
***THE CONNECTION BETWEEN LITERATURE AND CINEMATOGRAPHY. THE
CASE OF BIOGRAPHICAL MOVIES***

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Abstract : The article is focused on a comment referring to the connection between literature and cinematography, in the context of an interdisciplinary approach meant to depict the differences and similarities between the two arts. The paper also brings into attention the case of biographical movies dedicated to some of the most famous writers, based on documents about events in their private life and artistic evolution, drawing the conclusion that the work and the author cannot be separated. We also tried to depict some common features that linked the postmodernist and decadent artists, features that characterized their personalities and works and were illustrated in some of the most successful biographical movies.

Keywords: literature, cinematography, influences, interdisciplinarity, context.

The connection between literature and cinema industry is complex and complementary, also bringing into discussion many aspects that make a difference between the two arts. The advantages of modern technology made possible the appearance of productions based on famous novels adapted to film screenplays which imply a short watching time and the use of work methods specific to filming techniques. Literature is the art of words and it works with an abstract material whereas cinematography is an industry and a visual art focused on image and its effect to catch the eye by the impact of chromatics and scene dynamics. If we discuss over the relation between a famous novel and the cinema production realized starting from it, we can notice a lot of advantages and disadvantages. While reading a book, the lecturer allows himself time for insisting on certain chapters or pages that he may read again as many times as he likes or needs in order to better understand the text, making use of his attention and imagination in order to extend or shorten the length of events. One of the advantages of a film production is that it synthesizes the actions, making a summary that is presented to us in the frames of television or cinema. Thus, the viewer faces the version established by the director and the suggestions for clothes, décor, characters look, proposals that facilitate quick assimilation of information to the prejudice of imagination which is more stimulated and exploited when reading the book.

The contribution of technology to broadcasting artistic products and productions is partial, limited as it offers only copies of the artistic process and a quantity of information that may be useful but cannot supply the direct contact with the artistic work which is the only one able to justify and allow for the valuing judgment, so that we have to do with mass imaginary valuing judgments made superficially in alert pace [Ianoși, 1972, p. 40]. Technology cannot totally replace imagination, psychical and emotional resources of the reader who is free to study and interpret the text according to the time he affords for the act of reading as well as he experiences his skills to combine the symbols and significances in order to open new creative perspectives. Movie productions may allow the viewer to study the characters from different angles and to focus on the dynamics of people in action by means of moving the camera from the exterior to houses interiors made familiar due to detailed reconstruction depicted in colors

and forms that give the personal note. However, movies cannot support the multitude and variety of feelings and symbols decoded during the personal and intimate lecture which is made possible in tranquility and solitude. Such a lecture sets the complicity between reader and writer, reader and characters, apart from the group community joined while watching a movie at the cinema hall.

On the other side, the cinema productions may spread the euphoria of a popular craze when they are updated to mass consumption trends. Successful movies such as *Gone with the Wind*, *Anna Karenina*, *The Red and The Black*, *War and Peace*, *The Lover*, based on the similar books are examples of productions quickly assimilated by the public not necessarily assuming the previous reading. Visual information is mediated by a dynamic support which sustains the multiple perspectives over the movement quickly recorded by the eye guided indirectly by the director. The literary work, as a static frame, presents graphic information in a fringed space limited by lecture conditions more demanding than in case of watching a movie.

