9 Transmediation

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Transmediations are everywhere around us. We meet the same concepts, ideas, narratives and experiences in different kinds of media products every day. TV commercials convey the same advertisement slogans as posters on advertisement billboards. We listen to popular songs on the radio, on Spotify or enjoy artists performing them at live concerts. Whenever a theme, an image or a narrative that is familiar to one media product is mediated again in a different media product we say it is transmediated.

We may not always pay attention to transmediation. When listening to a song being performed live, listening to it on an LP on a record player or listening to it via a compressed MP3 file via a smartphone, the basic media types of organized sound and qualified media types of music remain the same. When a novel is republished as an audiobook, the technical media of display and basic media types (re)construct meaning that was previously mediated by another media type. We might perceive a record, an MP3 file or an audiobook as a remediation, a repeated mediation, of the same media product. However, a change in the technical media of display or basic media type also involves an aspect of change; the change transfers a song or a narrative into a new context and it transforms its experience of the song or the novel. When a novel is adapted into a film, when a poem describes an oil painting, or an opera adapts a drama, all three media aspects change.

This chapter explores transmediation between qualified media types. When we watch a film based on a novel we have read, we recognize the plot that has been transferred into a film. At the same time, something has also changed. The plot finds itself transformed as it has been turned into a film. If we have met the story of a film in the form of a novel before, we start to compare two media products, the one as a source and the other as a target product. The study of transmediation explores the relation between a source media product and a target media product, exploring what is transferred and what is transformed?

In the following cases, we demonstrate how narratives and ideas can only be transferred by being transformed. This is obvious in the familiar case of a novel-to-film adaptation, which is our point of departure. Literature and film are two different qualified media types that use different basic media types: in a novel

the narrative is formed using the basic media type of text displayed on pages or screens. The audiovisual narrative of a film uses moving images and different kinds of sound-based media types displayed on a silver or electronic screen. Printed text is materially static and consists of the predominantly symbolic signs of language, whereas film is kinetic and temporal in the material modality and integrates the symbolic signs of auditive text with the dominantly iconic signs of images. What the novel *describes* with language, the film *depicts* with moving images and shows in dialogue between characters. Also, of course, there are immense differences when it comes to producing and disseminating literature and film. If we look at an adaptation like this, it becomes quite obvious that all adaptations, no matter how faithful they strive to be, involve huge changes. The two media types must by necessity deploy different means to accomplish an equivalent result.

In everyday language, we often speak of transmediations as if they were a transfer of the media product: we discuss how a ‘novel is turned into a film’. But strictly speaking, it is not the novel, painting or drama that is transformed. Instead, it is the ideas, narratives and concepts previously communicated in the source media product that are reconstructed in the target media product. And, in the end, although the material source media product remains unchanged, our idea of the source media product is transformed by the transmediation.

The question of transmediation has primarily been explored in the field of adaptation studies. Probably the most well-known examples of transmediation, and definitely the one that has been most thoroughly researched and theorized, are novel-to-screen adaptations (competing with studies of text-to-stage and theatre-to-film adaptations, see Elliott 2020). This field is often simply called adaptation studies, but when we discuss transmediation and adaptation in this chapter we will use it both in the broad sense suggested by Linda Hutcheon (Hutcheon and O’Flynn 2013) followed later by a more intermedial rethinking of the same position by Salmose and Ellestöm (2020). Hutcheon managed to open the field of adaptation studies to include not only literature and film but also opera, theatre, theme parks and many other qualified media types.

The overarching analytical challenge of adaptation is how to put transfer and transformation in relation to each other. Here, the comparison between source and media product easily leads to some pitfalls. Thomas Leitch has addressed some of these fallacies for the case of novel-to-film adaptation (Leitch 2003); for instance, a one-sided focus on what has changed and media specificity, or applying ‘fidelity’ towards the source product as a central qualifying criterion when evaluating an adaptation. Instead, Leitch suggests focusing on different kinds of adjustment strategies in literature-to-screen-adaptations (see Box 9.1).

Box 9.1 Adjustment strategies

Compression: abridging the plot, for instance, of a novel, so that it fits the format of a 150-page-long screenplay.

Expansion: if a film is based on a short story, then it is the job of the screenwriter to 'bulk up' the plot by adding more material.

Correction: introducing important changes to the source media product, often by changing the ending to fit the social context of the target media product.

Updating: transposing the plot of a classic text into a modern context in a way that demonstrates its contemporary (or universal) relevance.

Superimposition: decisions about what source material to adapt are often made based on reasons other than the literary value of the text. Concerning film, Leitch notes that cinema often 'superimposes' co-authors who are responsible for making the adaptation. Such co-authors are often the stars – actors, writers or directors.

