

LANGUAGE SPECIFICS OF NARRATIVE VIEWPOINT IN CINEMATIC ADAPTATIONS OF ENGLISH PROSE

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The development of cinematic adaptation process referring to contemporary English literary works entails certain language and stylistic changes which are reflected in the script and film versions of the former. The present research purports to study the narratological perspective of K.Stockett's novel "The Help" and its film version by T.Taylor stylistically and structurally, subjecting both the works to comparative and contrastive analysis.

Keywords: *narrator, narratee, narration, narrative structure, viewpoint, cinematic translation, script.*

PROPRIETĂȚI LINGVISTICE ALE PUNCTULUI DE VEDERE NARATIV ÎN ADAPTĂRI CINEMATOGRAFICE ALE PROZEI ENGLEZE

Dezvoltarea procesului de adaptare cinematografică a operelor literare engleze moderne necesită unele schimbări lingvo-stilistice ale limbajului, care se regăsesc în scenariile și în versiuni ecranizate ale acestora. În prezenta lucrare se efectuează analiza stilistică, structurală, comparativă și contrastivă a perspectivei naratologice în romanul american *The Help* de K.Stockett și în adaptarea cinematografică a acestuia de T.Taylor.

Cuvinte-cheie: *narator, cititor, narațiune, structură narativă, punct de vedere, adaptare cinematografică, scenariu.*

A literary work of any value naturally invites quite a number of interpretations and can be given many readings depending on the opinions expressed and the viewpoints suggested by it either openly or covertly. The reliability of the narrative agency frequently produces the impression of authenticity regarding the events exposed, or can, on the contrary, generate an altogether opposite effect of obtrusiveness. It is for this reason mainly that a careful choice of the angle of vision on the part of the narrative agent, whether conscious or intuitive, can make literary prose sound either realistic or purely fictional.

Further insight into the genre of novels may suggest that the adaptation process can also enhance the effect of naturalness attributed to exposing the events and portraying the characters of the original source as compared to its literary version, and since translating classical English novels to film has gained increasing popularity, as well as critical acclaim over the past century, the transposition of the narrative perspective from literary works to the cinematic genre could provide the reader with a more or less critical angle from which the actions and actants are represented within both.

Much has been stated upon the nature and status of film adaptations of contemporary English classics, and the prevailing number of opinions on the subject has so far been far from flattering with reference to the film translations. The latter, as contrasted to the literary work, tends to lose creative authenticity to the adaptation process itself, involving either the inevitable curtailment of the literary data or its significant modifications in order to fit within the boundaries of the audio-visual medium and film genre in general. Most often these aspects of cinematic versions are looked upon as disadvantages rather than positive aspects.

As M.Fabe suggests in her treatise "Closely Watched Films: An Introduction to the Narrative Film Technique", one of the greatest contributions made by the early pioneers of perfecting cinematic technique in general, as Griffith, for instance, was the process of setting the *mise-en-scene*, which ultimately involved such elements of directing film as scene design, lighting techniques, choosing and guiding actors, as well as other 'profilmic elements', which, as defined by film specialists, include 'the objects placed in front of the camera to be photographed' [1, p.3-4]. Thus, photographing, staging and reflecting instead of narrating can also provide the viewer, as well as the reader, with an effective and hence imaginative picture of the events revealed.

Yet adaptation is still viewed as a lower, less authoritarian form of art, prone to entertainment rather than entertaining thought or further speculation on the subject touched, the fact underlined by J.Tibbets and J.Welsh in "The Encyclopedia of Novels into Film". The relation of literature to its film translation is akin to rather an opposition than conjugation, of art to commerce, critical as it might be, belittling the status of the latter and glorifying that of the former. As the authors suggest, most critical approaches to film opposed to

literature also view the two related and contrasted to each other on the assumption of individuality winning over collaboration [4, p.16]. The opinion in itself, however, might prove to be a misconception, or a theoretical trap many critics are prone to become victims to, since the modern views on the adaptation studies, which are so far only gaining weight and reputation as valid scientifically grounded outlooks upon the process and outcome of cinematic translations, have made sufficient progress.

