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Creativity as the driving force of screen adaptations (based on the “Lost Symbol”)

The article deals with the creative aspect of screen adaptations as a form of intersemiotic translation. It considers the film-makers' creativity as a tool employed to ensure commercial appeal of the target media product while following the conventions of meaning-making in the multimodal space of cinema and preserving social and cultural features of the source. Adapters are not bound by the equivalence criterion to the same extent literary translators are. However, the choice of the work of literature is never made at random, it is determined by the value of the source text for the target audience. Consequently, its reinterpretation shall meet the expectations of those familiar with the original but also respect the affordances in force in a medium where the visual aspect prevails over language.

The current paper studies the screen adaptation of “The Lost Symbol” by Dan Brown, a novel filled with mystery but also focused on the broad historical and cultural perspective on the facts and myths surrounding the Order of Masons. The film-makers choose to emphasize the quest-like nature of the narrative by increasing the number of riddles in the spirit of Freemasonry in order to reinforce suspense. Their characters also evolve in terms of personalities they endowed with. Their feelings and emotions in the novel are solely restricted to what is required in order to pursue the search. The actors' play, however, cannot be as simple as that which urges film-makers to elaborate on every facet of their individuality. A complex mixture of fear, love, curiosity, regret, inspiration and much more become the driving force of the story. Meanwhile, the ancient wisdom they seek is no longer reserved for a limited circle of the enlightened but for anyone able to see through the symbols.

Key words: *affordances, creativity, cultural value, intersemiotic translation, screen adaptation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since its emergence, cinema has been attracting more and more attention among scientists not only due to its dynamic development but also the scope of its influence on society. Its ability to reach out to extremely broad audiences makes cinema an invaluable resource able to give an insight into the very depth of human culture at a certain period of time. However, film-makers also seek to create a product that would appeal to people from various backgrounds and walks of life which becomes possible only on condition that it resonates with them, their values, beliefs, expectations as representatives of a certain culture. It is in this search for balance between the intellectual and the mass content, between different ages, occupations and much more that the very essence of culture manifests itself, especially when it comes to screen adaptations. The present study is based on "The Lost Symbol", a novel by Dan Brown reimagined for screen purposes in 2021. The **object** of the study is represented by the shifts in the source work determined by the affordances characteristic of cinema as a multimodal medium disposing of a variety of meaning-making tools other than language. The **subject** of the research is creativity as a means of balancing conventions of the meaning-making process in cinema as well as social and cultural specifics of the source text. The study was **aimed** at exploring creative decisions that film-makers take in order to turn a literary work into a visually appealing product which still preserves essential characteristics of the source that determined the choice of the source.

It would seem that modern technology gives almost infinite opportunities to innovate and still humanity has never stopped retelling the same stories over and over again using all the resources available. The phenomenon of screen adaptation is so complex and multifaceted that it has sparked interest of scientists in the fields of translation studies, semiotics, intermedial studies, adaptation studies and more. Only a multidisciplinary perspective can account for all the variety of factors and players involved in the creative transposition of a book onto the screen which determines the **relevance** of the research. The research proceeds from the view that a screen adaptation is a manifestation of a translation process, infinitely more complex than an interlinguistic translation, a narrative eloquent linguistically, visually and auditorily. The study is, thus, based on a multidisciplinary approach combining findings of Semiotics, Translation and Film Studies. The main stages of the research included:

- providing a theoretical framework for intersemiotic translation as an inherently creative process of adaptation across different media;
- determining the main shifts that took place while adapting "The Lost Symbol" for screen purposes at the level of characters as well as the general representation of the storyline;

- establishing the creative solutions the film-makers find in order to preserve the identity of the source while ensuring its visual appeal and dynamics in the new medium.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The process of adapting a literary work for functioning in a different environment shows numerous similarities with what R. Jakobson once termed intersemiotic translation. Though initially it covered only "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems" [10, c. 114], the concept was further expanded to encompass interactions between other forms of art such as cinema, dance, sculpture, video games, etc. Moreover, semioticians argue that any product of culture can be viewed as a text regardless of the semiotic system(s) used to create it, thus, both a book and a film are considered as texts entering into relations which, from the cultural perspective, fit into the concept of translation, a text as an almost infinite process unfolding within an intersemiotic space. Therefore, any cultural phenomenon potentially possesses a translational dimension [14].

