

“A SIGN OF A LETTER COMING” Adapting Munro’s (faked) epistolary correspondence

SABRINA FRANCESCONI
UNIVERSITÀ DI TRENTO

Abstract –This article examines American director Liza Johnson’s adapted film *Hateship Loveship* (2013), based on Alice Munro’s short story “Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage” (2001). It forms part of an ongoing project on Munro television and film adaptations, acknowledged as other, distinct, independent stories generated by the writer’s storytelling impulse, by the story(re)telling tension inherent in her narrative. Specifically, this work concentrates on the film adaptation of the epistolary correspondence. Pervasive and pivotal, letters are indeed at the core of the story, as epistles ostensibly exchanged by an adult couple are actually faked by two young girls. In metafunctional terms, these letters operate in the narrative at the ideational, interpersonal and textual levels: by conveying information about characters, events, places; by establishing social relations among characters and between the narrator and readers/spectators; by configuring fractured and layered textuality. The short story and the film offer distinct treatments of the letters in terms of presence, distribution, remediation, and transcodification, which in turn impacts narrative development, focalization and engagement.

Keywords: adaptation; letters; metafunctions; Alice Munro; Liza Johnson.

*She felt a fool for mentioning a wedding,
when he hadn’t mentioned it and she ought to
remember that.
So much else had been said—or written—such
fondness and yearning expressed,
that the actual marrying seemed just to have been
overlooked (A. Munro, p. 14).*

1. Introduction

Taken from Munro’s story “Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage”,¹ the quote suggests a tension between life and language, between events (“actual marrying”) and their verbal configuration (“mentioned”, “said”, “written”, “expressed”). The problem is first outlined at the oral level, with the repeated verb ‘mentioned’, which makes the

¹ “Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage” was included in the collection with the same title, first published by McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, in 2001. All quotations from the story are taken from the Knopf edition, published in 2002, with page numbers in parentheses. The title evokes a game played by two girls in the story, where one takes his/her name and that of the desired lover, removes duplicated letters, and then counts “Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage” on his/her fingers for the number of unlike letters. This foretells the kind of relation the couple may have.

protagonist feel “a fool”. Yet, it is the verb “written”, foregrounded by its position between parenthetical dashes, that generates the friction: what has been written—namely, the letters being exchanged—mocks, challenges and even subverts reality.

Part of an ongoing project on television and film adaptations of Alice Munro’s stories, this article examines the film *Hateship Loveship* by American director Liza Johnson, concentrating on how she adapts the motif of letters in the film narrative, from a metafunctional viewpoint. Particular attention is devoted to the third letter in the short story. Pervasive and pivotal, letters are indeed at the core of this story, as faked letters ostensibly exchanged by an adult couple are actually written by two young girls. The research question for this article is the following: how do the letters and the exchange of letters operate in the adaptation?

Based on the short story “Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage”, *Hateship Loveship* was released in 2013, featuring Kristen Wiig as Johanna Parry, Guy Pearce as Ken Boudreau, Hailee Steinfeld as Sabitha, and Nick Nolte as Mr. McCauley. The plot revolves around Johanna Parry, a reserved caregiver who starts working for the rich and elderly Mr. McCauley and for his granddaughter Sabitha. The teenager’s mother had died many years before in a car accident, while her father lives in Chicago. Motivated and supported by her friend Edith, Sabitha plays a joke on the housekeeper and nanny, sending her passionate emails purportedly written by her father (Chang 2013; Herz 2013). The film was shot in New Orleans, Louisiana.

As Bodal and Strehlau claim (2016, p. 68), the film received mixed feedback, from celebratory, to mild, and even denigratory. On the one hand, the scholars found this adaptation successful “for rendering visible some specific Munrovan elements, such as class conflicts or ambiguous relationships between female characters” (2016, p. 74). On the other hand, they observed that the film failed to capture and render the “tone” and “essence” of the short story, offering “an altered and simplified version” (2016, p. 74). In *The New York Times*, Scott (2014) claimed that both the director and the screenwriter “have transformed a taciturn masterpiece into an absorbing, messy, modest story of damaged relationships.” The protagonist’s performance was generally acclaimed, for her successful interpretation of Johanna Parry’s character.

Alice Munro, interestingly, offered no assessment of the adaptation. At the premiere of the film, at the 2013 Toronto International Film Festival, the author admitted, through her editor Ann Close, that she had not seen the film and probably would never see it: as the medium was so different, she did not think her comments would be useful (Alter 2014; Ue 2014). This is not surprising, as the Canadian author rarely elucidates her own narratives or comments on her stories. Instead, she prefers to give her readers the freedom and responsibility of interpreting her texts.

