication, is also worthy of note, since its version, equally as image-focused and bound as its literary predecessor, reveals peculiar forms of structuring the work's personages employing the possibilities of the cinematic version.

The beginning of the novel version locates the protagonist of the novel, Aibileen Clark, in a definitive time-span, where the environment is at first still indefinite, yet possible to recognize owing to the voice of the narrator, i.e. Aibileen herself:

"August 1962. Mae Mobley was born on a early Sunday morning in August, 1960. A church baby we like to call it. Taking care a white babies, that's what I do, along with all the cooking and the cleaning. I done raised 17 kids in my lifetime. I know how to get them babies to sleep, stop crying and go in the toilet bowl before they mamas even get out a bed in the morning" [Stockett, p.1].

The expository passage of the novel, recounted in the first-person, immediately brings to the fore the story-teller, a certain maid taking care of 'white babies'. With prior knowledge of the distinct African American dialect, immediately evinced in the first lines of the novel by such phonologic deviations from the norm as the indefinite articles replacing prepositions ('taking care a white babies', 'get out a bed'), which represent the typical assimilation pattern with the genitive marker 'of' replaced by 'a', it is possible to leap to the conclusion that the action develops in the American South of the 1960ies. This being a hectic politically charged period of the US history, heavily influenced by the notable Civil Rights movement, the Southern postcolonial chronotope comes into the narratee's focus as the exposition unravels. Another conclusion one might arrive at is that the one telling the story is the representative of African American ethnicity, since the attribute 'white' defining the narrator's speciality sharply contrasts with the dialectal features of the autodiegetic narrative voice. The protagonist is by definition quite religious, which partly explains why the collective character, probably the entire African American community of the region, terms the babies born on Sundays the 'church' ones. Thus, the chronotope helps identify the narrator-character's occupation, ethnicity and the

general historical background of the work implicitly, through the verbal indicators and deviations from the standard norm of the English language.

However, the aforementioned traits of the storyteller must be deduced by the narratee and urge for careful inspection of the language in question. The scenario, drafted by T. Taylor, on the contrary, clarifies the details from the very beginning:

“Jackson, Mississippi: 1963.

Int. Aibileen’s House – Kitchen – Evening.

Aibileen, black, 53, stands at a kitchen sink, washing dishes. She wears a yellow dress with black piping. The framed portraits hang on the wall above her: Jesus Christ and an unknown young black male wearing thick glasses. Aibileen swallows hard.

Aibileen: *I was born in 1911... Chicksaw County, Piedmont Plantation” [Taylor, p.1].*

It is clear that what the novel only implies by the inconspicuous narrative hints becomes obvious owing to the requirements of the script which serves as the primary source of the film adaptation: the location is determined immediately, for the state of Mississippi, Jackson, is one of the typical elements of the postcolonial American chronotopes, which heralds the presentation of the protagonist, defined as a ‘black’ of ‘53’ who indulged in the everyday routine activity of washing dishes by the kitchen sink. The chronotopic environment is elicited immediately, with the historical background and temporal boundaries determined precisely: it is in the year of 1963 that the action develops. Moreover, Aibileen’s date of birth makes the character herself distinctive and unique, standing out amid other figures of either the same or different ethnicities and occupations.

The narrative pattern of the novel also shapes the spatial and temporal, as well as image-building techniques, in an implicit, more or less indistinct manner at the beginning of the work, and the narratee’s second-guessing should bear reference to the knowledge of the US history and politics. The first-person story-teller, whose voice can sound more or less natural, deems the chronological precision of self-identification as unnecessary, and it is owing to her major occupation that the narratee gets to know the status of the main character. The visual indices of the autodiegetic narrator’s image are absent from the exposition altogether.

