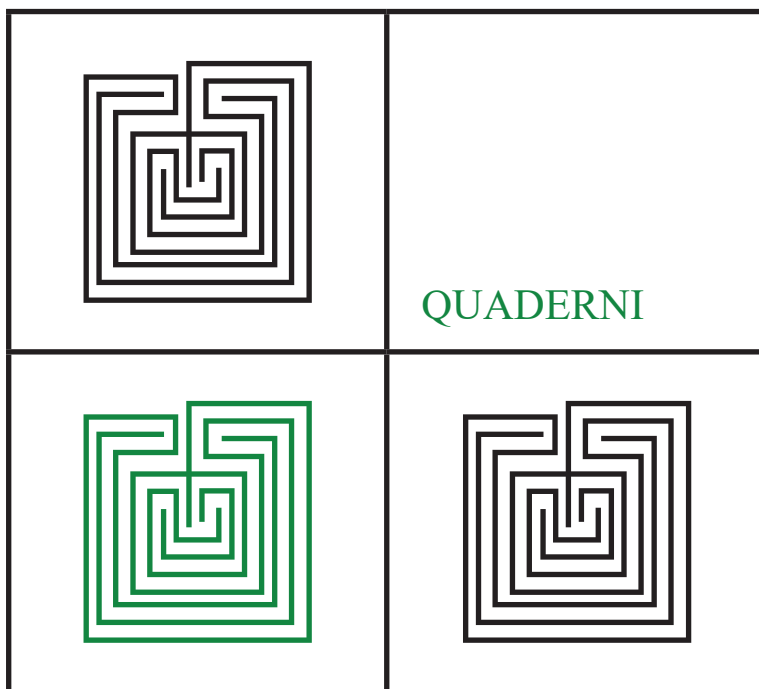

ADAPTATIONS OF STORIES
AND STORIES OF ADAPTATION

ADAPTATION(S) D'HISTOIRES
ET HISTOIRES D'ADAPTATION(S)

edited by / sous la direction de
Sabrina Francesconi / Gerardo Acerenza



LABIRINTTI 187

Università degli Studi di Trento
Dipartimento di Lettere e Filosofia

A collection of interdisciplinary essays by thirteen international scholars in Canadian studies, this volume explores adaptation process and practice from synchronic and diachronic perspectives. These contributions critically analyze linguistic and textual dynamics across genres (opera, poems, short stories, novels, TV series, films, picture books) adopting a broad range of methodological frameworks and tools. They examine the adaptation of stories alongside stories of adaptation, exposing many facets of complex issues such as identity, agency, culture, space, and time. Attention is also devoted to how different media (e.g. books, TV, digital devices) and modes (e.g. writing, music, images) affect the codification, transcoding, and decodification of Canadian narratives. The authors convincingly argue that, when stories move and change, they emotionally and cognitively engage and transform readers, listeners, spectators, audiences – all of us.

Ce volume collectif regroupe les articles de treize chercheurs internationaux en études canadiennes et québécoises qui tentent de cerner les différents enjeux et stratégies de l'adaptation. En s'appuyant sur des cadres théoriques divers et des méthodologies variées, les contributions analysent de manière critique les dynamiques de l'adaptation à travers les genres littéraires (poésie, nouvelle, roman), les médias (littérature, cinéma, série télévisée, musique) et les cultures. Les lecteurs sont ainsi invités à découvrir d'un côté des adaptations d'histoires et de l'autre des histoires d'adaptations. Les auteurs soulèvent plusieurs questions liées à la pratique de l'adaptation, puisque à partir du moment où des histoires sont adaptées, elles voyagent à travers les pays et les langues, elles changent de médias et peuvent mobiliser des émotions différentes chez les lecteurs, les auditeurs ou les spectateurs d'une autre culture.

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ADAPTATION OF STORIES
AND STORIES OF ADAPTATION:
MEDIA, MODES AND CODES

ADAPTATION(S) D'HISTOIRES
ET HISTOIRES D'ADAPTATION(S):
MÉDIAS, MODALITÉS SÉMIOTIQUES,
CODES LINGUISTIQUES

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TRANSPARENT TRICKS:
LOOKING IN THE MIRRORS OF SCREEN ADAPTATIONS

Sabrina Francesconi

Università degli Studi di Trento

Introduction

This essay discusses the trope of the mirror as a heterotopic space in a range of Munro's screen adaptations. Shot by different directors and expressing different stories of adaptations, a mirror scene is pervasive and pivotal for all six of the audio-visual artefacts analyzed here. The mirror scene operates as a semiotically layered and complex trope, encompassing emotional, cognitive, and aesthetic concerns, while enacting issues related to identity, agency, textuality. However, some recurring formal regularities – carrying potential semiotic implicatures – are found across these films.

The analytical framework of multimodal stylistic analysis is adopted, foregrounding the meaning-making potential and stylistic effects of integrated socio-cultural modes and modal resources in audio-visual dynamic artefacts (e.g. the size and position of the mirror, the use of voice-over or dialogue, the duration and position of the scene within the film). The aim is not to find rules to be followed from a prescriptive perspective, but to detect some recurring multimodal patterns and strategies enabling meaning-making in mirror-based scenes.

Across the films, both unmarked and marked functions of the mirror can be identified. Unmarked categories reveal material,

perceptual, and cognitive processes: mirrors enable the mirroring character to act, to feel, and to think. Unmarked functions include the mirror's functional, validating, expressive, and introspective roles. In marked categories, mirrors fulfil more oblique functions: the mirroring/mirrored subject has less control over the visual process and may be unaware, criticized, included, or excluded. Such mirrors can be critical, intrusive or inclusive.

