

## **The distillation of language in film: poetry in the writer's biopic**

A look at the relatively scarce scholarship on the adaptation of poetry quickly distinguishes it as the most elusive of the main literary genres for adaptation studies. Poetic works have been adapted, sometimes, into films that avoid poetic language itself, that is, verse (some examples are *The White Cliffs of Dover*, adaptations of *Beowulf*, and films like *Braveheart*, adaptation of *The Wallace*). In some other cases the verse is kept, into art films that re-elaborate the poetry with the medium's capacity for symbolic images (Sandra Lahire's *Lady Lazarus*) or "theatrically" in Shakespeare adaptations. There are also peculiar examples such as Sally Potter's *Yes*, a film written and performed completely in iambic pentameters that narrates an original story set in contemporary London.

On the other hand, poems are quoted and recited in all sorts of different films. In those cases, the poems are not really adapted but transmediated, and incorporated into a narrative. The poet's biopic stands out as one of the most likely genres for the presence of poetry, recited, quoted or interpreted and therefore is the most suitable genre to study the phenomenon. Hanna Andrews initiated this line of research in an article published in *Adaptation* in 2013. In her analysis, Andrews introduces the critical term "interpolation," which she describes as "the insertion of content from a different context into the body of the new text." She explains that in these cases, the intertext is not integrated, but that the plot provides a "signposted" opportunity for the insertion and that it is hardly ever the full poem which is inserted, but a few selected lines, "to illustrate the particular moment in the life that is being portrayed." (Andrews, 2013, 370). The first part of this presentation will discuss how these two terms, interpolation and transmediation describe what happens in a range of poet's biopics, such as *Sylvia*, *Mrs Parker and the Vicious Circle*, *Kill your Darlings*, or *Pandaemonium*.

Thus, using transmediality as "an analytical perspective" (Elleström, 2013, 115) the analysis will then develop two aspects of this practice: on the one hand, an account of the range of narrative conventions that provide occasion and space for the poem within the story; on the other hand, the actual strategies for transmediation and their effects on audience reception in terms of the phenomenological capacities of film resources. Thus, the different modalities in which film expression engages, enhanced by means of rhythm, colour, texture, music, sound and voice effects, as well as montage and mise-en scène will be explored as means to integrate the poetic lines into film as a medium and into the message about the poet's life, personality, critical reception or creative efforts.

### References:

Andrews, Hannah 2013 "Recitation, Quotation, Interpretation: Adapting the Oeuvre in Poet Biopics" *Adaptation*, Volume 6, Issue 3, 1 December 2013.

Elleström, Lars 2013 "Adaptation within the Field of Media Transformations" in Brunh, Jorgen, Gjelsvik, Anne and Eirik F. Hanssen *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*. London and NY: Bloomsbury Academic.

## Bio-data

Carmen Pérez Ríu is a lecturer and researcher at the University of Oviedo (Spain). She specializes in the field of film criticism, particularly film adaptation studies, from a gender perspective, and has published a monograph entitled *La Mujer victoriana en novelas inglesas contemporáneas y sus adaptaciones cinematográficas* (Oviedo: Universidad de Oviedo, 2000). She has published contributions in collective works on literature and film as well as in academic journals including *Literature/Film Quarterly*, *Brönte Studies*, *Adaptation*, *Arbor*, and *Atlantis*. Her research interests also include feminist film and media studies in general, and she teaches in the Masters Degree in Gender and Diversity of the University of Oviedo (Erasmus Mundus). She is currently Coordinator of the undergraduate degree in English Studies of the University of Oviedo.