

# Comparative Literature: Literature and Film as the Double Look of Janus. The Fluidity of Boundaries and the Parallel Universes

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**Abstract:** *In a comparative literature study, the discussion about the fluidity of the boundaries between Literature and Film is a universe that reflects a history marked by close or lesser proximity. Often, in this sense, a critical study of this problem has a double look because it not only requires a diachronic view but also a synchronous one. On the other hand, is not only important to identify points of convergence but of divergence, always in conjunction with the objective of analysing the equipollents Literature and Film. So, between Literature and Film, a double look is needed, like the Roman god Janus, linking, for example, semiotics and narratology, and evaluating the possible multiplicity of perspectives.*

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## 1. Introduction

Comparative literature can be defined as “literature without borders” (Dominguez, Saussy, & Villanueva, 2014: xv) or as Sangia (2018) wrote:

Comparative literature is an interdisciplinary field whose practitioners study literature across national borders, across time periods, across languages, across genres, across boundaries between literature and the other arts (music, painting, dance, film, etc.), across disciplines (literature and psychology, philosophy, science, history, architecture, sociology, politics, etc.) (Tötösy de Zepetnek, 1998: 80) (Cao, 2013: xix).

Comparative studies include, of course, literature and film, a complex web of connections between writers and directors, adaptations and (in)fidelities, initiated with the history of filmmaking with the first literary adaptations. However, literature and film, like Janus, the double face roman god, still arouse strong debates about links and borders, horizons and differences.

Ingmar Bergman, in an essential text for understanding the relationships and approaches between literature and film, said, in a manic way: “Film has nothing to do with Literature.”

his position is clearly a paradox if we think that the filmmaker found in literature, with interesting systematicity a fruitful field, with clear connections with the film, particularly in the field of narrative, as stated by Abílio Hernandez Cardoso (1995, p.15). In contrast, José Martínez Ruiz, with an antagonistic view, argues that “El cine es literatura, si no es literatura, no es nada» (1999, p.5). These two statements can contribute to the discussion of the fluidity of the boundaries between literature and cinema, universes

that reflect a story marked by greater or lesser proximity. In this sense, a critical study of this problem has a double look because it not only requires a diachronic view, but also a synchronous, and is not only important to identify points of convergence but of divergence, always in conjunction with the objective perspective of the equipollents literature and cinema.

It seems to be consensus matter that filmmakers saw early on in literature, a repository of themes and narrative structures that could be vectors for the future of cinema. At the dawn of cinema, Griffith did not hesitate to recognize that gathered in Charles Dickens narrative models, techniques, a conception of time and suspense, linking two parallel and simultaneous actions. Already in 1867, Méliès adapted from literature, *Faust and Margaret*, in 1868, *Cinderella*, and in 1902, begins his interest in the works of Jules Verne, adapting to screen *Voyage to the Moon*.

Whether we address the semiotic domain, in line with Metz, Lotman Garroni or Chatman, whether we address the aesthetic or historical aspects, in line with Eisenstein, Bazin or Mitry, film never fails to establish relations with literature. Indeed, as argued by Carlos Reis, we can consider film as an articulated language, and evaluate the cinematic language in the same way that one analyzes the literary language (1997, p. 56). Thus, the narratological proximity between literature and cinema is a demonstrable reality, as evidenced by Aguiar and Silva when he says that the film text is devoted to telling a story, to which characters are connected and move in a spatial-temporal axis, becoming thus a similarity with the literary text, centred on storytelling (1990, p.178).

Historically, Jacques Aumont, Alain Bergala, Michel Marie and Marc Vernet argue that the connection between cinema and literature is due to three factors: the figurative moving image (film provides a figurative image that leads to the

narration), the image in motion (film approaches the story as it is a path from an initial state to a terminal state) and the search for legitimacy (1996, pp. 90-91). These authors argue that film, when its dawn, was, above all, a fairground attraction, a new marvel of technology, "an invention without a future" as stated by the Lumière brothers. On imperative grounds of affirmation in terms of status, it sought to combine with the arts of unquestioned nobility, including the theatre and the novel, developing his vocation story.

## 2. The fluidity of boundaries and the parallel universes

The narrative has established itself as a characteristic that united literature and film, different semiotic systems. As postulated by Aguiar e Silva:

Every narrative text, regardless of the semiotic system that enables its structure, if it exists, specifies an instance enunciator who reports actual or fictitious events that succeed in time - to represent events that constitute the transition from one state to another state, the narrative text necessarily also represents different states - originated or suffered by anthropomorphic agents or not, individual or collective, and situated within the empirical world or a possible world (1988, pp. 597-598).

The narratological perspective we chose leads us to consider *ab initio*, the distinction adopted by Christian Metz, in the footsteps of Cohen-Seat, between cinematographic facts and film facts. The former include technical factors, economic, social, political, etc., While from the perspective of semiotics, films are seen as texts, units of speech, that can be put in perspective in the different systems (whether or not codes) that underpinning these texts, as Metz says.

With this perspective in mind, film language and literary language can be joined by homology relationships, which leads us to think in the words of Garroni regarding the view of Eisenstein, who considered the distinct character of the film in the film edition, but which employed after that facet for characterization of literary and theatrical works, and in corroboration with Abílio Hernandez Cardoso when he says, about Modernism, that his literary practice confirms the notion that there are no rigid boundaries between the verbal and visual, meeting some of the best-known examples in the use of collage and disruption in surrealist texts, and in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and newspaper news in *USA* by John Dos Passos (1995, p. 1148).

