

LITERATURE AND FILM: MODERNITY – MEDIUM – ADAPTATION

Steven Ungar

Department of Cinema & Comparative Literature, The University of Iowa, USA

Keywords: Literature, Film, Modernity, Adaptation, Narrative, Semiotics, *The Third Man*, *Contempt*

Contents

1. Introduction
 2. Toward a Critical Convergence of Modern Literature and Film
 3. Adaptation in Theory and Practice
 - 3.1. From Text to Film
 4. Conclusion: No End in Sight
- Glossary
Bibliography
Biographical Sketch

Summary

Interactions between literature and film facilitate tracing the evolution of European modernity during a period of intense innovation from 1890 to 1930 and since. This interaction also discloses broader issues of aesthetics and technology that center on the emergence of cinema as a distinctive cultural medium of the twentieth century. Two examples of adaptation from fiction to film – Carol Reed and Graham Greene’s *The Third Man* (1949) and Jean-Luc Godard’s *Contempt* (1963) – set the dynamics of adaptation into context. A concluding section reviews current issues related to adaptation and current technologies of visual cultures.

1. Introduction

The evolving relations between literature and film between 1890 and 1930 provide a suitable context to trace cultural modernity in light of key concepts and historical inquiry. From the side of film, the period in question approximates the era of silent (sometimes equated with “early”) cinema spanning the work of Thomas Edison, Louis and Auguste Lumière, and Georges Méliès, up through the onset of sound film. Silent film should not, however, be misconstrued as film without sound, since projections through the 1920s often included musical and voice accompaniments. Sound film likewise offers a complexity encompassing speech, music, and ambient noise in various combinations and expressions. The period between 1890 and 1940 also coincides with the emergence of a European literary modernism for which overlapping concepts and practices among literary, visual, performing, and plastic arts are central. The notion of a grand synthesis in a total work promoted collaborations among playwrights, musical composers, dancers, and painters whose efforts defined *avant-garde* practices many of which continue to the present. Grounded in musical composition by Richard Wagner’s total work of art *Gesamtkunstwerk* and in poetry in Stéphane Mallarmé’s notion of *Le*

Livre (Book), this synthesis promoted a new awareness of parallels and differences among artists, writers, and composers. Claude Debussy's 1894 musical composition, "Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun" linked to Mallarmé's 1876 poem of the same title and Jean Cocteau's 1920 play, *The Newlyweds of the Eiffel Tower* were among new collaborations and hybrids among music, drama, and poetry that reconfigured possibilities of creative expression. Debussy's work also points to the major role played by adaptation — mainly, but certainly not exclusively, from literary sources – in any consideration of film and literature.

-
-
-

TO ACCESS ALL THE 17 PAGES OF THIS CHAPTER,
Visit: <http://www.eolss.net/Eolss-sampleAllChapter.aspx>

Bibliography

- Andrew, Dudley. (1984). *Adaptation*. In *Concepts in Film Theory*. 239 pp. Princeton University Press. [Key source on topic, with updated references]
- Aumont, Jacques. (2000). "The Fall of the Gods: Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Mépris* (1963)." In Susan Hayward and Ginette Vincendeau, eds., *French Film: Texts and Contexts*, Rev. Edition. 348 pp. New York: Routledge. [Broad analysis across film & literary studies].
- Bazin, André. (1997). *Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest*. In Bert Cardullo, ed., *Bazin at Work: Major Essays & Reviews from the Forties and Fifties*. 252 pp. New York: Routledge. [Prime reference for early postwar discourse on topic of adaptation from literature to film].
- Cohen, Keith. (1979). *Film and Fiction: The Dynamics of Exchange*. 216 pp. New Haven: Yale University Press. [Groundbreaking study by virtue of its informed overview of topic & references to Christian Metz's semiotics of film].
- Corrigan, Timothy. (1999). *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader*. 374 pp. Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall. [Solid introduction, with excellent supporting articles].
- Denby, David. (2007). *Big Pictures*. *New Yorker* (7 January), 54-63. [Smart overview of changes in film spectatorship in conjunction with new formats such as iPod and portable DVD players]
- Greene, Graham. (1999). *The Third Man*. 157 pp. New York: Penguin. [First published in 1949. An entertainment in the genre of British "thriller," with literary appeal to general readers and specialists]
- Jakobson, Roman. (1971). *The Dominant*. In L. Matejka and L. Pomorska, eds., *Readings in Russian Poetics*. Cambridge, MIT Press. [Key essay by a forefather of postwar formalism at crossroads of linguistics and literature]
- Lindsay, Vachel. (1915). *The Art of the Motion Picture*. 289 pp. New York: Macmillan. [Early landmark formulation in film theory by a noted U.S. poet scholar].
- MacCabe, Colin. (2003). *Godard: A Portrait of the Artist at Seventy*. 432 pp. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. [Definitive English-language study in format of Biography].
- Magny, Claude-Edmonde. (1972). *The Age of the American Novel: The Film Aesthetic of Fiction Between the Two Wars*, Trans. Eleanor Hochman. 239 pp. New York: Ungar. [First published in 1948. A major account of aesthetic impact of interwar American film & literature on French fiction].

