



AFLUENTE: REVISTA DE
LETRAS E LINGÜÍSTICA
ISSN 2025-3441

10.18764/2525-3441V9N26.2024.02

The invisible threads that interweave the blurred realities of Julio Cortázar's *Las Babas Del Diablo*, and its adaptation, Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up*

Os fios invisíveis que entrelaçam as realidades borradas em *As Babas Do Diabo*, de Julio Cortázar e sua adaptação, *Blow-Up*, de Michelangelo Antonioni

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Abstract: The objective of this article is to do a comparative analysis of the short story “Las Babas del Diablo” (published in 1959), by the Argentinian writer Julio Cortázar, and its filmic adaptation, *Blow-Up* (released in 1966), by the Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni. The method is a comparative analysis encompassing the narrative structure of each work, taking into consideration the following elements: plot, characters, time, space, focalization and imagery. In order to theoretically ground the analysis, a brief literature review on adaptation and film theory is presented, based mainly on works by Linda Hutcheon (2006), Deborah Cartmell (2012), Julie Sanders (2005), Linda Seger (1992) and Thomas Leitch (2012). The discussion shows that Hutcheon’s adaptation theory describes very properly how the process of adaptation occurs, taking into consideration its multiple aspects, keeping always in sight the value of both works as intertextual entities that just enrich each other.

Keywords: Adaptation; Comparative Literature; *Las Babas del Diablo*; *Blow-Up*.

Resumo: O objetivo deste artigo é realizar uma análise comparada do conto “As Babas do Diabo” (publicado em 1959), do escritor argentino Julio Cortázar, e sua adaptação fílmica, *Blow-Up* (lançado em 1966), do diretor italiano Michelangelo Antonioni. A metodologia é uma análise comparativa, focando na estrutura narrativa de cada obra, levando em conta, em especial, os seguintes elementos: enredo, personagens, tempo, espaço, focalização e imagens. Para fundamentar a análise, uma breve revisão de literatura sobre adaptação e teoria fílmica é apresentada, fundamentada em Linda Hutcheon (2006), Deborah Cartmell (2012), Julie Sanders (2005), Linda Seger (1992) e Thomas Leitch (2012). Em relação a nossos resultados, percebemos que a teoria de adaptação de Hutcheon descreve de maneira bastante apropriada como ocorre o processo de adaptação, levando em consideração seus múltiplos aspectos, mantendo sempre em mente o valor de ambas as obras como entidades intertextuais que se enriquecem mutuamente.

Palavras-chave: Adaptação; Literatura Comparada; *As Babas do Diabo*; *Blow-Up*.



INTRODUCTION

According to Linda Hutcheon (2006) adaptations have become a ubiquitous phenomenon, especially as a transposition of literature to cinema. Adaptation has a dual nature of product and process, "a context – a time and a place, a society and a culture." (Hutcheon, 2006, p. xvi). Adaptations, however, are not a new phenomenon when it comes to film history. For instance, the first fictional film, Alice Guy-Blaché's *The Fairy of the Cabbages* is an adaptation of the French folklore that babies were born out of cabbage; other classic film, such as Georges Méliès's *Trip to The Moon*, is also an adaptation of Julio Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon*.

Filmic adaptations of literary works hold significant influence in our society, exemplifying the interconnection between literature and film, even within distinct socio-cultural contexts. They provide audiences with new perspectives and interpretations of familiar narratives, serving as proof of the enduring relevance and malleability of storytelling across different mediums, using different types of signs. As Hutcheon (2006, p. 177) puts it, "adaptation is the norm, not the exception".

In this article, we seek to do a comparative analysis of the short story "Las babas del diablo" (published in 1959), by the Argentinian writer Julio Cortázar and its adaptation, the film *Blow-Up* (released in 1966), by the Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni, based on their narrative structures. For this, we do a brief literature review on adaptation, based mainly on Linda Hutcheon (2006), Deborah Cartmell (2012), Julie Sanders (2005) and Linda Seger (1992). After this theoretical discussion, we run a comparative analysis of the short story and its filmic adaptation considering points of contact between them, and how the adaptation aspects show themselves in the film.

FRAMING ADAPTED STORIES: SOME THEORETICAL INSIGHTS ON ADAPTATION

Theories of adaptation represent a relatively recent field of study and have evolved in the last few decades, marked "by a notable lack of consensus about the extent, the methodology, and the boundaries appropriate to its objects of study" – except, of course, for the near-unanimous rejection of fidelity discourse" (Leitch, 2012, p. 103). Despite this theoretical consensus, there remains a common notion

that a faithful adaptation to the source text is inherently superior, which fundamentally contradicts the very concept of adaptation.