According to P. Cattrysse, both translation and adaptation "involve interaction of users with texts in a socio-temporally defined context and argues that both are teleological processes, in that they are influenced by source and target (con)text conditioners, the latter of which play a pivotal role in the overall decision-making" [6, c. 47-79]. Although it proved impossible to use the traditional criterion of equivalence to account for the changes that adapters introduce, the question of influences guiding them in their pursuit remained open. K. Perdikaki establishes the following interpretive categories underlying adaptation shifts:

1. Economic reasons which are related to the need to make a profit. This group of factors covers all the tools employed to attract the biggest audience possible and manifests itself not only in the changes made to the story but also in trailers, interviews with actors released before the premiere, etc.
2. Creative reasons result from translational subjectivity and reveal the manipulations that the source undergoes due to individual interpretation of the adapters.
3. Social reasons deal with the way social issues are presented in the original and the adaptation within a given spatiotemporal context [15, c. 83-84].

However, creativity seems to deserve a much more important place in the adaptation process which is inherently creative just as any translation. Though the place of creativity has long been a debatable issue in Translation Studies, the shift towards the cultural and, later, cognitive paradigm demonstrated that no translation can be viewed as a mechanical re-coding based on purely automatised skills. On the one hand "many of the problems that translators face are of the open-ended kind, i.e. there is no predetermined solution,

they cannot be solved consciously under controlled conditions, and the solutions cannot be subjected to absolute verification. Thus their solution requires the use of problem-solving strategies that are creative in nature" [13, c. 113]. On the other hand, in cognitive sciences creativity is defined as the ability to create a product that is not only innovative but also appropriate for an intended situation and possessing a certain value under the given circumstances [17, c. 95]. Essentially, it means that any creative process has its limitations but in translation it gives "voice to the intention of the original not as reproduction but as harmony, as a supplement to the language in which it expresses itself" [3, c. 79]. Any new translation enriches the original and reaffirms its value within a given cultural environment.

Within his theory of translation, A. Lefevere used the term of refraction which is applicable to adaptations as well. Refraction is "the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads the work" [12, c. 205]. Adapters are basically rewriting the original literary work to "refract" it onto a different medium or a combination thereof. A. Lefevere focuses on the needs of the target audience as the main factor in the translation process which requires a certain compromise, a compromise that adapters seek when attempting to reconcile two or more semiotic systems. "A translator's creativity is an essential element in the translation process as it... reconciles what might seem conflicting notions: fidelity and freedom" [2]. In fact, it is argued that translation is an act of repeating the creative path that the author took to produce their work, a process which is inherently multi-layered in case of a screen adaptation where different actors come together to produce a new artwork [9].

Thus, we view creativity as a feature inherent in the act of adapting a book for screen purposes which allows film-makers to achieve a commercial success through an optimal choice of meaning-making resources and their combination as well as to adjust the socio-cultural aspect of the original work to the expectations of the target audience.

Although the choice of the work to be adapted is largely based on economic reasons, it is creativity of all those involved in production that makes it a success. "Novels that are adapted and recontextualised ... acquire a dynamic mobility through their contact with new media of social experience, responding to needs of contemporary audiences" [15, c. 4]. Stepping out of the pages, the story starts a new life and has to be rebuilt with a new, broader toolkit which encompasses much more than the written word. The filmmakers are, therefore, tasked with selecting aspects of the original work to highlight or those to remove. Sometimes, certain new elements are introduced to lure the audiences which is often the case with personal relationships being reinforced on screen or a love story being added. In order to ensure relevance of their work

and, consequently, its commercial success, filmmakers are free to expand the narrative at their own discretion, to move it to a different era, to add a touch of realism or fantasy, etc. Fidelity to the source text is no longer of primary importance, what matters instead is the ability of the adaptation to "address an era's cultural needs and pressures" [1, c. 37], to serve its purpose for a new audience.

However, multimodal spaces are also governed by certain guiding principles or affordances [11]. Essentially, it means that some aspects of meaning can be conveyed more easily in an image while music is more suitable for others, etc. Meaning, thus, is unevenly distributed across different modes [11, c. 285] which allows film-makers to choose the resources that will prove most eloquent when combined. Cinema "derives its impact from a number of technical, performative and aesthetic strategies that combine in a syncretizing, largely hybrid medium, establishing interlocking conventions of storytelling" [16]. It is much more explicit in nature when compared to literature.

A Cinematographic image carries more "data" than a literary one, and is ordered, though not in a linear way, based on the legibility and visibility of more or less recognizable figures of the world (people, objects, landscapes);

B The literary text conveys more information, more implicit than its cinematographic equivalent which must necessarily "show" something. For this reason the written text can be considered more ambiguous than the visual one [8].

