



## **Lady Chatterley: rewriting D. H. Lawrence's novel on screen**

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper analyses the rewriting of *John Thomas and Lady Jane* (1977), the second version of a representative modern narrative, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), by D. H. Lawrence, and the corresponding film, *Lady Chatterley* (2006), by the French director Pascale Ferran. Based on theoretical principles of film adaptation as translation (Cattrysse, 2014), on the discussion of translation as a kind of rewriting (Lefevere, 1992), and on principles of intersemiotic translation (Plaza, 2001), the aspects of the process of the main characters' construction and the reception of the film will be discussed, as well as its role in the representation of Lawrence's search for a classical unity in his vision of man.

**Keywords:** adaptation, cinema, narrative, rewriting.

### **Lady Chatterley: reescrevendo o romance de d. H. Lawrence na tela**

**RESUMO.** Este artigo analisa a reescrita de *John Thomas and Lady Jane* (1977), a segunda versão de uma narrativa moderna representativa, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, de D. H. Lawrence, e o filme *Lady Chatterley* (2006), da diretora francesa Pascale Ferran. Com base em princípios teóricos da adaptação fílmica como tradução (Cattrysse, 2014), na discussão sobre tradução como um tipo de reescritura (Lefevere, 1992) e em preceitos da tradução intersemiótica (Plaza, 2001), aspectos do processo de construção dos principais personagens e de recepção do filme serão discutidos, bem como seu papel na representação da busca de Lawrence por uma unidade clássica na sua visão de homem.

**Palavras-chave:** adaptação, cinema, narrativa, reescritura.

### **Introduction**

This paper aims to analyze the rewriting of *John Thomas and Lady Jane* (1977), the second version of a representative modern narrative to the cinema, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1971), by the English writer D. H. Lawrence, and the corresponding film, *Lady Chatterley* (2006), by the French director Pascale Ferran, discussing ways of reading this literary text in the new medium, and possible impacts to its critical reception. In order to do so, we give focus to the main characters' construction, Constance and Parkin, and their translation to the screen, as a reinforcement of Lawrence's ideas on the return of the modern man to a natural world of instinct. We start from the fact that the cinematographic text emphasizes to spectators Lawrence's attempt to a classical unity in his vision of man, and that the director's choice in adapting the second version of the novel may be interpreted as evidence of that. As theoretical background, we take into account ideas of film adaptation as translation, by Cattrysse (2014), the discussion of translation as a kind of rewriting, by Lefevere (1992), and principles of intersemiotic translation, by Plaza (2001).

*Lady Chatterley's Lover*, as in any of Lawrence's novels, focuses on controversial themes, such as love, sexuality, social classes, gender etc. By questioning moral values and social conventions of the English society in the 1920's, the novel was regarded as polemical, having great impact on the English literary system. The film *Lady Chatterley*, by Ferran, rewrites the particular literary universe of this Lawrence's novel to new audiences in the context of the 2000's.

### **Intersemiotic translation**

With changes in the traditional perspectives of adaptation studies towards a more descriptive rather than a prescriptive approach, film adaptation, as any kind of translation, may not be no longer analyzed either exclusively under the viewpoint of the source text, or under criteria of equivalence and/or fidelity. Plaza (2001), reinforcing this new approach to the analysis of the translation process between different means of language, has conceived intersemiotic translation as a critical and creative practice, as actions on structures and events, as dialogues of signs, as the other in differences, as rewriting of History. In this sense, intersemiotic translation has a

great interference in any context of production, once the sign action turns translation into the meaning constructor in a specific historical moment. It must be therefore a critical translation practice and, besides observing constraints and particularities of the new means of language, it should give a qualitative feature to the process, making it “[...] move from mere reproduction to production” (Plaza, 2001, p. 109).

