The Process of Adapting a Literary Work: A Multifaceted Methodological Approach

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the role of diverse methodological approaches in the adaptation of a literary text to other genres and artistic media. It focuses on analyzing the structural changes that the elements of the text's structure undergo, as well as identifying some of the most significant factors influencing these changes.

This study employs a qualitative research methodology focused on the meta-analysis of adaptation studies and theories, theories of text perception and reading, all framed within structuralist and post-structuralist perspectives. The method of direct observation was also utilized in the adaptation process of Ismail Kadare's novel, "Who Brought Doruntina?" (Kush e solli Doruntinën).

The findings of this work confirm that the structural changes in a text are dictated by structuralist and deconstructionist paradigms, the approach to, and the perception of, the text during the adaptation process. A diachronic approach and the perception of the text through an open reading steer the adaptation process toward an ad hoc structure. In conclusion, we posit that the more open and diachronic the reading and perception of the text, the more substantial the structural changes become during the adaptation process.

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the changes a work of art undergoes, serving not only to enrich and complete the theoretical framework but also to inform practical activity in the process of adapting literary works for stage, screen, or other genres and media.

Keywords: *structuralism, post-structuralism, adaptation, intertextuality, semiotics, dialogism*

Introduction

To better understand and know the process of adapting a work of art to other genres or media, it is essential to trace its developmental history, focusing on some of the most important stages. Undoubtedly, interdisciplinary approaches in the study of the adaptation process, primarily focused on structural changes and the factors influencing these changes, have consistently opened new perspectives, from which deeper meanings and explanations are derived in this field of study.

Theoretical formulations on art, just as artistic works themselves, have developed within specific historical and cultural contexts. The first evidence of artistic works adapted from histories, narratives, myths, or poems comes from antiquity. According to an account from antiquity, it is believed that Aeschylus (525–456 B.C.) stated that his works "are but slices cut off from the great banquet of Homer's poems." This account of the Greek tragedian serves as a clear testament that the phenomenon of adaptation is almost as old as art itself. Meanwhile, the first works and efforts to study and systematize this practice within a more precise theoretical and methodological framework began to appear only in the 20th century. The first theoretical formulations in this field resulted from studies by André Bazin and George Bluestone on the adaptation of literary works to cinema. Canadian academic Linda Hutcheon (2006), known for her studies in literary theory and criticism, emphasizes that for a long time, "fidelity criticism," as it came to be known, was the critical orthodoxy in adaptation studies. Other scholars share this opinion, such as Timothy Corrigan (2007), who also states that the most common discussions and debates about film adaptation generally seem to focus on the notions of specificity and fidelity. Albanian cinematography has not been an exception to this trend. In its entirety, largely for reasons that would be explained by an analysis of the political and ideological context in which Albanian cinematography began and developed, we can confidently assert that cinematic creation in Albania has been entirely dominated by judgment and evaluation based on the criterion of "fidelity." A similar panorama is presented in the practice of adapting literary works for theatre and television, primarily those realized until the end of the 1980s.

On the other hand, contemporary developments in Albanian art have revealed not only the theoretical gap in studies in this field but also the fact that, for the most part, stage and cinematic creation, when addressing the adaptation of a literary work, has remained "hostage" to the notion of "fidelity." Despite this aesthetic reality, attempts and efforts exist to introduce approaches and methodologies into the practice of the adaptation process that do not belong to traditional approaches. The lack of other studies in this field makes discussing the adaptation process even more difficult; therefore, this work aims to address these gaps in the theoretical framework.

We analyzed the progress of the adaptation process in relation to different approaches, such as structuralism, post-structuralism, theories of perception and reading, by tracking and researching factors that directly influence the practical process of adaptation. It was hypothesized that the adaptor's approach and perception of the literary text play a significant role in determining the methodology followed by the adaptation process and structuring the resulting work.

Research Problem

The research problem of this paper arises primarily from the fact that studies in this field are relatively new, and consequently, the adaptation process still has poorly understood aspects. The interplay between different approaches and perspectives in the study of the adaptation process, or even the practice of adaptation, has not only increased the possibility of different interpretations but has also revealed new problems and issues for study, raising questions such as:

- What changes occur in the structure of a literary work during the adaptation process?
- Which structural elements are most prone and exposed to change?
- What factors influence the structuring of the adaptation process?

As a theoretical research problem, investigation into this issue directly affects practice by recommending concrete approaches and interpretations that influence both the process and the adapted work. On the other hand, it is necessary to understand the validity of the significant contradiction formulated by Timothy Corrigan (2007): "on the one hand, adaptation, in its specific and more general sense, suggests alterations, adjustments, and intertextual exchanges, while on the other, discipline denotes and connotes rules, boundaries, and textual restrictions" (p. 30).

