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(eds.)

The Visual and the Verbal in Film, Drama, Literature and Biography

EXTRACT

Dis/Continuities

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Edited by Mirosława Buchholtz

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Introduction

The times we live in are marked by revolutionary changes: political, social, cultural, technological, and many others. Some of these changes are spectacular and easily definable; others are taking place slowly and imperceptibly. Some are radical and consist in breaking with past traditions, others have their origin in previous outlooks and movements. The present series aims at studying changes of all kinds as manifested in language, literature, and culture. Seen in historical and theoretical perspectives, changes reveal the tension between continuity and rupture inherent in all human endeavors. While conclusions will of necessity remain tentative, temporary, and contingent, the series offers space for reflection on a variety of intersecting dis/continuities.

The first volume of the series addresses the relation between the visual and the verbal, which is in itself an age-old antinomy. Its development could be traced from Horace's notoriously misunderstood dictum "Ut pictura poesis" (as is painting so is poetry) to Giovanni Sartori's Cassandric view of the degeneration of *homo sapiens* into *homo videns* and the replacement of the abstract, conceptual language by the poorer concrete, perceptive language, which results in the diminishing of connotative skills. The religious debate over icons took place roughly midway through the development from Horace to Sartori. Although iconolatry and iconoclasm are in their origin religious concepts, they have been readily taken over by artists and writers, along with the emotional fervor and intensity characteristic of religious and political controversy. Contemporary iconodules and iconoclasts are like their pious predecessor concerned about the dilemmas of who or what, how, to whom, and for what purpose is being represented in words or pictures. The iconodules today are increasingly aware, however, of their diminished ability of recreating and adapting, rather than making of new images.

The juxtaposition of the visual and the verbal is problematized further by the ambiguity inscribed in each of these terms. The visual is both seen and imagined, the verbal can be seen, read, and heard. The epistemological overlap facilitates a shortcut that may nevertheless close off nooks and crannies of cognition that are worth exploring. The contributors to the present volume represent a variety of interests in film, drama, poetry, prose, literature, biography, ekphrasis, and photography, theory and practice, as well as their intersections and interconnections. Whereas reflection on the visual and the verbal may seem obvious with reference to film and drama, it is less so in the context of literary and biographical studies, not because they are difficult to find there, but because they tend to be overlooked in the overabundance of aims and issues. Adopting a variety of methodologies, each of the contributors draws a link between the parti-

cular and the general, a text or a picture at hand and a mechanism that produces or annihilates meanings. Some big literary names surface in the following articles, most notably William Shakespeare and Henry James, but forgotten and marginalized writers and artists, such as old Irish poets, Wyndham Lewis, Stefan Themerson, feminist and postcolonial dramatists are also brought into the limelight.

The opening article by **Andrzej Weseliński** offers a summary and an illustration of the state of film adaptation today. It reveals in particular a growing hostility toward film adaptation and points out its sources. Weseliński extends the discussion on adaptation by pointing out that the "screen" is currently used as an all-embracing term which includes the cinema and TV screen as well as the computer screen, where DVDs can be viewed, video games can be played, and Internet sites accessed. He focuses on the most promising area of adaptation studies that is independent of literature studies and film studies, pointing also to various discourses of textual enquiry that shape the field of adaptation studies.

Jacek Fabiszak looks from a historicist perspective at two adaptations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: Roman Polański's Hollywood production of 1971 and Krzysztof Nazar's 1988 version made for Polish television. He perceives Polański's decision to remove the original ending of the play, which brings the redress of all injustices, in the context of the film director's experience of the Holocaust and, on a personal level, of the brutal murder of his pregnant wife. Furthermore, Fabiszak addresses the question of how and why Nazar adapted Polański's ideas onto the small screen, and shows what role Nazar's version, which highlights psychological violence, played (or meant to play) in Poland on the eve of political, social, and cultural change.

Agnieszka Rasmus considers both the politics and the poetics of cinematic dialogism. She seeks to move away from the medium-specificity approach and the dominant literature-to-film paradigm, and to extend the discussion on adaptation by studying film remakes. She compares two versions of *Sleuth*: the 1972 one by Joseph L. Mankiewicz and its 2007 remake by Kenneth Branagh. She looks at how the idea of transgression was transformed and reinterpreted from class wars at the heart of the original film to sex games as the driving force of the remake. The change, as she argues, reflects the contemporary viewer's sensibilities (as envisioned by the film makers and re-makers).