Julie Sanders (2005, p. 26) points out that an adaptation "signals a relationship with an informing source text". Therefore, an adaptation entails change, rethinking and recontextualization, moving away from the idea of valuing adaptation because of fidelity. As Linda Seger (1992, p. 8) explains, "there is only one kind of impossible adaptation—the one where the producer and writer do not have creative license. Changes are essential in order to make the transition to another medium". The author employs this example to illustrate the process of adaptation

The adaptor is much like the sculptor Michelangelo, who, when asked how he was able to carve such a beautiful angel, replied, "The angel is caught inside the stone. I simply carve out everything that isn't the angel." The adaptor is sculpting out everything that isn't drama, so the intrinsic drama contained within another medium remains. (Seger, 1992, p. 2)

Acknowledging an adaptation as an independent work of art characterized by inherent change, Linda Hutcheon (2006, p. 170) defines it as "an extended, deliberate, announced revisitation of a particular work of art". In this way, adaptation is a repetition without replication, a derivation that is not derivative, a second without being secondary (Hutcheon, 2006). The researcher introduces three fundamental elements that characterize adaptations: a) formal entity or product: A transposition with a possible change in medium, genre, frame, context and ontology; b) a double process of creation: adapting implies (re-)interpretation and (re-)creation of a work of art. Consequently, there is a double process of appropriation and salvaging the source text through a different perspective; and c) a process of reception: – a form of intertextuality, since the audience experiences as "palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition and variation" (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 8).

According to John North (apud Hutcheon 2006, p. 2), an adaptation from a novel to a film has as characteristics: simplification of the plot, lower number of secondary characters and subplots, and: "A film has to convey its message by images and relatively few words; it has little tolerance for complexity or irony or tergiversations.". Nevertheless, adaptations can also become more complex, since according to Fischlin and Fortier (2000, p. 4), they can "expand or contract".

In an adaptation from a short story to a film we may have an expansion for instance.

Adaptations are important for two main reasons: first, it spreads the knowledge making it accessible for a larger audience; and second, it makes the knowledge understandable and even more attractive for audiences that use different mediums. In terms of language, what happens is similar to translation of one language to another, so if someone cannot understand one of the languages, this person can understand the other. Nonetheless, adaptation goes beyond translation, since it appropriates and salvages other work.

Thus, adaptation socializes and makes knowledge - and the works of art - more democratic. Deborah Cartmell (2012), acknowledging it, argues that adaptation is the art of democracy, since it is ruled by commonality and democratic values.

[...] the adaptor need not be a servant of the adapted author but free to change the text to appeal to a mass contemporary rather than elite audience – adaptation is the art of democratization, a “freeing” of a text from the confined territory of its author and of its readers. [...] Adaptation is, indeed, the art form of democracy. (Cartmell, 2012, p. 8)

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Hutcheon points out that common sense and some scholars have undermined adaptations in a conservative way, as if the prior works were always superior to the adapted one. For instance, the following terms were once used by scholars to describe adaptation: tampering, interference, violation, betrayal, deformation, perversion, infidelity, and desecration (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 2). Hutcheon adds that even Virginia Woolf (1926) stated that film is a “parasite”, and literature its “prey” and “victim”; although she recognizes the importance of the art modality:

[...] if a shadow at a certain moment can suggest so much more than the actual gestures and words of men and women in a state of fear, it seems plain that the cinema has within its grasp innumerable symbols for emotions that have so far failed to find expression. (Woolf, 1926, p. 309)

Hutcheon (2006) signals the reason for detrimental opinions towards adaptations like these has to do with considerations regarding the value of certain mediums or genres, as if some mediums or genres were more important than others. Christian Metz (1974, p. 44) expresses well what characterizes cinema and

how it should not be seen as an invalidation or victim of other arts: [cinema] "tells us continuous stories; it 'says' things that could be conveyed also in the language of words; yet it says them differently. There is a reason for the possibility as well as for the necessity of adaptations".

What mediums do is like a filter in a photographic camera: it filters the information according to its constitution. The source is still unchanged; the result is what we call in Mathematics, a transformation, which is homeomorphic to the source, meaning both have the same form in terms of an inner relational structure and hierarchies. What changes from one to another are the signs and the language employed. Therefore, the discussion about superiority on one modality or medium over the other is pointless.

It is important to emphasize that, even though theories of adaptation are recent, adapting is not exclusive to film nor a contemporary process. The very essence of storytelling, for instance, has echoes of adaptation, like as expressed by Walter Benjamin (1990, p. 90) "storytelling is always the art of repeating stories". Hence, we can state that one reason for adaptation to exist is because of the human need of telling stories, sharing ideas and communicating.

Even some art modalities are adaptations from one another. One example is the lyric, in literature, which finds its origins in the musical instrument. Similarly, the film evolved out of photography and literature. If one wants to transpose something from one art modality to another, we perceive a form of adaptation. What distinguishes them are the attributes and features of each art modality, whether it is a written text, an audio text, an imagetic text or a film text. To retell a story in a certain medium, the story must fit into the medium's characteristics and target audience.

Hutcheon also extends similar reasoning for adaptations:

All these adapters relate stories in their different ways. They use the same tools that storytellers have always used: they actualize or concretize ideas; they make simplifying selections, but also amplify and extrapolate; they make analogies; they critique or show their respect, and so on. (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 3)

What we see then, is different languages in use in different mediums to try to express a story, but not limiting the story to the constraints of the medium. This implies the differences we notice in adaptations. What matters in this case is the

communication that is established between the story being told in different mediums.

