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SHORT-FILM ADAPTATIONS OF MUNRO'S STORIES IN THE 1980s
A multimodal stylistic analysis[1]

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Abstract - This paper presents and deconstructs the four clichés regarding the inferiority of adaptations to adapted texts identified by Linda Hutcheon (2013), by examining screen adaptations of Alice Munro's short stories. It focuses on three short Canadian films released in the 1980s: *Boys and Girls* (1983), *Thanks for the Ride* (1983) and *Connection* (1986). The theory derives from Hutcheon's reconceptualization of adaptation(s), while the methodology relies on multimodal stylistic analysis. The inspection of the adaptation process reveals lines of narrative continuity and discontinuity that show the distinct narrative potential of audio-visual artefacts. Contrary to what is commonly thought and expressed by the clichés, the three Canadian films manage to negotiate intimacy and distance through point of view; to express interiority; to shape nonlinear, fractured and layered temporality; to give form to metaphors and other figures. In *Thanks for the Ride*, the representation and negotiation of intimacy and distance in point of view are central and fluid, functional to the intersectional discussion about gender and social class. Interiority is expressed in *Boys and Girls* through close-ups and eye-angles, with particular attention to the filmic representation of the female protagonist Margaret. *Connection* deploys and intertwines two diegetic and temporal plans, and the resurfacing past profoundly affects the present time. Ultimately, all three films convincingly depict a mirror scene, a semiotically layered and complex trope, which represents Munro's concern with introspection.

Keywords: short-film adaptation(s); clichés; multimodal stylistic analysis; Alice Munro.

[Laird] was wearing a little bulky brown and white checked coat, made down from one of mine (A. Munro [1968] 2000, p. 122).

These days our back porch was piled with baskets of peaches and grapes and pears, bought in town, and onions and tomatoes and cucumbers grown at home, all waiting to be made into jelly and jam and preserves, pickles and chilli sauce (A. Munro [1968] 2000, p. 116).

1. Introduction

In the epigraph above, Laird's "little bulky brown and white checked coat", as well as the family's "jelly and jam and preserves, pickles and chilli sauce" result from a process of adaptation. In the first case, the mother has reduced ("made down") the daughter's coat to fit the son's body and protect him from the cold. In the second case, perishable fruit and vegetables have been transformed into ("made into") durable products to feed the family during the wintertime. The agent of both adaptations is the mother, the one who adjusts

[1] As part of a broader ongoing project on television and film adaptations of Munro's stories, this work follows three published articles. The first (2018a) offers a close reading of *Away from Her* by Sarah Polley and focuses on the discourse on senile dementia in the short story and in the film. A second article (2018b) examines *Hateship Loveship* by American director Liza Johnson, concentrating on how letters and correspondence function in the adaptation. A third article (2019) addresses *Edge of Madness* by Anne Wheeler and discusses the behaviour and function of the close-up as a size-of-frame technique.

clothes and who processes food to address the different environmental conditions and changing needs of her family. This transitive mutation mirrors "the biological process by which something is fitted to a given environment" (Hutcheon 2013, p. 31). It is not by chance that the metaphor of adaptation used in text transcodification is borrowed from the biological world, and evokes intransitive processes of adjustment, mutation and evolution.

Embracing the notion of adaptation as change, this paper aims to discuss and deconstruct the four clichés about the inferiority of adaptations to adapted texts identified by Linda Hutcheon (2013). It seeks to overcome superficial and biased perceptions of adaptations as minor and subsidiary texts, as well as simplistic comparative approaches based on "fidelity discourse" (Hutcheon 2013; McFarlane 1996; Stam 2014). The focus is on three short Canadian films released in the 1980s based on Alice Munro's short stories: *Boys and Girls* (1983), *Thanks for the Ride* (1983) and *Connection* (1986). The theory derives from Linda Hutcheon's reconceptualization of adaptation(s) (2013) and the methodology relies on multimodal stylistic analysis (McIntyre 2008; Nørgaard 2009, 2010, 2014; Pillière 2014; Zurru 2010). By unpacking a layered and complex multimodal meaning-making system, the adopted methodological framework enables analysts to carry out a detailed and accurate analysis and to achieve a more profound understanding of screen adaptations as expressing modal, medial, and aesthetic change.