This article is organised into 5 distinct sections. After this introduction on the aim and focus of this contribution, the next section outlines the literature in film transcodification and, more specifically, in film adaptations of Munro’s works. Following are two sections, which discuss the theory and methodological tools used to analyze the adaptation. Then comes an analysis and discussion of Johnson’s film transposition. The final section includes the conclusion and describes future research plans.

2. Literature review

Research on the film adaptation of literary works has a long tradition and encompasses a broad multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary area at the crossroads of literary, media, and semiotic studies. Notably, important contributions have been made by the disciplinary

fields of comparative literature, literature and film, and English. Scholars in film, media, and communication studies have also devoted their attention to the nature of the shift from page to screen. Insightful research has also been conducted within translation studies, semiotics and multimodal research. The Association of Adaptation Studies, based at De Monfort University, Leicester, with their Centre for Adaptations and their journal *Adaptation* (Oxford University Press) has been a particularly productive platform for interdisciplinary research on adaptation. Other relevant scientific journals are the *Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance* (Intellectual Publications) and the *Literature/Film Quarterly* (Salisbury University).

Over the decades, numerous publications established and nourished the contemporary critical debate on adaptations. A pioneering American work in the field was George Bluestone's *Novels into Film* (1957): after providing some theoretical background, he analyses six case studies, assessing these adaptations on a scale from mediocre to superlative. Adopting "a modified structuralist approach" (1996: 201), Brian McFarlane's *Novel to Film* provides a theoretical account of page-to-screen transformation, as well as a careful assessment of what constitute transferable and non-transferable elements in adaptation. The interface between the literary and the filmic is the main concern of Stam's three-book series. The first, *Literature through Film: Realism, Magic, and the Art of Adaptation*, concentrates on the history of the novel, also drawing attention to filmic adaptations of chronologically-presented literary works. Edited with Raengo, the second, *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice*, is a collection of essays on adaptations, introduced by a relevant essay by Stam himself "The Theory and Practice of Adaptation". Finally, *A Companion to Literature and Film*, co-edited with Raengo, offers essays on the narratology of adaptation, on adaptations by specific directors, and broader concepts of transtextuality and intermediality. The semiotician Nicola Dusi, in *Il cinema come traduzione. Da un medium all'altro: letteratura, cinema e pittura*, concentrates on the passage of a text from language into other media (2003), including literature, cinema and visual arts. Of particular interest for this work, Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* outlines a reconceptualization of adaptation, conceived as a process encompassing issues of medium, context, engagement, as well as narrative strategies. The 2013-second edition of this volume includes new media in the panorama of possible adaptations, with particular attention to videogames. This framework will be outlined in the next section.

Overall, intersemiotic translation of Munro's *oeuvre* has received only modest critical attention (Bodal and Strehlau 2016, p. 67; Ue 2014, p. 175), and the void should be filled. This surprising neglect may be related to the fact that, in many cases, these audiovisual texts are very hard to access and, therefore, have a limited audience (Herz 2013). In turn, reduced visibility may be partly related to the fact that Munro herself has never been involved in the adaptation process, and has often avoided commenting on the resulting films, claiming that they are independent stories, different and distinct from her own (Alter 2014; Ue 2015).

Recently, though, scholars have started drawing attention to specific television and film adaptations of the Nobel laureate. Ue (2014) addresses *Boys and Girls* (1983) by Don McBready, with particular attention to metanarration and the use of perspective and gesture as effective semiotic systems for constructing gender and identity. McGill (2008), Berthin-Scallet (2010), Saidero (2017), and Francesconi (2018) have examined Polley's *Away from Her*. McGill (2008) explores notions of fidelity, in the story, in the adaptation, and in the relation between the two. Berthin-Scallet (2010) conducts a formal analysis, with special attention to the use and functions of framing, camera movement, distance,

transition ties (especially cuts and dissolves) and their implicatures in terms of narrative cohesion. Saidero (2017) deals with (English-Italian) interlinguistic and intersemiotic translation processes. Francesconi (2018) focuses on the discourse on Alzheimer's disease carried out in the short story and in the film. Lesczynska (2015, 2016) and Suchorska (2016) address *Lives of Girls and Women*. Lesczynska (2016) examines the growth of Del Jordan as a writer, thus considering the film as a (remediated) *Künstlerroman*. Suchorska (2016) carries out a comparative analysis of Holland's *Washington Square* and Wilson's *Lives of Girls & Women*, with a focus on the representation and development of the female protagonists—respectively, Catherine Sloper and Del Jordan—from naive and innocent girls, to mature and independent women. An analysis of the short-story cycle by Alice Munro and its film adaptation is also the topic of Lesczynska's Master dissertation (2015), with a special focus on time, space and events. Already mentioned in the introduction, the only critical work on *Hateship Loveship* I am aware of is by Bodal and Strehlau (2016). The next two sections describe the relevant theory as well as the methodological framework and tools I use in my analysis.