Cinema is also inherently more dynamic. Authors of literary works can describe feelings or landscapes for many pages which is impossible in cinema whose audience expects a completely different pace. In order to create a commercially successful product, film-makers need to combine creative use of semiotic resources and respect for the media and cultural affordances in the given context.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The current study is focused on the screen adaptation of "The Lost Symbol" by D. Brown [4] as a vivid example of the film-makers' creativity aimed at constructing a visually appealing story based on a book, highly intellectual in nature but also very much reliant on the broad perspective of human history and culture it provides through verbal means. The story starts with Langdon, a Harvard professor, receiving a call from his mentor who asks him to deliver a lecture at the Capitol. However, upon arrival, he finds only Peter's hand placed in the middle of one of the halls and the mysterious caller tells him to embark on a quest to unearth ancient wisdom concealed with the order of Masons if he wishes to see Peter alive again.

The first decision the film-makers take is to shift the timeline. In the series, Robert Langdon is shown as a young Harvard professor who has not yet gone through

all of the adventures depicted in “The Da Vinci Code” and “Angels and Demons”, the change which represents the first step towards characters who are much more profound, much more “alive”. The key to Dan Brown’s writing is extensive research in history, theology, mythology while his characters are there to serve the plot, to resolve the mystery. However, people appearing on the screen are always perceived in their entirety. “The cinema cannot avoid a rather precise representation of visual detail. It cannot ‘say’ simply, ‘A man came into a room’” [7, c. 30]. The characters communicate with the viewer not only through words, but also through mimics, tone and pace of their speech, their movements and other means of non-verbal communication. It is their “humanity” that allows film-makers to connect with their audience on the basis of a phenomenon known as emotional contagion which takes place when we subconsciously start mirroring feelings and emotions of other people. Consequently, those responsible for the screen adaptation face the need to “complement” the images created by the author which, in case of “The Lost Symbol”, leads them to highlight the relationships already embedded in the novel which is primarily reflected in Langdon’s relations with Peter and Katherine Solomon.

The book briefly mentions that Peter was like a father to Langdon, replacing the family the latter was deprived of. Nevertheless, the young age of Langdon in the series enables the film-makers to take a creative approach to representation of their connection vividly shown in multiple flashbacks. More importantly, this change helps Ashley Zukerman, the actor playing Langdon in the TV show, to reach out to the audience conveying a vast range of feelings and emotions: from profound respect to friendly irony, from sincere gratitude to extreme anxiety knowing his mentor is in danger. Peter’s image is equally expanded on the screen. While the writer gives the recipient virtually no opportunity to get to know Peter who the authorities find at the end of the story, in the series he is no longer an ephemeral figure holding higher wisdom. Malakh kidnaps Langdon making him work with Peter in order to crack the puzzle. The strength of their bond becomes obvious starting from the very first moment when they hug each other, Langdon asking his friend whether he is in pain. The emotional impact on the audience is reinforced by the fact that Peter, being a 33rd degree Mason who swore to protect the ancient wisdom at all costs, agrees to assist in uncovering the secret in order to prevent Langdon from being tortured.

The series also presents the relationship between Langdon and Katherine in a completely new light. Dan Brown’s Katherine is Peter’s sister while in the series she is presented as his daughter who is in love with Langdon. In spite of the fact that they are working together to save Peter both in the book and on the screen, the film-makers’ decision to introduce a love story gives a new dimension to their quest. An extensive

use of flashbacks, in its turn, provides the audience with a sufficient background for their relationship.

On the one hand, the described changes are determined by the medium itself. The cast plays a crucial role in the success of a TV show, sometimes even before its release, while the characters invite the audience into the fictional world. However, the viewers will follow only if they believe them, if they are realistic enough to blur the border between fiction and the world as we know it. It is the film-makers responsibility to choose which shifts are to be introduced, what kind of an image should be projected for the character to capture the viewer’s imagination and engage with them at an emotional level. Proceeding from the source, the film-makers use their own creativity to make their final product as holistic as possible.

Cinema is also inherently more dynamic and visually explicit while a literary work can prove more descriptive allowing the reader to reconstruct the necessary details on the basis of lengthy conversations or internal monologues, thorough historical overviews or depiction of landscape and architecture. Dan Brown’s novels attract the recipient due to the insight into history, culture and science that they provide. Meanwhile, the right pace for a TV show is ensured through a change of events fast enough to keep the viewer in suspense. The film-makers, thus, focus on the mystery to be resolved and amplify it even further. Both in the book and in the TV series Langdon seeks to uncover the mystery of a pyramid he found in Peter’s Chamber of Reflection in the basement of the Capitol. Still, in the novel, the capstone necessary to decipher the hidden message was entrusted to Langdon by his mentor a long time ago even though he was not aware of the fact. Langdon in the TV show, in his turn, has to find it which allows the film-makers to add several more layers to the quest and to preserve the eventful rhythm of the story.