This essay is organized into 6 distinct sections. After this introduction on the aim and focus of the contribution, the next section outlines the theory. The following unit addresses the methodological framework and tools. Section 4 illustrates the case studies and then come the text analysis and discussion. The final section includes the conclusion and describes future research plans.

2. Adaptation(s) as Sites of Intertextual and Political Engagement

In her insightful *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon defined an adaptation as "both a product and a process of creation and reception" (2013, p. xv). In this vein, the current paper addresses three short films (adaptations as products) and their adaptation stories, in relation to their socio-cultural contexts, as well as to subjective dynamics, of codification and decodification (adaptations as processes). As such, the very notion of adaptation foregrounds the multifarious and multifaceted "engagement" (2013, pp. 22ff) between adapted texts and adaptations. Engagement operates both at the aesthetic level (intertextual engagement between texts) and at the political level (interpersonal engagement between artists and their audiences). In the case of political engagement, adaptations allow superdiverse readers, spectators or players to differently engage with narratives. Since adapted stories can either be told (*e.g.*, novels), shown (*e.g.*, ballets), or invite participation (*e.g.*, park rides), different media and genres imply diverse forms and degrees of emotional, cognitive and imaginative engagement with the adaptation, as well as with the adapted text. In the case of aesthetic engagement, adaptations should be understood as developing horizontal relations between texts. Such reconfigured intertextual horizon rejects definitions of adaptations as "derivative and secondary" (Hutcheon 2013, p. 2) and avoid simplistic comparative approaches based on "fidelity discourse" (Hutcheon 2013; McFarlane 1996; Stam 2014). The systemic denigration of adaptation(s) can be captured in a net made up of four clichés, exposed by Linda Hutcheon as follows.

According to the first cliché: "Only the Telling Mode (Especially Prose Fiction) Has the Flexibility to Render both Intimacy and Distance in Point of View" (Hutcheon 2013, p. 52). While acknowledging that "telling a story is not the same thing as showing a

story" (2013, p. 52), Hutcheon problematizes the neat distinction between telling/showing and explores their contact zone. She discusses the bidirectional exchange between literary texts and their film transpositions, epitomized by the multiple and shifting points of view characterizing contemporary narrative as influenced by film technique. Generally, adaptations do not shape a first-person narrator; most films deploy "a kind of moving third-person narrator" (Hutcheon 2013, p. 54) and use the camera to represent a variety of viewpoints at different moments, through a variety of interacting modes, including angle, soundtrack or costume (Hutcheon 2013, p. 55). As a matter of fact, the use of 'literary' film devices like the voice-over is criticized by many adaptation theorists and critics for being a linear transfer of a verbal, monomodal literary form of expression (Hutcheon 2013, p. 54).

The second cliché is related to the first, claiming that: "Interiority is the Terrain of the Telling Mode; Exteriority is Best Handled by Showing and Especially by Interactive Modes" (Hutcheon 2013, p. 56). In this cliché, the telling mode is considered the privileged means for expressing thoughts and feelings, whereas the showing and interactive modes effectively render action and movement. As a matter of fact, this second cliché is particularly consistent with this case study, if we consider that Alice Munro has generally been appreciated for her ability to explore the mind (Duncan 2011; Hooper 2008; Howells 1998).[2] Yet, while recognizing the strict bond between literature and interiority, one may object that films can effectively render intimacy through close-ups (Hutcheon 2013, p. 59), followed by specific editing techniques used to express thoughts and reminiscences. Likewise, dissonant relations between audio and visual tracks may be used to convey psychological and emotional tension, and visual and audio correlatives can be created for interior states. In an opera, again, the aria conventionally represents interiority (Hutcheon 2013, p. 60).

According to the third cliché: "The Showing and Interacting Modes Have Only One Tense: The Present; The Mode of Telling Alone Can Show Relations among Past, Present, and Future" (Hutcheon 2013, p. 63). If the representative potential of the camera is immediately associated with the here-and-now, the cinematographic semiotic system relies on effective techniques to render analeptic and proleptic movements, as well as temporal ellipsis (Hutcheon 2013, pp. 63ff). Transition ties, such as fade-in, fade-out, and time-lapse dissolves render those temporal transitions that a verbal text expresses through connectors like 'meanwhile', 'before', 'after'. In film narrative, a temporally antecedent plan can be realized via a range of modes, including music, costume, titles, sepia colour, and archaic recording devices. The duration of a shot, timing and pacing, can also be used to modulate temporality.