3. Adaptations

Any definition of adaptation(s) needs to consider the multifold and multifaceted relations between different texts, between text and audience, and between text and context. The present section seeks to outline this threefold discussion. In Hutcheon's terms, adaptations are “deliberate, announced, and extended revisitations of prior works” (2013, p. XVI). This conceptualization highlights a tight bond between two works, an adapted text (to be preferred to terms such as ‘source text’ or ‘original text’) and an adaptation. Specifically, adaptations enact “repetition without replication” (2013, p. 7), as they rely on “derivation that is not derivative” (2013, p. 9). Far from being secondary, minor, subsidiary forms of expression to be consumed and examined through the lens of a biased and limited “fidelity discourse” (Stam 2004), adaptations should be regarded as enacting “[a]n extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work” (2013, p. 8). Understanding adaptations as adaptations means decoding the “palimpsestic intertextuality” (2013, p. 22) inherent in the transcodification, keeping the memory of the adapted texts while appreciating the similarities and differences in the adaptation. To put it differently, transpositions should be seen as enacting and negotiating dialogic relations between differently codified stories.

Given its focus on the film adaptation of literary works by a single author, the present analysis is motivated by the understanding that other, distinct, independent stories have been generated by Munro's storytelling impulse, by the story(re-)telling tension inherent within her stories. More specifically, I devote attention to how letter correspondence, and the fragmented and layered narrative it shapes, have been adapted for migration to the screen.

The term ‘adaptation’ is used “to refer to both a product and a process of creation and reception” (Hutcheon 2013, p. xv), encompassing a transposition regarded either as a textual output or as an interpretative, creative process of narration. A text-focused perspective pays attention to narratological strategies of “selection, amplification, concretization, actualization, critique, extrapolation, popularization, reaccentuation, transculturalization” (Stam 2004, p. 45). A process-focused approach addresses contextual factors related to ‘stories’ of adaptations, involving historical, socio-cultural, economic factors behind the adaptation, as well as biographical information about the director(s).

Hence, to create and bring an adaptation to fruition is a unique process, which may be motivated by a range of factors (Stam 2004, p. 25). Directors may adapt a literary work

to pay tribute, to celebrate, to exploit a successful story, to criticise, to deconstruct, to rewrite. They may express intimacy with or distance from the author and the work. In turn, spectators may watch an adapted film because of their passion for the adapted work, passion for the director, simple curiosity, or because they have been attracted by marketing campaigns. Similarly, the critical inspection of adaptations is a partial, contingent and motivated process. Scholars may be interested in the political, historical, legal, narrative, technical dynamics and implicatures of the adapted film and concentrate on these various aspects, using diverse epistemologies and analytical frameworks. Related to differences in the motivations that lead to the en/de-coding in adaptations, are the modes and forms of engagement employed.

By means of different media and genres, stories can be either told (e.g., short stories), shown (e.g., film), or offered for interaction (e.g., videogames). They allow recipients (be they readers, spectators or players) to differently engage with characters, settings, plots and motifs. Clearly, the telling, showing, and interacting modes of engagement are all immersive, that is they involve us "imaginatively, cognitively, and emotionally" (Hutcheon 2013, p. 23). However, immersion has different forms and different degrees. Engagement is, more specifically, contextual, and happens in a particular socio-cultural environment, in a given spatio-temporal situation, also determined by economic dynamics (Hutcheon 2013, p. 28). Engagement is, thus, personal, social, and aesthetic. The following section outlines the methodology for the analysis I will use in this paper.

4. Methodology

In order to elucidate the meaning-making potential of the cinematographic adaptation of epistolary correspondence, this article adopts the metafunctional framework developed by Halliday (1978, 2004) and Halliday and Hasan (1975). The three Hallidayan metafunctions or lines or strands of meaning embrace the main, general purposes language is used for:

1. The first is the ideational metafunction, which sees the clause as representation, and is concerned with representing the world, the content of narrative, and the abstract structure of reality, through which that content is interpreted.
2. The second is the interpersonal metafunction, enacting interpersonal relations among participants, establishing social relations and perceiving the clause as exchange.
3. The third is the textual metafunction, concerned with the construction of the text, in terms of organisation, cohesion and coherence, and the clause as message.