Edyta Lorek-Jezińska focuses on the figure of Ophelia, whose madness, intensity and relative silence have inspired a number of versions, representations, and interpretations both in literature and criticism. She analyzes two plays: Deborah Levy's *Pushing the Prince into Denmark* (1991) and Bryony Lavery's *Ophelia* (1997), pointing out several differences between the strategies adopted by the two female dramatists. For example, whereas Levy

explores the cause of Ophelia's unhappiness, Lavery uses the figure of Ophelia to activate and stimulate other female characters from Shakespeare's plays to form a rewarding acting material for feminist theatre.

Grzegorz Koneczniak's first contribution comments on Helen Gilbert's anthology of postcolonial plays (2001). He argues that the texts included in the anthology exemplify three kinds of postcolonial iconoclasm: first, the subversion of postcolonial establishments and authority; second, the redefinition of colonial and postcolonial femininity; and third, various iconoclastic acts staged against colonial and postcolonial agency, which frequently take the form of essentialist constructions of subjectivity. His second article focuses on two plays included in Gilbert's anthology: *The Hungry Earth* (1979) by Maishe Maponya and *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1997) by Jane Taylor. While studying the interplay of visuality and orality in both texts, Koneczniak traces the change in the dramaturgical conventions of enacting the neo-colonial period of apartheid within the space of almost twenty years.

Wacław Grzybowski builds upon Paul Ricoeur's *Rule of Metaphor*, Eric Voegelin's *Anamnesis*, and Emil Benveniste's notion of the so-called "transparent sign" to offer his own integral (integrated) idea of metaphor which consists in linking them to the referential function of language and metaphor at the basis of which Neo-Thomist philosophy finds the existential proposition, the fundamental verbalised, or even non-verbal, assertion about existence of a given thing. The existential proposition becomes then the basis of analogy of being, i.e. of the recognition of a variety of similitudes and dissimilarities between natural entities, as well as artifacts, with metaphor being one of the varieties of analogous knowing. Grzybowski explains his theory with reference to old Irish poetry.

Dominika Buchowska studies Wyndham Lewis's activity as the editor of *Blast* in 1914-15, and especially of its successor magazine, *The Tyro*. She argues that unlike *Blast*, *The Tyro* was conventional in terms of typography and layout, but, just like its predecessor, it was short-lived; only two issues were published in 1921 and 1922. Analyzing the correspondences between the verbal or the textual and the visual in terms of comparisons, contrasts, analogies, and mutual influences, Buchowska draws a panorama of avant-garde and international modernism in Britain in the first decades of the twentieth century, as well as a portrait of Lewis as a literary man and a proficient painter.

Mirosława Buchholtz argues that every time photography enters the novel, it does so anew and at a different stage in the development of both. Furthermore, every such occurrence calls for a redefinition of the stake that each of them has in the real (real speech, real image, real situation) and its modalities (surreal and hyperreal). She focuses on three literary experimenters who sought to rejuvenate

the novel also, though not exclusively, by means of including photographs in their books: Henry James in the New York Edition of his canon (1907-1909), André Breton in *Nadja* (1928), and W.G. Sebald in *Schwindel. Gefühle* (1990).

Rod Mengham seeks to reinstate the almost vanished legacy of Polish film pioneers Franciszka and Stefan Themerson, who left Poland first for Paris in 1938, and then for London in the early years of World War II. They never succeeded in establishing a *modus operandi* for their mode of film-making in the cultural climate of post-war Britain, but they both adapted to this alien environment by becoming different kinds of artists: Franciszka concentrated on painting and drawing, while Stefan published a series of acerbically funny texts that were philosophical essays in fictional form. Mengham comments briefly on their pre-war films, of which only three have survived, and devotes the major part of his essay to an analysis of Stefan Themerson's post-war prose.

Jarosław Hetman traces the development of ekphrasis from Homer to the present. In the analytical part of his article, he focuses on the cooperation between the American postmodern writer Paul Auster and the French conceptual artist Sophie Calle in the last decades of the twentieth century. He seeks to demonstrate that despite spectacular formal differences, contemporary ekphrasis is part of a relatively uniform process of development taking place in the course of millennia. Viewed in the context of conceptualism, ekphrasis allows him to distinguish a number of relations between literature and visual art.

The closing article focuses on visual portraits in biographical accounts. The author argues that with the exception of ekphrasis, which invites comparison of the visual and the verbal, portraits and biographical texts are not to be compared in the sense of evaluation leading to choice. They should rather be metaphorized as independent parties involved in a dialogue that welcomes further, unending evidence both visual and verbal. What role visual portraits play in biographical studies is shown in the analyses of four images of Henry James made by different artists and at different stages of his life.

The debate begins, and its aim is to keep pace intellectually with the changes which humanity as a whole both makes and undergoes. What better aim for the humanities of the twenty-first century?