As the examples of screenplays based on famous novels are well-known, it would be interesting to comment on the biographical movies that focus on the lives of famous writers so to discuss the relation between film and biography in the context of eroticism as a cultural feature and spiritual pattern of the exceptional personalities whose biographical routes were transposed in artistic movies. Remarkable artistic personalities have made the subject of historical dramas, connecting their work with their private life, an intersection of influences that cannot be separated. In the following pages we will bring examples of movies that tried to make a picture of the lives of some important writers who experienced eroticism as a spiritual state and extension of the mind able to comprehend the infinity of nuances and symbols displayed in the act of complex loving. The literary work of these writers expressed eroticism as an artistic function translating the content of intelligence and sensibility sublimed in the forms of a ritualized imagination. *Total Eclipse* (1995) is a drama concentrated on the sinuous and intricate relation between the adolescent poet Arthur Rimbaud and his mentor, Paul Verlaine, evolving in the context of the artistic scene of the 19TH century, in the middle of the decadent times. Brilliant, immature, eccentric, solitary and self-destructive, Rimbaud interferes into Verlaine's life, starting an obsessive, extreme and tragic affair troubled by neurotic accents pushed to paroxysm. Rimbaud is the outrageous but fascinating rebel. The film does not depict detailed aspects from his life but the short catastrophic relation between him and Verlaine. The script is based on documents, letters, poems belonging to the two artists, memories of their relation. Rebelled against the rules of a conventional society, Rimbaud challenges and overwhelms the more mature Verlaine, married with the faithful Mathilde by whom he is not attracted in spite of the financial benefits offered by her wealthy father. Rimbaud overwhelms Verlaine and mocks his conventions, constantly interfering into his family life sometimes with accents of maniac love. The scenes are not comfortable at all, bringing into attention the delicate subject of homosexuality, mental and physical cruelty. Behind the literary work of the two French poets, their personal life spread with thrilling scenes either depressing or exciting, was the source of inspiration for an exceptional movie.

Another biographical drama is *The Edge of Love* (2008), which presents the tumultuous life of the charismatic and talented poet Dylan Thomas, seen from the views of

the two most important women in his life, Caitlin Mac Namara and Vera Philips. *Becoming Jane* (2007) is a comedy that places young Jane Austen in the middle of a charming and amusing love story, in the atmosphere experienced by the characters of her novels that enjoyed so many generations of readers. The movie focuses on the relation between Jane and the Irish lawyer Tom Lefroy, telling a story about passion and social drawbacks that is supposed to have inspired the ingenious observer of human relationships in novels such as *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, etc.

Sylvia (2003) is the story of the relationship between the prestigious poetess Sylvia Plath and her husband, the poet Ted Hughes. The story starts in 1956, with their love at first sight during the studies at the University of Cambridge. Crossing the time of relative harmony in their marriage, the film spotlights Sylvia's neurotic profile caused by the fact that she had been permanently in the shadow of Ted's commercial success. The scenes sometimes depressive depict the obsessive accents of jealousy, furious outbursts and suicide tendencies of the talented poetess. The film reconstructs the last part of her life, inspired by Ted Hughes's book of poems entitled *Birthday Letters* published in 1998 in which he broke the silence kept since her suicide.

Born Into This (2003) is a biographical movie with documentary value which reflects the portrait of the disputed American writer Charles Bukowski. Instead of a classical script with an ordered narrative, the film is made from flashes of memories and confessions of the writers' admirers, friends and relatives, musicians, actors, etc. and cuts from interviews given by Bukowski, presented as in an album looked through at random, spread with lines of his poems. The film succeeds in introducing the viewer into the nonconformist atmosphere of the image and attitude excesses and eccentricities which marked the tumultuous and chaotic existence of this brilliant postmodernist writer. Attending sordid outskirts, debasing human experiences, poverty, alcoholism, conflicts and tormented relations are all witnesses of the extremes and exaltations of a postmodernist ethos of confusion and imbalance having roots in the decadent age of Rimbaud's vagrancy. The ramblings of the latter one are updated in the context of the diffused Postmodernism as a proof for the permanence of the adventurous and troubled spirit and for the reiteration of brilliant artistic patterns in contemporary forms. According to Terry Eagleton the freedom of the postmodernist subject consists in becoming aware of the fact that there are no solid grounds in a world which does not offer him another guarantee but himself. In the contemporary world being free means being disrupted, diffuse and relative [Eagleton, 1996, p.38]. Individual confusion and failure of personal expectations are extended at the social level in an atmosphere of uncertainty characterized by the inexistence of a future direction and the impossibility to carry out plans. Terry Eagleton's view is similar with that of Jose Ortega y Gasset who assumes that, in the present, life is doubtful and put under question because of the multitude of possibilities unknown to the previous times, which makes contemporary life superior compared with the past but also unsafe regarding man's destiny. In spite of all the reasons meant to justify the supremacy of the contemporary world, the more we are convinced that all is possible the more we feel that the worst is also possible that is barbarism and regression. The so called safety of the present is only an illusion and this self indulgence leads to neglecting the future thus there is no wonder why contemporary people make no plans and have no ideals as no one is interested in