A way to analyze an adaptation is having in mind the Erwartungshorizont (Horizon of Expectation¹), as in Hans Robert Jauss' *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982). Interpreting the adaptation as a work inserted in a historical moment. It demands an exegesis and hermeneutics of the work, analyzing it in the terms of its interpretation for the target audience the work was aimed for. Once this is established, what remains is the transformation, transposition or interpretation of the source work into the new medium and audience. In more objective terms, it is to establish the communication and points of contact between two texts from different mediums with different meanings for distinct audiences.

Linda Hutcheon (2006, p. 10) adds that analyzing adaptation can be perceived through three distinct lenses: narrating, performing, and interaction. This broadens the scope of what elements can be adapted beyond the mere story or plot. Consequently, there are numerous points of contact to consider when conducting comparative analyses, including themes, events, narrative elements, world, contexts, symbols, imagery, and so on. In the next section, we do a comparative analysis of Julio Cortázar's "Las Babas del Diablo" and its filmic adaptation, Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up*, based on their narrative structures, focusing on the following elements: plot, characters, time, space, focalization and imagery.

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NARRATIVE REFLECTIONS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF JULIO CORTÁZAR'S "LAS BABAS DEL DIABLO" AND ITS FILMIC ADAPTATION, MICHELANGELO ANTONIONI'S BLOW-UP

The short story "Las Babas del Diablo"

In the first three paragraphs of "Las Babas del Diablo", the narrator wonders in which person the case should be told, if in first, second, third person, or an

¹ A literary event can continue to have an effect only if those who come after it still or once again respond to it —if there are readers who again appropriate the past work or authors who want to imitate, outdo, or refute it. The coherence of literature as an event is primarily mediated in the horizon of expectations of the literary experience of contemporary and later readers, critics, and authors. Whether it is possible to comprehend and represent the history of literature in its unique historicity depends on whether this horizon of expectations can be objectified. (Jauss, 1982, p. 22)

invented one, which includes clouds and pigeons' point of view. This confusion about which perspective to take to tell a story seems a common Near-death Experience: a person sees themselves from outside the body as in third person. Also, it is common to see inside all apartments of a building simultaneously, or to have extra corporeal capabilities that were not previously possible due to the constraints of the body.

Another interpretation is the shattered self, split self or schizophrenia², as observed in this excerpt: "When we find a spider inside the shoe or when we breathe, we feel like a broken glass³" (Cortázar 1969, p. 78). Both the spider and the shattered glass serve as an extended metaphor throughout the whole story. This split self, using divagations and different points of view is typical of a stream of consciousness, that we can observe in Virginia Woolf's writings, like in her short story Monday or Tuesday:

Lazy and indifferent, shaking space easily from his wings, knowing his way, the heron passes over the church beneath the sky. White and distant, absorbed in itself, endlessly the sky covers and uncovers, moves and remains. A lake? Blot the shores of it out! A mountain? Oh, perfect—the sun gold on its slopes. Down that falls. Ferns then, or white feathers, for ever and ever— (Woolf, 1997, p. 17)

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The bird's presence is also ubiquitous throughout the short story and film, as in Virginia Woolf's short story. The main action in the short story happens within a day, with a split of the time and space where the setting changes from Michel's apartment to several locations in Paris, Quai de Bourbon Island, and back to his apartment. In the film the time changes into day at Ron's mansion.

The narrator goes on: "it's better to put things in some order, going down the stairs of this house to Sunday, November 7th, exactly a month ago [...] One goes down five floors and is already on Sunday, with an unsuspected Sun for November in Paris⁴" (Cortázar 1969, p. 79). We have an impossible mixture of space and time – go downstairs until Sunday. The day is 7, the floor is 5, two prime numbers. The month is November in Paris, November is 11, another prime number. The narrator shows a peculiar preference for prime numbers, which have an important role in nature. In some survival life cycles as the American cicadas,

² From Ancient Greek σκίζω (skhízō, "to split") + φρήν (phrén, "mind, heart, diaphragm") + -ia.

³ Original: Cuando pasa algo raro, cuando dentro del zapato encontramos una araña o al respirar se siente 'como un vidrio roto'. All translations are ours.

⁴ Original: pongamos un poco de orden, bajemos por la escalera de esta casa hasta el domingo siete de noviembre, justo un mes atrás [...] Uno baja cinco pisos y ya está en el domingo, con un sol insospechado para noviembre en París.

and other biological phenomena, they also set the pillars of Mathematics as in Euclid's many theorems. Maria Loconsole and Lucia Regolin (2002) give us interesting insights on prime numbers relevance.

In his 1985 sci-fi novel, the American scientist Carl Sagan imagined a first contact between the humankind and an extra-terrestrial civilisation, where the aliens sent a message that consisted of a sequence of prime integers. The protagonist deciphered the message and described prime numbers as a universal system of communication, as well as an expression of an "intelligent mind" (Loconsole; Regolin, 2002, p. 1)

In the short story, the life cycle of the woman and the young man, as the spider and baby spider are an extended metaphor, associated with the prime number.

We notice an instance of metalanguage on: "if something from all of this... And after the 'if', what shall I put, how will I correctly conclude the clause?"⁵ (Cortázar 1969, p. 79). Compared with the previous excerpt in which there is a "we" narrator, something uncommon in narrative, and questions about the order in the story itself, the narrator also questions about the structure of the sentence. We notice here that such questions touch the essence of the reality itself in the characters and writer perspectives.

