

**Adaptation and Translation in Epic Fantasy: Loss or Gain?
The case of “Game of Thrones” by George R.R Martin**

التكييف و الترجمة في الفانتازيا الملحمية: ربح أم خسارة؟
"صراع العروش" لجورج. ر.ر. مارتن أنموذجا

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Abstract:

The field of adaptation is developing at a rapid pace that we can say that adaptation has become a more collaborative work between writers, producers and screenwriters. Today, some popular and contemporary novels are rewritten into screenplays by their authors. In other cases, these latter are involved in the process even if they are not working on the script like George R.R Martin's "Game of Thrones", the corpus that we have selected to work on.

In the light of the theory of adaptation, we will focus on the relationship between the written text and the film in the epic fantasy genre to analyse the processes and mainly the characters and the theme(s) of the novel in the encounter between the literary work, the reader, the subtitled film and the spectator and try to answer the question: is adaptation in epic fantasy translated works a loss or a gain?

Keywords: Adaptation; Translation; Epic fantasy; Novel; Film.

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ملخص:

شهد مجال التكيف تطورا سريعا حيث تمّ عقد عديد الشراكات بين المؤلفين والمنتجين وكتاب السيناريو ، وهو الحال بالنسبة لرواية "صراع العروش" لجورج ر. ر. مارتن التي نالت شهرة في مجال التلقي السينمائي بفعل استثمار آليات التدفق المعلوماتي ووسائط الاتصال الحديثة، والتي اخترناها مدونة لدراسة العلاقة بين الرواية أو النص المكتوب وتحولاتها في السينما في محاولة لتصوير عملية التكيف وتأثيرها على الترجمة السمعية البصرية. بناء على هذا الطرح سنجيب عن التساؤل المركزي التالي : هل التكيف في ترجمة أدب الفانتازيا الملحمية ربح أم خسارة ؟

وتحاول الدراسة البحث في استثمار آلية التكيف من الإبداع الروائي إلى السينمائي لإثبات أن الأجناس الفنية لا حدود بينها ومن التغيرات تنشأ الإبداعية.

الكلمات المفاتيح: التكيف؛ الترجمة؛ الفانتازيا الملحمية؛ الرواية؛ السينما.

1- Introduction:

The study of adaptations has nowadays developed to embrace "literature" and the "screen" in the broadest senses of each word, and a significant number of films that have won the Oscar and marked the history of the global cinema are adaptations based on novels like: *Gone with the Wind* (1939) by Margaret Mitchell, *Oliver!* (1968) with 5 oscars, based on Charles Dickens' masterpiece, *The Godfather* (1972) by Mario Puzo which won 3 awards, *The Lord of the rings* (2001) by J.R.R Tolkien winning in all the 11 of its nominated categories, *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) based on Vikas Swarup's book and more recently *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2017) by J.K Rowling.

The awards these works have received are evidence of the presence and importance of adaptation in the contemporary culture and the relationship between literature and cinema which allows stories to travel through a different system to various cultures.

In parallel, over the last years, "novel to film" or "literature and film" studies have grown to what is today known as adaptation studies; a field that has witnessed a rich development as R. Barton Palmer says: "Arguably, the most important development during the last two

decades in cultural studies has been the increasing focus on adaptation (which can now claim to be a separate field unto itself, worthy of the prominence that specialized journals would afford it)". (Palmer, R.B., 2009, 87)

In fact adaptation studies are derived from the Arts and Humanities. This new discipline has brought new horizons and multiple perspectives and approaches to the "novel to film" process and result research such as: interpretation, rewriting and refunctioning. However, to what extent is a written text adapted? What impact has the adaptation on the original text and the audio-visual translation? Is it a gain or a loss?

To analyse this problem, the current study study has been based on Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory and Gérard Genette's theory of intertextuality. Furthermore, Roland Barthes works will help us to formulate the concept of adaptation.

Through this paper, we will conduct an in-depth analysis of the aesthetics of the Game of thrones by George R.R Martin, which is the first novel in the series and the title of the screen adaptation. In addition, we will study the main theme(s), characters of the novel and the way adaptation can impact the written work in an attempt to answer the above mentioned questions.

2. Adaptation

2.1 What is adaptation?

The term adaptation as a concept is used in many fields. Adaptation constitutes a core around which different meanings are produced, but remains understood as a process, transfer and conceptual operator.