This is definitely not the case of the film adaptation, where the external appearance of the white babies’ caretaker is the primary focus: Aibileen ‘swallows hard’, she is wearing ‘a yellow dress’ and she is in her early 50ies, the details immediately recreating the visual picture with the efficiency proper to the script. The narrative technique undergoes modification: no 1st person narrative is observed, the monologue being replaced, as is required by the cinematic genre, by the dialogue, with the playwright’s remarks fulfilling the function of chronotope definition and image shaping.

Another character who emerges into view immediately in the novel and a fraction later in the script is the alleged white baby, Mae Mobley, the major achievement, as the main character naturally considers, of her toil and care, whom she treats with utmost attention, which gives credit to her undisputed experience:

“But I ain’t never seen a baby yell like Mae Mobley Leefolt. First day I walk in the door there she be, red-hot and hollering with the colic, fighting that bottle like it’s a rotten turnip... So I took that pink, screaming baby in my arms. Bounced her on my hip to get the gas moving and it didn’t take two minutes fore the Baby Girl stopped her crying, got to smiling up at me like she do” [Stockett, p.1].

The archetypal caring mother represented by the image of the protagonist is more obviously and delicately shaped once she assumes the responsibility of the ‘Baby Girl’, the capitalization hinting at the non-discriminating attitude of Aibileen’s upon a child of a different ethnicity. The child herself appears visually clear, as the protagonist immediately reveals the parental negligence and overall capriciousness of the ‘whites’ leaving the baby ‘screaming’ and ‘red-hot’, the problem which the black child caretaker immediately fixes. This again individualizes Aibileen’s image, since the tradition of child rearing is the skill naturally imbibed by the African American women prior to and after the Civil War in the alleged postcolonial Southern American chronotope.

The film script represents the baby with less detail in the exposition, since only a few features of the baby girl remain explicit:

“Mae Mobley: Ai-bee!

Int. Leefolt Home. Mae Mobley’s Room – Morning. Mae Mobley Leefolt, 2 ½ years old, stands in a crib calling out for Aibileen.

Mae Mobley (sing-song): Ai-bee!

Aibileen enters. Her dark black skin contrasts angelically with a light gray dress, white panty hose and shoes.

Mae Mobley: Ai-bee!

Aibileen: Hi!

Aibileen lifts Mae Mobley out of her crib" [Taylor, p.2].

The script again gains the upper hand over the novel version in elucidating the key feature of the baby girl, her natural childish self-indulgence and capriciousness, as well as the yearning for care and parental love, which is, as the main character indicates, absent from the Leefolt household altogether. The dialogue of the script, short as it may be, discovers another trait of the central image: Aibileen appears as the angel of mercy and love, her dark skin contrasting with white attire of a maid. The image of the Baby Girl, Moe Mobley, attributes an additional colorful touch to the interaction: she speaks in a sing-song manner, calling out for the one she thinks of as a mother, Aibileen's name becoming a symbol of affection the baby has been deprived of. The setting is limited to the Leefolt residence, which, similar to the previous excerpt from the script, where the main character's kitchen is portrayed, imparts intimate character to the narrative.

In the novel, however, the spatial indicators and the chronotope itself are blurred, since only walking into the 'door' hints to the presence of the house, while most of other activities are limited to Aibileen's arms, whereas in the script the crib emphasizes distinctive maternal character of the maid-baby interaction.

Thus, as results from the analysis performed, the chronotopic indicators help shaping the literary images in the novel adaptation not less, and at times even more effectively that they do in the initial literary piece. While in the literary work the chronological, as well as spatial components of the chronotope might be given indirect connotations, the script makes the temporal and spatial environment where the action unfolds literal and visually enhanced owing to the requirements of the audio-visual and verbal genre it is meant to serve.

The narrative technique of the monologic discourse, coupled with the autodiegetic first person narrator present in the novel evoke the individualization of the story-telling perspective, with the final touches of the central images to be reconstructed by the narrate; in the cinematic script the visual images placed within the spatial limits of specified chronotopes acquire literal character, complying with the requirements of the cinematic genre of the film version.

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