Mirosława Buchholtz

Film Adaptations: Theories, and New/Old Dilemmas

Andrzej Weseliński

My paper, as its title suggests, aims to reflect on and extend the debate on the subject of film adaptation and also to present new research in the field.

It is by now a commonplace that the history of film is marked by its heavy reliance on literature, particularly on narrative fiction. Since the silent movie era Hollywood has turned to literature for inspiration and persisted in the practice of translating books into film. Numerous writers were drafted in by Hollywood studios to adapt literary works. The coming of sound intensified the exploitation of the treasure trove of American and European fiction, with the added importance of dialogue. In the 1930s many serious writers, such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Nathanael West, and Aldous Huxley, committed themselves to adapting literary works for Hollywood studios, with varying degrees of success.

A second commonplace is that the relationship between film and literature is a topic which is as rich as it is elusive. It is rich thanks to the popularity of screen adaptations and the flood of scholarship responding to those adaptations which emerged over the past three or four decades. It is elusive because of the inherent difficulties in comparing two different media.

Relations between film and literature are a subject in themselves. George Bluestone was the first critic to write a book-length study of adaptations: *Novels into Film. The Metamorphosis of Fiction into Cinema* (1957). In the opening chapter of his book ("The Limits of the Novel and the Limits of the Film") Bluestone undertakes a comprehensive survey of relevant aesthetic principles. He points out that on the face of it, a close relationship has existed from the beginning. The reciprocity of film and literature manifests itself from almost any point of view: "the number of films based on novels, the search for filmic equivalents of literature, the effect of adaptations on reading, box-office receipts for filmed novels, merit awards by and for the Hollywood community" (1973: 2). Bluestone begins his book by looking at connections between fiction and the movies, and ends up by emphasizing their differences. For Bluestone, the key to adaptation studies is to acknowledge the different formative principles of literature and film. According to him, all the differences derive from the contrast between the novel as a conceptual and discursive form, and the film as a perceptual and presentational form: "Like two intersecting lines, novel and film meet at a point, then diverge. At the intersection, the book and shooting script are almost

indistinguishable" (1973: 63). And he goes on to say that when the lines diverge, they also lose resemblance to each other so that the filmed novel, in spite of certain resemblances, inevitably becomes a different artistic entity from the novel on which it is based. (N.B. It should be noted that Bluestone, like many early critics, uses the word "novel" to refer to literature as a whole.)

Many later critics acknowledge that Bluestone's book gave a fresh impetus to the studies of adaptation and contributed significantly to the emergence of Film Studies in the academy. The American critic Joy Gould Boyum acknowledges that having read Bluestone's book, she began to perceive with greater clarity the special nature of the biases that adaptation tends to elicit. In the Preface to her perceptive book *Double Exposure: Fiction into Film* (1985), Boyum writes that Bluestone's work helped her to understand the extraordinary complexity of the transaction between viewer and film in the context of the adaptation, "where the viewer's response to a given film was preceded and controlled by a prior response to the literary work on which that film was based" (1989: xi). In her book the critic sets out not only to explore the art of adaptation, but also to defend it. It is worth noticing that Part One of Boyum's book is titled significantly "In Defense of Adaptations." She takes as a point of departure for discussion Bluestone's statement that an art addressed to a mass audience will be – by that very fact – more limited than an art addressed to an elite one. And she remarks wryly that defenders of high culture have always shared Bluestone's bias (1989: 10). Taking a new look at film versions of famous American and European novels, she attempts to refute the commonly held opinion that screen adaptations, in most cases, are inferior to the literary originals. She argues that ideas about the process of adaptation are very much in need of revision: "For one thing, there are prejudices that have prevailed; for another, there are radical artistic changes that have taken place since Bluestone's work was published" (1989: 22-23). Since the 1960s dozens of infinitely more sophisticated adaptations than those Bluestone deals with have been released. The detractors of adaptations, particularly the literary establishment, seem not to have noticed that many arguments they put forth against screen adaptation are really about film when it was synonymous with the traditional Hollywood production, about the kind of films which predate the artistic innovations of avant-garde filmmaking, the European art film, the French New Wave, the Italian Neorealists, and so on.

Having analyzed 17 screen adaptations, including such well-known films as *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, *Apocalypse Now*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Death in Venice*, *The Day of the Locust*, and *The Magnificent Ambersons* (Orson Welles's picture), Boyum contends that those adaptations serve to totally undermine the long-received view that the book is always better than the movie, that film must of necessity "simplify, belittle, and do untold damage to fiction" (1989: 285). Contra-

ry to what the detractors of adaptation have held in the past, literary forms do not by their very nature resist conversion to the screen, while film is an art eminently capable of translating fiction not only in plot and theme, but also in style, technique, metaphor, symbol, and allegory. Boyum' argument in support of adaptation is also an argument for film as collaborative art: when two parallel arts join forces at the movies, they are even capable of transcending their literary source. She asserts that film is in a very real sense "a form of literature itself," that is, "a system of narration that unites the power of words with the potentially even greater power of the images they aim to create, it might even be considered a natural step in literature's evolution – a form that Flaubert and Dickens [...] had somehow envisioned and, through Griffith, Eisenstein, and other filmmakers, actually helped to create" (1989: 23).