According to the fourth cliché: "Only Telling (in Language) Can Do Justice to Such Elements as Ambiguity, Irony, Symbols, Metaphors, Silences, and Absences; These Remain 'Untranslatable' in the Showing or Interacting Modes" (Hutcheon 2013, p. 68). Clearly, "a word-oriented writer's point of view" (Hutcheon 2013, p. 70) perceives a movie or television adaptation of a literary work to be a limiting process. To "visually oriented filmmakers" (Hutcheon 2013, p. 70), the availability of a range of semiotic modes that can appeal to several sensorial dimensions is, instead, a resource. In a performance text genre, comparison can be expressed through editing, irony through accents and registers, symbolism through music or close-ups, ambiguity through an intersemiotic

[2] In November 2007, Florence hosted an Italian conference on Munro, organized by the Salomè forum *Donne psicanaliste in rete*, where literary scholars and psychotherapists shared and intertwined theories and tools to explore the Canadian author's pages.

dissonance between soundtrack and light, for instance. Chromatic choices, too, can realize a number of functions and serve symbolic purposes. In their saturated or desaturated, flat or modulated manifestations, as well as in monochrome or colour contrasts, they convey deep and effective semiotic messages.

Against this backdrop, this paper aims to challenge biased and simplistic clichés about adaptations, by acknowledging and exploring the meaning-making strategies and procedures used in three Canadian short films. After illustrating the theory for this essay, the next section presents the methodological framework used for the analysis.

3. Multimodal stylistic analysis as methodological framework

In the field of applied linguistics, stylistics aims to carry out an accurate and detailed analysis of literary texts through the tools of linguistics (Burke 2014; Neary 2014; Toolan 2015). Sometimes called 'literary linguistics', stylistics has traditionally inspected literary texts, although a range of other textual domains including academic, medical, and journalistic ones are increasingly being addressed (Burke 2014, p.1; Nørgaard 2010). According to Michael Toolan, a stylistic approach to the literary text "assumes that the descriptive and explanatory systems of one linguistic model or another should be a good way of enhancing our understanding of how the text works" (2015, p. 9). The different linguistic models Toolan refers to may be, for instance, formalist, functionalist or historical ones. Hence, stylistics is a composite and layered field of studies, and includes several established sub-fields, such as, formalist stylistics, functionalist stylistics, historical stylistics, pedagogical stylistics, corpus stylistics, cognitive stylistics, feminist stylistics, translation and stylistics, as well as multimodal stylistic analysis (Burke 2014; Nørgaard 2010).

Developed across the last two decades, the framework of multimodal stylistic analysis integrates stylistics and multimodality. As Linda Pillière explains, "[m]ultimodal stylistics […] aims to use literary stylistics with multimodal theory to analyse texts" and clarifies that: "the role of multimodal stylistics is to demonstrate how the different semiotic resources interact to produce meaning" (2014, p. 100). In order to describe the text, a multimodal stylistic analysis addresses communication systems going beyond the verbal, that is, it addresses a range of distinct and alternative modes, often co-occurring with language in its written or oral forms. In this vein, modes become semiotic resources, modes for making meaning (Bateman and Schmidt 2012; Burn 2014; Kress 2010; Kress and van Leeuwen [1996] 2006).

Among the first attempts to explicitly connect and integrate stylistics and multimodality are McIntyre (2008), Nørgaard (2009, 2010, 2014) and Zurru (2010). A preliminary distinction can be detected between time- and space-based objects of inspection, in their simultaneous or sequential meaning-making patterns. On the one hand, attention has been devoted to the analysis of static texts, to the choice, combination and organization of graphic features like typography, images or blank spaces. For instance, Nørgaard (2014, p. 478) has examined the semiotics of paper and the materiality of the novel. On the other hand, critical attention has been devoted to dynamic images in the analysis of films, TV series, and YouTube videos. For instance, McIntyre (2008) has inspected the film adaptation of *Richard III* by Ian McKellen, whereas Zurru (2010) has addressed animation and focused on the Walt Disney *Shrek* saga.