The story told by the narrator starts with Roberto Michel leaving the number 11 of rue Monsieur-le-Prince on Sunday 7th of November (house 11, Sunday 7, month 11 - 3 prime numbers), then we see a glimpse of his thoughts: "(now two smaller ones pass, with silver edges). It takes 3 weeks"⁶ (Cortázar, 1969, p. 90). The numbers 2 and 3 are primes. The sentences in brackets show Michel's stream of consciousness.

In several instances we see distortions of reality in surrealistic imagery, as in: "But the sun was also there, riding the wind and being friends with the cats"⁷ (Cortázar, 1969, p. 80). The positioning of the sun above may give this impression, but then we see here a glimpse of the invisible wind as a wild horse; therefore, we have a personification of the Sun, reinforced for being "friends with the cats", since it's common for cats to stretch out under the Sun.

⁵ Original: si algo de todo eso... Y después del "si", qué voy a poner, cómo voy a clausurar correctamente la oración?

⁶ Original: (ahora pasan dos más pequeñas, con los bordes plateados). Llevaba tres semanas.

⁷ Original: Pero el sol estaba también ahí, cabalgando el viento y amigo de los gatos.

The following instance shows 11 again, another prime number, they keep coming up throughout the text: "I calculated that around eleven there would be good light, the best possible in the fall⁸" (Cortázar, 1969, p. 80) The sentence is also fundamental to explain the title of the short story, since it determines the Season the story happens, Autumn (a more detailed explanation ahead). The Zenithal angle at 11am is 15°, it gives a great luminosity and casts just enough shadow to allow the maximum of elements of the landscape to be visible.

We find a break of the 4th wall in: "(although I should have remembered another poet, but Michel is stubborn)⁹" (Cortázar, 1969, p. 80-81), in which the narrator gives their opinion about Michel to the reader. The fourth wall is an imaginary wall that separates the actors from the audience in the theater. The break of the fourth wall is a form of metalepsis: "any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse as in Cortázar), produces an effect of strangeness" (Genette, 1980, p. 234-235). This occurrence is another narrative transgression, generating an effect of a mixture between the fictional reality of the character and the real reality of the reader.

In the narrator's opinion, photography captures the truth, while reporters capture lies. The relation between the photographer's own reality and the one imposed by the camera is described as a permutation in: "Michel knew that the photographer always acts as a permutation of their personal way of seeing the world for another one imposed by the camera¹⁰" (Cortázar 1969, p. 81). Michel points out the lie that the word "now" expresses, since an instant in time is so unfathomable: "now" is impossible to grasp by human senses, this limitation can be overcome by the help of the camera. This paradox is expressed in "letting me go from things, statically running with the time¹¹" (Cortázar, 1969, p. 82): the freezing of the unstoppable flux of the river of time, the eternity expressed through the paradox "statically running".

Sitting on the parapet of Quai de Bourbon Island, Michel spots, five meters away, a blond woman and a boy whom Michel witnesses urging to escape. Michel tries to see the woman's face, then: "Now, thinking about it, I see her much better

⁸ Original: calculé que hacia las once tendría buena luz, la mejor posible en otoño.

⁹ Original: (y eso que debería acordarme de otro poeta, pero Michel es un porfiado).

¹⁰ Original: Michel sabía que el fotógrafo opera siempre como una permutación de su manera personal de ver el mundo por otra que la cámara le impone.

¹¹ Original: dejándome ir en el dejarse ir de las cosas, corriendo inmóvil con el tiempo.

in that initial moment when I read on her face (suddenly she turned like a copper weathervane, and the eyes were there)¹²" (Cortázar, 1969, p. 83). This turning of the woman's face as a wind vane is very significant, as a metaphor shows the high positioning of the woman like an eagle riding the wind as the Sun on top of a building indicating the directions. This metaphor can be also interpreted as a turbine propeller taking the command of the situation. The wind is paramount for this short story, it's the invisible force that moves things. The woman's beauty adds more to her position of dominance.

The boy was around 14-15 years old, well dressed. A man with a grey hat was reading a newspaper in a car, while observing the couple from a certain distance. The woman moves, so the boy is between her and the parapet, she looks taller as if over him like a spider making sure he would not escape. Michel prepares the shot, positioning the camera to capture the couple and a tree, to give some color to the grey background, the car is out of the picture. Michel waits for the right expression on the couple's face: "the expression that encompasses everything, life that movement measures with a compass but that a rigid image destroys by sectioning time"¹³" (Cortázar, 1969, p. 88). Here we notice the apparent continuity of the life cycle. The movement can be interpreted as the Action, the Action as the Verb, the Verb as the Logos a reference to the Bible's verse "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1 KJV), in which the Verbum or Action brings reality and life itself into existence. The sentence can also be alluded to The Ancient of Days design by William Blake, in which God sets a compass to measure the Earth.