We investigated the changes undergone by the elements of the narrative structure of a literary work during its adaptation into another genre or medium. It was posited that the nature and extent of changes in a work's structure during the adaptation process are conditioned by the perception, analytical approach, and interpretation

of the text during adaptation. This paper first discusses the early theoretical approaches and formulations on adaptation, focusing on their concrete effects on the practice of adapting literary texts to stage and cinematic works. The analysis then expands to include disciplines and interdisciplinary studies in other fields. Finally, by highlighting not only theoretical but also practical differences between traditional and non-traditional approaches, the discussion concludes with practical recommendations for the adaptation process. This structure is designed to facilitate the analysis of various theories on adaptation and other related theories, as well as to enable verification of the hypotheses raised in this paper.

Literature Review

The adaptation of literary works to other art forms, primarily cinema and theatre, has been and remains a significant process in the development of art. The fact that studies of this process began only around the second half of the last century is compounded by the fact that, for a long time, debates and discussions about adaptation revolved around the similarities and fidelity the adapted work displayed toward the source material. This paper will examine the adaptation process through the lens of theoretical contributions, concepts, and theses generated by research in other disciplines, which offer opportunities to understand in depth not only the adaptation process but also the work itself, whether it is the source or the work resulting from adaptation. Theories of adaptation, or other theories that have influenced the development of a theoretical framework for studies in this field and have also determined the methods used in practical adaptation, were developed primarily during the 20th century. Concerning the approach and degree of autonomy they create between the source work and the adapted work, adaptation theories can be divided into two main groups.

The first group includes theories that consider adaptation as a process and a work dependent on the source material, both in content and artistic aspects. In this theoretical approach, critics and theorists like René Wellek and Austin Warren emphasized the adapted work's obligation to preserve the aesthetic and content characteristics of the source. Within this group, we also consider theories emphasizing the specific differences and changes between the two media. In this approach, where French critic André Bazin is a prominent contributor, the focus is on the differences between literature and cinema as a medium with profoundly different characteristics from literature.

The second group of theories on adaptation, corresponding to the postmodernist period of studies in this field, comprises theories and approaches that view the adapted work as autonomous and free from the obligations defined by the first group's theories. Among the most important names with significant theoretical

contributions to this group is Linda Hutcheon. The theoretical framework of this second group is enriched by transposing concepts, notions, findings, and results from other fields of study, particularly anthropological and cultural studies. Theories derived from linguistics, psychology, psychoanalysis, semiotics, narrative theory, and theories of perception, reading, and translation have provided new perspectives for adaptation studies. In just a few decades, research theories and methods related to the adaptation process of artistic works have developed, moving from simple models focused on the relationship between the literary work and the adaptation medium to interdisciplinary methods rooted in structuralist and post-structuralist approaches.

Despite the theoretical influx from non-traditional approaches and methods, adaptation, as a product of artistic practice, remains constrained by older approaches and traditional methods. While there is debate about the differences between literature and cinema, little attention has been paid to adapting literary works for theatre or television. Moreover, comparisons are often made between the source work and the film or stage production, overshadowing the screenplay and dramatic text, even though adapting the literary text into a screenplay and dramatic text is crucial for the adaptation process. Furthermore, studies exploring the role of the approach to the adaptation process and the specifics of the target medium in shaping the final adapted work are lacking. These unexplored areas in this field of study require further research.

Methodology

A qualitative approach oriented toward the meta-analysis of some of the main theories and approaches in the field of adapting literary works for stage and screen was used for this study. This data, collected as secondary data, constituted the primary basis for the analysis. Ismail Kadare's novel "Who Brought Doruntina?" was selected as the primary data source. The direct observation method was used in the adaptation of this novel to analyze the application of non-traditional approaches and methods in the adaptation process.

Results

The analysis of major trends and approaches in adaptation revealed that the adaptor's relationship and approach to the source material play a significant role in the adaptation process's trajectory and the adapted work's quality. Changes and transformations in a work consist of modifying or reconfiguring the components of the work's structure. Changes occurring in a work's structure are quantitative,

qualitative, and functional. These changes arise not only from the specific requirements of the target medium but also, and more importantly, from factors inherent in the adaptation process itself.