According to the Oxford Learner's Dictionary of Academic English, adaptation is **"the action or process of changing something, or of being changed, to suit a new situation"**. We can also find the following definition: **"a play, film or television drama that is based on an original book or play. Tate's reworking of 'King Lear' is one of the many Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare."**

From these definitions, it is clear that the word “adaptation” is not limited to one activity. Adaptations can be found on television, on the big screen, in theatre, novels, video games and in theme parks such as The Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Orlando.

The word “adaptation” in the visual field is not easy to define and a simple definition does not exist: **“Adaptation is potentially a way of one medium seeing another through a process of mutual illumination”** (Stam, R, 2004:4).

Nevertheless, there are two very common definitions of adaptation when it comes to film or television transformation. Konigsberg defines it as: **“A work in one medium that derives its impulses as well as varying of its elements from a work in a different medium”** (1997:6). In his definition, Konigsberg presents the adaptation as a complete finished product. Thus, it can be said that adaptation is a work that resembles its original and takes its schema and reformulates them in an audio-visual form.

Boussinot, on the other hand, proposes a more precise definition. He speaks of a specific process, the “mise en forme”: a manipulation of texts: **« la mise en forme cinématographique d’une idée, d’un sujet ou d’une œuvre littéraire [... et] entre l’idée et l’œuvre il y a le synopsis, traitement ou continuité (récit développé) et à la fin le scénario découpage »** (1967: 9-10), which means that adaptation is the cinematographic formatting of an idea, a subject or a literary work. He then explains that to transform the idea into that work, the following steps are required: the synopsis, treatment or continuity and at the end the screenplay cut".

For Robert Stam **“Adaptation theory has a rich constellation of terms and tropes - translation, actualization, reading, critique, dialoguization, cannibalization, transmutation, incarnation, transmogrification, transcoding, performance, signifying, rewriting, détournement - all of which shed light on a different dimension of adaptation”** (2004:4).

Adaptation is then a relationship of mutation or migration of

storyworlds which can be seen in its cultural and political transfer processes. This can also be "updating" the novel according to the media, cultural, historical and social context.

Looking at this definition, it is important to understand that the transfer from the written to the visual requires distinguishing the different steps in the transition from "telling" to "showing" and the tools used for each as **"telling is not the same as showing. Both stage and screen adaptations must use what C.S. Peirce called indexical and iconic signs - that is, precise people, places, and things— whereas literature uses symbolic and conventional signs"** (Giddings, Selby and Wensley; 1990:6).

However, the reader and spectator do not receive the story in the same way; the storyworld does not fully cover the impression that media can leave on us, it cannot summarise the multitude of connections between texts and films on the memory of the reader/spectator. A storyworld needs to be defined in this context.

The concept of the storyworld is actually the specific type of mental representations. David Herman says that: **"blueprints for a specific mode of world-creation, but it would be more appropriate to say « world imagination », for while the author creates the storyworld through the production of signs, it is the reader, spectator, listener, or player who uses the blueprint of a finished text to construct a mental image of this world"** (Marie-Laure Ryan; Jan Noel Thon, 2014:3), which means that adaptation takes place on cognitive, mental and imaginary levels.

The perception of this mental representation is different from text to film; as in an illustrated novel, illustrations can function as paratexts for the literary work - having no ontological continuity with its narrative, but possibly with its world, setting or character - but can be integrated into the filmic narrative derived from it.

The term "adaptation", thus, encloses psychic, imagined and mythical exchanges between filmic images, and creativity that emerges from the transition of the text to the screen. This specific point is described by Barthes as he noted the term **"filmic"** which refers to something other

than the structural and technical properties of film: **“Le filmique, c’est, dans le film, ce qui ne peut être décrit, c’est la représentation qui ne peut être représentée. Le filmique commence seulement là où cessent le langage et le métalangage articulé.”** (Barthes, R, 1982 :58).

The filmic, in this perspective, characterises thoughts proper to the cinema, which can migrate out of the films, into writing or into the memory of the spectator, carrying its imaginary power into literature. The power of the picture in the transmission of the thoughts and mental images which is often discussed as being too effective since it can cover the omissions of some parts of the written text while the adaptation process or even the film subtitling or dubbing.

Then are all written texts adapted in the same way? What purposes for adaptation and which rules and elements?

2.2 Types of adaptation

In order to explore the different types of adaptation more concretely, the theory of adaptation that will guide our work is inspired by Linda Hutcheon who divides the study of adaptation into two fields: **adaptation as a product** and **adaptation as a process**.