When it comes to "sectioning time", it looks like Michel has a continuous conception of the time as Newton. In fact, either space or time are continuous or absolute, as per Quantum Mechanics and the Theory of Relativity. Instead, space and time are discrete quantities, the smallest measurable length is the Planck length = $1.616255(18) \times 10^{-35}\text{m}$ and the smallest measurable time is the Planck time = $5.391247(60) \times 10^{-44}\text{s}$. Thus, space and time are discrete, the same as a photograph.

¹² Original: Ahora, pensándolo, la veo mucho mejor en ese primer momento en que le leí la cara (de golpe había girado como una veleta de cobre, y los ojos, los ojos estaban ahí).

¹³ Original: la expresión que todo lo resume, la vida que el movimiento acompasa pero que una imagen rígida destruye al seccionar el tiempo.

The presence of the tree may also signify an allusion to the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil of the Garden of Eden. In the Biblical narrative, Adam and Eve were allowed to eat from any tree in the Garden of Eden, except from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Serpent tells Eve that if she eats from it, she will be like God, knowing the difference between Good and Evil. Eve eats from it, and tempts Adam into eating it, he does. Then God punishes Adam, Eve, the Serpent and even the ground, and expels them from the Garden. Similarly, in the short story we have the same situation, Eve as the blonde woman, the boy as Adam, and the tree. The boy is being tempted. The Nahash may be represented by the man with the grey hat.

The woman follows by folding her web around the boy: "the woman proceeded with her task of gently tying the boy¹⁴" (Cortázar 1969, p. 88). Michel starts then to imagine the possible outcomes of the event. The stream of consciousness is present once more, in what looks more like a projection of his own memories. He closes his eyes and puts the scene in order, just like a sequence of pictures on a film. Tones of the Oedipus complex fill the description. At this point the narrator breaks the 4th wall again, to communicate to the reader that Michel is guilty of fantasizing: "Michel is guilty of literature, of unreal creations¹⁵" (Cortázar, 1969, p. 89), but justifies his behavior as something which that woman would inspire. Then the narrator switches suddenly to 1st person narration again: "I framed everything (with the tree, the parapet, the eleven o'clock sun) and took the photo¹⁶" (Cortázar, 1969, p. 89). The couple perceive with hostility that a photo was taken.

The woman asserts that no one has the right to take a photo without permission and demands that Michel gives her the film roll. Michel replies that it is not forbidden, meanwhile the boy turned around and ran away: "getting lost like a strand of the Virgin in the morning air. But the strands of the virgin are also called the devil's drool¹⁷" (Cortázar, 1969, p. 90). Here the full metaphor of the short story is complete, the season is autumn as we pointed out before:

A curious term refers to the tens of thousands of spiderlings that, with the end of spring and the beginning of autumn, are born and

¹⁴ Original: La mujer avanzaba en su tarea de maniatar suavemente al chico.

¹⁵ Original: Michel es culpable de literatura, de fabricaciones irreales.

¹⁶ Original: Metí todo en el visor (con el Árbol, el pretil, el sol de las once) y tomé la foto.

¹⁷ Original: perdiéndose como un hilo de la Virgen en el aire de la mañana. Pero los hilos de la Virgen se llaman también babas del diablo.

immediately start to produce threads of a viscous substance that solidifies upon contact with the air. When the wind picks up, these almost invisible threads get carried away like kites, with the spiders on them in search of new destinations. Swifts are well aware of this migration route and it forms their main aerial diet. This phenomenon is very common in rural areas of Argentina, and popular imagination has given it a name, "las babas del diablo" ("the devil's drool"), just like the title of Julio Cortázar's 1959 short story. This story represents "the relationship of man with reality through language, the relationship of the writer with reality through literature, and the relationship of the artist with reality through art," as defined by Carlos Albarracín-Sarmiento (in "Literatura y realidad." AIH. Actas IV)¹⁸. (Garcileon, 2012: n. p., our translation).

The scene depicted uses as a metaphor the almost invisible spider webs that are dragged out by the wind carrying thousands of baby spiders in the Argentinian Autumn to describe the virgin boy escaping on this invisible web thread, riding the wind – the threads of the virgin. Since the threads were weaved to deceive as in the aphorism of Sir Walter Scott's epic poem, Marmion: "Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive!¹⁹", it's also called the devil's thread.

The man with the grey hat leaves the car and stares at the couple, Michel then understands he had a role in all this. An interesting fact is highlighted in "los vencejos conocen bien la ruta de esta emigración y constituyen su plato principal aéreo" (Cortázar, 1969, p. 90). Swifts are "[...]insectívoros, feasting on insects and small spiders they catch on the wing. They never feed on land, and are not equipped with sharp talons for catching or gripping prey, so are limited to eating flying insects and aerial spiders". (Birdfact, n. p.)

While the blonde woman has the role of the spider, the boy has the role of the flying baby spider (thread of the virgin), the man with the grey hat has the role of the Swift, watching to capture the boy as soon as he escapes from the spider's web. Since the boy was from a middle class or rich family, the plan was probably

¹⁸ Original: Curiosa denominación que hace referencia a esas decenas de miles de crías de araña que, con el fin de la primavera y el comienzo del otoño, nacen y enseguida empiezan a segregar hilos de una materia viscosa, que se solidifica al contacto con el aire. Cuando se levanta el viento, estos hilos, casi invisibles, se dejan arrastrar, como si fueran cometas, con sus arañas sobre ellos en busca de nuevos destinos. Los vencejos conocen bien la ruta de esta emigración y constituyen su plato principal aéreo. Este fenómeno es muy frecuente en zonas rurales argentinas, y la imaginación popular le ha dado un nombre, "las babas del diablo", como el título del relato (1959) de Julio Cortázar, un relato que representa "la relación del hombre con la realidad a través del lenguaje, la relación del escritor con la realidad a través de la literatura, la relación del artista con la realidad a través del arte" según lo define Carlos Albarracín-Sarmiento (en "Literatura y realidad." AIH. Actas IV).

