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Literature and Cinema: Aspects of Interaction

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Abstract

The article is devoted to understanding the interaction of literature and cinema. It outlines the key approaches to studying this interaction: First, the study of the specifics of the participation of cinematographic interpretation in the formation of literary history and the history of reading; secondly, the definition of the degree of mutual influence of literature and cinematography. The problem of intermedia, which actualizes the mutual influence of the two arts, is connected with the search for new ways of influence, the translation of one text into the coordinates of the other. Literature is looking for new ways of unfolding the plot, building text space, cinematography - new ways of interpreting the stories and developing a verbal layer of cine-text. The theme of their mutual influence became an object of close observation and analysis both among the classics of Soviet literary criticism and cinematography, and among Western theoreticians of the cine-text; research in this area has now of great importance and undoubted interest. At the same time, it is interesting that the greatest surge of purely scientific interest in cinematography occurs in the 1920-30s and the end of the 20th century. And this is due to the approval and the prevalence of cinema (more widely - audiovisual entertainment content) in the public space amid large historical changes. Cinema becomes a way of transformation, of reorganization of the perception of a person, of his way, by the method of familiarizing the individual with a large cultural layer of the country. Through screenings, the cinema not only indirectly acquaints a person with the texts of literary classics, but also participates in the development of the literary text itself, preventing its "necrosis". Literature is becoming more and more "pictorial", palpable for the reader. At the same time, it should be said that neither the theory of cinema nor literary criticism has developed a scientific analysis apparatus that contributed to the competent and objective analysis and comparison of two texts, literary and cinematographic. Thus, there is a task in developing methodological grounds for comparing the screen version of literary works and their primary sources, as well as determining the degree of mutual influence of literature and cinema.

Keywords: Literature, Movies, Plot, Movie interpretation.

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Introduction

One of the most important problems for the modern humanities is the problem of intermediality. It is well known that in the history of literature the periods of style dynamics are interrelated with the search for new expressive opportunities in related arts, with the “translation” of stylistic devices of these arts into the language of literature, which is the most characteristic of modern literature, which appears in an intense dialogue with the theater and cinema. As rightly pointed out by M. V. Nemtsev, when comparing literature and cinema “it should be remembered that the latter is also one of the texts of the 20th century – the texts in the broadest understanding that goes beyond Philology. < ... > culturologists consider the text to be a semiotic unit for which the opposition of literature / lack of literature is not a differentiating feature. The text can be addressed to any of the senses, but the main condition for the text as an object of scientific and artistic interest is its value. Thus, cinema is focused on audio-visual perception. By registering the points of intersection between two texts – cinema and literature – we are dealing with the most important feature of the culture of the century – intertextuality. The 20th century was flooded with texts with references to other texts and other cultural layers” (Nemtsev, 2004, p. 16). The elements of the poetics of art invade the artistic writer’s world, which is, in fact, completely different from the literature (or, on the contrary, borrows a lot from the latter – especially the plot basis, and therefore, often as though it is secondary to it), organically intertwining with the actual literary principles of pictorialism.

It is noteworthy that the connections between writers and film directors can be quite unexpected and paradoxical: some of them are based on direct thematic overlaps, the similarity of motives, the experience of a common theme; others are comparable in terms of the specifics of the creative method and in the nature of the vision. The connection with other art is often hidden in the depth of the creative idea, while thematic similarity or the plot are not of paramount importance – the attitudinal and subjective similarities become the key one, as well as the expression of the views on the reality and expression of the spirit of time through the personality of writers and their predilections become fundamental.

Materials and methods

A lot of works cover the theoretical development of the literary texts adapted for the big screen. As soon as feature-length films appeared, literary critics, film experts and film directors tried to understand the features of the interaction between cinema and literature, including the objective laws of the film adaptation of a literary work. The very number of monographs on this topic, which appeared in the first half of the 20th century reflects the interest in this subject, and many of the works of N. D. Anoshchenko, B. Balazs, L. Delluc, A. I. Piotrovsky, Yu. N. Tynyanov, V. B. Shklovsky, S. M. Eisenstein and I. G. Ehrenburg of 1920-1930-ies still have not lost their theoretical importance (Knigi o kino, 1962, pp. 23-24). In 1948, the French researcher A. Bazin published the short article “Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest” (Bazin, 2000, pp. 19-27), which was an important step in the study of screen adaptation.