In her book, *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon summarizes the different meanings of the word "adaptation", among which she notes that **“An adaptation is an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work [...] the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation”** (2006: 7-8).

Each person forms his or her own point of view on films that are based on texts. There are different styles of adaptation, different approaches, and different reasons for doing this work. According to Hutcheon, this definition helps us to distinguish between two main categories of adaptation as a product or a process, a conventional or a modernized adaptation. The first of these two categories includes adaptations that more closely represent the text and the second includes adaptations that take some artistic freedom.

In fact, the first one is often seen as a being limited; a sort of a translation, a transposition **“in which a novel is directly given on screen, with the minimum of apparent interference [...] The film [is] envisioned as a book illustration”** (Giddings, G, 1990: 11). While for those interested in adaptation as a process, the film does not have to resemble the novel.

The differences between the two can be created in terms of time, place and characters as these adaptations show another dimension of the novel through transformation.

Hutcheon notes that **“[the] transposition to another medium, or even moving within the same one, always means changes or, in the language of the new media, 'reformatting'”** (2006:16) because the transposition to another medium requires transcoding from one system to another according to a specific process. Then adaptation to other media requires **“[a] translation in the form of intersemiotic transpositions from one sign system to another”** (2006: 16).

The film and the novel are created from two different semiotic systems: **“the film and television images are predominantly iconic, whereas words in a novel are symbolic, in other words the film or television image implies a close relationship between signifiers and signified compared to the arbitrary relationships of verbal language”** (Giddings, G, 1990: 6). A problem, consequently, arises since the two systems are not interchangeable and the visual is inadequate to show certain aspects that we can explore in writing, for example internal dialogue.

When translating between systems **“[the] changes are inevitable the moment one abandons the linguistic for the visual medium”** (Giddings, G, 1990:10). Thus, an adaptation **“is repetition, but repetition without replication”**, (Hutcheon, 2006: 7) for some aspects of the original must be omitted.

This omission is often inevitable at another level while subtitling or dubbing the film. However, the image is a powerful element that covers these gaps; as places, clothing, and decor in addition to sounds and music can substitute words.

The reason why we will shed light in the present study on epic fantasy works known for their rich texts in terms of fiction, imagination and symbolism but first we will try to define the “epic fantasy”.

3. Epic Fantasy

3.1 Definition

Epic fantasy is a subgenre of fantasy known for being related to the world of imagination. Its works often include imaginary creatures like elves, trolls, beasts, unicorns, dragons, the wizards and magical elements. Based on myths and legends, the story usually takes place in entirely new worlds, far lands and mythical regions like the Middle-earth (Hobbit/ The Lord of the Ring), Hogwarts (Harry Potter), and Westeros (Game of Throne).

J.R.R Tolkien is considered the founding father of fantasy as his “The Lord of the Rings” is a classic in the genre. This genre is very popular among not only children but also adults. It is also as popular as books in big screen for a lot of successful fantasy films are book adaptations.

3.2 Corpus

A Song of Ice and Fire commonly known by the collective name “Game of Thrones”, the first published volume in 1991 and the title of the adaptation, is an epic fantasy series written by the American novelist and short-story writer George R. R. Martin. The book series consists of five novels starting with A Game of Thrones (1996), A Clash of Kings (1998), A Storm of Swords (2000), A Feast for Crows (2005), and A Dance with Dragons (2011) with two forthcoming novels entitled by The Winds of Winter and A Dream of Spring.

George R.R. Martin series of A Song of Ice and Fire has become a worldly phenomenon selling more than 70 million copies all over the world as being translated into 47 languages according to the Guardian. The adaptation “Game of Thrones” has on the other hand garnered 160 Emmy nominations and won 59 awards.

Fantasy is often considered as being aimed at children. However, “Game of thrones” is mainly for adults. Martin confirmed that in an

interview where he states:” **I don’t have anything against kids’ books or young adult fantasies, there are many wonderful kids’ s fantasies out there-I grew up on that stuff and cut my teeth on it, but there should also be Fantasy for adults. Fantasy is the realm of imagination and romance.**” (Lesley Goldberg, 2012).

Every book in the series takes place on the massive, fantastical islands of Westeros and Essos which form an entirely fictional world. The story despite the fact of being a fiction, reflects the reality as Charles Yu states “**a myth that, however fantastical it can get, always resonates in our temporal world**” (Charles Yu, 2018) as Martin’s view of the world is regarded as a mirror of the struggles, political conflicts and crisis in today’s world.