Discussion

The current theoretical and methodological framework for adaptation studies does not meet the needs of researchers or practitioners. For a long time, the criterion of fidelity to the original work sufficed for analyzing and answering critical questions about film adaptations of literary works. However, other genres, like theatre, opera, or television, remain marginalized in these studies. Dudley Andrew (1984) describes the landscape of theoretical studies on film adaptation as "frequently the most narrow and provincial area of film theory." This observation seems to hold true even 20 years later, as Thomas Leitch (2003) noted that "Adaptation study has indeed for many years been marginal to the study of moving images in general" (p. 167). However, the real issue that has marked theoretical and practical developments in this field lies elsewhere. According to Timothy Corrigan (2007), "The most common discussions and debates about adaptation seem generally to focus on the notions of 'specificity and fidelity'" (p. 31). "Specificity" refers to evaluating and judging the adaptation by examining the specifics of different genres and media, while "fidelity" refers to the dependent relationship between the literary work and the adapted work. This methodological approach, articulated in George Bluestone's (1957) seminal work "Novel into Film," limited debates on adaptation to the similarities between the literary text and the adapted work. For many years, the concept of fidelity to the "meaning" and "essence" of the literary work served as the primary criterion for evaluating adaptations as "successful" or "unsuccessful." American academic and scholar Thomas Leitch (2003) considers the notion of "fidelity" as one of the twelve main fallacies in adaptation theory and practice, arguing:

> "Fidelity to its source text—whether it is conceived as success in re-creating specific textual details or the effect of the whole—is a hopelessly fallacious measure of a given adaptation's value because it is unattainable, undesirable, and theoretically possible only in a trivial sense" (p. 161).

Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins (2010) argue that this approach "perpetuated a reliance on fidelity as a primary criterion for judgment" and "unwittingly defines an adaptation's scope and quality in terms of its allegiance to the primacy of the source text." American film theorist and professor at New York University, Robert Stam (2000), observes that "the language of criticism dealing with the film adaptation of novels has often been profoundly moralistic, awash in terms such as infidelity,

betrayal, deformation, violation, vulgarization, and desecration" (p.54). It is understandable that an analysis using such loaded terms makes it difficult to maintain a rigorous scientific method. Furthermore, the tendency to explain adaptation as a change imposed solely by the differing characteristics of specific genres and media has produced a mechanistic approach in this field. On the one hand, we have the material offered by the literary work, and on the other, the specific form of the genre or medium to which the adaptation is directed. Meanwhile, the adaptor's role is reduced to adapting this literary material with as much fidelity as possible to the new form's structure. From this perspective, it is natural to ask: "Given the indefensibility of fidelity as a criterion for the analysis of adaptations, why has it maintained such a stifling grip on adaptation study?" (Leitch, 2003, p. 162).

A brief overview of Albanian art history reveals two factors driving the perceived obligation to demonstrate fidelity to the literary work:

- The reputation of the author and the work's popularity, upon which adaptors often rely for the success of their adaptation.
- The ideological weight of the themes and messages conveyed by the literary work.

Both factors are evident in the development of Albanian cinema and theatre. In most cases, adapting literary works has not stemmed from the inherent potential of a medium like cinema, theatre, or opera, to absorb and reinterpret material from another medium. Instead, the driving force has often been the obligation to remain ideologically aligned with the original message, transplanting it untouched and unaltered. The messages conveyed by the literary text remain the ultimate goal. "Most theories of adaptation assume, however, that the story is the common denominator, the core of what is transposed across different media and genres" (Hutcheon, 2006, p.10). Adaptations of Ismail Kadare's prose are a notable exception. In most of these adaptations, there is a greater tendency to remain "faithful" to the author's style and language than to the work's inherent messages. However, despite its long dominance, the "fidelity and specificity" approach has not proven to be a convincing method, even in challenging the notion of fidelity itself, because "The only remake that would have maintained perfect fidelity to the original text would have been a re-release of that text" (Leitch, 2003, p.162).

Structuralist Perspective

Recognizing the limitations of an approach focused on fidelity, adaptation studies began incorporating concepts and principles from other disciplines. Interdisciplinary research, particularly after the second half of the 20th century,

yielded significant results in understanding the individual and the world. Structuralism offered a new way of observing human existence and the world, including art and literature. The structuralist approach, in addition to updating theories of knowledge, also produced new understandings of reality. According to Jean Piaget (1970), structural thinking played a significant role in developing new concepts in various fields, including mathematics, logic, physics, biology, psychology, linguistics, anthropology, and philosophy, by formulating principles and concepts that began to be transposed between disciplines. Research in art also became part of this trend. New research methods provided suitable approaches to studying literature. The concepts and principles formulated by Viktor Shklovsky, Roman Jakobson, and Boris Eichenbaum, founders of the Moscow Structuralist School, marked a turning point in literary analysis by shifting the focus toward the structural components of a work and the function of its internal elements. According to Speller (2011), Lévi-Strauss's transposition of the structuralist principles of Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic structuralism opened up the perspective of studying works of art and literature as one would study language. The theories of Roland Barthes, Juri Lotman, Mikhail Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva, and others, completely changed the approach to the adaptation process and the adapted work, creating the possibility of a method and principles that also serve the artistic practice of adaptation.