Cattrysse (2014), discussing the adaptation phenomenon as a translation process, points out fundamental questions to the understanding of the adaptation process as a translation practice, for it follows criteria of approximation or distance from the source text. Regarding this basic principle, in his methodological proposal *Descriptive Adaptation Studies*, Cattrysse (2014) reinforces the idea that the analyses of film adaptations should not be built simply based on comparative descriptions between the source and the target texts, and that one particularity what makes film adaptation different from other kinds of translation must be taken into account, or rather, the production process. It means that the creation process of audiovisual products takes place in different contexts, as well as their reception, since the social context of the reception of a literary text is not the same as that of the reading and reception of a cinematographic one.

Accordingly, rather than trying only to describe the transmuted elements from the book to the screen, or to map out their omission, the observation of under what circumstances the film adaptation was created, and its functioning in the reception system become relevant. Regarding that the film adaptations are always submitted to a constant movement of transformation, and rewritings, in which sometimes they do not even assume explicitly their condition as an adaptation of a source text, the way the products are received in the target system must be also observed, as how much they interfere with the dynamics of it. For example, the observation of their role as a conservative or an innovative product may be taken into account to understand their impact in the poetics of the target system. These roles are responsible for determining the selection policy and ways of adapting the source text.

Cattrysse (1992) highlights the complexities of defining the role and function that adaptations may take within the literary system. One of the points emphasized is the way these film adaptations are perceived by the public and critics, for it is not necessarily because they are aware of the existence of underlying literary source elements that a film adaptation functions as an adaptation. In his

discussion on the adaptations made in the American film *noir* of the 1940 and 1950's, the author shows an example:

Thus, French and American public and critics in the 1940 and 1950's were all aware of the popular literary origins of the American *Film Noir*, but only in France did the *Films Noirs* clearly function as film adaptations. French contemporary critics appreciated both *The Romans Noirs* and the films noirs. As against this, American critics had no high esteem for this pulp literature, which they considered morally depraved. They preferred to ignore the whole genre, and therefore, when they wrote about *Film Noir*, they tended to skip their literary origins (cf., e.g., Higham and Greenberg 1968), stressing their filmic qualities only (Cattrysse, 1992, p. 58).

As it can be observed in the above passage, the social prestige of the source text in the reception system may be seen as a good starting point to analyze ways of adapting it, and its impact on the poetics of the target system.

By defining poetics, Lefevere (1992) affirms that it consists of two components. The first is an inventory of literary devices, genres, motifs, prototypical characters and situations, and symbols. The second is a concept of what the role of literature is, or should be, in the social system as a whole. The latter concept has great influence on the selection of themes that must be relevant to the social system if the literary work is to be recognized as such. In this sense, the functional components of a poetics is closely tied to ideological influences, and generated by ideological forces in the environment of the literary system.

As a result, the production of the work of literature, or any product of art, follows some codes of the literary practices, and guides some activities, such as writing, rewritings, criticism, production, reception etc inside the system. This established set of rules permit the codification of elements, which characterize a systematic poetics.

Lefevere (1992) discusses the process of rewriting as an activity, which takes an important place in the establishment of the poetics of a literary system as original writings do. In his conception, rewriting is the varied forms of texts, which present, criticize, adapt and resignify other texts, or rather, activities that contribute to the development of the literary system, affecting its dynamics. By pointing out translation as a relevant kind of rewriting, the author reinforces its impact on the literary system:

Rewritings, mainly translations, deeply affect the interpenetration of literary systems, not just by projecting the image of one writer or work in another literature or by failing to do so

[...] but also by introducing new devices into the inventory component of a poetics and paving the way to changes in its functional component [...] (Lefevere, 1992, p. 38).

Thus, it may be concluded that rewritings have the power of projecting images of the literary universe of a work of art or a writer, and deeply impact the process of creation and reception of the products. They may also interfere with the process of displacement of these products, dislocating their position from the periphery towards the center, or vice versa.