After identifying several categories for the use of mirrors in the film adaptations, I turn my attention to the adaptation process and to how the adaptation affects the mirror trope. In audiovisual adaptations, the mirror scene undergoes multiple textual processes, including additions, omissions, expansions, and compressions. These intersemiotic dynamics are not regarded as betrayals of the adapted text but rather testify to the creative and transformative aspects of the adaptation. More specifically, they enact modal, medial, and aesthetic change.

This work is organized into eight distinct sections. After this introduction, the next section outlines the literature on film adaptation. The following three sections describe the six film adaptations, the mirror as trope and the multimodal stylistic methodology. Then come the analysis and the discussion. The final section includes the conclusion and describes future research plans.

Literature review

Over the last decades, the film adaptation of literary works has been explored intensively and pervasively. Research has been published in monographic works, starting with George Bluestone's pioneer *Novel to Film: A Critical Study* published in 1957,¹ and, more recently, in specialized editorial series such

¹ G. Bluestone, *Novel into Film: A Critical Study*, The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore 1957; B. McFarlane, *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1996; R. Stam, *Literature through Film: Realism, Magic, and the Art of Adaptation*, Blackwell, Malden 2005; R. Stam,

as Palgrave «Studies in Adaptation and Visual Culture». Articles in the field appear regularly in journals such as the «Journal of Adaptation Studies», the «Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance» and the «Literature/Film Quarterly». Moreover, academic visibility has been acquired and reinforced through popular university courses with titles such as *From Page to Screen* or – indicating a more specific focus – *Austen and Film*.

The established and flourishing contemporary debate stands in stark contrast to the pervasive dismissal of adaptations as inferior and derivative productions.² This limited and limiting approach is found in both informal and academic settings. Such denigrations may mainly reflect the emotional bond readers feel to adapted literary texts. It could also be related to their underestimation and misunderstanding of an adaptation's semiotic potential, as instantiated in the net of clichés generally associated with adaptations.³

Thomas Leitch labels conceptual and methodological limits within academic research as «fallacies in contemporary adaptation theory».⁴ Adaptations were first addressed from a comparative perspective, which failed to acknowledge the fundamental incomparability of adapted text and adaptation, due to differences in variables including text genre, logic, medium, and mode. This leads to a general disregard for adaptations, which are considered a form of betrayal of original source texts and assessed in terms of loss. Frequently, Leitch adds, research outputs in adaptation studies offer limited, specific case studies.

E. Raengo (eds.), *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, Blackwell, Malden 2004; R. Stam, E. Raengo (eds.), *A Companion to Literature and Film*, Blackwell, Malden 2004.

² L. Hutcheon with S. O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation* (2nd edition), Routledge, New York-London 2012, p. xiii; R. Stam, *Introduction: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation*, in R. Stam, A. Raengo (eds.), *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, pp. 1-52.

³ L. Hutcheon with S. O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, pp. 52-68.

⁴ T. Leitch, *Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory*, «Criticism», 45/2 (2003), pp. 149-171.

In order to overcome these biased approaches to adaptations, as well as simplistic conclusions, numerous scholars have advocated new epistemologies and robust methodologies, as well as a broader field of application. In this vein, this work adopts multi-modal stylistics as methodological framework and addresses six distinct and independent audio-visual artefacts.

Six film adaptations

The mirror will be observed in six films based on Alice Munro's short stories. The first instances are three short Canadian films released in the 1980s. Produced by Atlantis Films and directed by Don McBrearty, the first is entitled *Boys and Girls* (1983). The protagonist of this 25-minute-adaptation is thirteen-year-old Margaret, played by Megan Follows, who lives in an Ontario farmhouse. Margaret liberates an old horse about to be killed (the meat is to be used to feed the silver foxes the father breeds), as a form of rebellion against gender roles and the constraints imposed upon her.⁵ This film adapts a story with the same title from the first collection by Munro.⁶

An adaptation of another story from the same volume, the second film is *Thanks for the Ride* by John Kent Harrison (1983), a 28-minute adaptation starring Lesley Donaldson (Vicky), Melissa Bell (LoreAnn), Peter Kranz (George), and Carl Maroote (David). Set in Mission Creek, a little town on the shores of Lake Huron, the film tells the story of two cousins who meet two young girls and invite them out for a ride. The evening is underscored by the inability of these young men and women to

⁵ See T. Ue, *Incarceration, Focalization, and Narration: Adapting the Two Selves in Boys and Girls*, «Short Fiction in Theory and Practice», 4/2 (2014), pp. 175-185; H. Ventura, *Alice Munro's Boys and Girls: Mapping Out Boundaries*, «Commonwealth Essays and Studies», 15/1 (1992), pp. 80-87.

⁶ A. Munro, *Boys and Girls*, in *Dance of the Happy Shades*, Vintage, London 2000, pp. 111-127.

communicate with each other, mainly due to differences in social class and education.

The third short film is *Connection* (1986), an adaptation of the first part (also entitled *Connection*) of a double short story devoted to Munro's family history. This short story, *Chaddeleys & Flemings*, comes from *The Moons of Jupiter* (1982). Produced by Atlantis Films and the National Film Board of Canada, *Connection* was written by Kelly Rebar and directed by Wolf Koenig. The 24-minute-adaptation features Kate Trotter (Maureen), Patricia Hamilton (Iris) and Tom Butler (Richard). It revolves around a dinner shared by Maureen, her husband Richard, and Iris, a relative Maureen has not seen for years. The women enjoy many stories from their past, but Richard never fails to express his snobbish sarcasm.