¹⁹ Available at: <<https://nosweatshakespeare.com/quotes/famous/oh-what-a-tangled-web-we-weave/>>. Accessed on July 19, 2024.

seducing and kidnapping. Michel disturbs the triangle, saving the boy and taking his place in the triad.

The man with the grey hat walks towards Michel, like a clown with a floured face, the nostrils black and visible; the pavement hurts his feet. Swifts are from Apodidae family, ἄπους (ápous), meaning "footless", since their legs are small and weak as described in Wikipedia. The man matches the description of a Swift.

The settings change to Michel's room on the 5th floor (prime number). He developed the photo, and it was so good he enlarged it, the enlarged photo was so good, he enlarged it again. He stared at it for a couple of days, seeing the lost petrified reality. The enlarged photo was eighty by sixty as a cinema screen, according to Michel: "where at the tip of the island a woman talks to a boy and a tree shakes some dried leaves over their heads²⁰" (Cortázar 1969, p. 94). Michel starts to see the static photos as images in movement, like the woman speaking in the boy's ear, caressing his face. The realities are permuted, the photography moves, while Michel's reality on the other side of the lenses is frozen, petrified, as seeing in the excerpt:

Suddenly, the order reversed itself, they were alive, moving, making decisions and having decisions made about them, heading towards their future; and here I was, trapped in another time, in a room on the fifth floor, not knowing who this woman, and this man, and this boy were, being nothing more than the lens of my camera, something rigid, incapable of intervention²¹ (Cortázar, 1969, p. 94).

Another aspect we can analyze in the short story is Potentiality or Dynamis (δύναμις) versus Actuality or Energeia (ἐνέργεια):

'Potency' means: (a) the source of motion or change which is in something other than the thing changed, or in it qua other. [...] (b) The power of performing this well or according to intention; because sometimes we say that those who can merely take a walk, or speak, without doing it as well as they intended, cannot speak or walk. [...] (c) All states in virtue of which things are unaffected generally, or are unchangeable, or cannot readily deteriorate, are called "potencies. (Aristotle, 1989, p. 17-18).

²⁰ Original: donde en la punta de una isla una mujer habla con un chico y un árbol agita unas hojas secas sobre sus cabezas.

²¹ Original: De pronto el orden se invertía, ellos estaban vivos, moviéndose, decidían y eran decididos, iban a su futuro; y yo desde este lado, prisionero de otro tiempo, de una habitación en un quinto piso, de no saber quiénes eran esa mujer, y ese hombre y ese niño, de ser nada más que la lente de mi cámara, algo rígido, incapaz de intervención.

Potentiality is the state of becoming, the starting of moving, or flux or the source of something being moved or changed by something else. While for Actuality "is the activity; hence the term 'actuality' is derived from 'activity', and tends to have the meaning of "complete reality." (Aristotle, 1989, p. 18)

Actuality, hence, is the end Telos (τέλος), or realization of the Potentiality, or reaching the Arete (ἀρετή), or "full realization of potential or inherent function.". Thus, When the realization of the Potentiality is reached, something becomes Actuality "All states in virtue of which things are unaffected generally, or are unchangeable, or cannot readily deteriorate" (Aristotle, 1989, p. 18). Therefore, when we stare at something eternal as a photo, where the time has stopped, and we are instead in a reality where the time runs unstoppable, what results is our death. That's the power of Actuality versus Potentiality in Aristotle, Actuality is connected to eternity²², the immutability of the timeless photography, the photography has much more Actuality than Potentiality, so when put side by side, photography and an observer, life swiftly runs out of the observer. A similar situation occurs in the movie *Somewhere in Time* (1980), in which Richard Collier stares at the photography of Elise McKenna and is warped into the time the photography was taken. Michel, similarly, was powerless before the invisible scaffolds of the liquid thread and perfume of the woman. Michel was getting closer seeing the tree branches rotating like windmill propellers as in *Don Quixote de La Mancha*. The camera moves towards the man with the grey hat, who looks back as wanting to grasp Michel in the air, at this moment Michel sees a big bird passing in front of the image. The boy flees again flying over the island, Michel is happy for once more he saved him. The man appears in front with the mouth slightly opened where his trembling black tongue could be seen. Michel closes his eyes, and then sees only the blue sky, clouds and birds on the frame. Somehow, Michel is captured by the Swift and is now carried in his flight.

A possible allusion and a pun with the Swift: as the running out threads of the spider, Michel's life is spent hopelessly. As poetically said in the Book of Job: "6 My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope²³" (Job 7:6 KJV). *Tiqvah* (תִּקְוָה) means hope, but it is also a pun, what is rare in Hebrew,

²² Based on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Available at: < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1oWnS0tSRg>>. Accessed on Aug 11, 2024.