In multimodal stylistics, Nørgaard (2014, p. 471) identifies two main approaches: a cognitive one, concerned with the cognitive impact of multimodal literature, and a social

semiotic one that aims to develop descriptive grammars for all the semiotic modes. The socio-semiotic approach adopts the metafunctional framework outlined by Halliday (1978, 2004) and Halliday and Hasan (1985). The three Hallidayan strands of meaning are: the ideational metafunction, concerned with the expression of content; the interpersonal metafunction, focused on social relations among interactive participants; the textual metafunction, involved in the construction of the text. In a film, these metafunctions follow the logic of time in their multimodal meaning-making: the projection of a range of audio-visual modes and modal resources is sequentially realized. For instance, dialogue, action, setting fulfil the ideational metafunction; perspective, size-of-frame, depth realize the interpersonal metafunction, whereas framing, visual-verbal interplay, continuity via voice-over express the textual metafunction (Bateman and Schmidt 2012; Burn 2014; Kress and van Leeuwen [1996] 2006).[3]

After illustrating the theoretical and methodological framework for this essay, the next section presents the three audio-visual texts.

4. Three Canadian short films as Munro's adaptations

In the last five decades, numerous television and film adaptations of Alice Munro's stories have been released.[4] Initially, a number of works were produced by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation for national television (today, almost only accessible within the CBC archives). Later, a second group of Canadian films were produced outside the CBC context by private companies; these have mostly circulated at a national level. A third group includes works from the early 21st century that have begun to reach an international audience. These latest films signal an established international dimension, in terms of production, direction, and fruition. Against this backdrop, this essay addresses early audio-visual artefacts, and focuses on three short Canadian films produced in the 1980s: *Boys and Girls* (1983), *Thanks for the Ride* (1983) and *Connection* (1986).

Directed by Don McBrearty and released in 1983, the film *Boys and Girls* is based on the story with the same title from the first collection by Munro, *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968). The unnamed, first-person narrator of the adapted text: "relays the story of her eleven-year-old self liberating a horse before it was to be killed by her farmer father and thus actively, if perhaps subconsciously, resist[ing] both obedience to her father and the gender role imposed upon her as a girl" (Ue 2014, p. 178). Living in a farmhouse in a southwestern Ontario small-town community, the girl longs for the freedom of the outside world but is instead forced to help her mother in the oppressive kitchen. She perceives, in

[3] The fine-grain multimodal stylistic analysis is carried out through the ELAN software, a system for multimodal video annotation developed at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, and freely available online at http://tla.mpi.nl/tools/tla-tools/elan/. The software enables the use to easily create, edit, visualize and search multimodal annotations in the video under investigation. Annotations on visual and audio systems are created on tiers as determined by the analyst. The annotation process is based on previous text segmentation, which adopts the shot as the basic meaningful textual unit.

[4] The list of Munro's adaptations, in chronological order, is the following: *How I Met My Husband* by Roland Herb (1974); *The Ottawa Valley* by Janine Manatis (1974); *Boys and Girls* by Don McBrearty (1983), *Thanks for the Ride* by John Kent Harrison (1983); *Connection* by Wolf Koenig (1986); *Lives of Girls and Women* by Ronald Wilson (1994); *Edge of Madness* by Anne Wheeler (2002); *Away from Her* by Sarah Polley (2006); *Canaan* by Mani Haghighi (2008); *Hateship Loveship* by Liza Johnson (2013); *Julieta* by Pedro Almodovar (2016); a forthcoming Australian adaptation of "Runaway" by Mirrah Foulkes. For an overview of Munro's adaptations and critical works about these audio-visual texts, see Francesconi (2018a, 2019) and Thacker (2005).

her parents, gender-based inequalities in how they approach and relate to their son and daughter. The story, thus "bring[s] into focus gender role stereotyping and the limitations enforced on the girl as she grows into adolescence" (Ventura 1992, p. 80). The protagonist of this 25-minute-adaptation is thirteen-year-old Margaret, played by Megan Follows. *Boys and Girls* was produced by the small company Atlantis Films, and received an Academy Award for the best story-live-action film (Thacker 2005, p. 407). This signalled the beginning of director Don McBrearty's television career.