These short films are followed by three longer films, released in the following three decades. The first is *Lives of Girls and Women*, directed by Ronald Wilson and written by Charles K. Pitts. The 91-minute-film was released in 1996 and actors include Tanya Allen (Del Jordan), Wendy Crewson (Ada Jordan), and Peter MacNeil (Tom Jordan). The plot follows the personal growth of a young woman, Del Jordan, through family tensions, spiritual and religious inquiries, as well as sentimental and sexual experiences. She finally acknowledges her creativity and passion for writing.

A much-admired adaptation is *Away from Her* by Sarah Polley (2007), featuring Julie Christie (Fiona) and Gordon Pinsent (Grant).⁷ The plot follows a seventy-year-old woman, Fiona, who

⁷ A. Berthin-Scaillet, *A Reading of Away from Her, Sarah Polley's Adaptation of Alice Munro's Short Story, The Bear Came Over the Mountain*, «The Journal of the Short Story in English», 55 (2010), pp. 157-171; C. Concilio, *The Mark on the Floor. Alice Munro on Ageing and Alzheimer's Disease in The Bear Came Over the Mountain and Sarah Polley's Away from Her*, in C. Concilio (ed.), *Imagining Ageing. Representations of Age and Ageing in Anglophone Literatures*, Transcript Verlag, Bielefeld 2018, pp. 101-125; R. McGill, *No Nation but Adaptation: The Bear Came Over the Mountain, Away from*

develops Alzheimer's disease. When her symptoms become evident, Fiona is hospitalized in a private clinic, where she establishes new social relations and falls in love with Audrey, an inmate also affected by senile dementia. This film adapts Munro's *The Bear Came Over the Mountain*, anthologized in *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* (2001).

By the American director Liza Johnson, *Hateship Loveship* was released in 2013 and lasts 101 minutes, bringing the epistolary short story *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* to the screen. Actors include Kristen Wiig (Johanna Parry), Guy Pearce (Ken), Hailee Steinfeld (Sabitha), and Nick Nolte (Mr. McCauley). The protagonist is Johanna, a reserved housekeeper working for the rich and elderly Mr. McCauley and his granddaughter Sabitha. With her friend Edith, Sabitha organizes a fake love correspondence between Johanna and her father, Ken. The joke, surprisingly, leads to the couple's wedding.

Shot by different directors and expressing different adaptation stories, all six of these audio-visual artefacts showcase pervasive and pivotal mirror scenes, which seem to carry some semiotic implicatures and deserve close textual scrutiny.

The mirror as heterotopic site

Either celebrated or condemned, the mirror has changed in form and material, use and function across the centuries.⁸ Multiple, hybrid meanings and aims can be detected in mirror-related texts, practices, and phenomena. First, the mirror enacts visual representation, reduplication, and confirmation of someone or something; it is, thus, meant to reflect its object with precision

Her, and What It Means to Be Faithful, «Canadian Literature / Littérature canadienne», 197 (2008), pp. 98-111.

⁸ B. Goldberg, *Lo specchio e l'uomo*, trad. it. di N. Polo, Marsilio, Venezia 1989.

and clarity. This is, indeed, the first definition of the lemma ‘mirror’ provided by the *OED*: «A piece of special flat glass that reflects images, so that you can see yourself when you look in it». The definition places emphasis on the ‘reflecting’ function of the glass, which enables visual self-perception. However, from the perspective of self-analysis, a mirror can also be a screen for the projection of one’s identity, fears, uncertainties, and desires. In this respect, the dictionary describes «a mirror of something», defined as «something that shows what something else is like». This second definition foregrounds the ‘revealing’ function of the glass, whose re-presentation is clear and faithful.⁹ At the same time, this meaning suggests a tension between sameness and alterity: the mirror site contains the same content located in a different place.

In Munro’s adapted texts, mirrors first play a role as everyday material items, described in terms of physical and circumstantial properties. In the short story *Boys and Girls*, the unnamed narrator hates a «wavy mirror» placed in her kitchen;¹⁰ Del in *Lives of Girls and Women* describes a «dark mirror».¹¹ Both items show traces of decay. Dimensions also matter, like the «little bureau mirror» the mother in *Lives of Girls and Women* uses to put on her pillbox hat,¹² or the «full-length mirror»¹³ Johanna finds at Milady’s store, or, again, the «three-way mirror» Del, wearing her mother’s dressing gown, uses to admire herself.¹⁴ Generally, mirrors are domestic pieces of furniture, except for the «rear mirrors» of George’s car in *Thanks for the Ride*, and the mirror in the fitting room at Milady’s in *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship*,

⁹ U. Eco, *Sugli specchi e altri saggi: il segno, la rappresentazione, l’illusione, l’immagine*, La nave di Teseo, Milano 2018.

¹⁰ A. Munro, *Boys and Girls*, p. 117.

¹¹ A. Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, Vintage International, New York 2001, p. 61.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 60.

¹³ A. Munro, *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*, in *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*, Vintage, London 2001, p. 8.

¹⁴ A. Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p. 192.

Loveship, Marriage. Domestic mirrors, in turn, can also be differentiated in terms of the rooms where they are located (halls, bedrooms, or kitchens) and the pieces of furniture they are attached to («my little bureau mirror»,¹⁵ «the deep mirror in the built-in sideboard»¹⁶).

