LINGUISTIC TRAITS OF PLOT EXPOSITIONS IN FILM ADAPTATIONS OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

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Prezentul articol studiază posibilităţile de redare a trăsăturilor subiectului în proza engleză precum expoziţiile romanelor în scenariile adaptărilor cinematografice ale acestora. Sunt tratate conceptul structurii narative şi cel al subiectului literar. De asemenea se analizează particularităţile

procesului restructurării acestor elemente în redarea filmică a romanelor. Proprietăţile lingvistice şi cele literare ale operelor studiate sunt comparate şi contrastate cu versiunile lor cinematografice, accentul fiind pus pe reproducerea figurilor de stil lexicale şi grafice ale prozei literare în scenariul adaptărilor acestora. Scopul studiului este de a determina gradul fidelităţii lingvistice şi contextuale păstrat în filmele bazate pe opere literare. De asemenea sunt luate în consideraţie indiciile lexicale stilistice care contribuie la reproducerea cinematografică a conţinutului operei literare în formă audio – vizuală şi narativă a variantei adaptate.

Cuvintele - cheie: naraţiunea, adaptarea cinematografică, subiectul literar, personajul literar, expoziţia

A notable feature helping to distinguish one narrative subgenre from another often pertains to the telling strategy selected by the story - teller to render the events in a work of fiction, be it transferred through the verbal, audio – visual or any other medium perceived by the narratee. Whenever the question of assessing the status of the contemporary cinematic work, also construed in modern film and literary theory as akin to a tellable narrative, emerges in order to be evaluated from the standpoint of its artistic and cultural value, it is frequently viewed as secondary to the literary piece it is often adapted from. V. LoBrutto in his treatise entitled "Becoming Film Literate" [3, p. 20] insists that the essence of any cinematic narrative naturally sets it aside from any other literary genre, since its medium of conveying fabulaic details is quite specific.

The process of translating the verbal matter into action, atmospheric ambiance and particular environmental circumstances come into play as suggested by the medium itself. The author claims therefore that unfolding the plotline has a lot to do with fitting into the natural temporal, as well as spatial constraints which are in essence visual rather than purely verbal, though the audio – visual generic model is what helps a film adaptation intersect quite naturally with literary matter.

Plot, habitually viewed by M. Abrams as a series of acts and events in a narrative aimed principally toward achieving a particular artistic effect and impact upon the narratee, will thus be the focus of the study and the center of structural, as well as stylistic exploration [1, p. 224]. The goal pursued is the necessity to see how the script of an adapted literary work reflects yet still departs to an extent from the schemata of the original work. Its influence on the overall perception of the adaptation as a separate narrative subgenre prone to become a construct of film discourse in its own right is also to be considered. The graphic stylistic means reshaping the script to a certain degree are also to be accounted for owing to the discrepancies the subgenres are characterized by and the media, or channels, through which the narrative is conveyed.

The observation about the structure of literary pieces tightly linked with atmosphere itself becomes all the more topical when one embarks upon considering the variety of means to convey the elements of literary and dramatic situations, otherwise known as plots, into the field of the film adaptation, which constitutes the subject matter of the study in question. It is therefore of paramount importance to follow the models and stratagems via which the initial elements of literary plots, i.e. expositions, are transformed into cinematic versions. As A. Bennett insists, the aspects to consider while analyzing any literary work involve taking into account such factors as temporality, connectivity, linear order of the events, the elements of narratorial impact, as well as the emotive aspects, identified as desire and power [2, p. 48]. These duly considered, one can conclude that their belonging to the plot and fabula is undeniable.

Therefore, when viewed from the given standpoints, the plot of a slave narrative, identified by K. VanSpanckeren as the specific subgenre and the harbinger of the first full – fledged narratives of African – American former slaves, raises specific issues which are inalienably linked with the above plot – related elements [5, p.132]. Their transformation into the cinematic medium of text presentation through the core element of the plot, i.e. its exposition, will thus constitute the basis of the research.

The novel itself, written by S. Northup in 1855, features a traditional lyrical prologue anticipating the emphatic exposition itself, being the famous poem by William Cowper, which begins as follows:

"Such dupes are men to custom, and so prone
To reverence what is ancient, and can plead
A course of long observance for its use,
That even servitude, the worst of ills,
Because delivered down from sire to son,
Is kept and guarded as a sacred thing" [6, p.5].

The rhetorical character of the poem, which is ironic and undercut with bitterness, forwards the underlying hint to the battle for deliverance, both physical and emotional, of the protagonist to later ensue from the exposition:

"But is it fit or can it bear the shock
Of rational discussion, that a man
Compounded and made up, like other men,
Of elements tumultuous….
Should be a despot absolute, and boast
Himself the only freeman of his land?" [Ibidem]

It is therefore only logical that the first person narrative situation is established in the exposition of the novel, where the authorial narrator gives a brief account of his ancestry and genealogy, stating, through the usage of coherently delivered capitalizations, that the family background of his and his family's is an issue quite controversial to consider:

"Having been born a freeman, and for more than thirty years enjoyed the blessings of liberty in a free State - and having at the end of that time been kidnapped and sold into Slavery, where I remained, until happily rescued in the month of January, 1853, after a bondage of twelve years - it has been suggested that an account of my life and fortunes would not be uninteresting to the public" [6, p.16].