Katherine shows him a page from the Old Testament in Hebrew sealed with a Leviathan Cross which, according to her father, was more important than his life. Some of the words have been replaced which eventually leads Langdon to use the keyword cipher resulting in three words “Buried Ezra Dove”. Since Ezra Dove was a Freemason, Katherine and Langdon decide to check the place of his burial where they get into a trap but manage to escape through a secret path marked by a relief. It depicts Jona which in Hebrew means Dove and the whale, another name for Leviathan. That path not only saves their life but also gives another clue, a tape that shows one of the Freemasons who is able to bend matter to his will since he broke his oath and gained the ancient wisdom. The tape also contains the following riddle:

An architect with forty-Six,
builds a bridge of weightless bricks.
In Etam waits a stone once hewn,
returned at last to mother’s womb.
Lastly, heed the Starling’s call,
for all who seek must also fall [5].

Bellamy, Peter's friend and also a Freemason, helps Langdon understand that the riddle refers to Pierre Charles L'Enfant, the architect who drew plans for Washington. The only possessions that survived till present included three watches, three compasses, two books and a map, at the time of his death they cost exactly 46 dollars. The time on the watches points to the latitude while the compass when combined with the Masonic square on the map shows the longitude. These coordinates lead to the quarry where most of the stone was taken to build some of the most famous structures in Washington. It is there that Langdon finally finds the capstone.

Interestingly, all the additional riddles perfectly correlate with the general storyline and the spirit of Dan Brown's work filled with masonic symbols. The film-makers succeed in expanding the narrative with some of their own ideas without disturbing its general logic. Thus, a viewer unfamiliar with the novel will hardly be able to guess that these stages of the quest were never part of the source. The creative choices made provide for a greater visual appeal as well as keep the viewer involved since one mystery is immediately followed by another.

The transformations described above also serve another purpose, they allow the film-makers to visualize all the potential of noetics. It is considered to be a pseudoscience dealing with the ways the human mind influences the world around. However, it is crucial for the story created by Dan Brown since the ideas underlying research in noetics seem to be in agreement with the ancient wisdom guarded by Freemasons. The novel suggests almost infinite opportunities opening for those able to use their consciousness in order to transform reality. The film-makers, in their turn, demonstrate irrefutable proof of the ideas implied by the literary work. Katherine uses one of her developments to help Langdon unlock the code he thought was beyond his reach. The helm she makes him wear stimulates neuronal activity and reduces external "noises" which prompts the symbologist to decipher the mystery concealed in the Hebrew parchment. The film the protagonists find at the cemetery vividly shows what can be achieved by the ones who unearth the ancient secrets. The creative vision of the adapters reinforces the concept the writer gives a hint to.

Additionally, Katherine, desperate to find her father, recurs to the services of a specialist in psychometry, the so-called remote viewer, who can sense other people at a distance. The man working in a secret governmental program of psychic surveillance, manages to understand that Peter is surrounded by something connected with one of the elements and able to reflect light while he is, indeed, floating in a chamber of sensory deprivation. If the book mostly describes cutting-edge equipment available to Katherine and gives only a slight hint on its actual application, the film-makers make it quite evident which not only helps the film-makers to balance

verbal descriptions characteristic of the novel and visual explicitation necessary for the TV show but also reinforces the idea that ancient mysteries are worth looking for. The key elements of the plot are unfolding against the background of music written by Dennis Tschirner which intensifies the sense of awe and thrill.

The need to keep the audience in anticipation until the very last moment also determines a certain change in the way the TV series ends. In the novel, the authorities stop Malakh while Peter himself reveals the hidden wisdom to Langdon which turns out to be the Bible, the original source of wisdom and a space for multiple interpretations. The film-makers, however, let the protagonists pursue their search since even Peter is unaware of what they are going to find. On the one hand, such a modification gives an insight into how close Peter, Langdon and Katherine are as each of them is willing to give up any mystery and their own life for the others. Their actions, verbal and non-verbal means of communication reaffirm their loyalty to each other which pushes them to unlock all the codes in order to prevent Malakh from hurting anyone. It is for this reason that Langdon is ready to give the Bible he found in the foundation of the building to Malakh while Katherine kills the latter in order to protect Langdon from his wrath when he realizes that the entire quest led to nothing more than this book. It is especially symbolic as not long before the events unfolding she learns that Malakh is, in fact, her brother who has been considered dead for years.