A representative example of the powerful influence of rewritings on the change of literary status within the system is D.H. Lawrence's case. It is known that in the first decades of the twentieth century, his works were neglected by critics who observed in the texts shocking and obscene traits, which clashed with conservative values of the English society. Only in the 1950's, with a change in publication practice, and a change in attitude amongst critics and academics, his ideas become more serious and acceptable to readers. Beynon (1997) points out some other reasons for that sudden interest in Lawrence's texts:

Also, western society by that time had developed more permissive standards regarding sexual behavior so Lawrence's writing about sex no longer seemed as shockingly 'licentious' as they had to earlier readers. Thus the way was cleared for readers to make a more discerning estimate of life and work, and by mid-century a critical and biographical 'revival' of his reputation was under way (Beynon, 1997, p. 54, emphasis in original).

As we can see, the new historical and social context, as well as rewritings, changed the attitude of readings towards Lawrence's works, consequently, altering visions of his literary production. So, he was no longer regarded as a 'sex-obsessed' writer to become a great and creative artist of great importance in western literature. Although the critical approaches towards his works, providing them with new interpretations, which contributed to changes in status, his novels are still source of controversies, and object of rewritings, as the film adaptation *Lady Chatterley*, by Pacale Ferran.

#### D. H. Lawrence and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

Modern Age has been characterized by a time of changes with a preoccupation with substituting old values, and developing concerns in all human being's activities. It was characterized either by an attempt to find substitutes for religion, which seems dead, or by a kind of spiritual emptiness with a sense

of hopelessness of trying to believe in anything. One of the responses of Literature to this new reality was with the presentation of new perspectives in writing, consolidating a variety of innovations in aesthetics, mixtures of genres, and themes.

The novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (2006), by D. H. Lawrence, written in 1928, for example, takes on one of these perspectives. It may be seen as the writer's reaction against liberal principles, which consisted of the belief that man's future lies on earth, not in heaven, and of the idea of that with the scientific and social progress, an earthly paradise may eventually be built. Lawrence, on the other hand, criticized that excess of reason in modern societies, and believed that man should go back to the natural world of instinct. Thus, his works do not have anything of science, since, in his vision, instinct is more important; even religions are too much rational, and if man wants a faith, he must worship the primitive aspects of human beings.

*Lady Chatterley's Lover* depicts these ideas by describing in its narrative the relationship between an upper class married woman, Constance Lawrence, and her husband's gamekeeper, Oliver Mellors. Constance grew up in an intellectual environment, in contact with artists, men, what makes her someone singular. She is described as a very independent person, and she was so since her youth. Because of that, she thinks and acts differently, reshaping the roles of women in the Victorian society. She gets married to Clifford Chatterley, an heir of an aristocratic family, and in a month after the marriage, he is sent to the war, comes back crippled, and sexually impotent. Completely dedicated to his literary career, then to his family business, Clifford is gradually moving away from his wife. Then, Constance starts getting sexually involved with other men, and finds in Mellors, an ex-soldier, who decided to live isolated after loving successive failures, a real feeling for the exploration of life in her vitality and naturalness.

Unlike Clifford and his intellectual friends who have a completely different social background, Mellors is quiet, positive and aloof. Son of a collier, he went to India and became an officer in the war. His wife left him while he was away, and now he lives alone as a gamekeeper, a lonely person in Wragby Hall, The Chatterleys' property. By describing the character, Hough affirms that,

He seems a poor example of the warmth and intimacy he might be supposed to represent, and we have a good illustration of how Lawrence can forget doctrine, become possessed by the genius of fiction-entirely to the advantages of his work (Hough, 1973, p. 101)

As may be inferred from the above passage, Mellor is constructed as an extremely understanding character, existing in his own right, and becomes important to reinforce the possibility of the growth of a relationship between two people separated by the barriers of class and condition throughout the narrative.

By doing so, Lawrence presents to readers a polemical narrative construct, in which social and cultural conventions of the English society from the twenties are being questioned, deepening discussions on themes, such as love, sex, and asymmetry between social classes.

The author wrote three versions of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The first version of the book was published in the United States by the *Dial Press* in 1944 under the title *The First Lady Chatterley*, and for the first time available under the same title in a British edition in 1972.