When characters look into mirrors, the Canadian laureate carefully notes their manner of seeing: «I glanced in the rear mirror»,¹⁷ «I would [...] look at the reflection»,¹⁸ «she peered aggressively at her own dim face»,¹⁹ «I stared, goose-pimpled and challenging, into the three-way mirror».²⁰ In turn, mirrors enable characters to accomplish some act (e.g. «shaving»;²¹ «combing [one's] hair»,²² «put[ting] on a hat»,²³ «plucking [one's] eyebrows»²⁴). Mirrors are sometimes described in relation to emotions and feelings: the wavy mirror is «hated» in *Boys and Girls*;²⁵ the mother in *Lives of Girls and Women* «peered aggressively» into the hall mirror.²⁶ Elsewhere, characters fulfil cognitive processes: glancing at a mirror becomes an act of introspection (e.g. «to wonder»²⁷).

At times, the role of mirrors is marked in other ways. The mirroring/mirrored subject has less control over the visual process; she is unaware, criticized, or excluded. For instance, Johanna defines the mirror positioned in a dress store as a «transparent

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 60.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 89.

¹⁷ A. Munro, *Thanks for the Ride*, in *Dance of the Happy Shades*, Vintage, London 2000, p. 50.

¹⁸ A. Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p. 89.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 135.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 192.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 96.

²² A. Munro, *Boys and Girls*, p. 123.

²³ A. Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p. 60.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 227.

²⁵ A. Munro, *Boys and Girls*, p. 117.

²⁶ A. Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p. 135.

²⁷ A. Munro, *Boys and Girls*, p. 123.

trick».²⁸ When mirrors fulfil such oblique functions, they operate as narrative triggers and profoundly impact the unfolding of the story itself. In *Lives of Girls and Women*, Del likes manipulating human figures in front of a mirror, by changing her position and perspective. Towards the end of the narrative, she tells a poem in front of the mirror, thus anticipating her future as writer.

Overall, across all of her stories, Munro pays attention to the semantic properties of the mirror, including its materiality, dimensions, position, as well as the intensity and duration of the gazing process. Mirrors, as such, operate as sites of action, conflict, performance and, in consequence, narrative construction.

The tension between unmarked and marked functions can be described by appealing to Michel Foucault's conceptualization of utopia and heterotopia in *Les mots et les choses*.²⁹ Following Foucault, the mirror may be first defined as a utopian space: a placeless place, an unreal virtual place that allows one to see one's own visibility. In order to question this unproblematic relation, Foucault himself evokes the traditional duplication function played by mirrors in Dutch paintings,³⁰ where the representation was never neutral, but implied processes of modification, restriction, bending, narrowing. He also observes that mirror re-presentations imply decomposition and recomposition. In the analysis of the notorious painting *Las Meninas* by Velazquez, Foucault observes the small, rectangular mirror depicted on the wall. The glass depicts King Philip IV and Queen Marianne, acting as models for the painter. The latter is situated outside the space of the room. In this vein, the French philosopher describes the mirror as a heterotopic, contradictory space. Offering more layers of meaning and relationships to places beyond the immediately visible, the mirror becomes a space of alterity, of difference. Unlike the

²⁸ A. Munro, *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*, p. 8.

²⁹ M. Foucault, *Le parole e le cose. Un'archeologia delle scienze umane*, traduzione di E. Panaitescu, Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, Milano 2001. On the notion of heterotopia, see H. Ventura's essay in this volume, pp. 30-31.

³⁰ M. Foucault, *Le parole e le cose*, p. 21.

consolatory space of utopia, heterotopia reveals intimate as well as social tensions: it disturbs and anticipates a crisis in the refracted character or the refracted story. The layered trope of the mirror never reduplicates or confirms, but upsets and transforms.

In a similar vein, this work explores the multimodal component of adaptations, with a focus on how their distinct manner of meaning-making – using different modes and modal resources – shapes the heterotopic trope of the mirror.

Multimodal stylistic analysis

Alongside formalist, functionalist, historical, and corpus stylistics, multimodal stylistics has become one of the most widespread and increasingly influential sub-fields of stylistics.³¹ Multimodal stylistics has traditionally focused on literary discourse but, more recently, is increasingly applied to other domains. By integrating literary stylistics and multimodality, multimodal stylistics investigates a text through the co-presence and interaction of a range of modes and modal resources, often co-occurring with language in its written or oral forms.³² In the case of static texts (novels, magazines or flyers) attention is given to modes and modal resources

³¹ D. McIntyre, *Integrating Multimodal Analysis and the Stylistics of Drama: A Multimodal Perspective on Ian McKellen's Richard III*, «Language and Literature», 17/4 (2008), pp. 309-334; N. Nørgaard, *The Semiotics of Typography in Literary Texts. A Multimodal Approach*, «Orbis Litterarum», 64/2 (2009), pp. 141-160; N. Nørgaard, *Multimodality and Stylistics*, in M. Burke (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook to Stylistics*, Routledge, London 2014, pp. 471-484; L. Pillière, *Crossing New Frontiers? Investigating Style from a Multimodal Perspective*, «Études de stylistique anglaise», 7 (2014), pp. 99-120; M. Toolan, *Stylistics and Film*, in M. Burke (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook to Stylistics*, Routledge, London 2014, pp. 455-470; E. Zurrú, *Breaking the Crystal Shoe: A Multimodal Stylistic Analysis of the Character of Cinderella in the Shrek Saga*, «Textus: English Studies in Italy», 23/1 (2010), pp. 235-261.