setting them [Ortega y Gasset, 2007, p. 81]. The difference of expectations is also identified in expressing the feelings and manifestations of eroticism from the conventions and moral duty of the pre-Victorian age to keep a balance between passion and reason in Jane Austen's novels to the refined eroticism pushed to exhaustion in Marguerite Duras postmodernist novels such as *Emily L.* or *India Song*. The latter one, also filmed and inspired from the writer's own experiences during her stays in colonial Indochina, is an experimental play that combines words having unlimited possibilities of denotation with colors and sounds perfectly captured in flashes of memories narrated by four voices who tell the tragic love story of Anne-Marie Stretter, wife of the French ambassador to India with Michael Richardson, occurring in the luxurious but also extreme Indian scene, combining love, passion and eroticism which make contrast with disease and poverty of the Indian people. More passionate but also subtle and full of symbols is *The Lover*, a guidebook for ritualized eroticism, sexuality and sensuality, pleasure, desire and exotic love story between a poor 15 years old young girl and a rich Chinese man, in the context of social class differences that condition their affair.

An earlier trace anticipating the rise of Postmodernism is identified in Baudelaire's anti-romantic aesthetics which leads artistic creation and aesthetic contemplation to anti-naturalism, artistic work being not any more based on nature but the same with nature. Baudelaire's theory referring to aesthetic experience grants memory total power in the creative process as the profound values of the aesthetic experience are not necessarily represented by sensibility and astonishment when facing the new but the capacity to explore the resources of emotional memory in order to recall the happenings and recover the past. The temporality having exploratory and recovery function, but also possessing fictional attributes due to the foray in ideal spaces and imaginary worlds as a compensatory alternative to the constraints of the chronological time is placed on the receptive level of the aesthetic experience [Jauss, 1983, p.55]. The more artistic work succeeds in exceeding the chronological time and harmonizing the spirit and the physical life the more it cultivates the timelessness.

Whereas Baudelaire makes use of the attributes of the aesthetic experience in order to explore the ideality and conceives even the aesthetic evil projected by intelligence to challenge and test the power of mind and the limits of imagination but with the option of freedom, hidden himself behind the mask of the ghost or that of the demon, Rimbaud explores the darkness of his own soul admitting himself as being possessed. Rimbaud assumes his monstrous nature the same time he spreads the visionary theory about artistic creation: it is the duty of the poet to exploit his senses in order to become a visionary by systematic disorder, trying all the forms of love, pain, insanity thus reaching the Unknown and becoming the great neurotic, the great murderer, the great cursed and the supreme scientist [Fundoianu., 1980, p. 474]. The faith and the denial, the revolt against death and the fear of death, freedom as an act of personal will, the sacred disorder of the spirit, the duality, the culture of the extremes and opposite forces are major characteristics of the decadent ethos also theorized by Friedrich Nietzsche. Exploring the darkness and the abyss, displaying the signs of rising and decline are elements of the Decadence seen as a culture of denial. The decadent exploits his own weakness and the nihilism interpreted as a duty and spiritual mood, but losing his will of

living he pretends that he leads a remarkable life that fascinates the people around convinced by the lie which became credible. The Decadence extracts its influences from the modern romantic suffering, becomes aware of the sense of the Modernity, and by asserting a radical creed it is placed on a vanguard position preparing then the road for the Postmodernism. That is why brilliant artists like Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Nietzsche, etc. cannot be included in a single current as they gather various influences which placed their works in the range of exceptional and perpetual values.