(Leitch 2007, pp. 98–100)

The adjustment strategies can be applied to describe the transformation process of film adaptations but also to other artistic media products. However, if we want to analyse transmediation not only as an adjustment, we have to address how ideas can be transferred by transformation: We then have to investigate the interplay between *medium specificity* and *transmediality* (see Box 1.2).

A first important step when analysing transmediation is to consider the medium specificity of the source media product as well as the target media product in order to understand their medial 'affordances', their medial possibilities and limitations. This first step helps to describe the process of transformation based on the changes of technical media (the basic qualified media types involved). However, if we only consider medium specificity we risk getting stuck stating the obvious, namely that the target media product per definition is different to the source. Therefore, we also have to consider transmedial aspects, including the transfer of ideas, concepts and structural patterns.

Transmedial features can be expressed in several qualified media types. The notion of 'joy' can be expressed with quite different basic media types, with body language, the organized sound of music or the words of a literary text. There are words or phrases that by habit and convention are used to express joy. The image of a laughing person conveys joy. Images of balloons or fireworks are often connected to joyful contexts and conventions. Specific pieces of music are associated with festivity and joy, and certain musical patterns iconically relate to movements we perceive as joyful.

Structures and patterns can be transmedial, too. Narratives can be told in words, conveyed by still or moving images, or the organized sound of music.

Due to the media specificity of written, narrative literature, cinema or graphic novels, the same transmedial narrative of a quest will be told differently in the words of a novel, the moving images and sound of a Hollywood movie or the words and images of a graphic novel.

The analysis of transmediation then addresses how media-specific characteristics are used to convey transmedial ideas or structures. Which concepts and structural patterns of the source media product are easily communicated by the technical media of display and the basic media types of the target media product? Which aspects need to be transformed because of the medium specificity of the target medium?

A model for studying transmediation

To understand such processes, we must recognize the media aspects of each media product and how we interact with them in the four modalities. We will have to discriminate between transmedial and media-specific aspects and between aspects of transmediation and media representation, which will be introduced below. For the study of transmediation we suggest a multistep analysis in order to systematically disentangle and describe important aspects of the transmediation process that takes place between the source and the target media product.

- 1 The first step is to construct a working hypothesis that *delimits the scope of comparison*. To simply compare source and media target products inevitably ends with the same unsurprising result, namely that the target result differs in many important ways from the source. Therefore, the analysis needs to pursue a specific, well-defined question.
- 2 The next step consists of a *comparative close reading* of the source and the target media product. The main questions here are what has been omitted from the source media product and what has been added, transformed or developed in the target media product. Differences necessarily include form as well as content.
- 3 In the third step, the differences and similarities in terms of *transmediality and media specificity* are identified. First, which transmedial traits were transferred? Which aspects do we recognize? Second, which of the changes can be connected with medium-specific affordances of the technical media of display and the basic media types?
- 4 Fourth, which changes are connected with the *contexts and conventions of the qualified media types*? This depends on the contextual conditions of the different production processes, which can include the producer's intentions and the production circumstances as well as commercial considerations and broader historical, philosophical or aesthetic considerations. This aspect is often overlooked in formally oriented studies: in some cases, to address such questions will of course also require additional methodologies, including knowledge about historical and institutional factors. This level

thus has the possibility to make the analysis more complex but also involves the danger of jumping to conclusions based on limited knowledge. The fourth task, therefore, is to discuss the conditions that may frame the findings of step three.

- 5 In a fifth and final move, a *new perspective* is employed. Instead of seeing only a transformation of source to target, every new transmediation in another media type affects our understanding of the source media product. This step should open a reflection on which aspects of the originating source may be read in a new way in the light of the target. Do we learn something new about the source?

In the next sections, we modify – or adapt – these five analytical steps to three different media types and three cases, in slightly different ways. We discuss the adaptation of a literary canonical work, Joe Wright’s 2005 novel-to-film adaptation of Jane Austen’s novel *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) a novel that repeatedly has been adapted into new contexts and audiences. We then explore how poetry expresses the encounter with a piece of visual art, as in the Canadian poet Ann Carson’s ekphrastic poem ‘Western Motel’ (Carson 2001), which describes Edward Hopper’s painting of the same name from 1957. Finally, we explore a stage-to-stage adaptation with the example of the German composer Richard Strauss’s opera adaptation (1905) of Oscar Wilde’s drama *Salomé* (1891). Both drama and opera are performed on stage, but the kind of performance, the use of dialogue and music, and the conventions at play differ widely and inform the adaptation process

Novel-to-film adaptation

Novel-to-film studies were held in low esteem for a long time. It did not belong in the traditional discipline of literary studies but was not considered to be a genuine part of film studies. From its beginnings, film studies strived for the recognition given to the study of established media types like literature. Therefore, film studies investigated and highlighted the medium-specific forms of the still ‘new’ medium of cinema and was thus less interested in relations of cinema with other media. It was only much later, in the 1990s, that adaptation studies became a broadly recognized academic discipline. At the time of writing, several academic journals specialize in novel-to-film adaptations, and at conferences and on the pages of books, intense discussions take place concerning the history, form and importance of adaptations.