4. CONCLUSION

"The Lost Symbol" can serve as a clear example of how film-makers' creativity provides for an equilibrium between the affordances imposed by the medium of cinema and the idea of the author whose work was chosen for a reason. Considering the predominantly visual nature of cinema, emphasis is placed on the adventure and mystery which are so appealing for the readers of Dan Brown's novels. The film-makers make the fullest use of the multi-layer quest constructed by the writer as well as its intricate connection with a wide variety of historical events, prominent figures of the past and everything lying on the border between history and myth.

In fact, it is this feature that is highlighted by the creators of the series who remove all the secondary storylines in order to focus on the principal characters and the secret they seek to uncover. Diving deep into the history of Freemasonry and the conspiracy theories surrounding the order, the film-makers build upon the pursuit of ancient wisdom accelerating its pace through new elements which reinforce the value of the knowledge to be gained. A dynamic chain of riddles rivets the viewer's attention while a tangible proof of what is at stake forces them to follow the protagonists till the very end.

A comprehensive development of the visual narrative also calls for characters that could prove

realistic enough to trigger emotional contagion. Readers may enjoy a detailed description of an architectural structure and its significance or beautifully depicted landscapes, even the language itself possesses a certain aesthetic value in a literary work. However, on the screen, the dominant role is played by image mostly centered around the character whose emotions the viewer unconsciously absorbs which results in an urge to act in a similar manner, to accompany them on their path. Thus, the film-makers decide to foreground interpersonal relationships, those between Langdon, Katherine and Peter as well as some other characters who seemed insignificant in the novel. As a result, the audience receives an opportunity to experience Langdon's pain when Peter is missing, Katherine's grief when her brother is presumed dead and her confusion at seeing what he has turned into, Peter's affection to Langdon, excitement of the pursuit of knowledge and much more.

Meanwhile, the way the ancient wisdom is eventually revealed in the novel and in the TV show allows the film-makers to send a slightly different message to their audience, that of faith in humanity and their power. While the literary work reserves enlightenment only to a limited circle of those who are considered worthy, the series presents it as a gift to be discovered, even for a high-ranking Freemason who claims that "The Torah, the Koran, the Upanishads... There is a reason why these ancient texts have endured. People sense there is a power in them that we have yet to understand. We just stopped looking for it. Of course, it's never too late to start looking again" [5]. The **prospect** for future research consists in exploring the interplay between social and economic factors as well as the adapters' creativity on a broader sample of screen adaptations with varying degrees of similarity to the source.

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КРЕАТИВНІСТЬ ЯК РУШІЙНА СИЛА КІНОАДАПТАЦІЙ (НА МАТЕРІАЛІ “ВТРАЧЕНОГО СИМВОЛУ”)

У статті розглядається творчий аспект екранізації як форми інтерсеміотичного перекладу. Дослідження вивчає творчість кінематографістів як інструмент, що використовується для забезпечення комерційної привабливості цільового медіа-продукту із дотриманням конвенцій формування сенсу в мультимодальному просторі кіно та збереженням соціальних та культурних особливостей джерела. Виконавці адаптації не обмежені критерієм еквівалентності, як літературні перекладачі. Однак вибір твору ніколи не відбувається випадково, він визначається цінністю вихідного тексту для цільової аудиторії. Отже, його переосмислення має відповідати очікуванням тих, хто знайомий з оригіналом, але також поважати вимоги, що діють у середовищі, де візуальний аспект переважає над мовою.

У статті розглядається екранізація «Втраченого символу» Дена Брауна, роману, сповненого таємниць, але також зосередженого на широкій історичній та культурній перспективі фактів і міфів, що оточують Орден масонів. Режисери, у свою чергу, підкреслюють квестовий характер оповіді, збільшуючи кількість загадок у дусі масонства, щоб посилити напруженість сюжету. Їх персонажі також розвиваються з особистісної точки зору. Їхні почуття та емоції в романі обмежені лише тим, що необхідно для продовження пошуку. Гра акторів, однак, не може бути такою спрощеною, у результаті режисери розкривають кожен грань їхньої індивідуальності. Складна суміш страху, любові, цікавості, жалю, натхнення та багато іншого стає рушійною силою історії. Тим часом давня мудрість, яку вони шукають, більше не призначена для обмеженого кола просвітлених, а для будь-кого, хто здатний бачити крізь символи.

Ключові слова: *інтерсеміотичний переклад, кіноадаптація, конвенції, креативність, культурна цінність.*

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