However, Boyum is well aware of the implacable hostility between film and literature. She makes frequent references to defenders of high culture, such as Virginia Woolf and Hannah Arendt, who considered film adaptations as abominations or crude usurpations of literary masterpieces that threatened to devour and/or destroy its literary source. Hannah Arendt in her essay "Society and Culture" attacked the entertainment industry voraciously feeding on the entire range of past and present culture, adjusting literary works to the tastes of the film audience rather than to the film medium (1960: 283-284). It is small wonder, therefore, that Boyum gives vent to her frustration when she characterizes film adaptations as occupying "a no-man's land, caught somewhere between a series of conflicting aesthetic claims and rivalries" (1989: 17). And she adds that this is perhaps the most pressing reason for rethinking all those contentious issues concerning this kind of "hybrid" study.

It appears that the burning issues concerning this "hybrid study," even in the next decade, remain unresolved. In 1999 Imelda Whelehan in her perceptive essay "Adaptations: the contemporary dilemmas" characterized the area of adaptations studies as "caught between literary criticism and film studies." Despite the fact that there has been a steady stream of publications devoted to the process of adaptation from text to screen, literary critics and film theorists were unable to work out a happy compromise in their approach to this "hybrid" subject (1999: 4). The arrival of Film or Media Studies in the 1960s, often within English Departments, was greeted with a mixed response and often berated as not a "serious" subject. Although the study of literary adaptations on Film and TV has become more "acceptable" as a feature of English and/or Media Studies in higher education faculties of art, it is still surrounded by all sorts of prejudices about this "hybrid" study. Studying literature on screen is fraught with problems, especially in making decisions about giving the "appropriate" amount of attention to each medium and fostering the skills specific to each artistic form.

A few years later, in a companion-piece to Whelehan's essay, co-authored by Deborah Cartmell, the critics reiterate that literature on screen, always a "hybrid" subject, tends to occupy an uneasy place between Film Studies and Literary Studies (2007: 1). Although literary adaptations have been the subject of much academic discourse in both fields (for instance, *auteur* studies, Shakespeare on Screen, which is now a major industry of criticism, and more recently, Jane Austen on Screen), there have been few attempts to evaluate the process of adaptation itself and even fewer attempts to theorize the textual transactions that occur in the process. Most of the criticism until the 21st century was predictable, judging a screen adaptation by its fidelity to its literary source or, even more vaguely, to the "spirit" of the book (whatever it means). Moreover, regardless of its proximity to the literary original, the prevailing view was that an adaptation could only be a pale version of something distilled into a more "palatable" form in face of the logocentric belief that words come first, that the word occupies a central position. In this light adaptations can only be regarded as "appropriation." And that is why adaptation criticism until recently has been bedevilled by highly emotive words implying that the cinema has done a disservice to literature and emphasizing what has been lost rather than what has been gained in the process of adaptation. The conventional language of adaptation criticism has been abundantly moralistic, often carrying overtones of prudishness and/or aesthetic disgust, for instance: "infidelity," "betrayal," "violation," "bastardization," "vulgarization," and "deformation." One striking example is John Grierson's comment on the adaptations of classic English writers, such as Shakespeare and Dickens. John Grierson, the British director, producer and theoretician, founder of the British documentary movement in the 1920s, compared the screen versions of "Copperfields and Romeos" to prostitution (1937: 139-140).

Robert Stam in his landmark essay "The Theory and Practice of Adaptation," which introduces the collection *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (2005), takes a different approach which rejects the axiomatic superiority of literature to film. He points out that the standard rhetoric has often deployed "an elegiac discourse of loss, lamenting what has been 'lost' in the translation from novel to film." Too much of the adaptation discourse has focused on the subjective question of the quality of adaptations, rather than on the crucial issues of the theoretical status of adaptation and the analytical interest of adaptations (2005: 3-4).

Stam makes a bold attempt to deconstruct the axioms which construct the subaltern status of adaptation vis-à-vis literature and also to point to alternative perspectives. He argues that the intuitive sense of adaptation's inferiority derives from a constellation of deep-rooted prejudices and identifies eight major sources of hostility to adaptation. First, the *historical priority of literature*, the assumpti-