Enabling us to observe both the text and the context, this metafunctional framework permits us to raise the following questions. What information do the letters provide about the characters, setting, and plot? What relations do they establish between characters and between the reader, the narrator and these characters? How does the epistolary correspondence affect the cohesion of the text? Aiming to answer these questions, the following section provides an analysis and discussion of Johnson's film adaptation.

5. Analysis and discussion

In the short story, "Hateship, Friendship, Loveship, Courtship, Marriage", letters play a crucial role. The narrative kernel is that an epistolary correspondence between Ken and Johanna is intercepted, and a fake correspondence is generated. What is initiated and played as a game by two girls has profound consequences for the adult people involved,

and radically changes their lives (Howells, 1998, p. 132; Schuh 2014, p. 63). In fact, Johanna eventually moves to Gydnia, marries Ken, and they have a child, Omar (Munro's story is set in Canada, between rural Ontario—where McCauley and Sabitha live—and Gydnia, Saskatchewan, Ken's residence).

Munro's short story includes 8 letters, distributed across 3 out of 14 sections. In section n° 4, there are 2 letters. The first is sent from Johanna to Ken (p. 17) to inform the man about the furniture being sent to Gydnia by train ("I am going to arrange to get all your furniture out to you on the train as soon as they can take it and prepaid as soon as they tell me what it will cost" (p. 17)). Besides overtly revealing the letter content, the story divulges how previous letters had been posted:

This was the letter she had taken to the Post Office, before she went to make arrangements at the railway station. It was the first letter she had ever sent to him directly. The others had been slipped in with the letters she made Sabitha write (p. 17).

By drawing attention to the epistolary motif, this passage contextualises the letter within a broader and earlier correspondence.

The second letter is sent by Johanna to McCauley, to inform him of her departure and to give him precise instructions on how to warm the meal she left (p. 18). One long letter is featured in section n° 6, from Johanna to Ken (p. 29), where she tells him her story. Readers are thus informed that the housekeeper, born in Glasgow and taken to a children's home when she was five years old, had reached Canada when she was eleven. Having almost no education, she had worked in a nursing home, later in a broom factory and, finally, had taken care of the factory owner's mother, Mrs. Willets. Intercepted, read, and sent by the girls to Ken (without receiving any answer), this text initiates the fake correspondence.

The core of the epistolary exchange, section 7, includes 5 letters. The first one is real, from Ken to Sabitha (p. 31), while the second one (p. 32) is faked, from Ken to Johanna, and typed. Acknowledging her story, this letter expresses Ken's admiration for Johanna ("I must say I admire you very much" (p. 32)) and confesses the man's psychological fragility ("I do not know why I have this inner restlessness and loneliness, it just seems to be my fate" (pp. 32-33)). The third one (p. 33) has been written by Johanna to Ken, not sent by the girls in its original version, but in a form that fits in with the fake conversation. The short story reveals the never-posted original text, where Johanna gives voice to her longing for a letter, while looking at a picture of Ken:

So the day before yesterday I was dusting around it and I imagined I could hear you say Hello to me. Hello, you said, and I looked at your face as well as you can see it in the picture and I thought, Well, I must be losing my mind. Or else it is a sign of a letter coming. I am just fooling. I don't really believe in anything like that. But yesterday there was a letter (p. 34).

This version needs to be substituted, as it refers to a precious letter from Ken that the man had never written. Once more, the epistolary exchange is positioned in-between fiction and reality, and is read through the filter of folly ("I am just fooling").

While the fourth letter is from Ken to Sabitha about a hotel that has strangely come into his possession (p. 35), the fifth is another faked letter from Ken to Johanna (p. 39), in which he passionately expresses his intimate feelings and his desire for her ("I thought of you so often and longed to see your dear sweet face" (p. 40)). Her pragmatic answer to this

last love letter is in the very first letter, about the furniture being sent to Saskatchewan by train. Johanna shifts to life, making a transition to reality: she leaves McCauley's house and travels to Gydnia. The following table shows the presence, order, and topics of the letters in the story.