Rimbaud's self-condemnation and climbing his misfortune to the state of virtue, oppressing any hope and exploring darkness are continued by Nietzsche who reflects the portrayal of the decadent characterized by a deep grief also visible on his face; not only that he cannot hide his sadness during the rare moments of happiness but he also stumbles on it and tends to get rid of that uncomfortable and strange feeling of happiness that he forces to suppress as a result of an inner jealousy [Nietzsche, 2007, p. 228]. While willingly sinks into the chasm of darkness and into the alluring but dangerous maze of hell, Nietzsche also warns that the one who fights with monsters must protect himself from not becoming a monster as well, as the search of darkness can be reflected in the depths of soul [Nietzsche, 2007, p. 92]. Nietzsche's philosophy was also the subject of a short film (*Nietzsche*, 2003) which opens with his famous assertion *God is dead* that is the starting point for the intellectual debate about existentialism between the two characters who then make a dialogue on Kierkegaard's and Sartre's theories.

The decadent roots of Baudelaire who, without knowing anything from what is ought to be known and determined to do nothing of what is supposed to be done, sentenced himself [Fundoianu, 1980, p. 502] are developed by Nietzsche's nihilism and then extended by Oscar Wilde. However, Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was strongly influenced by Baudelaire's aesthetics. Dorian Gray is just the literary projection of the writer himself who developed a decadent theory of beauty expressed by the main character of the book who is the perfect image of an authentic dandy, controversial and eccentric, at the junction of contrasts and extremes. Similarly with Nietzsche's nihilism and decadence, Wilde asserts that the most difficult and intellectual thing is to do nothing, to take advantage of the material and financial comfort meant to afford the decadent the luxury of intellectual and artistic concerns and the acquisition of valuable items that surround him in a refined and stylish environment. Wilde's character expresses the decadent theory according to which the intellectual with no ideals and focused on exploiting his own negativity indulges into an anachronistic stagnation which decomposes him in fragments of profitable knowledge whereas the defied time leads him to the gate of chaos. Dorian Gray builds an artificial universe that replaces the art world thus leading himself to disaster as for him life itself represented the main and the greatest art, the rest of the artistic concerns being nothing more than just simple pre-arrangements to welcome it [Wilde, 1995, p. 43]. The attention to details, including garments, is one of the techniques approached by Dorian Gray in order to complete and make perfect his own religion that is Beauty. The concern about details is part of Dorian Gray's theoretical concept regarding a particular life style, characterized not so much by the objects themselves and the beauty of their material appearance but the beauty of their existence seen as a possibility of sensitive extension of imagination. That kind of beauty consists in a personal approach to the external

environment, a stylish perception supposed to alter and dehumanize reality, avoid living forms from its content and the focus on aesthetic emotions. As an aesthetic category, beauty is a perception on the existence filtered through cultivated specific aesthetic feelings, initially outside the concept of style which it attains as a result of the profitable adjustment of material life to the art world. Dorian Gray's failure comes from his conscious imprisonment in the realism of the existence populated by human patterns and behaviors incompatible with the essence of art. He brings life down in the centre of the artistic concerns and stagnates in a state of fascination and narcissistic admiration for his own identity finally overwhelmed and crushed by the infinity of art.

Oscar Wilde's controversial life was also the subject for a film (*Wilde*, 1997) that presents his successful artistic ascent but as well his outrageous affairs condemned by the Victorian society. Somehow similar with the story between Rimbaud and Verlaine, the film depicts the obsessive love of the eccentric Irish writer for Lord Alfred Douglas whose father sues Wilde at law, and as a result of the process he is sentenced to two years in prison. The same subject had previously been detailed in another film focused, as the title announces, on *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (1960).