How did studies in other disciplines influence the creation of new concepts and principles in adaptation, and what do we mean by the structure of a work? In his book *Structuralism* (1970), Piaget explains:

> "As a first approximation, we may say that a structure is a system of transformations" and "the notion of structure is comprised of three key ideas: the idea of wholeness, the idea of transformation, and the idea of self-regulation" (p. 5).

These three key ideas, which Piaget considers essential qualities of structure, are important for explaining not only the structure of a work of art but also its adaptation process. The idea of transformation expresses the structure's capacity for change. Based on this definition, adaptation, as a phenomenon accompanying all changes and transformations, including adapting a literary text for stage or screen, manifests itself through changes in structure. Juri Lotman (1977 [1971]), a prominent figure in semiotics and Russian-Estonian literature at the University of Tartu, equates a work's structure with its idea-content (p. 12): "the idea-content of a work is its structure." Studying a literary work's structure as a closed entity has been fruitful in understanding its depths. Ferdinand de Saussure, the Swiss linguist and philosopher known for his contributions to semiotics, is also considered a founder of structuralism in linguistics. Saussure's main principles are expressed in his theory of signs. For Saussure (1916), linguistics is "a science that studies the life

of signs within society" (p. 16). Another important concept from Saussure (1916) is the arbitrary nature of linguistic signs (p. 67). The methodological approach to researching the structure of artistic works was further strengthened by the French literary theorist, philosopher, and semiotician Roland Barthes. In *The Rustle of Language* (1989), Barthes views structuralism as a science that "finds itself" at every level of a literary work (p. 6). The development of the narrative approach by structuralist philosopher and literary critic Tzvetan Todorov demonstrates that the study of literary works became entirely focused on their structural levels. When discussing the relationship between elements at different structural levels, we must consider the concept of the dialogic relationship between components within a work's structure, or even between the structures of two different works, a concept formulated and explained by Mikhail Bakhtin.

In summary, structuralism, unlike previous approaches in art and literary studies, placed the focus of analysis and research within the artwork itself, highlighting its structure and the internal relationships between its components. Consequently, the approach to the author's role also changed, moving from "author-centrism" to viewing the author's role within the specific levels and elements of the work's structure. This shift serves as a precursor to post-structuralism, which pushes the author to the periphery of artistic study, ultimately declaring the "death of the author." The approach to the author's role and the concept of dialogue between structural elements were crucial in paving the way for the post-structuralist period in the study and interpretation of art.

Post-structuralist Perspective

In the 1960s, the debate surrounding structuralism, primarily in French intellectual and academic circles and some Eastern European centers, encompassed various fields, including philosophy, linguistics, literature, and cultural criticism. Scholars like Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Julia Kristeva challenged some of structuralism's concepts and principles. This rejection of part of the structuralist legacy, along with the development of new concepts and theses, gave rise to post-structuralism. The main difference between the two approaches lies in how they conceive of structure. Post-structuralism posits that "the literary text is not a closed, but an open structure… to be reworked by a boundless context" (Stam, 2000, p. 57). Other differences emerged regarding how texts are understood. Post-structuralism argues that every text has not only an open meaning but also uncertain, unstable, and often unclear meanings, reflecting the potential for multiple interpretations. Recognizing these multiple meanings highlighted the importance of perception and reading in textual interpretation. Post-structuralists viewed these multiple

meanings as an attribute of the reader rather than inherent to the text itself, giving the reader a significant role in understanding and interpreting a work. Regarding the reader's role and theories of perception, Linda Hutcheon (2006) states:

> "Reader-response theory, which flourished in Europe and North America in the 1980s, may be partly responsible for the change in the way we think about reception in the mode of telling. Thanks to theorists like Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, and Michael Riffaterre, readers are no longer considered passive recipients of textual meaning but active contributors to the aesthetic process, working with the text to decode signs and then to create meaning" (p. 134).

Julia Kristeva's involvement in the debates surrounding structuralism marks a crucial moment in post-structuralist thought. While discussing Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts in Paris, Kristeva first articulated the term "intertextuality," initially analogous to Bakhtin's "dialogism," but later developing it into a key concept in literary criticism. Kristeva (1980) argues that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double" (p. 66). Intertextuality became central to post-structuralist thought because, for them, a text "cannot exist as a hermetic or self-sufficient whole, and so does not function as a closed system" (Worton & Still, 1991, p. 1).

