

## Kurzvita

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and film adaptation. He is a co-founder of the master program Literature and Intercultural Communication ([www.phil.muni.cz/wlmk](http://www.phil.muni.cz/wlmk)) and a Project Director of the international Centre of Literary and Intercultural Studies ([www.phil.muni.cz/wcls](http://www.phil.muni.cz/wcls)).

## Fellow-Projekt

»Czech and Central European literature on screen

The main aim of this interdisciplinary project placed on the borders between literary and film studies and cultural studies is to examine Czech and Central European literature on screen. The object of my scrutiny is primarily the literary and filmic work of art. I am describing relations between literature and film in the context of their origin. In this research project, I will focus on three main topics: a) specification of the concept of adaptation and methods of its study, b) interpretation of the aesthetic nature of film adaptation (styles,

genres, narrative structures, manifestations of intertextuality and intermediality, etc.), c) reconstruction of the creative process and production background of film adaptation (adaptation as a sociocultural institution).

The output of this project will be a book introducing new ways of thinking within adaptation theory and demonstrating the richness of this phenomenon in Czech and Central European culture of the second half of the 20th century.

*Petr Bubeníček*

## Dr. Petr Bubeníček

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1. The output of this project well-developed in Greifswald (January – September 2013) will be a book introducing new ways of thinking within adaptation theory and demonstrating the richness of this phenomenon in Czech and Central European culture of the second half of the 20th century. The monograph will attempt at confronting different approaches to adaptation and its function within Czech society or culture. The idea is to base our thinking around concepts which together form a specific part of our cultural identity. The side output of this project developed in Greifswald has been a volume of academic Journal Czech Literature dealing with literature on screen (Česká Literatura 2/2013) and an extensive article »Adaptations and their intrusions: Studying literature on screen«.

2. Analyses of film adaptations of literary texts have not got sufficient attention in contemporary Czech literary science or film studies. The essential problem might be seen in the absence of methodology which would enable the handling of the film adaptation phenomenon. Relations between film and literature in the Czech cultural context can be observed from the early stage of the film history up to the present. The richness of this intermedia exchange invites debates which have not been adequately theoretically based yet.

3. The main representatives of contemporary adaptation studies (R. Stam, L. Hutcheon and T.

Leitch) often call for exploring new methods. The field of adaptation studies is very diverse; it by far exceeds direct relations between literature and film and it enables to study the given phenomenon in a cultural, social or economic perspective. However, it follows from the seminal texts of the up-to-date trends in new adaptation studies that scholars are still trying to find an appropriate terminology in order to name phenomena involved in transformations from literature to film. One of the interpretation keys that is used in analyses of novels and films is interpretation in the context of media relations.

It still happens frequently that literary historians and others are offended by film-makers' invasions from the sphere of commercial Hollywood relations into the sacred worlds of literature, using expressions such as »betrayal,« »degradation,« »devaluation,« etc. Nevertheless, as Linda Hutcheon has convincingly demonstrated in her book »A Theory of Adaptation«, cinematic works can also portray the inner worlds of characters, which becomes even more apparent when authors use techniques of avant-garde cinema and diverse experiments. Hutcheon also proves that pauses, symbols and metaphors are not only a matter of verbal representation, but can be also transferred to an audio-visual medium.

In the last century, adaptation studies preferred the traditional objectivizing and comparative

## Projektbericht

approach. To make the picture complete, let me mention that the fundamental interpretation framework among Czech scholars was the prevailing structuralist approach of the Prague school, enriched by phenomenological literary analysis and later by the findings of French structuralism. Nevertheless, a vast majority of Czech scholars writing on the topic of adaptations draw on literary studies, and during their studies they were instructed to apply the structuralist method to reading literary texts. It was thanks to the intermedial turn that the approach to the verbal text changed radically: the significance of developing media competences grew. These competences are supposed to allow literary scholars to transcend the boundaries of one medium and turn their attention to broader phenomena (cf. W. Wolf). Their awareness of multimedia relations has brought them to the study of ekphrases, transpositions, illustrations, etc. Jan Mukařovský, the main representative of the aforementioned Prague School, was able to step out of the framework of language and indicated a possible way of transcending the boundaries of media. In 1933, he published his study »A Note on the Aesthetics of Film,« in which he considers relations across different types of art, which he sees as enriching; in this way, art »finds new ways how to experience its means of creation and look at its material from an unusual perspective.«

Certainly, this kind of study requires an appropriate definition of the medium, a definition which strikes a balance between a conception that is too broad and one that is too narrow and technical. Wolf argues that »Medium, as used in literary and intermediality studies, is a conventionally and culturally distinct means of communication, specified not only by particular technical or institutional channels (or one channel) but primarily by the use of one or more semiotic systems in the public transmission of contents that include, but are not restricted to, referential messages. Generally, media make a difference as to what kind of content can be evoked, how these contents are presented,

and how they are experienced« (W. Wolf: 2011). An analysis of multimedia relations thus leads one to a focus on specific forms of articulation by different media. Wolf's definition also shows how crucial he finds the shift from a semiotic model towards cultural paradigms.