Produced by the National Film Board of Canada, *Thanks for the Ride* (1983) was written and directed by John Kent Harrison. The adapted story, which comes from Munro's first collection, is about two cousins from the city, Dick and George. Unusually for Munro, the narrator is one of these men, Dick. The cousins go out with two young women, Adelaide and Lois, who they met in Mission Creek, a little town on the shores of Lake Huron. The young men and women exhibit differences in terms of social class and education and experience profound isolation and inability to communicate during the evening they spend together. Dominated by a "sense of entrapment" (Bigot & Lanone 2014, p. 38), the story ends with Lois's cry: "Thanks for the Ride!" The "loud, crude" cry (Munro 1968, p. 59) is "a way of regaining partial control over the scene as the men leave, of having the last laugh, the last word" (Bigot & Lanone 2014, p. 127). The 28-minute adaptation stars Lesley Donaldson (Vicky), Melissa Bell (LoreAnn), Peter Kranz (George), and Carl Maroote (David) and convincingly relies on an expensive car to signal the higher social status of the protagonist, named David in the film. At the audio level, the soundtrack *Hello Young Lovers* by Frank Sinatra introduces and accompanies the romantic motif of the narrative.

Produced by Atlantis Films and the National Film Board of Canada, *Connection* (1986) was written by Kelly Rebar, directed by Wolf Koenig, with music composed by Harry Freedman. The 24-minute-adaptation features Kate Trotter as Maureen, Patricia Hamilton as Iris and Tom Butler as Richard. It narrates the tensions between attractive and sensitive Maureen and her husband Richard, a successful and arrogant lawyer. When the couple receives a phone call from Iris, a relative Maureen has not seen for years, Maureen invites her for dinner. The arrival of this exuberant woman and the sharing of some memories from the past allow a second parallel story, as well as a second temporal dimension, to unfold. The women remember a summer visit four unmarried cousins, including Iris, had paid to Maureen's family in Dalgleish, their small hometown in rural Ontario. After Richard's harsh comments upon Iris's departure, Maureen throws a plate with a piece of pie at her husband. Appearing in *The Moons of Jupiter* (1982), Munro's adapted "Connection" is part of a double short story devoted to her family history, entitled "Chaddeleys & Flemings". In the first part, "Connection", the female protagonist retraces the maternal side of the family, populated by a long list of sociable, noisy and open women, including Iris.

After illustrating the three films addressed by this essay, the next section presents the multimodal stylistic analysis and discussion, in light of the four clichés about adaptations detected by Linda Hutcheon.

5. Multimodal stylistic analysis and discussion

In this section, every film will be discussed in relation to a single cliché, while all three films will be considered together in relation to the last cliché.

Thanks for the Ride (1983) will be used to discuss the first cliché, about the

negotiation of intimacy and distance in point of view in adaptations. The protagonist and focalizer in this short film is David, the first and the last character that spectators see on the screen. The character's centrality is not only realized through his pervasive presence (he is on screen in 46% of shots), and strategic positioning (across the whole film, including front and end positions), but also through foregrounding techniques of representation (95% of one-individual shots are realized by a close-up). David comes from a socially privileged family background, symbolically represented by his father's car. The expensive vehicle is frequently depicted and operates as the setting for four long sequences: the ride from David's house to the Live bar (1:37-3:32); the ride from the Live bar to Vicky's house (6:37-9:21); the ride to the barn in the field, where they have sex (12:46-15:02); the ride back home (24:04-27:11). Many shots focus on the car itself as the main represented participant, including the opening shot itself in the garage, and numerous long-shot units with the car crossing the bush. Although David interacts with several characters throughout the film narrative (in 51% of shots he is alone, in 22% with Vicky, in 17% with George), it is his relationship with the car that most eloquently reveals and crystallizes his personality.