For our purpose of investigating adaptation, the post-structuralist approach provides a clear analytical framework for understanding the text selected for adaptation, the adaptation process, the resulting work, the influencing factors, and the adaptor's role as a reader. We have identified the key factors involved in adapting an artwork: the adaptor (reader), the source work, the adaptation process, and the resulting work. Linda Hutcheon (2006) notes that the process and the product share the same definition (p. 8). However, more important than this shared definition is understanding each component's role and the effects of prioritizing one over the other. When the adaptor prioritizes the process, it becomes exploratory, increasing the potential for a new and original structure for the adapted work. Conversely, when prioritizing the product, considering that "each medium has its specificity deriving from its respective materials of expression" (Stam, 2000, p. 59), the adaptor becomes more of an implementer, trying to fit the source material into the new medium's format. This approach views the adapted work within a defined, closed, self-sufficient, and potentially formalistic structure, risking a schematic outcome. The explanation that "we experience adaptations (as adaptations) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation" (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 8) focuses on the process, not the final product. Post-structuralism offers

approaches and methodologies for an open, exploratory, and unpredictable adaptation process, not predetermined by the new medium's structural specifications.

One of Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic concepts, adapted by Levi-Strauss in his studies of myth and culture, is "binary opposition." According to Fogarty (2005), Saussure's definition is significant because it is "not a contradictory relation but, a structural and complementary one." This understanding helps identify not only opposing but also complementary meanings within a text, expressed through hidden or missing structures. In the preface to *Of Grammatology* (1997), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak notes that for Derrida, a text, whether "literary," "psychic," "anthropological," or otherwise, is "a play of presence and absence, a place of the effaced trace" (p. lvii).

The National Theatre's stage adaptation of Kadare's "Who Brought Doruntina?" (1980), titled " A Midwinter Night's Dream " (1999), reveals hidden structures within the novel. Unlike previous adaptations, " A Midwinter Night's Dream " presents a structure arising from an inverted perception of the binary relationship between external and internal time. The adaptor situates the stage adaptation's narrative entirely within the protagonist's internal time. Stresi, Kadare's protagonist, awakens from a rainy night's sleep to the news of Doruntina's arrival. The adaptor reinterprets this as occurring within Stresi's dreams before the news arrives in external time. This shift to internal time affects all other structural components. Spaces overlap: the bedroom becomes both Doruntina's mother's house and the village cemetery. Internal time creates a vertical temporal structure where past, present, and future intertwine. Stresi speaks of Doruntina's wedding and death as the most significant events in the village. The bed transforms into a bathtub where Stresi's wife lies suffering. This intertextual variation evokes Kadare's "Before the Bath" (1991), with Stresi enacting the drowning of his wife three times. Kadare (personal communication, September 1999) noted that the theatre's resources allowed the adaptation to explore depths inaccessible to literature.

The relationship between the adaptor as reader and the author's text is complex. Wollen's (1969) explanation of a director's approach to an author's text offers a useful analogy: "The director does not subordinate himself to another author; his source is only a pretext, which provides catalysts, scenes which use his own preoccupations to produce a radically new work" (p. 113). Defining the adaptation process presents a similar challenge. Given the unresolved problems and unanswered questions in this field, Linda Hutcheon's (2006) definition offers a broader perspective: "Sometimes, like biological adaptation, cultural adaptation involves migration to favorable conditions: stories travel to different cultures and different media" (p. 31).

Conclusions

This paper concludes with observations from the analysis and recommendations for the practice of adaptation.

- Adaptation is fundamentally about the capacity for change.
- These changes are quantitative, qualitative, and functional, affecting both content and form.
- Changes during adaptation manifest as structural differences.
- Compared to previous approaches, structuralism provides a deeper understanding of art. However, it represents a static phase of adaptation, scanning the literary work's content and exhibiting normative tendencies.
- Post-structuralist approaches foster a dynamic reconfiguration process toward a new structure.
- The extent of structural change depends on several variables.
- The adaptor (reader) is the primary determinant of the new structure.
- A more diachronic and paradigmatic reading leads to greater divergence between the source and adapted works.
- Orienting the adaptation process solely toward the new medium's specifications risks formalism and schematism.
- Adaptors should explore the process to find an *ad hoc* structure.
- Juri Lotman (1977), quoting Dostoevsky, explains the *ad hoc* structure: "I believe that for different forms of art there are corresponding series of poetic thoughts, such that a thought can never be expressed in terms of a form that does not correspond to it" (p. 33).

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