Winter is coming, the cold season is approaching. After the death of Robert Baratheon who brought stability to the kingdom for 17 years, the noble houses in the seven kingdoms are living a political crisis for the iron throne.

The characters of A Song of Ice and Fire are divided in three primary plotlines: the first is a war between the most powerful families of Westeros. The second is the threat of the Others, led by the Night King beyond Westeros’s northern wall. The third follows Daenerys Targaryen and her adventures to take back the Iron Throne. The chapters of the books are called by the names of the characters as each chapter is narrated from the character’s point of view.

The principal themes of the story are power, family, ambition and history. Westeros is similar to Britain for the division of the seven kingdoms and lords realms is much like the seven kingdoms of England consisting of North Umbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Kent, Essex, Sussex, and Wessex. The sophisticated dialogue, treachery, betrayals intrigue, alliances, assassination and war remind the reader of Britain’s brutal past, at those medieval history times.

In terms of analysis, while studying the genre of “ASOIAF” (A song of Ice And Fire), **signs of historiographic metafiction can be detected;**

which is a form that exhibits a contradiction while strongly assuring its artistic fictional state and rooted liaison with some historical facts (Hutcheon, 1988:5).

Martin has in fact based his fantasy on historical events and incidents such as the English civil wars known as the Wars of the Roses the as well as from Maurice Druon's novels of French history, *The Accursed Kings*.

4. Game of Thrones: from Written Book to Screen Adaptation

If we consider that cinema is a representation of the imaginary. Epic fantasy adaptation would be thus one of the richest cinematographic experiences.

The books start with maps illustrating the regions where the story takes place (Refer to appendice: figure 1), showing the importance of h in the text which is illustrated on the screen where not only the place is well shown but also the time. The vast lands are seen through the camera with new dimensions, the use of black and dark blue colour brings a special effect to the area during those old medieval times of middle age. (Appendice: figures 2-3).

In his interview with Laura Miller on 92YPlus, Martin explains the importance of the map in his world of Ice and Fire “ **You know when I began back in 1991 I had probably written about 50 pages I said oh I better creates a map so I know where I am. Maps are necessary to fantasy I think ,I know some critics occasionally have sort of made mock them up but if you're creating a secondary world ,you really need them [...] if I am writing straight historical fiction and my character in Ireland says I must go to France, you don't need a map. I know where France is but in my world if a character says I am going to Dorne, you don't know if Dorne is the next village or you know halfway around the world, you better have a map so these things the characters are saying make some sense.so I created a map which was basically simple and as the story continued I started adding more and more places to it [...] we did the map book lands that the ice and fire which involve considerably more map creation ...”**

Suspenseful drama, full of epic events and unexpected ending, A Song of Ice and Fire and its adaptation “Game of Thrones” build tension layer by layer. The books are extremely long and have more details than the adaptation which summarised extensive descriptions in pictures and visual elements.

4.1 Analysis

George R.R Martin’s characters are beings apart. While creating his characters, Martin does not respect the constraints of the realistic novel. His characters are a unique and complex creation, composed of multiple levels of personality which are developing through the events of the story.

They are products of themselves, i.e. the qualities of one character and personality traits are transmissible, people evolve and therefore change according to the circumstances in which they find themselves. Moreover, in this complexity, George R.R Martin's novel contains several textual transformations. The reason why the adaptation is relevant to the discussion, as the idea of hypertextuality and intertextuality are well represented.

Game of Thrones, tells the story of the novel through the screen but it is not only a transformation based on the written words in the text, as it also utilises external materials, notably the new technologies which brought new perspectives to the fictional world.

A crucial step in the process of the adaptation is undoubtedly the interpretation of the written text as the symbolism can be conveyed in different forms depending on the reader’s experience and background as this latter is an active participant in the process.

In « De l’oeuvre au texte », Barthes states that the Text is plural « **le Texte est pluriel** » (1993). The plurality of the text does not only mean that the text has several meanings, he explains « **qu’il accomplit le pluriel même du sens: un pluriel irréductible** » (1993), which means that the text fulfils the plural of meaning: an irreducible plural, because signifiers constitute a chain of endless meanings as they are never limited not due to the ambiguity of their content but to their stereophonic plurality.

« **Le pluriel de texte tient [...] non à l'ambiguïté de ses contenus, mais à ce que l'on pourrait appeler la pluralité stéréophonique des signifiants qui le tissent** » (Barthes, 1993), i.e. the plural of text is due [...] not to the ambiguity of its contents, but to what we might call the stereophonic plurality of the signifiers that weave it because for him, the text is a bunch of quotations, references, echoes; of antecedent or contemporary cultural languages: « **entièrement tissé de citations, de références, d'échos; de langages culturels antécédents ou contemporains, qui le traversent de part en part dans une vaste stéréophonie** » (Barthes, 1993).