The second version, written in English in 1927, was published for the first time in 1954; it appeared in an Italian translation by Carlo Izzo and Giulio Monteleone together with the translations of the first and the third versions in the book *Le tre "Lady Chatterley"* (Lawrence, 1954). As we can see, the process of writing of the novel is symptomatic of its controversies, because of its polemical nature, what made it amenable to interdictions, censorship, and rewritings in different systems of reception, and language, since the beginning.

Lehman and Hunt (2010) listed some of the elements responsible for the negative impact of the novel in England, justifying that the title given to the second version may be seen as evidence for that:

The novel created an international scandal in the early twentieth century, with its graphic sexual explicitness. The novel is so vivid in its descriptions of sex, including the penis, that Lawrence actually titles an earlier version after the main character's pet names for their genitals, *John Thomas and Lady Jane* (Lehman & Hunt, 2010, p. 7).

One of the strategies used by Lawrence in the narrative construction was the frankness in the way language is presented to talk openly about sexual intercourse, and the glorification of physical love as a natural experience of the body. This made the novel to be labeled as obscene, banned for over thirty years, and allowed to be published in England only in 1960.

Although the recognition that the use of an allegedly obscene language may be characterized as an important aspect in the narrative construction, it is also necessary to remark that the use of such language is not only a mere description of situations.

Far more than that, in this novel Lawrence presents a complex philosophy, which opposes, not only to the social and political system, but also to the destabilization of a whole paradigm of the modern rational civilization. By rejecting this civilization, the relationship between man and woman plays a very important role in his works. It is through love and sex that man is able to reach out towards vitality and integration.

In 1929, the author wrote an afterword 'A Proposal of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*', as an explanation to his position. It is a kind of manifesto in which Lawrence defines the true love as a manifestation of one of the sources of human nature. He highlights aspects of modern man's attitudes, and the conflict between his rational and natural portion. In order to justify this viewpoint, the writer makes a critique of the rational way that modern man behaves and deals with his natural instincts. A good example for that is when he talks about relationships based on convenience and reason:

Modern people are just personalities, and modern marriage takes place when two people are 'thrilled' by each other's personality: when they have the same tastes in furniture or books or sport or amusement, when they love 'talking' to one another, when they admire one other's 'mind'. Now this, this affinity of mind and personality, is an excellent basis of friendship between sexes, but a disastrous basis for marriage (Lawrence, 1971, p. 350, emphasis in original).

One can notice that this idea of relationship and marriage gives focus to mind, and represents violence to man's physical aspect. In Lawrence's perspective, this is a source of unbalance, or rather, a rupture with the classical unity in his vision of man, in which intuitive, emotional and rational aspects must be shown in equal emphasis. He reinforces that by saying:

Life is only bearable when the mind and the body are in harmony, and there is a natural balance between them, and each has a natural respect for each other (Lawrence, 1971, p. 335).

These concepts are made clear in the novel through characters' perceptions on facts, and reflections about their condition, and through the exploration of their self. One expressive example for that is when Constance goes to the keeper's cottage and sees the man washing himself naked to the hips down:

Yet in some curious way it was a visionary experience: it had hit her in the middle of the body. She saw the clumsy breeches slipping down over the pure, delicate, white loins, the bones showing a

little, and the sense of aloneness, of a creature purely alone, overwhelmed her. Perfect, white, solitary nudity of a creature that lives alone, and inwardly alone. And beyond that, a certain beauty of a pure creature. Not the stuff of beauty, not even the body of beauty, but a lambency, the warm, white flame of a single life, revealing itself in contours that one might touch: a body!

Connie had received the shock of vision in her womb, and she knew it; it lay inside her. But with her mind she was inclined to ridicule (Lawrence, 2006, p. 69).

It is observed in this passage the lack of balance between the mind and the body. Constance is affected by an experience, which blurs her perception for a while with both curiosity and the awakening of her instincts. But, she immediately rationalizes it, reinforcing the nature of this common conflict in Lawrence's characters.

Through the above considerations about the novel, and the philosophical principles present in its construction, we can visualize the level of complexity of this artistic project, and its impact on the reception system, regarding its avant-garde quality, which brought into discussion taboo themes in that social context. This innovative approach makes us understand controversies, and the negative reception of the book, which has been referred to by contemporary critics (Beynon, 1997), under the conservative viewpoint at the moment the novel was written.