²³ Blue Letter Bible. Job 7 (KJV) - [Is there] not an appointed. Available at: < https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/job/7/1/ss0/r10/t_concf_443006>. Accessed on Aug, 11, 2024.

because it also means cord or thread. That gives sense to the idiom "life hanging by a thread".

Blow-Up, the film

The adaptation *Blow-Up* (1966) also starts by the end as in the short story, with the main character, Thomas, dead, invisible in the grass field of the public park, above only the white clouds. Here we have a "(re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation; this has been called both appropriation and salvaging" (Hutcheon 2006, p. 8); although in both short story and film they are dead, the settings change. The first scene may be interpreted as an omen for what was going to succeed with him, as in an *Inclusio* in which the end meets the beginning, in a circle drawn by the movement of life. In the initial credits we can see a woman dancing over a building parapet, as the victoriously spider that succeeded, a clear (re-)interpretation of the blonde woman and the young man on the parapet of Quai de Bourbon Island in the short story.

Thomas can be an allusion to the Bible character, someone that only would believe, seeing. In the short story, the main character's name is Roberto Michel: Roberto means bright fame (he has a relation with the light throughout the narrative). Michel means who is like God. In the Bible, Michael is a guardian angel who fought a dragon and expelled it from Heaven. So, we have a triad: Michel, the angel, the woman as the eagle, the man with the grey hat as the swift in the short story. This explains Michel's attachment with the sky, clouds, light, being a guardian to defend the boy.

The story setting is London, on a Saturday morning, while in the short story it is in Paris on a Sunday. It was around 1966, at this time the Vietnam War was escalating, we can see lots of protesters against nuclear weapons in the film. Here we notice the adaptation as a formal entity or product – a transposition with a possible change in medium, genre, frame, context and ontology, according to Hutcheon, since we have a change of medium (short story to film), a change of context, that include settings (Paris to London), also historically and culturally. The man with a grey hat in the short story is alluded to in the film by a bunch of mime artists in a WWII Jeep that goes around the city making mimics and receiving donations. For mime artists they are quite noisy at the beginning. The car parks in a plaza and they go downstairs to the streets.

We notice Hutcheon's (2006, p. 9) point about some adaptations becoming more complex when Thomas leaves a hostel for down-and-outs (doss house) where he was overnight to take photos of homeless people, with a package of film rolls and camera on his hands. He is soon met by the mime artists and gives them some money. So, instead of the non-interaction with the man, Thomas interacts with mime artists, who are friendly: an expansion and recreation of what we find in the short story.

The protagonist goes to his studio and sees Verushka reflected on a glass, waiting for him for a photo session. In the short story Michel sees the car with the grey hat man reflected into the boy's eyes. The model says she's in a hurry because she is flying to Paris at 11pm, the same city where the short story happens. The photo session happens as in a simulated intercourse: Thomas whispers in her ear, saying to her what to do, the session ends up with a simulated orgasm. In the short story the blonde woman is over the young boy whispering in his ear. After this, Thomas starts another photo session with several models at once. The ladies behind transparent screens, as in a fragmented split reality, similar to what happens in the short story. He is quite rude with the models; he seems unaffected by their beauty. The models are quiet all the time, as if they were mannequins inside vitrines. In these instances, we see many points of contact between the short story and the filmic adaptation, also the "(re-)creation" and "(re-)interpretation" always present. We see changes in the narrative structure, since the semiotic language of images can say much more in words than text, the sewing of the scenes tries to keep the dynamic nature of cinema, with the main character constantly in movement from one scene to another.

The action in the film, corresponding to the action in the short story, begins when Thomas leaves his studio and heads to an antiques store, the owner is absent, so while waiting for the owner, he leaves to a nearby park to take photos. He starts chasing pigeons and taking photos when they fly. Pigeon is a common theme in the short story as well. Thomas spots a couple in the park, a woman, Jane with her lover, an old man. Here we see differences in terms of space and characters, since the short story is set on an island in Paris, with a blonde woman and a young boy. Differently from Paris that has no wind, the park is very windy, and the trees keep moving. Although there are differences, the essence of the plot

is kept in both short story and filmic adaptations, in what Hutcheon (2006) calls a process of reception – a form of intertextuality.

The couple kiss each other, then Jane notices Thomas taking photos. Two trees in the background, while in the short story only one tree appears on the frame. The woman says he can't take photos of people like that, people have the right to be left in peace. He argues that it is his job and that girls would pay to have their photos taken by him. He goes back to the antique store and buys a red propeller, a reference to the wind vane hair of the blonde girl in the short story. The woman's lover vanishes.