³² G. Kress, *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*, Routledge, London 2010; C. Jewitt (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*, Routledge, London 2014².

including typeface, spacing, layout, and colour which make meaning simultaneously. In the case of dynamic textuality (films, TV series, and YouTube videos), modes and modal resources include (but are not limited to): perspectives, size-of-frames, depth, light changes, colour contrasts, soundtracks, and voice-overs. The present work addresses the latter – audio-visual artefacts that unfold over time – and concentrates on the mirror as trope.³³

Pervasive and pivotal mirror scenes seem to make meaning in a systemic way: in relation *a)* to the type and function of the mirror as object; *b)* to the modes and forms of interaction with the mirroring character or other character(s), if present; *c)* to the intersemiosis of the mirror with different sounds. As for *a)*, attention is devoted to mirror size, shape, material and typology. Related to this is the position of the mirror in a room, the piece of furniture on which it stands, or the wall on which it hangs. As for *b)*, significant elements include the material, behavioural, or mental activities the character performs while engaging with the mirror. The human subject may be sitting, standing, or moving and may make gestures or movements, or assume a posture. S/he may or may not look at the mirror, thus becoming either the subject or the object of the gaze, raising issues of agency. As for *c)*, attention should be given to background music, noises, or voices.³⁴ In the case of background music, the kind of music should be identified. Is it vocal or instrumental? Is the volume low or high? What emotions does the melody evoke? If present, noises may be natural or artificial, have specific materiality, and various degrees of volume. Interacting sounds may in-

³³ J. Bateman, K.H. Schmidt, *Multimodal Film Analysis: How Films Mean*, Routledge, London 2012; A. Burn, *The Kineikonic Mode: Towards a Multimodal Approach to Moving Image Media*, in C. Jewitt (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*, pp. 373-383; N. Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1996; J. Wildfeuer, *Film Discourse Interpretation: Towards a New Paradigm for Multimodal Film Analysis*, Routledge, London 2014.

³⁴ T. van Leeuwen, *Speech, Music, Sound*, Macmillan, London 1999.

stantiate human voices and attention should be paid to: who is speaking, how s/he is speaking, what is being uttered, as well as the addressee of the utterance. The whole mirror scene should be also assessed in terms of its duration and position within the film narrative, as well as in its unitary or divided composition. From the point of view of cohesion, references and cross-references should be identified and mapped, both within the film and across films. Ultimately, the multiple and multifaceted function of a mirror scene should be discussed, as all these parameters and all these modes and modal resources carry specific semantic, narrative, and aesthetic implicatures. The following section seeks to identify, outline and discuss some of the semiotic categories instantiated in the mirror-related scenes.

Multifunctional mirrors: reflection and beyond

Across the films, the first basic mirror scene typology is of a functional nature: the mirror enables a character to fulfil material aims for which looking at one's refracted image is essential. It can be found in *Lives of Girls and Women*, *Away from Her*, and *Hateship Loveship*.

Lives of Girls and Women features two functional mirror scenes. Both involve the figure of Ada Jordan wearing lipstick, first in her room (17:45-17:52) and later in the kitchen (25:09-25:18). While she wears lipstick in both scenes, the context changes, as do the mother's attitude and expression: enthusiastic in the first, concerned in the second. The two mirrors are also different: the bedroom mirror is big, placed on a table, whereas the kitchen mirror is small, hanging on a wall. In both cases, the scene is accompanied by a dialogue. While addressing her friends, the smiling mother says: «I'm so glad you could come, ladies». Then she turns towards Del and adds: «You look charming!». In the second, the woman is getting ready for a funeral, while having a conversation with her husband about brain transplants and wondering

if doctors could transplant brains. Her husband asks: «Were you planning to discuss these ideas with the folks at the funeral?», explaining that «they do have a different set of notions, and they might easily be upset». These scenes portray Ada as a prismatic character: both active, sociable, exuberant as well as educated, intelligent, curious.

Notably, *Away from Her* features a similar scene. Fiona puts on light-brown lipstick (30:12-30:30) while looking at herself in an oval-shaped, face-sized mirror. This is followed by a shot/reverse shot series and a conversation. Fiona says to Grant: «I suppose I'll be dressed up all the time. I'll be sort of like...». She turns towards her husband and completes the sentence: «in a hotel». She asks how she looks, and Grant-as-mirror replies, «Just as you always looked», then adds four precise adjectives taken from Munro: «Direct and vague, sweet and ironic». The setting is the entryway of the house, a liminal site between the interior domestic space and the outside world: Fiona is leaving her house to be admitted to the nursing home. Instantiating the lacanian mirror-as-threshold,³⁵ the mirror symbolically marks the passage from present to future, from independence to dependence, from what is known to what is unknown and cannot be controlled. Yet, it signals and celebrates the woman's awareness and her irony as she confronts her fate.

At times, mirror scenes in the adaptations portray a quick act in which a character reasserts control over his/her face or figure before facing other people. The films that make use of this typology do not show the process of getting-ready in front of the mirror, but rather its outcome. The scenes are semi-private: technically, the character is alone in front of the mirror; practically, s/he is getting ready for social exposure and interaction. The mirror performs the function of checking, or, better yet, quickly validating, the character's personal appropriateness for a social situation in which

³⁵ J. Lacan, *Scritti*, Einaudi, Torino 1974, pp. 87-94. The significant number of mirrors in the corpus placed in a domestic entryway corroborates this line of interpretation.

s/he is about to take part. More specifically, in both films, these units of self-approval relate to privileged social and economic status. The characters are aware of, they want to display and profit from their privileged condition, symbolized by a car and house, respectively. In *Thanks for the Ride*, this happens to David who quickly checks his image in the mirror before leaving his house to pick up his cousin George. Positioned at the beginning of the film (01:13-01:37), the scene occurs in the living room. A small mirror hangs on the wall and shows the boy's charming face. He bites an apple and casts a self-approving smile. His sport jacket looks nice and he can borrow the father's expensive car: the ride looks promising. In *Connection*, a similar scene (08:47-08:49) involves Maureen in the front hall of her house, just before she opens the door for her dinner guest Iris, who has just rung the bell. She quickly glances at the mirror and approves of her own impeccable make-up and hairdo. 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». If the dynamic images show the surface hospitality, the voice admits her profound motivations: impressing her guest and marking the social distance between them. It is with this interplay between the visual and audio that the mirror scene projects the contradictions in the protagonist and inscribes the tension in the narrative.