The starting point of contemporary adaptation studies is criticism and questioning of the premises of older approaches to the study of adaptation. Close readings focusing on the work, and comparisons of the literary pretext and the new filmic text are being replaced by the study of adaptation as a part of cultural and social history. Adaptation is now seen as a complex phenomenon based on diverse contextual factors. But have all questions been answered? Is it possible to completely abandon the text? Books and film adaptations can still be viewed as artefacts whose aesthetic functions produce different effects on the audience. The audience experience a synthesis of a pretext and a new text, and the wish to compare the film with the literary work is still prevalent in the common way of thinking. It remains a question whether the theory of film adaptation offers tools and concepts which link formal aesthetic positions with contextual frames and which enhance our understanding of considerably diverse phenomena.

4. The project aims at creating a platform for a discussion leading to verifying or criticizing the methodologies used in contemporary adaptation studies. The main topics will be current trends in the theory of adaptation and a view of this phenomenon from the perspective of cultural studies and intermedia studies. The event will also include a debate about adaptation as a cultural and aesthetic text related to the area of Central Europe. The dialogue between different approaches will be directed towards possible interdisciplinarity in humanities, interconnecting research on the poetics of film adaptation with the study of adaptation in cultural, social and economic frames as well as of the process of making an adaptation (medial culture, culture of production), analyses of adaptation as an intermedial phenomenon and

approaches to adaptation which borrow methods from the field of translation theory. Possible interconnections between a »mere« interpretation of a literary and filmic text on the one hand and alternative approaches on the other hand will be considered. The aim of the project is to determine to what extent these various methods can contribute to a further discussion about literature on screen.

5. The main aim of this interdisciplinary project placed on the borders between literary and film studies and cultural studies is to examine Czech and Central European literature on screen. The object of my scrutiny is primarily the literary and filmic work of art. I am describing relations between literature and film in the context of their origin. In this research project, I am focusing on three main topics:

- a) specification of the concept of adaptation and methods of its study,
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- c) reconstruction of the creative process and production background of film adaptation (adaptation as a sociocultural institution).

As regards methodology I am drawing from theories of intertextuality, intermediality and narratology. I am interested in art representation, art distinctiveness, literary and filmic methods, media combinations and changes, as well as transfers across media. While studying literature on screen today we cannot disregard other incentives, especially a wide range of non-literary sources which inspire adaptation. Stressing broader cultural contexts and economy in some cases will lead me to the origin of screenplays, laws and honorariums, the creative genesis of adaptation, choices and customs, production mechanisms of adaptation industry and other factors.

The side output of this project developed in Greifswald has been a volume of the academic Journal »Czech Literature« dealing with literature

on screen (Česká Literatura 2/2013) and an extensive article »Adaptations and their intrusions: Studying literature on screen«. This submission considers how we can better understand film adaptation nowadays. The introductory section outlines changing ideas regarding intermedia transpositions between literature and moving images, not only reflecting the turnaround in the Anglo American field which started around twenty years ago, but also the way Russian formalists approached this phenomenon and the way Czech researchers have contributed to the debates. For further consideration of »films of the books« we have set out three interpretational perspectives, which we have developed further: intertextual, intermedia and cultural social. The first two perspectives have made it very clear that shifts towards a materialistic view have not reduced our interest in the aesthetic nature of adaptation and the malleability of the new text. Our interpretations deal with films by John Huston (The Dead, The Man Who Would Be King) and James Ivory (The Remains of the Day). Of course we cannot just make do with an immanent analysis of the text and an exposition of the relations between the book, the screenplay and the film. We believe that we will only gain any substantial motivation to ask new questions if we approach adaptation from culturological, sociological and economic viewpoints. In the final part of the article we have thus turned our attention to questions leading us from the silver screen to the circumstances surrounding the creation of the new text. We have examined the issue of film transcription authorship, basing our working hypotheses on a particular case in which a hired lawyer assessed the author's share in the creation of a screenplay arising from a prominent work of Czech literature, Markéta Lazarová by Vladislav Vančura. Debates in the working group that preceded the filming and influenced the creation process were illustrated using Démanty noci (Diamonds of the Night) by Jan Němec.