During his car trip with his cousin George, David meets Vicky, and their distinct social provenance is highlighted across various scenes. Considering that the female character Munro defines as "cold and narrow and pale" (Munro 1968, p. 50) has entered the narrative in shot number 55 (7:27), her presence is clearly important. She appears in 32% of total shots: in 65% of shots she is depicted alone, while in 31% of shots she is with David. At the level of the ideational metafunction, spectators enter her room (whereas David's house was shown through the public spaces of the garage, garden and living room); at the interpersonal metafunctional level, she is frequently captured through close-ups; at the textual metafunctional level, she operates as a female and poorer correlate for David. Thus, a range of multimodal strategies depict Vicky's family, house, clothes, and invite the spectator's emphatic gaze. The progressive foregrounding of Vicky's character culminates in her unexpected cry at the end of the film. While David plays a role prescribed by his gender and social class, Lois subverts the position assigned to girls with the "rituals of the sex date" (Bigot & Lanone 2014, p. 38). While David expresses his identity via the father's car, Vicky resorts to her challenging cry. Like the short story, the film, thus, gradually changes and reverses the social distance spectators experience with the male and film characters. Hence, not only are the representation and negotiation of intimacy and distance in point of view present in the film, but they are central and fluid, functional to the intersectional discussion about gender and social class.

Boys and Girls, with particular attention to the filmic representation of the female protagonist Margaret, is used to discuss the second cliché, about the privileged bond between interiority and the telling mode, as well as the one between exteriority and the showing and interactive modes. Notably, Tom Ue claims that the film denounces "the narrator's incarceration" (2014, p. 175), by intertwining issues of gender and identity, expressed through a series of semiotic contrasts (inside/outside, lit/dark, cold/warm). As for the ideational metafunction, Margaret's presence is pervasive across the scenes; she is on screen in 52% of shots and she is predominantly portrayed alone (in 57% of shots). When the girl is depicted with other characters, she is generally represented with her younger brother Laird (in 42% of two-individual shots). This is not surprising, since the title of the story itself foregrounds the entangled relation between boys and girls (Ventura 1992, p. 84). As for the interpersonal metafunction, Margaret is generally captured through close-ups (75% of shots with Margaret as a represented participant), showing her head and shoulders. This solution positions her in a privileged position within the narrative

and establishes an intimate social distance between her and her spectators (Kress and van Leeuwen [1996] 2006; Neary 2014). Consistently, perspective is mainly achieved via an eye-angle (73% of Margaret-depicting shots) in which interactive participants are on the same level and share a relation of equality. It is thus through perspective and size of frame that the film enables intimacy to be established, interiority to be revealed and Margaret's sense of incarceration to be expressed.

At the textual level, the film opens and closes with a two-individual shot featuring Margaret and Laird. In the opening shot, the two are watching the father and the hired man who are killing Mack, an old horse, whose meat is used to feed the silver foxes. This unit ends with Margaret, firmly holding Laird's arms, looking into his eyes, and telling him, in a patronizing tone: "Laird, it's something they have to do. Better to see and to know" (1:20-1:46). In the closing shot, they are outside, sitting on the father's tractor, and chatting about what has happened, the fact that she has not closed the farmhouse gate, thus letting the old horse Flora escape. During a reverse shot, Margaret tells the brother, in a self-confident and assertive tone: "But, you know, Laird? They are never gonna catch me!" This emotionally tense unit ends with a two-individual shot. Notably, both the opening and closing two-individual shots realize significant manipulation in terms of adaptation: anticipation and addition, respectively. The position of the film-opening scene does not reflect the position of the corresponding scene in the short story, which occurs later in the narrative. This displacement may be functional to the construction of a solid and clear opposition between Margaret a) who initially legitimizes and Margaret b) who later challenges the *status quo*. The concluding scene, instead, has been added to the storyline, as Ue observes (2014, p. 182). This addition seems to suggest that Margaret is challenging the social system represented by her father, while her relation with her brother seems to show reconciliation. To sum up in metafunctional terms, it is at the textual level that her relationship to her brother is negotiated. While tensions and conflict are expressed at the ideational and interpersonal levels, the film's composition seems to pursue closure and resolution.

The third film, *Connection*, is used to discuss the third cliché, about the relation between the three modes of engagement and time (Hutcheon 2013, p. 68). As anticipated in the case-study presentation, the short story moves from a first part, set in the small town of Dalgleish, rural Western Ontario, and a second part, set in Capilano Heights, Vancouver. An adolescent in the first part, the unnamed protagonist is an adult married woman, mother of two daughters, in the second part. Both units revolve around a visit by relatives: the first narrates of the four cousins visiting the family, the second focuses on Iris's visit to the narrator and her husband (Hooper 2008, pp. 63ff). It is after this second episode and after her husband's snobbish and hostile behaviour towards the cousin that the protagonist throws a plate with a piece of lemon meringue pie at him. The problem is that of a connection to one's personal past, to one's family history: "[Richard] wanted me amputated from that past which seemed to him such shabby baggage" (Munro [1982] 1987, p. 13). As a matter of fact, it is with the non-amputated past that the story closes, with a short analeptic unit about the four cousins' visit.

