

Section «Journalism»

Narration as philosophy: from literature to television

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Novel adaptations in television only sparsely appear among Media researches as a case study within its own special conditions. This could be attributed to some common grounds between cinema and television that favors their approach through film theory as well as to the comparatively limited number of such TV productions. As part of an ongoing research, this paper derives from 2006 adaptation of Boris Pasternak's famous novel, 'Doctor Zhivago', into a TV mini-series for the Russian television. Public familiarity with this novel absolves this essay from its detailed presentation, highlighting for current purposes only the novel's historical and deeply philosophical content as it is reflected in its multiple references to religious philosophy, Christianity and human relation to the surrounding social world. [2,5]. Inspired by a widespread discussion on film and philosophy, we shall approach this TV production from the perspective of philosophical questions that constitute extensive part of a novel reading experience. The objective of the analysis is to show whether and how novel adaptations retain some, if at all, of the philosophical questions posed by the original work.

Setting as a starting theoretical point the foucauldian thinking on discourse's four fundamental properties - referentiality, subjectivity, knowledge and discursive strategies [6,4] - we are able to form two premises: firstly, the preceding original work, to which the adaptation is referring to, is part of the adaptation's historical reality. Secondly, the adaptation into a film or television has its own, exclusive cognitive and ideological qualities, which, nevertheless, are formed in a more or less tight relation to the original. If we adopt a respective foucauldian approach, we are provided with two additional methodological tools: the understanding of the adaptation as "reappearance of discourse" in special conditions and modes of existence and as "re-programming of the reception", meaning that the selective adaptation of the story's facts is related to certain external conditions [3]. Moreover, considering the theoretical background of more medium-centered approaches that emphasize on the material conditions and the intrinsic values of each medium, we could accept as a common ground that, at last, an adaptation is only a "paraphrase" of the original work, which preserves in the narrative only the characters and the facts of the story [1].

Turning our attention to the prospects left for philosophy, medium-centered theorists would claim that novel's philosophy survives in adaptations only through dialogue, a non intrinsic feature of cinema or television which does not qualify them as philosophy [7]. However, the film-as-philosophy argument seems to be gaining grounds, suggesting certain modes of the philosophical in film - dialogue excepted -, such as the illustration of philosophical theories, the counterexample, the making of philosophical claims, film's self definition and social criticism [8].

In this theoretical context, Doctor Zhivago's TV adaptation, is approached, on the one hand, as a different than the novel discursive field, expected to be sharing with the original

work the characters and the facts which are presented in accordance with the values of post-Soviet society, and, on the other hand, as a mass media product addressing to a group of viewers by rule heterogeneous and supposedly touched by a love story, rather than philosophy. However, it is observed that the novel's tendency to pose philosophical questions is retained to a certain degree through the form and beyond the dialogues. One mode of the philosophical in TV is the character's features and in specific Zhivago's dual status as a doctor and a poet, which determines his part in the development of the plot. His constant search for answers to the questions of life, death and existence emerges repeatedly either from his medical activity or his personal poetic writings. Another mode is detected within the connection between facts in terms of narrative causality that, in this case, becomes a question of life. When, for example, Zhivago is divided between his wife and his love for Lara, he turns to God praying for a decision that he himself is not able to make. At that exact moment partisans appear and force him to follow them in the forests. There begins his physical and spiritual fall. This causal connection of the facts not only furthers the plot but also constitutes the notions of theological and moral determinism, subjecting the moral to the word of God and identifying the immoral as punishment.

In conclusion, it seems possible to integrate novel's philosophy in a TV narration as knowledge and understanding of the world with the use of certain form features. The next challenge would be to search for possible philosophical differences between novel and TV adaptation. Returning to the same example, we should consider that in the novel, Zhivago, experiencing some godly sings of nature, had already decided to meet Lara once again, when he was stopped by the partisans. Employing the foucauldian approach and researching further the TV adaptation's discursive environment, the ideological background of such inconsistencies shall be revealed.

References

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