The third category involves the mirror as a site for the expression of emotions and passions. This typology is relevant in *Hateship Loveship* and is visible in two instances. After receiving Ken's (fake) mail, Johanna stands in front of a mirror in her room (33:22-33:25), covering her mouth with her hands, unable to control the explosion of intense emotions. An uncanny earlier scene (27:50-29:08), set in the bathroom of her new house, had shown Johanna cleaning this very mirror. She inspected her image and tried to improve her hairdo. Unexpectedly, she then started kissing the mirror in a passionate way before going back to clean the mirror again. Thus, both before and after the kiss, Johanna

cleaned the mirror, assuming her role of the perfect housekeeper and respecting the traditional reflecting function of the mirror. But in the in-between moment, she suddenly started kissing the mirror's flat surface, projecting her passionate desires. The physical distance between the mirroring character and the mirror is here abolished and the viewing process at the basis of the mirroring process is overcome: the mirror, ultimately, is acted upon, being cleaned and being kissed. This heterotopic mirror enabled the subject to project her most intimate desires.

Elsewhere in the screen adaptations, the mirror is used to represent mental processes, whereby the subject questions his/her psychological world. Slowly and profoundly, Margaret, Vicky and Del engage in visible introspection in *Boys and Girls*, *Thanks for the Ride* and *Lives of Girls and Women* as they meditate upon their female identity and condition. In *Thanks for the Ride* (10:34-11:34), the camera shoots Vicky in her room as she sits in front of the mirror, putting on some make-up, getting ready for the ride. In this introspective unit, Vicky is self-absorbed in the moment, not projecting future events. Differently, in *Boys and Girls*, a central scene (13:12-13:58) captures Margaret in her room, while looking at her refracted image in a big mirror. She is sitting down, her posture static, her gaze profound: like Vicky in *Thanks for the Ride*, Margaret is not checking her appearance, but scrutinizing and questioning her identity. Poorly illuminated, these scenes enact tension: no narcissistic self-confidence can be traced on the faces of these female characters. In the fourth mirror scene of *Lives of Girls and Women* (41:00-41:15), the only participant is Del, sitting in her room in front of a table mirror, trying different hairstyles, with a self-admiring and self-approving expression. The soundscape is a soft and sensual melody, which accompanies this slowing down, introspective, and intimate unit. From the diegetic viewpoint, this meditative scene enables the character to acquire awareness of her identity and anticipates the climax of the story. The last introspective instance (1:09:15-1:09:25) shows Johanna in front of a mirror at Ken's place, while getting ready

for the night: she is wearing an old-fashioned nightgown and her expression projects desolation. After the mirror scene, yet, she enters Ken's bed while he is sleeping, gives him a soft kiss, and leaves the room.

In the categories discussed above, mirrors enable the mirroring character to act, to feel, and to think: they assist in the performance of material, perceptive, and cognitive processes. In the next categories, described below, mirrors fulfil more oblique functions: the mirroring/mirrored subject has less control over the visual process, is unaware, criticized, or even excluded.

A mirror, placed inside a fitting room, where Johanna tries on a green dress, plays a significant role in *Hateship Loveship's* shop sequence (34:38-35:51). Unlike the validating mirror, this mirror criticizes the body. The scene is not private, the body is exposed. Johanna's refracted image is being observed, simultaneously, by herself and by the shop owner; the two visual perceptions are distinguished by the personality, sensitivity, and interest of the gazers. On the one hand, the owner wants to enhance and exploit Johanna's negative perception of her body and make her buy the green dress. On the other hand, the main character is trying to improve her figure with a new outfit, is trying to change her life. It is not by chance that the film ends with Johanna in her green dress, alongside her husband and her baby child. The layered heterotopic mirror, once more, operates as a diegetic trigger, which upsets and transforms the narrative.

Tension in the mirroring process is also suggested by several rear view mirrors and side mirrors present in *Thanks for the Ride*, *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Away from Her*. These items are always associated with a car and a male character and they deal with negotiated agency. *Away from Her* opens with Grant, who is holding an address written on a piece of paper (00:23-00:42). He is driving towards Marian's house to ask her to bring Audrey back to Meadowlake: this is his ultimate attempt to save Fiona, whose health condition has quickly deteriorated. The side mirror does not reflect Grant; it shows the street and the area behind

him. The reflected image is blurred and out of focus. Grant only casts a minor, almost imperceptible glance at the side mirror. This scene is followed by a flashback unit, in slow motion, accompanied by Grant's voice-over, in which Fiona proposed that the young man get married. Three rear view mirrors are shot later in the film: when Grant and Fiona drive back home after the medical examination in which her senile dementia is first diagnosed (11:44-11:55); when Grant drives Fiona to Meadowlake for her hospitalization (30:54-30:58); and when Grant drives home alone after visiting his wife at Meadowlake (49:55-50:05). In all cases, the rear view mirror at first only reflects Grant; then the camera moves to the front and shows the couple in a two shot.