Literature Review

In the second half of the 20th century researchers were more interested in the analysis of individual films. According to Robert Ray, professor of the University of Florida (Ray, 2000, pp. 44-45), even a superficial review of bibliography of publications on the topic of “Literature and cinema” shows that in the study of the relationship between literature and cinema, the only approach is prevalent: either a separate work is analyzed in comparison with its adaptation, or the screen versions of various works of one author are analyzed. At the same time, researchers of literature and cinema cannot resist the unpromising question of a layperson: “What is better - a film or a book?”, and receive an equally unpromising answer: “The book is better.”

If attempts are made to theoretically generalize the characteristics of the film adaptation as a phenomenon in relation to an original fiction, they are based on intuitive senses, and researchers employ terms like as “integrity and integrity”, “relevance”, “unity”, “maturation”, “subtlety” or “adequacy”. According to Robert Stam, a famous American researcher of film screen versions, “the language of criticism writing about movie versions of literary works is often thoughtfully moralistic, it uses the definitions such as “deformation”, “violation”, “simplification” and each such expose makes its specific negative contribution to the attitude towards the film adaptation” (Stam, 2000, p. 54).

The monograph by W. Buckland (2000) considers the establishment of the tradition of linguistic analysis in the theory of cinematography. The researcher compares the significance of establishing this tradition with a revolution. It is interesting to note that in the introduction to the work the author cites a joke about the modern historian, who is answering the question about the consequences of the French Revolution: “It is still too early to talk about it.” Indeed, it is too early to judge the influence of the linguistic approach on the analysis of films, which is becoming more and more widespread, but the final say in the analysis of screen adaptations of literary works lies with a philologist.

In this regard the work of F. Vanoye (2011) is also interesting, in which the researcher asks himself about the reasons for such a broad-scale cinema reference to literary texts, considers the processes in which a literary text becomes a film-author’s material for the game and composition of their own ideological constructs. The scientist focuses on the moments of impact of cinema and literature, where diverse, but, of course, fruitful processes, liable to create a truly remarkable cultural phenomena take place.

Jean Cléder in his study (Cléder, 2012), addressing the issue of the literature and cinematography interaction, expands the usual scheme, in which the result was a cinematic adaptation or literary novelization, and focuses on other areas and processes of interaction and interference and, highlighting basic notions in them, describes the common code of these two arts.

Nowadays the issue of interinfluence of cinema and literature is a prioritized one in Russian literary science. Thus, the work of I. Martyanova (2011) explores how the movies influenced the stylistic and narrative structures in the Russian prose style. At the same time, the researcher pays great attention to the essence of the textual phenomenon, which straightforwardly appeared at the junction of the literary- and film-code - a screenplay.

The collection of articles by T. Mikhailova (2015) addresses the principles of film adaptation and the conditions for the acceptable transfer of literary text elements into the cinematographic space, in which the cinematic text becomes identical to the literary one.

N. Fedoseyenko in her monograph (2016) also refers to the phenomenon of cinematic adaptation and to the process of interaction between literature and cinema in the framework of the film text creation, while contending that the concept of “screen adaptation” is not homogeneous and includes various manifestations of the transformation of the original literary text.

In addition to the above mentioned works, it is also worth drawing attention to thematic conferences that challenge the researchers with the problem of interaction between the two arts, the problem of interpretation and transformation (*Literatura – teatr – kino: problemy dialoga*, 2014; *Literatura – teatr – kino: problemy retseptsii i interpretatsii*, 2013; *Literatura i kino – v poiskakh obshchego yazyka*, 2013-2015; *Russkaya klassicheskaya literatura na stsene i v kino*, 2010, 2012).

However, to date, neither the theory of cinema, nor literary studies have developed a scientific instruments of analysis, which would objectively compare the literary work and its cinematic version. At the same time, there is a need in the development of scientific criteria for assessing the screen adaptation of literary works.