N°	Position	Correspondents	Topic
1	S. 4, p. 17	Johanna to Ken	Furniture being sent to Gydnia
2	S. 4, p. 18	Johanna to McCauley	Goodbye and meal instructions
3	S. 6, p. 29	Johanna to Ken	Woman's past
4	S. 7, p. 31	Ken to Sabitha	Man's health conditions
5	S. 7, p. 32	Ken to Johanna (faked)	Their friendship
6	S. 7, p. 33	Johanna to Ken (written but sent in a new version)	Their friendship
7	S. 7, p. 35	Ken to Sabitha	Ken's health and possession of a hotel
8	S. 7, p. 39	Ken to Johanna (faked)	Warm and passionate feelings for the woman

Table 1
Letters in the short story.

The short story by Munro is an epistolary work and letters operate in the text at the ideational, interpersonal and textual levels. First, letters convey information about characters, events, and places, as, for example, in n° 3, which serves to outline the story of the protagonist, from birth to adulthood (ideational metafunction). Second, letters establish social relations among characters and between the narrator and reader: all texts written by Johanna show her caring attitude towards others, be they McCauley, Sabitha, or Ken (interpersonal metafunction). Letters, finally, configure a fractured and layered textuality (textual metafunction).

The short story and the film offer distinct treatments of the letters in terms of presence, distribution, remediation, and transcodification. In the film, Johnson updates and 'remediates' (Bolter and Grusin 2009) the letter correspondence by using, instead, an e-mail exchange. First, Johanna receives and sends a paper letter signed by Ken Gaudette, whose content is visually revealed through a detail shot (16:50). In the following scene (17:00-20:00), Johanna writes a paper letter to Ken and asks Sabitha for her father's postal address. Sabitha's friend Edith offers to take the letter to the post office, but the girls open and read the content together. Then the girls suggest to Johanna that she use e-mail, since it is faster and cheaper than posting letters. In the following scene (26:00), Johanna goes to a public library to create an account and start the digital correspondence. The girls first write a fake e-mail back to Johanna, whose content is read aloud (30:30). Then, Edith writes an e-mail to Johanna, in which it is implied that there was another letter from Ken that had arrived in the meantime, even though the scene only shows Johanna reading Ken's mail (32:00). Later in the same scene, Johanna reads an e-mail she has received and writes an answer back (32:40), whose content is not revealed. She, ultimately, leaves a goodbye note for Mr. McCauley.

In the film, the presence of letters is rather faithful to the literary text, except for the absence of the first letter in the film and the reduction in the number of letters from

Ken to Sabitha. Further significant divergences are evident in terms of the distribution of the literary and cinematographic texts. In the short story, the correspondence is given a relatively central position, whereas in the film, it is anticipated. From a narrative viewpoint, it thus operates as the narrative kernel in the literary text, but as a premise in the film. This seems to suggest that Munro foregrounds the relevance of letters *per se*, whereas Johnson focuses on what they allow to happen, that is, their instrumental value.

Further differences at the level of *distributio* may be envisaged. For instance, the second letter from Johanna to McCauley is the 9th in the film: this means that the scene with the housekeeper's departure is positioned almost at the beginning in the short story but later in the film. This reflects the structure of the overall narrative. The short story begins with Johanna sending McCauley's furniture to Gydna, where Ken lives, and slowly offers clues about the joke being played by the girls, and on the protagonist's nature and past. By contrast, the film showcases chronological linearity: it features Johanna taking care of a dying woman, then reaching McCauley's house, after the woman's death, then moving to Chicago to reach Ken. In terms of letters, the cinematographic story moves smoothly from a "thank you note" (n° 1) to a "good-bye note" (n° 9). As a result, the spectator plays a more passive role than the reader does, as s/he does not experience the mystery and suspense pervading the literary text, first triggered by the furniture letter.

Seemingly unproblematic, the adaptation foregrounds a tension between the letter as text and the correspondence as process. The short story is focused on the epistles as textual fragments, explicitly displayed, embedded within the narrative in-between blank spaces, whereas the film indulges in the acts of correspondence, depicting Johanna reading, writing, and waiting for letters.

This ontological friction is subverted later in the story, when the faked correspondence is, in one case, silenced, and, in the other case, revealed. In the short story, Johanna decides that: "[it] might be better never to mention the letters in which he had laid himself open to her" (p. 52); she hides the correspondence through reticence. By virtue of this silence, the epistolary correspondence is acknowledged and foregrounded. In the film, the letters are instead explicitly mentioned by Johanna, who asks twice about them. In response, Ken admits to not having received any e-mails and not even having a computer (46:22-47:02). If the literary text leaves ambiguities and contradictions unresolved, the film ends with resolution. The following table shows the presence, order, medium, topic of the letters in the film:

Number	Position	Correspondents	Medium	Topic
1	16:50-17:23	Ken to Johanna	Paper	Thank you note
2	17:24-17:58	Johanna to Ken	Paper	Johanna's story
3	21:35-23:02	Ken to Johanna (faked)	Typed	Ken's loneliness
4	26:25-27:15	Johanna to Ken	e-mail	Not revealed
5	30:25-31:07	Ken to Johanna (faked)	e-mail	Ken's thoughts of her
6	31:08-31:14	Johanna to Ken	e-mail	Not revealed
7	32:15-32:40	Ken to Johanna (faked)	e-mail	Not revealed
8	32:41-33:22	Johanna to Ken	e-mail	Not revealed
9	39:21-39:23	Johanna to McCauley	Paper	Goodbye note

Table 2
Letters in the film.