A side mirror is also present in a short scene (1:13:43-1:13:45) in *Lives of Girls and Women*, set outside, just in front of Del's house. This scene depicts Garnet French, a boy Del is dating, gazing at the young woman in the side mirror of his pick-up. He has just convinced her to leave her books to follow him. Spectators do not have a view of Del but rather catch a close-up of Garnet's self-satisfied face in the mirror looking at Del. This shot is reminiscent of a similar one in *Thanks for the Ride*, with George gazing at Vicky in the rear view mirror. Both films rely on the rear view window in the car to capture a patronizing male gaze upon the female characters that negotiates agency. By bringing a power imbalance into play, the intrusive, aggressive, male gaze expresses the privileged position of the gazer over the gazed.

At other times, mirror scenes feature a clash between the mirroring and mirrored character. In *Lives of Girls and Women*, Del is refracted when her mother is in front of the mirror, while the mother is refracted when the daughter is in front of the mirror. In the already mentioned lipstick scene (17:45-17:52), the woman turns towards Del and says: «You look charming!» and the mirror shows the daughter. The third mirror scene in the same film (36:17-36:30) shows Del in her room, in front of a big mirror set on a table. The girl's face is not visible, but her mother's figure is refracted. The two are having a dialogue and Del is sharing some

negative gossip she has heard about Fern and Mr. Chamberlain, which the mother firmly rejects. Mirrors can include and exclude and, by their capacity to govern perspective, generate (dis)connections. Unlike the intrusive mirror, the unwanted reflection is not due to the character's gaze, but to the position of the camera. This inclusive compositional strategy has, indeed, an impact on the construction of the main character: Del's identity is strictly connected to that of her mother. This bond is valid and mutual, since her mother forms part of Del's growth as a young woman. Yet, inclusion is not unproblematic; it always carries tension and conflict.

Mirror and mirroring from page to screen

After identifying some categories for the use of mirrors in the selected six film adaptations, this section examines the adaptation process itself and how it affects the mirror trope. Are the mirrors present in the stories or not? How do the visual representations of mirrors in the film adaptations engage with their literary counterparts? In the process of audio-visual adaptation, the mirror scenes undergo semantically dense textual processes, including additions, omissions, expansions, and compressions.

In some cases, the film adaptations add mirrors to scenes although they are not present in the short stories. Polley's film relies on this strategy in a twofold way. On the one hand, as mentioned before, *Away from Her* significantly adds several rear windows to depict Grant. This device makes it possible to capture on screen the focalization on the male character found in the literary text. Yet, the use of rear and side mirrors also makes for a marked, oblique, uncanny sort of focalization. On the other hand, the film adds a scene in which Grant admires himself in the mirror in the entryway, echoing a similar scene featuring Fiona. In this way, Grant's character is made more relevant and more complex than in the story, consistent with his more frequent appearance as a

represented participant on the screen. From a stylistic perspective, these additions, then, operate as repetitions with variations, as subtle structuring and cohesive devices in the cinematographic narrative.³⁶

Sometimes, film adapters expand the presence and role of mirrors that were only succinctly mentioned in the stories. For instance, in the short story *Boys and Girls*, the protagonist admits:

I had not thought about it very often since, but sometimes when I was busy, working at school, or standing in front of the mirror combing my hair and wondering if I would be pretty when I grew up, the whole scene would flash into my mind.³⁷

Margaret is remembering the scene in which her father killed a horse; the memory is triggered by the mirror. This self-mirroring action occurs «sometimes», as an alternative to schoolwork, and enables the protagonist to comb her hair and wonder. The passage outlines a network of actions, interconnected as alternatives or additions («or», «and»), among which the mirroring process takes place. The film instead selects and expands this mirror scene and makes it more relevant. In so doing, it reveals the high level of introspection that takes place in the story, which in the literary text is expressed through direct and indirect free thought.

Also differing from the written texts, in some scenes, the audio-visual adaptations compress a scene, which is more extended in the story. This is the case in *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* and revolves around the green dress:

Right ahead of her, a full-length mirror showed her in Mrs. Willet's high-quality but shapeless long coat, with a few inches of lumpy bare legs above the ankle socks.

They did that on purpose, of course. They set the mirror there so you could get a proper notion of your deficiencies, right away, and then – they hoped – you would jump to the conclusion that you had to buy something to alter the picture. Such a transparent trick that it would

³⁶ A. Berthin-Scaillet, *A Reading of Away from Her...*

³⁷ A. Munro, *Boys and Girls*, p. 123.

have made her walk out, if she had not come in determined, knowing what she had to get.³⁸

The oxymoronic syntagm «transparent trick» reveals the fact that the mirror is not a neutral instrument, but a device at the service of the shop's owner. It is meant to highlight the customers' «deficiencies» and to convince them to remedy them by purchasing items of clothing. The symbolic relevance of the mirror is confirmed by its position almost at the beginning of the short story, in the second section, and by the length of the passage. The whole story, indeed, revolves around a trick (fake correspondence) and its unexpected consequences (a wedding and a child). This passage seems to embed the meaning of the whole story: Johanna accepts the mirror's trick and the fake correspondence in order to transform her life.