Namely, the ultra-postmodernist views upon the impact and validity on channeling the narrative or metanarrative data via the film's audio-visual and telling media, are prone to rather value than underscore the latter, as J.Manfred, the world renown and authoritarian narratology and film studies specialist, asserts. The author views film as a much broader and multifarious concept unit than the narrative printed genre, suggesting that the taxonomy of film and drama, with the notion of the narrative as the umbrella term, invites a number of interpretive angles, as would be the theory of narrative and narratology, but also the concepts and processes of dramatic adaptations.

Consequently, the question of prevalence is not only excluded from the genre categorization, but is likely to become obsolescent: the multiplicity of approaches to film as the contemporary specific narrative and audio-visual medium becomes the centre of film studies in general [3, p.1]. The critic assumes, on a profound study of film as a genre of contemporary art, that the term itself is 'a multimedial narrative form' shaped owing to feasible physical recording of both the auditory and the physical data, which culminate in forming what one is likely to term 'motion pictures'. While the film itself is approached as the performed and thus performative genre, designed primarily for the public, it is confined to specific dramatic principles of realization as well, since, akin to a drama, it relies largely on a script.

Yet the final demonstration process is less realistic or feasible: a film is displayed on and projected onto a screen, whilst drama is performed on stage. J.Manfred leaves no doubt, unlike the previously cited specialists in the field, that 'like drama, film is a *narrative* genre because it presents a story (a sequence of action units' [3, p.2]. The scientist insists also that a film as a multimedia production and genre is often equated with an adaptation, which is a natural transition, as film directors and theorists would have the general public believe. It stands to reason therefore that film and cinematic adaptation, as well as any other narrative, have as their basis a certain narrative canvass, which inevitably evokes such concepts as plotting, character presentation, which, in the case of a motion picture and the account kept of the constraints of the genre, are portrayed with greater amount of accuracy regarding the visual appeal to the potential viewer, and the angle of vision conveyed with greater or lesser accuracy. This can become the focus of the narrative vision and transgress the boundaries of a cinematic work, rendering a realistic account of the events rendered.

The angle of vision, or narrative viewpoint as it is variously termed, is commonly identified within the bounds of a motion picture connected to the *mise-en-scene* already determined in the study, and is given a precise definition by A.Villarejo in her scientific account "Film Studies: The Basics". The film theorist gives a broad identification to the concept itself, insisting upon the terminological construct of 'deep focus', which by and large incorporates a concoction of the so-called 'deep space which is a set (an element of *mise-en-scene*)' developing the action as perceived upon a number of planes, or sets, and 'camera aperture and focus', defined as the cinematic elements that contribute to paying closer attention to many plans, scenes and narrative excerpts. These are also defined by the author as 'depth of field' [5, p.153]. If one were to look upon a simpler identification of the similar concept of focalization in narrative theory, the concepts of 'showing' as it is presented in M.Fludernik's narratological studies would come to the fore.

Paradoxically enough, M.Fludernik is adamant on stating that in literature the showing mode within the narrative has fewer possibilities of story display than the film adaptation and drama, since, as the scientist puts it bluntly, 'showing, apparently unmediated presentation of events and people' can take place in the exclusive film and dramatic genres and media, while in a novel the utterances are quoted verbatim and are shaped as conversational instances. Yet, viewing the events from the focus of a specified single or collective character is an option offered quite generously by the novel in the first place; it is this option that is termed 'focalization', with such additional and quite useful analytical terms as 'filter' and 'lens', aiding the narrate perceive the story which is thus put across via the vision of a focalizer [2, p.36]. It turns out that in order to reshape the narrowing design of a novel as a genre through adapting it to the screen one is prone to enlarge the theoretical and analytical field of studies, cutting across the generic film and drama taxonomies and making a narrative feasible as bound to focalization.