Results and Discussions

The issue of the mutual influence between cinema and literature has drawn Russian researchers' attention (literary critics, first of all) since 1920-ies, provided that the greatest surge of purely scientific interest in cinema appeared in 1920-30-ies and the end of the 20th century. In our opinion, these two milestones are not accidental and are associated with the growing popularity of cinema, compared with printed matter during these periods. The reasoning of A. Serafimovich in this regard is quite remarkable. He pointed to the opposition between books' devotees and fans of movies emerging in Russian society in the first twenty years of the 20th century: "Publishers, booksellers – all those who somehow come into touch with the book, all are speaking in one voice: the demand for fiction has fallen and continuously, steadily, obeying some domestic law, continues to fall... I can see incredulous looks: cinematography replaces books!" (Serafimovich, 1912, p. 8). Clearly, that such a trend is characteristic of the socio-cultural situation in Russia at the turn of the 20th-21st centuries. Both in the 1920-ies., and in the last two decades the film has not replaced the readership books, but has played an obvious role in the introduction of the audience to fiction. In this regard, we would like to quote a teacher's recollection from the Siberian heartland in 1920-ies: "The books have been getting moldy without use in my library, and then there is a demand for them! - says the teacher. Some boy from my former pupils has come and said: "You, Ivan Petrovich, have a book about Africa, I remember –would you give me it to read..." I was pleasantly surprised and asked why he hadn't dropped in on me for three years, and then came, and he needed Africa? "Oh, says he, they showed paintings about it at the theatre, about the river Nile, I want to read more, so it will become clearer"" (Rubakin, 1916, p. 75). Despite the popularity of cinema at the turn of 20th -21st centuries, the perception of film adaptations of literary works remains the same. For instance, transfer of "The Idiot", "The Master and Margarita" to the screen by the film director V. Bortko, as noted by K. Yu. Ignatov, "was accompanied with resurgence of readers' interest to the literary sources" (Ignatov, 2008, p. 217).

By the time of the emergence and formation of cinematic art, literature has mastered the complex structures for the transfer of space-time relations and all kinds of means of determining and reconstructing of the past, present and future, has developed various types of narrative strategies and a system of narrative points of view. However, cinema, which was inferior to literature in narrative possibilities, used opportunities for visualizing, incorporating the principles of entertainment more effectively than other arts.

Litterateurs become the first cinema theorists, and at that time the concept of "cinematography of literature" appeared. In 1923 V. Shklovsky's book "Literature and Cinema" was published in Berlin, which also became a milestone in the history of Russian film studies; Yu. Tynyanov's article "On the Foundations of Cinema" offered a comparison of cinema not with prose, but with poetry, drawing an analogy with the change of verse, one metric unity to another, and the change of one shot to another during editing; in 1927 the publishing house "Kinogopechat'" (the very existence of such publisher is also notable) published a collection of formalists' articles "The Poetics of Cinema", edited by B. M. Eikhenbaum, which summarized the years of dispute about the movie that took place on the pages of the journals "LEF (Left Front of the Arts)" and "New LEF". Moreover, famous writers and poets participated as screenwriters in the shootings of the first Russian films of the 1910-ies: V. Mayakovsky wrote scripts for advocacy films; in 1918 S. Esenin, M. Gerasimov, S. Klychkov, and I. Pavlovich created the joint scenario of "Calling dawns"; V. Bryusov as a member of the Moscow Cinema Committee edited A. Razumny's films "Uprising" and "Mother"; A. Tolstoy, B. Lavrenyov, I. Babel, A. Lunacharsky, A. Marienhof, Yu. Tynyanov, B. Shklovsky and others wrote scenarios. There is such a trend of cooperation between writers and filmmakers at present: L. Ulitskaya was involved in the film adaptation of her novel "The Kukotsky Enigma", where she gave the director Yu. Grymov freedom to interpret plot collisions and was extremely pleased with the resulting film; V. Sorokin in co-authorship with Iv. Dykhovichny cinematized their own script, "Moscow"; the Kazanian writer-minimalist D. Osokin became the author of the script for the recent film "Silent Souls" (Russian title "The Buntings").