However, the most significant mirror-based strategy in the adaptation process is that of omission. What is obliterated is a scene where Del plays in front of the mirror and manipulates the refracted image:

I would go to the deep mirror in the built-in sideboard and look at the reflection in the room – all dark wainscoting, dark beams, the brass lighting fixture like a little formal tree growing the wrong way, with five branches stiffly curved, ending in glass flowers. By getting them into a certain spot in the mirror I could make my mother and Fern Doherty pull out like rubber bands, all wavering and hysterical, and I could make my own face droop disastrously down one side, as if I had a stroke.³⁹

Del challenges the reflective function of the mirror with a subversive act. This scene is absent from the film *Life of Girls and Women*, which is more concerned with and confined within the sensorial and sensuous dimension of Del's growth. Del is, indeed, more prismatic in the literary than the filmic text.

Consistent with this, another mirror-related scene left out of the adaptation is when Del recites a poem in front of the mirror,

³⁸ A. Munro, *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*, p. 8.

³⁹ A. Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p. 89.

thus anticipating her future as writer. In line with Leszczynska's observations,⁴⁰ Munro's text foregrounds Del's literary potential more than the film does.

I turned around, went back into the hall to look in the dim mirror at my twisted wet face. Without diminishment of pain I observed myself; I was amazed to think that the person suffering was me, for it was not me at all; I was watching. I was watching, I was suffering. I said into the mirror a line from Tennyson, from my mother's *Complete Tennyson* that was a present from her old teacher, Miss Rush. I said it with absolute sincerity, absolute irony. *He cometh not, she said.*⁴¹

Notably, these last two mirror scenes are semantically dense and intertwined. Before assuming her destiny as a writer, Del needs to come to terms with the mother. She accepts being part of a tradition of girls and women who love art and literature. But these women are not faithfully followed. They are challenged, transformed, and exorcized. The short story foregrounds this crisis as the prerequisite for awareness. The film omits these two scenes using, instead, the inclusive mirror-scene typology, whereby it creates a relation between the two female characters.

Conclusion

A semiotically layered and complex trope, the mirror in the film adaptations analyzed here fulfils both marked and unmarked functions. It performs a basic function in material, perceptual, and cognitive processes: in front of a mirror, actors act, think, express emotions. However, more oblique functions are also enacted, as when rear mirrors project intrusive interpersonal gazes, critical mirrors reveal problems and limits, or inclusive mirrors refract unwitting characters and create (dis)connections. The mirror is,

⁴⁰ E. Leszczynska, *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, 2015.

⁴¹ A. Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p. 304.

thus, a heterotopic space, which disturbs the setting, inscribes tension, and upsets the narrative. Conflict is expressed intratextually (e.g. among characters), intertextually (i.e., among adaptations and adapted texts), and intersemiotically (i.e., among modal systems).

The structure and role of mirror scenes is far from homogeneous in this corpus. Differences can be noticed across the screen adaptations in terms of distribution and semiotic implicatures. *Boys and Girls* features the meditation mirror to symbolically signal a profoundly introspective component in the story. Differently, *Thanks for the Ride* shows two mirror scenes: first a validating one, related to George; then a meditative one, related to Vicky. The two scenes (dis)connect the two characters and mark their profound differences in terms of personality and social status. *Connection* adopts a voice-over to reveal Maureen's intimate thoughts in front of a mirror, whereas the dynamic images project a more superficial level: narrative tension is here expressed at the intersemiotic level.

Longer and more recent film adaptations include a higher number and variety of mirror scenes. In *Lives of Girls and Women*, the functional, introspective, and intrusive mirrors reflect the complexity of the protagonist and her multifaceted relationships to her mother and Garnet. *Hateship Loveship* mainly deploys the expressive mirror to portray the passionate main character and the critical mirror to explain the diegetic twist. Like *Thanks for the Ride*, *Away from Her* adopts mirror scenes to problematize the relation between Fiona and Grant, to make Fiona's character more complex, and Grant's character more relevant within the narrative.

Not only does the mirror, as heterotopic space, negotiate intrapersonal dynamics and interpersonal relations. The mirror trope is also useful for exploring relations between the adapted text and the adaptation. Apparently aimed at mere replication, the adaptation process entails discontinuity as transformation: it enacts modal, medial, and aesthetic change. In this vein, intersemiotic processes of omission, addition, extension, and compression are

not regarded as betrayals but instead testify to the creative and transformative components of adaptation.

Specifically, adaptations tend to add or expand the mirror scene on the screen to suggest introspection (e.g. *Boys and Girls*) or focalization (e.g. *Away from Her*). By this, they are used to either symbolize interiority or to negotiate perspective and/as agency. They, however, omit or compress mirror scenes when they enact critical (e.g. *Hateship Loveship*) or playful gazes (e.g. *Lives of Girls and Women*), which impact on the unfolding of the narrative.

Limited in scope, this article is part of a broader project on television and film adaptations of Munro's stories.⁴² The next step will be to examine the behaviour and function of verbal language in audio-visual artefacts, in dialogue, voice-overs, and/or as writing.

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⁴² This work follows four published articles: *La traduzione intersemiotica: da The Bear Came over the Mountain di Alice Munro a Away from Her di Sara Polley*, in P. Faini (ed.), *Terminologia, Linguaggi specialistici, traduzione. Prospettive teoriche e pratiche*, Tangram, Trento 2018, pp. 141-154; 'A sign of a letter coming': *Adapting Munro's (Faked) Epistolary Correspondence*, «Lingue e linguaggi», 28 (2018), pp. 111-122; *Short-film Adaptations of Munro's Stories in the 1980s: A Multimodal Stylistic Analysis*, «Lingue e linguaggi», 33 (2019), pp. 87-99. *Film Adaptations as Intersemiotic Contact Zones: Edge of Madness by Anne Wheeler*, «Textus: English Studies in Italy», 32/2 (2019), pp. 77-91. The present article expands the corpus, elaborates upon the method, changes the focus.

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