Naremore, Jame. (1998). *More than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts*. 345 pp. Berkeley: University of California Press. [Informed analysis of international context Affecting genesis and evolution of Film Noir].

Saussure, Ferdinand de. (1959) *General Course in Linguistics*, Trans.Wade Baskin. 240 pp. New York: Philosophical Library. [First published in 1916. Precursor and founding source of the 1960s-1970s study of signs in culture (semiology)].

Silverman, Kaja and Haroun Farocki. (1998). In Search of Homer. In *Speaking About Godard*. 243 pp. New York: New York University Press. [Astute dialogue branches out from Godard's film toward issues of literary and film history].

Shklovsky, Viktor. Art as Technique. (1965). In Lee T. Lemon and Marion Reis, eds., *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*. 143 pp. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. [Key text of Russian formalism that sought to identify the specific qualities of literary texts].

White, Rob. (2003). *The Third Man*. 87 pp. London: British Film Institute. [Solid Analysis of the Carol Reed film in its cultural and historical contexts].

References

André Bazin, "Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest," in Bert Cardullo, ed., *Bazin at Work: Major Essays & Reviews from the Forties and Fifties* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 42.

Claude-Edmonde Magny, *The Age of the American Novel: The Film Aesthetic of Fiction Between the Two Wars*, Trans. Eleanor Hochman (New York: Ungar, 1972), 21-22. Magny's book was first published in France in 1948.

Colin MacCabe, *Godard: A Portrait of the Artist at Seventy* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), 156.

David Denby. *Big Pictures*. In *The New Yorker* (8 January 2007), 54.

Dudley Andrew, "Adaptation," in *Concepts in Film Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 96.

Graham Greene, *The Third Man* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 8. The short story was first published in 1949.

Jacques Aumont, "The Fall of the Gods: Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Mépris* (1963)," in Susan Hayward and Ginette Vincendeau, eds., *French Film: Texts and Contexts*, Rev. Edition (New York: Routledge, 2000), 185.

James Naremore, *More than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 77.

Kaja Silverman and Haroun Farocki, "In Search of Homer," in *Speaking About Godard* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 32.

Keith Cohen, *Film and Fiction: The Dynamics of Exchange* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), x.

Rob White, *The Third Man* (London: British Film Institute, 2003), 41.

Robert Stam. "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation," in James Naremore, ed., *Film Adaptation* (Rutgers University Press, 2000), 60-61.

Roman Jakobson, "The Dominant," in L. Matejka and L. Pomorska, eds., *Readings in Russian Poetics* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1971), 82-87.

See Ferdinand de Saussure, *General Course in Linguistics*, Trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959).

Timothy Corrigan, *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1999), 20.

Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," in Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker, eds., *Early Film* (British Film Institute, 1989).

Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Motion Picture* (New York: Macmillan, 1915).

Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in Lee Lemon and Marion Reis, eds., *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965).

Biographical Sketch

Steven Ungar was born in Chicago, IL in 1945. He studied at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, earning B.A. (1966) and M.A (1968) degrees in French language and literature. He received his Ph.D. in French in 1973 from the Department of Romance Studies at Cornell University (Ithaca, NY).

He taught at Case Western Reserve (1972-1976) and since 1976 at The University of Iowa (Iowa City, IA, U.S.A.), where he is Professor of French and Comparative Literature. His book-length publications include *Roland Barthes: The Professor of Desire* (1983), *Scandal and Aftereffect: Blanchot and France Since 1930* (1995), and (coauthored with Dudley Andrew) *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture* (2005). Current projects include a monograph on Agnès Varda's 1961 film, *Cléo de 5 à 7* for the British Film Institute's "BFI Film Classics" series and a study of postwar French documentary films.

Professor Ungar is a member of the Modern Language Association, the American Comparative Literature Association, and the Society for Cinema and Media Studies.