Back to the city, Thomas meets his photography book's editor Ron, who shows the photos taken at the doss house, and says he has a fabulous photo taken in the park as the final photo for the book, to contrast the violence depicted in the shots. He confesses to be tired of photographing models, and says he wishes to have tons of money to become free to photograph only what he likes. Back home, Thomas meets Jane who asks for the photos. They talk for a while, the music is on, she tries to follow the rhythm of the music, but Thomas challenges her to move slowly against the beat, like a tantalizing game. We know that $\text{Frequency} = 1/\text{Time}$, so when the frequency slows down, the time dilates ($\text{Time} = 1 / \text{Frequency}$ or $T = 1/f$), Thomas tries to manipulate the time. Therefore, the limit of 1 over f, as f approaches zero from the right is infinity, $\lim_{f \rightarrow 0+} \frac{1}{f} = +\infty$; the time blows up to eternity, as in a still state of a photograph.

She can't stand it for too long. She asks for water, while he goes to fetch it, she tries to escape with the film roll, unsuccessfully, since he caught her at the exit. She offers sex in exchange for the film roll, he refuses and gives her a fake film roll, she tries again, now because she wants it, but they are interrupted by the delivery of the red propeller. Jane says the propeller will look good in the studio, because it breaks up the straight lines, it sounds like a good metaphor for sinuous ways of reaching a purpose. She leaves because it's late, leaving a fake telephone number, good exchange for a fake film roll, her virgin threads failed in enfolding the prey. Here we see how reality is full of lies, but doesn't photography lie as well?

The main character develops the film, and hangs the photos on the wall. He starts to stare at them, from one to another, getting closer while drinking. He blows up the photo where Jane embraces the man at the park. In one of the photos, he

notices a hand holding a gun with a silencer and scope between the trees, behind the fence.

Thomas looks at Jane's photography, as if she is staring at the photography with the gun. Then in the picture, she and the man stare at Thomas. We can hear birds, as if we are immersed in the images, as if we are in the park. The images are like pixelated grains, and the crime clue of a detective case, the gun is there, as a visual metaphor for the paintings of his friend. Thomas is sweating, as if he were in the sunny park, while staring at the photos. He decides to call Ron, his friend, editor of his photography book, to tell what he has found "somebody was trying to kill somebody else " and Thomas saved his life. So, two triangles are formed in the park, the woman, the man and the shooter behind the fence, and the woman, the man and Thomas. The imaginary line from the woman to the shooter separating the quadrilateral in two triangles, splitting the reality. His call is interrupted by two models at the door.

While in the short story the photographer judges the woman for luring young men to her house, in the film he receives young ladies at his house. The ladies see all the options of modeling clothes and start to try them. They have a threesome, making another triangle in the movie. Later, he goes back to staring at the pictures and asks the ladies to leave. He blows up one more photo, where he spots what seems to be a body. It's night, and he decides to check at the park. As soon as he enters the park, the camera moves to a neon sign, where we see what seems like FoA in stylized letters, resembling a gun with a silencer and a mounted scope. Here we notice a strong semiotic language, where the image speaks, instead of words, what we see in terms of adaptation as a transposition from one medium to another, according to Hutcheon (2006).

Thomas finds the body of the man near a bush with no signs of blood. Later, he leaves to meet Ron and, as Thomas passes by Permutit store, he sees Jane at the entrance staring at the vitrine where a woman life size cardboard cutout is showcasing a fridge. Here is a reference to the permutation of realities the camera lenses make, between reality on one side and what is in the photo on the other side, as in "Las babas del diablo". The vitrine is like the camera lenses, separating the cardboard woman from Jane, but which one is more real? He hops off the car and runs after Jane, but she vanishes into thin air. He enters in the alley on the side of the store, and finds a rock band, the Yardbirds. The band is a reference to

birds in the short story. Although the music is very vibrant, everyone is static as in a photo. A visual rhyme with him and Jane at his studio, when he asks her to be still while listening to music. A guitar of one of the players has issues. The player breaks it and throws the pieces at the crowd that finally wakes up in a crazy frenzy. Thomas grabs the guitar neck and runs out with the crowd screaming trying to take it out of him. He throws it in front of a vitrine full of female mannequins, just like the static models he takes photos of, another visual rhyme.

The next day, Thomas goes back to the park; it is very windy. The body has disappeared, he looks up and sees the tree branches being agitated by the wind. Another reference to the short story. He looks to his left, and the neon sign FoA is shown again behind the trees. At the background it turns off, which catches his eye's attention as he turns to it. The mime artists are back in the Jeep on a road inside the park, they stop next to a tennis court and mimic a game with an invisible ball. One of them hits the invisible ball outside the tennis court in Thomas's direction, and they ask him to catch it. Thomas holds the invisible ball and throws it back to them. The camera zooms out, in an aerial view, showing Thomas alone in the grass field, he then disappears, closing the full circle, going back to the beginning of the film. So, the film starts from the end, as in the short story, even the music that starts the movie is heard at the end, as a cycle.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this study we did a brief literature review of what adaptation is according to Hutcheon (2006), i.e.: a formal entity or product; a process of creation and a process of reception. This definition can be observed in Cortázar's "Las Babas del Diablo" and its filmic adaptation, Antonioni's *Blow-Up*.

We verified many elements of contact between the film and the short story and perceived that Hutcheon's adaptation theory describes very properly how the process of adaptation occurs, taking into consideration its multiple aspects, keeping always in sight the value of both works as intertextual entities that just enrich each other.

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Enviado em: 11 de agosto de 2024

Aprovado em: 24 de outubro de 2024