The narrative cinema exemplifies the similarities between film narrative and literary narrative. Although this issue deserves careful analysis, we must emphasize, as a reference, the approach proposed by some authors. Carlos Reis, for example, combines concepts and entities of literature and film; Louis Giannetti defends a correspondence between the gaze of the camera and the voice of the narrator literary, and J. G. Boyum equalises the camera-film narrator to narrator literary (ie, as the words tell a literary narrative, the images work the same way in relation to the film narrative). However, like Seymour Chatman, one can not consider equal the camera and the narrator in terms of perception. Bruce

Kawin says that if the film can not identify the narrator through the narrator's literary representative brands (pronouns, tenses ...) this implies that the speaker can only be identified by a context, which means that the position of the camera, the choice of the point of view, the viewing angles, the editing effects and other film elements provide the viewer with a sequential reading of images, looking ahead to an identification of a narrator, responsible for the unification of all parts.

The foundation element of this problem is highlighted by Aguiar and Silva when presenting essential points of approach between literature and film, as are temporal arts that enable the construction and communication of stories. However, time and space have different characteristics in the two universes. Thus, Lotman argues that only the present exists in the film image (we cannot shoot a story in the future, unlike a novel) position followed by George Bluestone, which identifies one time in film and three in the narrative writing.

The film, in order to build a temporal sequence, uses techniques such as cutting, cast the chained, sound elements such as dialogue or voiceover, building up a combination of features, because it does not have the same dimension of verbal language. Literature and film are approaching when we invoke similar concepts as story time and discourse time (according to Genette). Abílio Hernandez Cardoso writes, clairvoyantly, about the purpose of the use of the ellipse in the movies:

An appeal to the ellipse, where a gap in film discourse (marked by casting a chained or cut) coexists with continued time story, sometimes gives rise to situations of notable dramatic cut as occurs in early 2001, *A Space Odyssey*, Stanley Kubrick (1968), by cutting across the view of the bone that flies driven by the primate arm and view of the starship across the space: the speech time is zero, story time equates to millions of years" (1995, p. 1145).

The alchemy of image was able to attract the literary text, leading the novel to two types of reaction: the approach of the letter to the image (when the novel reflects the view of the camera film) or the distance from the text to the image (when the novel values the inner monologue, preventing the translation by the image of the character stream of consciousness).

Text and image are often united mainly by the relevant social, historical and cultural feature, as well as the capabilities of ideological representation (Cardoso, 2016). In fact, these coordinates are very sharp, so the film is close to the novel since the contribution of Méliès that stands out "the condition of fictional narrative and consequent ability to act on their receivers with more reason when considering the huge projection and dissemination of the film" (Reis, 1997, p. 59). Moreover, as noted by Carlos Reis, "Filmmakers as L. Buñuel, I. Bergman, S. Kubrick, as formerly D. Griffith, F. Lang, S. Eisenstein and J. Renoir project in their movies, major trauma and concerns of man placed in Society and History" (Reis, 1997, p. 59-60).

Between literature and film, Sklovskij underlined a relationship of 'kinship', a 'bridge': the script. According to Sklovskij, the script should provide a comparison of images (and not just the juxtaposition defended by Eisenstein). The relationship between literature and film is not all exclusive to the art world. On this theme, Bazin wrote: "le cinéma assimile le formidable capital de sujets élaborés, amassés autour de lui par les arts rivaux au cours des siècles" (1958, p.32), as it is truly an impure art, because captures and combines elements of different art forms, which leads Harry A. Hargrave to argue that "film is not an art, it is many arts". However, we argue, as the author himself, that "(...) Whatever film is (...), it shares more parallels in form and function with literature than with any of other disciplines" (1975, p. 233), as indeed also states Maria do Rosario Bello Lupi (1995 -1996, p. 106 – 107).

Attesting the value of the essential literary source, we can find a historical succession of films inspired by literary works. But we must not fall into the fallacy of comparative because as stated by Stromgren and Norden (1984), all attempts to establish an equivalence between the quality of literary and film work reveal themselves misleading. In fact, it is above all often a negative correlation. In concatenation with the previous idea, it seems legitimate to judge a movie based on the criteria "fidelity to the novel." Literature and film, even if they are semiotic systems with numerous contact points, are also works of art that are valuable by themselves. On the other hand, the question of "fidelity" has been the subject of heated theoretical disputes.

### 3. Conclusions

In a first sum, we conclude that the relationship between literature and film reveals a set of convergences and divergences. So when the two universes are compared - literature and film - with crossroads or in a parallel way, we must seek to glimpse, first, the specificity of each, to assess the differences reflected on the interactions, and think about how to treat the categories of narrative, as underlined by Antonio Prete (1972, p. 38):

ritrovare l'unità a partire da un'analisi delle differenze tra immagine filmica e immagine poetica, tra la struttura del racconto filmico e struttura del racconto letterario, a partire dal riconoscimento della valenza conoscitiva dell'immagine filmica, dell'immagine poetica, della scrittura narrativa, cioè a partire dalla ricerca del senso, che è la sola realtà al di qua della specificazione dei singoli linguaggi, al di qua dei mezzi tecnici, dei procedimenti, dei processi di produzione.

However, we must bear in mind that the original book and the latter film cannot be evaluated from a dependency point of view. In a comparative study, independence from the origin is a strong value to preserve so that each work of art can be seen according to its unique value, as Emig (2018) points out :

Fidelity Criticism, a critical point of view that measures the success of an adaptation against the supposed value and meaning of the original, is as much a stalwart companion of adaptation studies as it is an embarrassment for it. Especially forms of adaptation studies that seem to assume that adaptation only comes into being with film, and that its traditional

'enemy' is literary studies, are often perplexed at the fact that critics are still tempted to search for truthful representations of original works or, worse, the intentions of their authors. Focused on the overt communal production of media such as film, such perspectives appear to them outdated and downright inappropriate.

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