If the adaptation of letter n° 2 in the short story is significant in terms of distribution and

story development, letter n° 3 (n° 2 in the film) undergoes profound and multifold manipulation, in terms of (partial) extrapolation, temporal dislocation and genre reconfiguration. The film extracts the content of a letter by Johanna to Ken and partially uses it at the beginning of the film, reconfigured in a narrative, rather than an epistolary form. As a result, the film starts in a chronologically earlier period of time, when Johanna worked for Mrs. Willets as a care-giver. In the opening scene, the old woman is about to die and asks, as her final wish, to wear her blue dress. An empathetic, committed, caring Johanna fulfils the woman's wish and prepares her for the funeral. After that, she moves to McCauley's house. This seemingly minor textual adaptation carries substantial implications from a narrative viewpoint, especially in terms of the already mentioned temporal organization, focalization, and engagement. In metafunctional terms, this cinematographic choice affects the ideational (depiction of characters), interpersonal (focalization and engagement) and textual (cohesion and order) metafunctions.

As for focalization, the short story opens at the train station, where Johanna is buying a ticket to send furniture to Saskatchewan. The focalization is on the ticket agent: readers first see and know the protagonist through his eyes ("a woman with a high, freckled forehead and a frizz of reddish hair", "her teeth were crowded to the front of her mouth as if they were ready for an argument" (p. 3)) and his guesses and judgement ("She might have been under forty, but what did it matter? No beauty queen, ever" (p. 4)). The entire second section of the text conveys the man's speculations: the woman was unfamiliar to him, as she was not related to anyone that he knew in town; she was not married, as she had no ring on her left hand; her appearance ("those shoes, and ankle socks instead of stockings, and no hat or gloves in the afternoon" (p. 7)) was that of a farm woman, but not her manners and not her self-confidence. Progressively, the social distance readers experience towards the ungraspable protagonist decreases and they begin to understand her feelings, emotions and thoughts. Towards the end of the narrative, the distance is reversed, as the penultimate sequence is entirely devoted to the woman's thoughts. Unlike the fluid, dynamic negotiation of distance in the literary text, the opening scene of the film (with Joanna as the emphatic caregiver, as described in the previous paragraph) immediately establishes an intimate social distance between the audience and the protagonist, which remains stable throughout the film narrative. In the film, the spectator maintains the same degree of empathy with the protagonist throughout.

Social distance also impacts the construction of the protagonist, who is more prismatic and modulated in the short story and more simplified and flat in the film. In the short story, Johanna is both fragile and strong, insecure and stubborn. The victim of faked correspondence, Johanna is also the one who invents ("a wedding") and omits ("the correspondence"); the victim of fake/fictional writing, the protagonist is a storyteller herself. In the film, instead, she is less nuanced. This is consistent with a more general trend in the film script: the on-screen characters are less complex than the literary ones. McCauley's daughter, for example, had been a turbulent young woman as a teenager and had died after a surgical procedure, whereas in the film, she dies as a result of her husband's drunken driving, being a victim. Ken, Sabitha's father, is irresponsible and dishonest (in the story he had served in the army and writes letters to his daughter) and wants the sceptical father-in-law to invest his money in a Chicago motel project. In the film, these characters are polarised, with McCauley and Marcelle being Ken's victims.

To conclude, several lines of divergence can be seen in the adaptation. First, Johnson updates and remediates the letter correspondence presenting, instead, an e-mail exchange. Second, the presence of letters is rather faithful to the literary text, but often their content is not revealed. Focusing on the acts of correspondence rather than on the

letters themselves, the film depicts Johanna in the act of reading, writing, and waiting for letters, and features the correspondence as a diegetic element. Third, in terms of distribution, the correspondence is anticipated, which makes it operate as a premise in the film, and gives it instrumental value for the subsequent resolution of the story. Fourth, in terms of order, the film showcases chronological linearity, which implies a fluid fruition of the story. Through partial extrapolation and anticipation of letter n° 3, an intimate social distance between spectators and the protagonist is immediately established and constantly maintained. If the literary work fractures textual unity, challenges readers, resists closure, the film develops a reassuring, linear, conclusive narrative.