With the few examples of biographical movies we illustrated the influence of the events in a writer's personal life upon his work, as literary creativity is marked by the personality of the writer and reflects the hypostases of the creative ego and his psychological profile. The study of writer psychology facilitates the knowledge of his numerous faces among which, that of the possessor of the divine gift leads him to the nature of the literary genius. Genius like endowment is considered either a compensation for some physical disabilities or an extension to the neurotic personality [Wellek, Warren, 1967, p. 117]. The emotional imbalance of such a personality is explicit and visible either in the content and form of the literary work as direct report of personal feelings (Baudelaire, Rimbaud, most of the symbolist and surrealist poets who composed at the impulse of spontaneous inspiration stimulated by various incentives) or it is a mark of literary characters' deviated behavior (The Brothers Karamazov). The genius nature was treated as a literary theme especially in the Romanticism which interpreted art as neurosis encouraged by cultivating and exploiting the resources of dreams and mysticism. Such interpretations led to theories as those of Novalis, Jean Paul, Heinrich Heine, according to whom artistic experience is the expression of unconscious states and activities released due to the compensatory presence of dreams. In accordance with the Romantic theories it is the soul and the dream the channels through which flow unsuspected forces brought to surface by the pure dream and the stream of unconsciousness. However, the unconsciousness is guided to conscious activities in order to bring creativity and especially poetry to the way of organized processes. Baudelaire and then Rimbaud acted in this direction in their efforts to express theories about the visionary artist and the creative process seen as an activity supplied by invisible forces that exceed the common reason, modeled by personal will and talent.

The psychological study of literature also draws attention to the methods used by artists in order to call inspiration, the stimulating role of the rites for finding the most adequate mood for creation, the artistic techniques supplied by habits taken from the private life of the artists: Hemingway used to write standing at a desk; Proust wrote while lying in

bed; Mallarmé composed his poems behind a curtain; Balzac wrote dressed in monk's apparels, convinced that he was celebrating a sacred rite. Writers' biographies offer us the images of exceptional personalities whose existential and artistic evolution includes the elements that place them among the myths of creation and personal life. The latter one draws the attention of the public the more the documentary memories such as biographical movies depict details from the everyday life of the artists, which make them more human in the eye of the audience and get them down in a familiar vicinity, a tangible one and solidary from behavioral and affective point of view. Roland Barthes synthesizes the originality of the writer by means of his creative nature in permanent search for material and sources of inspiration even during his holidays shared with workers and merchants. While the latter ones are simple tourists on the beach, the writer takes everywhere his artistic essence; although the sign of his humanity is visible in his private life, his inner muse works ceaselessly thus the writer performs a fake work but his holidays are fake as well [Barthes, 1987, p.87].

Conclusions

The biographical details cannot be separated from the creative work. The psychological and sentimental profile of an artist is reflected in his work either by a direct, explicit confession or behind the masks lent to characters. In the multitude of cinema productions included in the sphere of mass consumption and in the middle of pseudo-cultural, superficial and illusive entertainment, the biographical movie is a distinctive category, a material having documentary value. It also gathers mythological elements (by mixing the truth with the sacred halo that covers the protagonists) that justify its etiological function. Considering movies as myths is much more justified as these bring together the attributes of the myth defined by R. Barthes as discursive practice not necessarily verbal but made of pieces of writing or representations (such as photo, movie, publicity, etc.) as significant forms that convey messages by means of specific systems of communication [Barthes, 1987, p. 94]. Thus movie is a text or discursive practice transposed into images that makes possible bringing together fragments of literature, history, music, painting, etc. within a coherent and unitary whole mediated by the Story. According to R. Barthes, the Story is one of the approaching links between Novel and History as well as other conventions and safety elements that make sure the order of determination, signify intention and help us understand the facts (the past tense, the third person singular) [Barthes, 1987, p. 55-56]. The theory of the connection between Novel and History is continued with the reunion of the two forms of myth within the movie, which helps us see the history and live the literature [Șerban., 2006, p.20]. This is also the merit of the biographical movie which takes a special place among the cinema productions.

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