Accordingly, literature has been historically prepared for the perception of expressive means of cinema: it is becoming more and more “depictive”, which, as we know, was previously considered the prerogative of painting and subsequently of cinema; cinema, in turn, is moving in the direction of accumulation of its own means of expression, the main ones of which are editing and variation of points of view with the help of tracked by floor cameras. Literature has been “supplying” cinema with the depicted on the screen content. Cinema has a well-known influence on the compositional techniques of literature, which is seen in the composition, in the dialogue, in the ways of storytelling, in the increasing of association techniques, and in complex retrospective expositions in literary works. In this regard, the “cinematic” works, in terms of the use of cinema methods in the framework of the actual literary poetics of L. Ulitskaya, D. Lipskerov, V. Pelevin, A. Ivanov, S. Minaev are noteworthy. The novels of the latter such as “Generation “P”” (2010), “The Geographer Drank His Globe Away (Geograf Globus Propil)” (2013), “Soulless (Duchless)” (2012), by the way, were very successfully transferred to the screen. Along the same line is “Generations of Winter (Moscovskaya Saga)” by V.P. Aksyonov, which initially started as an American television project, but due to the fact that the writer failed to implement the plan of the TV series about three generations of the Gradvos in the United States, he had adapted the drafts of the script in the novel, which was then filmed in Russia.

We shall notice that the screen version of the literary work is an independent direction in the cinema. Suffice it to mention cinematic experience of P. P. Pasolini, who actively interpreted literary plots (from “The Canterbury Tales” and “Oedipus Rex” to “Medea” and “The Decameron”); or direct involvement of the writer F. Miller together with R. Rodriguez on the screen version of his graphic novel series “Sin City”, which is of a comic character; or the film version of B. Stoker’s novel “Dracula” by F. F. Coppola, who turned the “terrible” story in a sentimental and romantic one, and thus contributed to the further romanticization of a vampire’s image in the latest Gothic prose and cinema; or the script writing for the film “Shakespeare in Love” by T. Stoppard (the author of the post-modern play “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead”, which became a comment for the Shakespearean “Hamlet”), in which one of the versions of “the Shakespearean question” got used to the stage. Related to this, we can definitely find the TV project by M. Gatiss and St. Moffat “Sherlock” (2010-2014) that is quite a free adaptation of A. Conan Doyle’s stories, the set of which now takes place at the beginning of the 21st century, as well as the self-titled film interpretation of Pushkin’s “Dubrovsky”, carried out by a film director A. Vartanov in 2014, who transferred the plot conflicts of the classical text into current realities. This list can certainly be continued, but the principal thing to date is not as much the understanding of the basics of the interaction between literature and cinema, as the fact that neither the theory of cinema nor literary studies has not developed scientific tools of analysis, which “would allow to objectively compare the literary work and its cinematic version” (Ignatov, 2008, p. 220). At the same time, we note that almost all studies of the “relationship” between cinema and literature, including the Western ones (see: Branigan, 1984; Torop, 1991), use literary terminology, which is probably due to the fact that the authors of theoretical works on cinema are literature scholars, habitually using, speaking in terms of literary theory while talking about cinema.

Conclusion

Consequently, an important scientific task is not as much the formation in the cinema of its own concepts and terms, as the development of methodological considerations for comparing screen adaptations of literary works and their sources. Literary scholars should not be interested in the film studies side of the issue and not the problem of the adequacy of the film adaptation, but *how* the cinematic interpretation is involved in the formation of literary history and the history of reading, since it is obvious that any film adaptation can be considered as a variant of reading the original book, but, being an independent aesthetical fact, it becomes a continuation of the literary text history.

Another important aspect of the study of the interaction between cinema and literature is to determine the degree of interinfluence between literature and cinema. What literature gives the film, of course, is clear, especially taking into account the fact of writing screenplays by many writers, and this aspect is being actively developed by both Russian and Western researchers. But at the same time, the interaction between literature and cinema at the level of motives, plots, artistic moves and, most importantly, the visual language, is considered to be not enough. Currently, most studies address some issues of the interaction of the two arts – from the theme of cinema in literature or elements of literary poetics in cinema (see: Fitzsimmons, 2015; Manevich, 1966; Martianova, 2011; Mikhaylova, 2015; Nemtsev, 2004; Torop, 1991) – to the understanding of the film language and the study of cinema as a synthesis of narrative-visual and verbal trends (Lotman, 1973). Finally, in the case of studies of film interpretations, screenplays, “adjacent” genres of cinema and literature (movie romance, movie-essay, etc.) literary analysis can be organically combined with methods of analysis of film studies that will contribute to the creation of a universal methodology applicable to humanitaristics in general.

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