6. Conclusion

As part of a broader ongoing project on television and film adaptations of Munro's stories, this article follows a close reading of *Away from her* by Sarah Polley (2018), which focused on the discourse on senile dementia in the short story and in the film. This work has examined the adapted film *Hateship Loveship* by American director Liza Johnson, concentrating on the adaptation of the letters in the film narrative and, more specifically, on the third letter in the short story. The research question was the following: how do the letters and the exchange of letters function operate in the adaptation?

The presence and relevance of letters in the Canadian author's narrative, which Ailsa Cox describes as "a favourite Munro device" (2004, p. 79), is at the same time pervasive and significant. As Rebekka Schuh claims (2014, p. 32), twenty-two epistolary short stories may be identified in ten out of fourteen short-story collections, published from 1968 (*Dance of the Happy Shades*) to 2012 (*Dear Life*). Munro's use and the function of the letters in these stories is far from homogeneous (Schuh 2014), shifting from rather established, traditional forms (e.g., in "A Wilderness Station") to more innovative, experimental configurations (e.g., in "Material"). While adding an overall effect of immediacy to Munro's texts, epistolary fiction may differently project resistance to repressive power networks (e.g., in "Material"), the exploration of fantasies and parallel worlds (e.g., "The Jack Randa Hotel"), and therapeutic means (e.g., in "Carried Away").

Letters operate in "Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage" at the ideational, interpersonal and textual levels: by conveying information about characters, events, places; by establishing social relations among characters and between the narrator and reader; by fracturing and layering the texture of the story. Especially noteworthy is the adaptation of the third letter in the story, about Johanna's past. The letter undergoes a threefold process of extrapolation, temporal dislocation and genre reconfiguration. This seemingly minor operation carries substantial implications from a narrative viewpoint, especially in terms of temporal organization, focalization and engagement. Indeed, it configures chronological linearity, intimate social distance and unproblematic text fruition.

As a result of the presence, use and function of letters, the architecture of the short story is complex: it configures the text as a "layered palimpsest" (Hutcheon 2013, p. 22), it foregrounds a fluid horizon with shifting distances, it subverts temporal linearity, with a beginning in medias res and subsequent backtracking. By contrast, the film neutralises such complexity at various levels: temporality, stratification and proximity. Differences in the adaptation, however, are not seen as markers of betrayal of the adapted text. They are, rather, seen as expressing and performing the storytelling impulse inherent in Munro's narrative, whereby other, divergent, distinct stories are generated, which travel across countries, cultures, and art forms.

Limited in scope, this article is part of a broader project. The next step will be to

examine *Edge of Madness* by Anne Wheeler (2002), based on Munro’s epistolary narrative “A Wilderness Station” from the eighth collection *Open Secrets* (1994). The aim is to unpack similarities and differences in the adaptation of the letter exchange in Wheeler’s and Johnson’s works, the only film adaptations of Munro’s epistolary short stories until now. Ultimately, this next research stage aims to elucidate how epistolary exchanges, remediated and multimodally enacted, defer Munro’s art of storytelling. That art of storytelling which mocks, challenges and subverts reality, by mentioning unplanned weddings, by silencing anecdoted, by faking letters, by waiting for “a sign of a letter coming”.

Bionote: Sabrina Francesconi is Associate Professor of English Linguistics at the University of Trento. Her research interests are tourism and heritage discourses, inspected through multimodal genre analysis, and Alice Munro’s style, explored through systemic-functional stylistics. Besides articles and essays published in Italy and abroad, her works include the monographic volumes: *Heritage Discourse in Digital Travel Video Diaries* (Tangram, 2018), *Alice Munro, il piacere di raccontare* (Carocci, 2015); *Reading Tourism Texts: A Multimodal Analysis* (Channel View Publications, 2014); *Generic Integrity and Innovation in Tourism Texts in English* (Tangram, 2012); *English for Tourism Promotion: Italy in British Tourism Texts* (Hoepli, 2007); and the co-edited volume *Translating Tourism: Linguistic/Cultural Representations* (Università degli Studi di Trento, 2006). Currently, she is working on film and television adaptations of Munro’s short stories.