Notably, the film adaptation relies on multiple and significant inter-semiotic processes of manipulation, mainly related to present and past relation. Both the short story and the film deploy more temporal plans, but in the literary text past and present are sequentially organised (past, present, past), while in the film they are simultaneous and layered. The film unfolds indeed across two integrated and interwoven temporal lines: one in the present, one in the past. As already mentioned, the film opens with Maureen receiving a phone call from Iris and inviting the cousin for dinner. Shared by the two

women in the first diegetic line, the past is about the memories of a summer visit paid by four unmarried cousins to Maureen's family in Dalgleish. Accounting for a total of 4:56 out of 23:42 minutes, the past is represented through five distinct flashbacks (03:44-5:11; 06:20-8:04; 14:14-14:59; 19:26-19:56; 23:07-23:42). Scenes and sequences in the past are marked at the visual level, through the adoption of archaic recording devices, which project a more blurred and opaque image. Moreover, the third and fifth units feature a popular song performed by the women ("Row, row, row your boat / Gently down the stream / Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily / Life is but a dream"), which is used as a cohesive and closing strategy in the film. The first temporal present-past transition occurs between the first and second units, which show visual disconnection in terms of image quality but audio connection through the voice-over. *Connection*, thus, regards the temporal and interpersonal dimensions. The connection with the past, enacted by Iris's stories, implies the disconnection from the alienating present.

All three of these short films will be discussed in order to address the fourth cliché, which claims that only the Telling mode can express symbolic, metaphoric, humorous elements (Hutcheon 2013, p. 68). Reference will be made to the multimodal construction and use of the trope of the mirror, as an example. Pervasive and pivotal mirror scenes seem to make meaning in a systemic way, in terms of setting; the protagonist's activity, expression, degree of concentration; background music, noises or voices; scene duration and positioning along the film narrative. All these modes and modal resources carry specific semantic, narrative and aesthetic implicatures.

In *Thanks for the Ride*, David quickly checks his image in the mirror before going out to pick up his cousin George. Positioned at the beginning of the film (1:13-1:37), the scene occurs in the living room and ends with a self-confident and self-approving smile. Later in the cinematographic narrative (10:34-11:34, with two embedded units showing David and Vicky's mother), the camera captures Vicky in her room while sitting in front of the mirror, putting on some make-up, getting ready for the ride. In the introspective unit, Vicky is self-absorbed, not projected towards future events. Comparatively, David's mirror scene is shorter than Vicky's (10:34-10:50; 11:23-11:34) and the rhythm is quicker (also because the embedded units in the second scene produce a slowing-down effect). The two scenes (dis)connect the two characters, signal and mark their profound differences in terms of personality and social status, and contribute to the previously discussed reversal of interpersonal social distance.

These mirror scenes have echoes in the other two films. In *Connection*, Maureen is depicted at the house entrance, before Iris' arrival for dinner, when her guest has just rung the bell. She quickly checks her image (charming face, luminous make-up, perfect hairdo) and gives an expression of approval. Meanwhile, the voice-over utters her thoughts: "I'm afraid I also wanted Richard and his money and our house to impress Iris and forever lift me out of the category of poor relation". This scene is positioned in the first part of the film (8:47-8:49) and is evocative of David's unit in *Thanks for the Ride* for brevity, *dispositio* within the narrative, as well as narrative function. Differently, in *Boys and Girls*, a central scene (13:12-13:58) captures Margaret in her room, while looking at her refracted image. She is sitting down, her posture static, her gaze profound. The latter does not seem to be a sensorial, perceptive process, but a cognitive, psychological one: like Vicky in *Thanks for the Ride*, Margaret is not checking her appearance, but scrutinising and questioning her identity. Shot by different directors and expressing different stories of adaptation, the mirror scene is pervasive and pivotal across the adaptations. It operates as a semiotically layered and complex trope, which represents Munro's concern with introspection.