Accordingly, the most important person in the production of a written text is the reader, as each reader has the power to read, interpret the text, perceive the ideas, and then formulate his or her own mental images from the story.

If we look at the adaptation, the adaptor, himself is considered as a reader, and is free to show the text visually as he has understood it. A film version of a text is, in fact, an interpretation which is constructed from several texts. An adaptation is thus a set of texts or quotations that help to show the image conceived in the consciousness of the adaptor-reader.

To analyse the adaptation impact on the audio-visual translation (AVT), two aspects will be discussed: the main theme (s) and the portrayal of the characters from the page to the screen.

4.2 Game of Thrones: Themes and Characters from Page to Screen:

Themes and characters are the most important elements in the adaptation process because it is through them that the narrator portrays his main message, the values of man in difficult times.

The theme allows the reader to read what is happening from the outside and the social treatment that exists in the storyworld. On the other hand, the characters demonstrate the feelings while going through these events.

Critics agree on that George R.R. Martin's skills to write intriguing

and compelling characters with intricate drives is a major reason in the huge success of the screen adaptation. The characters in the novel are in fact exemplary and controversial. They are characters who do not conform to the realistic ideas of the character description. Some are simple individuals living up in the worst circumstances, other rich members of royal families seeking command of the lands but they are all presented as complex rather than ideal, i.e they are good and bad at the same time and in different times for they are "types." In this context Hugo says : « **Un type ne reproduit aucun homme en particulier ; il ne se superpose exactement à aucun individu ; il résume et concentre sous une forme humaine toute une famille de caractères et d'esprits. Un type n'abrège pas ; il condense. Il n'est pas un, il est tous** » (Hugo, V, 1882 : 238). As for him a type does not reproduce any particular man but it sums up and concentrates in a human form a whole family of characters and spirits. A type does not abbreviate; it condenses. It is not one, it is all.

Game of thrones does not only hold observations, but also personal reflections, which affect the readers and incite them to reflect on the states of the characters. Furthermore, it is a story of conflicts: man against man and man against himself.

In addition, the novel is full of descriptive paragraphs that allow the producers to better represent the story. However, there are still some little details that the reader does not think about, but that always exist. Incomplete holes exist in written works as well as in films, but so far it is the films that illuminate these gaps. The two executive producers, David Benioff and D.B Weiss, focused on different aspects of the novel to tell the story of the "Game of Thrones": the place, accents of the actors, the decor, clothes design, sounds and medieval music, camera effects and use of new technologies which created a new life to the story.

Despite the fact that the adaptation and its subtitled/ dubbed version missed some details in the book, we cannot deny that it played a crucial role in the popularization of the medieval world's story as it has become a best selling book series.

5- Conclusion:

The study of adaptation and mainly its impact on audiovisual translation will remain an area that will always provoke discussions. Early studies of adaptation, which focused on the relationship between the written text and the film/work derived from the text, are no longer adequate for the critical analysis of adaptation as adaptation encompasses multiple connotations related to the individual knowledge, experience and background to reveal the links between the original story and its screenplay.

The writer is like a weaver who mixes different texts to build a new story. His ideas are then personalized and the story given a new life. Thus, intertextuality can be seen as the basis of every adaptation. Based on the current study, we can say that literature and cinema are two different arts with limits to their production and that each adaptation is unique and is a representation of the conditions in which it is produced. Thus, the novel and the film cannot replace each other but they can complement each other.

To conclude and answer the question if adaptation in epic fantasy translated works is a loss or a gain, we can say that despite the fact that some linguistic aspects and content details get lost in the novel transfer to film, the adaptation offers new dimensions to the work through the image, decor, clothing, music and sound effect.

In addition, the literary work is full of implicit meanings which are not expressed directly and which represent ambiguous elements for the reader. The filmic adaptation conveys these meanings in a much clearer way. It also contributes to the novel popularization since cinema and media play a crucial role in today's modern life where people tend to watch more than to read. Thus, the screen adaptation of translated epic novels is a gain.

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Appendices



Figure 1- Map demonstrating the lands



Figure 2- Game of thrones poster



Figure 3- Jon Snow and Daenerys Targaryen



Figure 4- Medieval clothes