Of particular interest, as can be seen from the excerpt, is the story – teller's assertive claim to liberty as the inalienable right of any free – born individual: thus, '*State'*, granting freedom to his family, as well as the social stigma of *'Slavery'*, are the contrasting pillars forming the basis of the external conflict to be later developed in the novel itself. The contact with the narrate of the novel is immediately established in such a way, and the poetic prelude, proved by the cited example, fits into the general plot schemata.

The film script, written in 2012 by J. Ridley, departs from the original version of the novel to the extent of skipping the introductory remarks by Solomon himself. The accent shifts to catching the attention of the potential viewer and leading the latter through the plot. Hence the absence of the narrative voice - over or any other indices of the voice behind the screen, which delegates the authorial telling to the camera work and the scriptwriter's remarks:

"CARD: 1841. FADE IN: 1 INT. TOWNHOUSE/STUDY - DAY 1. -EARLY APRIL, 1841- We are close on a PAIR OF BLACK HANDS as they open A FINELY WRAPPED PACKET OF VIOLIN STRINGS. WE CUT TO the hands stringing a VIOLIN. It's not a high end piece, but it is quite nice. WE CUT TO a wide shot of the study" [7, p.5].

The presence of the title cards indicated as indispensable in the script is, in fact, a successfully stylized exposition accessory, bearing both the verbal and the visual import to the presentation of the film and script narrative, which, as well as the book, abounds in the upper – case textual fragments. These, however, could be attributed to the requirements of the scriptwriting technique.

Yet the capitalized '*PAIR OF BLACK HANDS'* presented by the collective 'WE' – narrator induces one to pay closer attention to the scene itself. The further capitalization, seemingly unnecessary, since the scenes have been introduced at the very beginning of the script, leads the narratee to the cut, the term being capitalized as well, which produces an ample and profoundly artistic impact upon the naked eye of a random reader. The effect of capitalization

itself is strengthened by the metonymic '*hands stringing a VIOLIN*', the echo of '*SLAVERY*' as it is, of which the instrument could be a symbolic presentation.

Thus, one can trace the similarities, despite the shortcut taken by J. Ridley to skip the family background in the exposition, between the initial scenes in the novel and those of the script version. Being considerably shorter, the film scenario oscillates toward presenting the events in medias res, whilst the novel narrative, layered from the generic standpoint, is more prone to be qualified as almost poetically tainted.

The conflict itself, contoured in the film version, is as explicit as the one in the novel, since the following passage referring to the next scene suggests the following:

"We come in on a lively affair. A dinner party is being thrown within the confines of a fairly stately house. In attendance are EIGHT COUPLES. All are WHITE and all are FAIRLY YOUNG, in their early twenties…
Solomon concludes the reel, and the dancers break into enthusiastic applause, which is followed by personal thanks and congratulations from all. It should be clear that despite their respective races there is much admiration and appreciation for Solomon's abilities" [7, p.5].

It is at this very point in the script that the capitalization surfaces as the deliberate stylistic choice of the writer: *'WHITE'* dancers, as contrasted to Solomon, show respect toward his gifted playing '*despite their respective races*', which again perpetuates the racial discrepancy and the roots of the conflict introduced in the novel's exposition.

The novelistic narrative also displays an instance of metonymy, which, just as the script itself, suggests the anthropomorphic nature of the conflict proper:

"Since my return to liberty, I have not failed to perceive the increasing interest throughout the Northern States, in regard to the subject of Slavery. Works of fiction, professing to portray its features in their more pleasing as well as more repugnant aspects, have been circulated to an extent unprecedented, and, as I understand, have created a fruitful topic of comment and discussion" [6, pp. 16 – 17].

Here the metonymy (*'works of fiction, professing to portray its features …have created a fruitful topic of comment…'*) is again indicative of the contrast, this being freedom opposed to slavery, which forms the core of the plot development in the further moments of complications, already dwelling on the biography of the protagonist and his family in detail. It is possible to trace the contiguous narratological features of the novel and those of the script: metonymy is retained in both the literary and film versions, forming an obvious stylistic and structural pattern.

Therefore, the first conclusion is that the film script of the novel simplifies the original literary version to the extent of omitting the poetic prologue and thus departing from the effect of the literary subgenre layering achieved in the narrative. It is obvious that in the literary work the premises for the evolution of the conflict are established at once and fortified by the centuries – old prejudices which are pointed to in the poetic form. However, as the analysis suggests, the script narrative is devoid of suchlike background details. Yet both the expositions of the film version and the novel contain contiguous stylistic properties which account for their narratological similarities.

The conflict, emphasized by employing the graphic device of capitalization in the adapted version, is explicit in the film script, as well as in the novel itself. The figures of metonymy and elements of atropomorphism further strengthen the emphasis upon the contrast of slavery opposed to liberty in the African American narrative of the novel. These are successfully transferred into the exposition of the film script stylistically and symbolically, giving proof of the similarities found in both prosaic and film story – telling techniques.

It is noteworthy that, while in the novel the exposition is chronologically consistent, the cuts subsequently guiding the narratee and the potential viewer through the intricacies of the script are the indicators of the film genre boundaries, which are confined to the time limits. A number of the narrative cuts and omissions are inevitably detected, which, however, does not diminish the explicit character of the adapted exposition. Consequently, the novel proper proves

to offer ampler digressions into the main character's narrative voice, his ethnic heritage and is naturally more detailed.

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