The notion in question refers to the verbal medium of the novel as a printed source on the one hand, and pertains to cover the elements of the deep focus on the other, involving the intricacy of filmic mise-en-scenes, multiple and many-angled plans of action and as many fields of vision as are possible to cover by the audio-visual and verbal narrative of the novel adaptation. The latter is determined as part of the narrative genre legitimately, and the difference consists in its transmission, which involves the screen, i.e. its major intermediary. When applied to the process of film adaptation analysis of the contemporary American novel, the question of the focus can be answered by looking more closely at the shifts of suchlike narrative perspective within K.Stockett's critically acclaimed and highly praised 2009 novel "The Help" reflected in its 2012 Oscar-winning film adaptation by T.Taylor. The analysis below will feature the elements of comparison and contrast of the narrative literary and cinematic techniques which serve to transmit the focus mentioned, be it the one of the fiction viewpoint or that of the cinematographic deep focus.

The study will center upon the comparison of the literary excerpts featuring the presentation of the secondary character Elizabeth Leefolt with the exposure of the same character through the cinematic script version. The two will be subsequently both identified and scrutinized stylistically and narratologically. The first extract from the novel by K.Stockett features the first-person point of view and the overt narrative agency of rather an obtrusive character: the narration is the exclusive realm and privilege of the protagonist, Aibileen Clark, guiding the narratee throughout the plot of the piece. Here, Elizabeth Leefolt is given an unflattering presentation via the fixed internal focalization of Aibileen's:

"Here's something about Miss Leefolt: she not just frowning all the time, she skinny. Her legs is so spindly, she look like she done growed em last week. Twenty-three years old and she lanky as a fourteen-year-old boy. Even her hair is thin, brown, see-through. She try to tease it up, but it only make it look thinner. Her face be the same shape as that red devil on the redhot candy box, pointy chin and all" [6, p.1].

The stylistic pattern emerging immediately and paralleling hence intensifying the perceptibility of Leefolt's image is the succession of the predicatives which feature some characterizing qualitative adjectives ('skinny', 'lanky as a fourteen-year old boy', 'thin, brown, see-through', 'be the same shape as that red devil...'). The qualifiers are sustained and made more prominent by the consistently patterned similes, which stress the unnatural thinness and non-motherly figure of the stereotype built owing to the intensely focused outlook of the narrator. The focalizer does not abdicate the controlling position, relentlessly imposing her viewpoint upon the narratee.

While the novel narrative limits itself to the mere concept and constraints of literary focus and focalization, the cinematic genre invites a broader and less neutral interpretation, where the deep focus helps shift the narratorial attention from the critical slant preferred by Aibileen to the semi-neutral film focus of the script-writer's remarks, the one which has to be shared with Aibileen's, no doubt:

"Mae Mobley's mother, Elizabeth Leefolt, 22 and lanky, enters wearing a lavender floral print dress very much under construction. Pins and double-stick tape hold it all together. She has pointed features and a nest of teased hair..." [7, p.4].

As can be determined from the very first passage, the narrative focus is marked by a greater degree of neutrality: the only token to the novel fidelity is the detached construction containing the predicative 'lanky': to that the indication of the precise age ('22') is added, intensifying the verisimilitude of the presentation, which is more of a camera-eye narration than the obtrusive first-person novel voice. The objects 'pointed (features)', as well as the nominal phrase 'a nest of teased hair' are the metaphoric extensions of the novel's more elaborate stylistic presentation mode. This does not diminish the vantage point of the script character presentation, maintaining the generic index of the deep focus, where the scene itself is being made more visual, specific and particularizing, with the details of clothing coming to the fore as well ('pins and double-stick tape...'). Consequently, while the novel presentation individualizes the focus of the protagonist upon the secondary textual figure, making it more stylistically marked, the film presentation narrows the focus down to the relevant, numerically and semiotically specific details, vivifying and sharpening the picture, which makes the term 'deep focus' self-explanatory to a greater degree.

Thus, the film adaptation determines and foregrounds the character presentation in the film version of the American novel studied, despite the oftentimes adopted viewpoint of the literary adepts on the generic limitations the motion picture imposes upon the adapted version itself. Therefore, if the focalization in the novel version can appear fixed, more stylistically patterned and modeled to appear subjective, the deep focus

of the film narrative specifies and neutralizes both the novelistic imagery and the technique of character presentation, where the figurative elaborateness yields to clarity, conciseness and life-likeness of the view-point conveyed.

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