There is no doubt that these formal, compositional, functional intersemiotic strategies enable and negotiate filmic notions of interiority, intimacy and distance.

6. Conclusion

This paper has discussed and deconstructed the four clichés regarding the inferiority of adaptations to adapted texts identified by Linda Hutcheon, by addressing screen adaptations of Alice Munro's short stories. In terms of research design, the analysis has selected and focused on three short films (20-28 minutes) released in the same decade (1980s) and in the same country (Canada).

Contrary to what is commonly thought and expressed by the clichés, the analysis has shown the narrative potential of audio-visual artefacts to represent qualities generally ascribed to writing. The three Canadian films manage to negotiate intimacy and distance in point of view; to express interiority; to shape nonlinear, fractured and layered temporality; to inform metaphors and other figures. This is achieved via a range of specific modes and modal resources, such as, represented participants, size-of-frame, perspective, camera movement, framing, visual-verbal-audio intersemiosis, film composition and cohesion, operating at the levels of the ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions. In *Thanks for the Ride*, the representation and negotiation of intimacy and distance in point of view are central and fluid, functional to the intersectional discussion about gender and social class. In *Boys and Girls*, interiority is expressed through close-ups and eye-angles, with particular attention to the filmic representation of the female protagonist Margaret. *Connection* deploys and intertwines two diegetic and temporal plans (past and present tenses), with the resurfacing past profoundly affecting the present time. Ultimately, all three films convincingly depict a mirror scene, a semiotically layered and complex trope, which represents Munro's concern with introspection.

The inspection of the adaptations has revealed lines of narrative continuity and discontinuity between adapted texts and adaptations, as well as interconnections across adaptations. Interestingly, the transformative story(*re*)telling process enacted by the film adaptors only incidentally regards the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions. All the three short films show a higher level of narrative continuity with the adapted short story, as for character and space representation, as well as for the narrative kernel. Notably, it is at the architectural level that the main lines of discontinuity emerge, whereby directors realize anticipations, additions, omissions, embedding and layering. The fact that the cinematographic story(*re*)telling process predominantly affects the story composition is corroborated by more recent and more extended adaptations, like *Away from Her* (2006), *Hateship Loveship* (2013), and *Julieta* (2016).

Rather than adopting the simplistic and biased lens of fidelity discourse, this multimodal stylistic analysis has acknowledged the medial, modal and aesthetic distinction between the adapted texts and adaptations. This irreducible ontological alterity precludes any comparative approach. Like "jelly and jam and preserves" of the opening epigraph derive from a transformation of "peaches and grapes and pears" and cannot be compared with the adapted fruit and vegetables, the literary written short story and the audio-visual film cannot be compared. Specifically, the cinematographic narratives are seen as other, distinct, independent stories generated by the Canadian author's storytelling impulse, by the story(re)telling tension inherent in her own narrative (Francesconi 2019, p. 89). This work, ultimately, does not celebrate Munro as storyteller because her adaptations are of a bad or good quality, but because her stories incessantly stimulate and generate other

stories.

To conclude, this work is limited in many ways. First, it addresses three films out of a more extended corpus of Munro's screen adaptations. Further research should expand this investigation to more recent and well-known films, including *Hateship Loveship* by Liza Johnson (2013), *Edge of Madness* by Anne Wheeler (2002), *Away for Her* by Sarah Polley (2006) and *Julieta* by Pedro Almodovar (2016). Through the lens of a multimodal stylistic framework, these film instances should also be discussed in relation to the clichés, as Wheeler's film is particularly relevant in relation to clichés 2 and 3, whilst Polley's film specifically relates to clichés 1 and 2. A second line of inspection could consider the cross-cultural adaptation these 'international' films experience, in their migration from Canadian to US, Spanish, Iranian, and Australian socio-cultural contexts. A third research direction could focus on visual-verbal intersemiosis, in how dialogues, voice-over and writing integrate with dynamic images and other semiotic resources to make meaning. Ultimately, attention should be devoted to the significant manipulation of the story architecture (including process of addition, omission, fragmentation, anticipation) performed by all Munro's adaptors identified in the conclusion of this essay. This four-pronged analysis will be the focus of future work.

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