Author’s address: sabrina.francesconi@unitn.it

References

- Alter A. 2014, Alice Munro's Prolific Film Career, in "Wall Street Journal", 3.4.
- Berthin-Scaillet A. 2010, A Reading of *Away from Her*, Sarah Polley's Adaptation of Alice Munro's Short Story, *The Bear Came Over the Mountain*, in "The Journal of the Short Story in English" 55, pp. 157-171.
- Bluestone G. 1957, *Novel into Film: A Critical Study*, The John Hopkins Press, Baltimore.
- Bodal E. and Strehlau N. 2016, *Hateship Loveship*, Adaptation, in Buchholtz M. (ed.), *Alice Munro, Understanding, Adapting, Teaching*, Springer, Cham, Switzerland, pp. 67-74.
- Bolter J.D. and Grusin R. 2000, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Chang J. 8.09.2013, Toronto Film Review: *Hateship Loveship*, Variety, <http://variety.com/2013/film/markets-festivals/hateship-loveship-review-toronto-1200604118/>
- Cox A. 2004, *Alice Munro*, Tavistock, Northcote.
- Dusi N. 2003, *Il cinema come traduzione. Da un medium all'altro: letteratura, cinema, pittura*, UTET, Torino.
- Francesconi S. 2018, *La traduzione intersemiotica: da "The Bear Came over the Mountain" di Alice Munro a Away from her di Sara Polley*, in Faini P. (ed.), *Terminologia, Linguaggi specialistici, traduzione. Prospettive teoriche e pratiche*, Tangram, Trento, pp. 141-154.
- Halliday M.A.K. and Matthiessen C. 2004, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (revised by, 3rd ed.), Arnold, London.
- Halliday M.A.K. and Hasan R. 1985, *Language, Context and Text. Aspects of Language in a Social-semiotic Perspective*, Oxford UP, Oxford.
- Halliday M.A.K. 1978, *Language as Social Semiotics: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning*, Edward Arnold, London.
- Herz B. 10.10.2013, *Exploring Alice Munro, but not through her Books*, in "Maclean's".
- Howells C. A., 2008, *Alice Munro*, Manchester University Press, Manchester & New York.
- Hutcheon L., with O'Flynn S. 2013, *A Theory of Adaptation*, Routledge, New York.
- Lesczynska E. 2016, *Del Jordan: Becoming a Writer*, in Buchholtz, M. (ed.), *Alice Munro, Understanding, Adapting, Teaching*, op. cit., pp. 75-87.
- Lesczynska E. 2015, *Time, Space and Events in Lives of Girls and Women: an Analysis of the Short Story Circle by Alice Munro and its Film Adaptation*, unpublished MA dissertation.
- McBrearty D. 1983, *Boys and Girls*, Atlantis Film, Canada.
- McFarlane B. 1996, *Novel to Film, An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- McGill R. 2008, *No Nation but Adaptation: 'The Bear Came over the Mountain', Away from Her, and What It Means to Be Faithful*, in "Canadian Literature/Littérature canadienne", 197, pp. 98-111.
- Munro A., 2001, *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*, McClelland & Stewart, Toronto.
- Polley S. 2006, *Away from Her*, Lionsgate, California.
- Saidero D. 2017, *Munro in Translation: an Analysis of The Bear Came Over the Mountain*, in Palusci O. (ed.), *Alice Munro and the Anatomy of the Short Story*, Cambridge Scholars, Newcastle upon Tyne, pp. 159-176.
- Schuh R. 2014, *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You: Alice Munro and the Epistolary Mode*, Unpublished MA dissertation.
- Scott A.O. 10.04.2014, *Don't Hoodwink the Help, Dear. Hateship Loveship, an Alice Munro Adaptation*, in "The New York Times", <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/11/movies/hateship-loveship-an-alice-munro-adaptation.html>
- Stam R. and Raengo E (eds.) 2004, *Literature and Film: a Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, Blackwell, Malden.
- Stam R. and Raengo E. (eds.) 2004, *A Companion to Literature and Film*, Blackwell, Malden.
- Stam R. 2005, *Literature through Film: Realism, Magic, and the Art of Adaptation*, Blackwell, Malden.
- Suchorska P. 2016, *There is a Change Coming [...] in the Lives of Girls and Women, Del Jordan's and Catherine's Sloper's Ways to Independence*, in Buchholtz M. (ed.), *Alice Munro, Understanding, Adapting, Teaching*, op. cit., pp. 89-103.
- Ue T. 2014, *Incarceration, Focalization, and Narration: Adapting the Two Selves in 'Boys and Girls'*, in "Short Fiction in Theory and Practice", 4:2, pp. 175-185.
- Wheeler A. 2002, *Edge of Madness*, Lions Gate Films, USA.