The French director Pascale Ferran faced the challenge of adapting the literary universe of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* into the cinema twenty four years after the film adaptation by Just Jaeckin. It is a Maïa Films Production, released in France in 2006, with the screenplay by Roger Bohbot and Pascale Ferran.

The film, as the novel, talks about the aristocratic young Constance (Marina Hands) who, living in an isolated country house with her invalid husband, Clifford (Hippolyte Girardot), finds in the gamekeeper (Jean-Louis Culloc'h) the awakening element for the previously undiscovered desire. Despite their opposite social backgrounds, Parkin slowly triggers in Constance the awareness of her condition.

Based on the second version of the novel *John Thomas and Lady Jane*, the film *Lady Chatterley*, by Ferran, shows on the screen some particular aspects in its narrative construction. One of these aspects is the alternative reading in which the main female character takes a central role in the story. At the very beginning of the narrative, Constance appears on screen in front of her house, saying good bye to one of the guests. Through a camera movement, the

woods around the house are showed. Then, she stands still, looks at the house and comes into it. Inside the house, it is showed a dinner party with Clifford's guests. Afterwards, Clifford and his friends start a conversation, discussing on their experiences in the trenches, and on the effects of the war in their lives. Constance arrives, and from the back of the door, hears the whole conversation in a visibly uncomfortable state.

From then on, the contrast between the social and individual is made clear to spectators. Nature is frequently showed throughout the film, manifested through the presence of the woods, water, rainfall, in a constant parallel to the Chatterley's house. This, in our opinion, reinforces both Constance's social life with her acquaintances and her rejection to all this, which can be associated with the search of harmony, and of her individuality. This can also be interpreted as an attempt to highlight an important theme in Lawrence's novels, which is the possibility of man's self-fulfillment and integration in society and in the universe.

By discussing Constance's defiant attitudes towards life in the book, Lehman and Hunt (2010) affirm that she may be seen as a new kind of woman in post-World War I England, and that her sexuality is central to that newness. In the first chapters, the readers know details about her environment of freedom and intellectual exchange, and that she and her friends become sexually active as teenagers with students at school. Thus, the novel brings a notion of a new woman who contrasts to that of the Victorian society.

The film, in another perspective, rewrites this aspect, taking into account contextual elements of reception. Regarding that the position of women in society has changed over the years with the claims of social and feminist movements at the end of the twentieth century, and that issues about their sexuality are no longer a taboo, as it was in the twenties, the director displaced the discussion about women's social condition from the book toward a more individual one on the screen. The naming of the film, *Lady Chatterley*, which is neither similar to the second version of the novel nor to the third one, suggests that the focus of the filmic narrative has changed, and that the emphasis is put on the exploration of the character's subjectivity in search of self-fulfillment. This strategy may be seen as a good example of what Lefevere (1992) has pointed out about the idea of that sometimes source texts are transformed to be in accordance with functional components of the poetics of the reception context.

Concerning the character's construction of Parkin (Mellors in the third version of the novel) in

the cinematographic narrative, as Constance, he also grows as a human being, and develops his ability to search for self-fulfillment and integration, although he is greatly affected by Constance's influence. Parkin, as Mellors, is described as a solitary man, isolated in the woods. But, compared to Mellors, he is described in the second version as a more sensitive, introspective and individual character. Ferran, in order to justify her choice for adapting this version of the novel, says the following about him:

Well, in the second version the gamekeeper is a much wilder, more sensitive character. He's a very solitary man, with a complicated relationship to speech. He really should have been a miner, but he didn't enjoy being around people. He prefers being alone in the woods like a hermit. In the film and in the book both characters are really transformed by their relationship and by their love. And his transformation really pivots around speech. Thanks to Constance, thanks to the love they share and the trust that emerges between the two of them, this transformation is possible. He finally becomes able to express himself and to express his feelings, and in the end of the film there is a very moving scene where he really gives in to speech and actually expresses his feelings with language (Ferran, 2007, p. 2).

Ferran's speech is quite revealing of the nature of her adaptation to the cinema. According to her, the particularities of this character's construction in the second version was one of the motives to her choice, since Parkin at first sight is the one represented as a more primitive being who is transformed by the presence of Constance, or rather, by love. In doing so the director shows to spectators an important discussion of Lawrence's literary universe, which is the relationship between man and woman. In the author's view, it is through love and sex that man is able to reach out toward the sources of vitality.

Another piece of evidence of this new direction for dealing with this character's construction on the screen is the effacement, or at least, the questioning of male supremacy (the role of phallus), which led Lawrence's novel to be accused of fostering the phallic worship. According to Lehman and Hunt (2010), by putting into screen a more sensitive character who falls in love with a woman, Ferran tones down the presence of the phallus, which is excessively described in the novel as an element of wonder for women, and of power for man. They reinforce that:

The brilliance of her film is closely tied to her groundbreaking decision to go back to an earlier draft of Lawrence's influential work since by virtue

of its comparative obscurity it was less also calcified than the classic, '*A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover*'. [...].

[...] dephallicizes the penis, lovemaking, and masculinity in a profundity of ways [...] (Lehman & Hunt, 2010, p. 174, emphasis in original).

One of the consequences of the above strategy is that the legacy of Lawrence's novel to the cinema, characterized by a new film genre, called 'body guy' genre, is not respected. According to Lehman and Hunt (2010, p. 1), since the film *Titanic* (1997), by James Cameron, this genre has flourished over the years. Its classic form is linked to the plot in which a beautiful, intelligent, but discontented woman is engaged or married to a cultured, intellectual, upper class male. Then, a working-class man, often close to the land, appears, awakes her sexuality and changes her life. As a consequence,

The body guy's masculinity and sexuality is so compelling that he rescues the woman from the stultifying world of the successful 'mind guy', who is boring, controlling, and significantly, a poor lover who fails to recognize, let alone fulfill, her sexual needs (Lehman & Hunt, 2010, p. 1, emphasis in original).

As we can see, the phallic worship theme is very present in this kind of narrative. Man's body is inserted as an element of stability to woman, in a moment of weakness, and spectators are motivated to find in filmic characters some prototypes of an alleged masculinity. As an example for that, Brad Pitt stars in at least four key films of the genre: *A River Runs Through It* (1992), *Kalifornia* (1993), *Legends of the Fall* (1994), and *Fight Club* (1999).

Yet, Ferran subverts this logic of reinforcement of a prototype of masculinity on the screen. In order to do so, she chose an unconventional actor to represent the gamekeeper. Different from those actors usually expected to this kind of films, Jean-Louis Culloc'h does not embody the ideal of a handsome body in a chiseled way. In so doing some elements of Lawrence's novel are clearly emphasized in Ferran's film, but the setting up of the filmic narrative deviates from the cinematographic production of the genre, and takes a particular position in the reception system.

## Conclusion

This discussion has shown that the film *Lady Chatterley*, by Pascale Ferran, although dealing with important elements of Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, has constructed on screen an alternative reading, which deviates from both the source

text and the filmic genre 'body guy', seen as the legacy of the book in the cinema. In so doing, the filmic narrative rewrites important aspects of D. H. Lawrence's literary universe through the following procedures: a) It updates, or at least questions, women's role in the twentieth first century; b) it subverts the phallogocentric logic of both the source text and the filmic genre 'body guy'; c) and it reinforces to spectators the classicist nature of Lawrence's novel, through the film adaptation of the second of its three versions.

Concerning reception, we may say that the filmic narrative is conceived as a creatively constructed product, having a great impact on the cinematographic system for portraying relevant themes from the source text, updating them to spectators from a new context of interpretation, in a moment in which Lawrence's work had already achieved social prestige and become a canon within the English literary system. So, the rewriting of the novel consolidates images of Lawrence's literary universe, emphasizing relevant discussions on his ideas to contemporary viewers.

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