Historically, a classical debate in adaptation studies was about whether adaptations have any aesthetic legitimacy despite their intermedial character: too literary for film enthusiasts and not sufficiently literary for the literati, they questioned the conventional expectations of both qualified media types. Few critics or artists today would doubt that it is possible to produce aesthetically satisfying work that crosses media borders. Therefore, the question of aesthetic purity is partly relegated to the historically dated arguments.

Another recurring question, however, addresses fidelity and refuses to die: the early critics engaged in adaptation studies were already well aware that fidelity was a problematic criterion, simply because any media transformation, by way of its very definition, must infer a change in means and signifying forms (demonstrated in Elliott 2003). Nevertheless, in many popular and journalistic discourses, the demand for fidelity lives on. However, in contemporary parlance, the value-laden notion of 'fidelity' is very often replaced by the more neutral terms 'similarities' and 'differences' when comparisons are made between source and target media products in adaptations or other transmediations. This is not only so in novel-to-film adaptations, but is typical in discussions about all transmediation in the aesthetic realm.

Contemporary adaptation studies proceed on the basis that cinema is inextricably connected not only to literature but also to other arts. In a standard textbook on adaptation studies, the shared history of film and literature is described as stretching all the way back to the very birth of cinema. The first films, produced at the end of the nineteenth century, were heavily influenced by *tableaux vivants*, vaudeville and theatre, and from its inception, cinema illustrated or adapted literary classics. Even today, more than half of Oscar-nominated films are adaptations of previously published literary materials (Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins 2010, p. 10), even though not all adaptations are marketed as such. Other film adaptations explicitly connect to their literary source, as what we here call '*prestige adaptation*': a mainstream film adaptation of a canonical literary work, usually cast with established actors whose status as stars, it is hoped, will mean that the film is successful (see Box 9.2).

Box 9.2 Prestige adaptation

In the context of Anglophone cinema, prestige adaptations encompass adaptations of Shakespeare's plays and canonical English novels (e.g. those of Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, the Brontës) but also classics of genre literature, for example, fantasy (e.g. J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*) or crime stories (e.g. Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*). When analysing this type of adaptation, it is important to be familiar with two concepts. Both are different forms of 'corrections' in Leitch's (2007) terms: *gentrification*, which describes the process by which screen adaptations of literary classics are made to fit the confines of contemporary film genres (see Whelehan and Cartmell (2010)) and *heritage film* (a term first coined by Andrew Higson (1993)), which originally denoted films from the 1980s and early 1990s that were set in the nineteenth or twentieth century, mostly adaptations of classics that include meticulously recreated period details and are combined with a nostalgic idealization of the life of the upper classes. Later adaptations of nineteenth- and twentieth-century classics were notably less complacent towards it, and more interested in depicting a realistic picture of the past. These films have been called *post-heritage* films (Monk 1995). The 2005 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* can be read within the broader context of post-heritage.

In order to analyse the process of transmediation between novel and film, we will explore a case in which the relation between source and target is apparent: a relatively recent film adaptation of Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). The adaptation, directed by Joe Wright and written by Deborah Moggach, was released in 2005 and is the newest adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* at the time of writing. It belongs to the category of prestige adaptations by virtue of its sumptuous production values (sets and costumes), as well as due to the star status of the actors involved: Keira Knightley (Lizzie), Matthew McFadyen (Mr. Darcy) and Judi Dench in the supporting role of Lady Catherine. This adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* also belongs to the category of post-heritage because of its critical attitude to certain elements of the past, such as the inferior status of women in the nineteenth century.

In the subsequent section of the chapter we will analyse the process of transmediation of the source media product (the literary text) to the target media product (the film) in five steps. The analysis will focus on the opening chapter of the novel, and the opening sequence of the film. For the sake of clarity, we decided to study the opening sequence of only one adaptation, without comparing it to other, earlier screen versions, even though such a comparative analysis usually yields interesting results.

At the time of writing, the film is widely accessible via various streaming services. We suggest that before reading on, you read the opening chapter of Austen's novel and watch at least the first five minutes of the film.

The opening of Pride and Prejudice: From page to screen

The initial chapter of *Pride and Prejudice* is relatively short. It opens with the celebrated first sentence, 'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.' This remark turns out to be an observation of the novel's remarkably ironic omniscient narrator who then moves on to relate a rapid-fire conversation between Mrs. and Mr. Bennet, which starts with a piece of local gossip: a large house in the neighbourhood has just been let and the new tenant is a young man. This is tantalizing news to a family which includes five unmarried daughters. In accordance with the inheritance law of the time, upon the death of Mr. Bennet, his property will go to his male next-of-kin, and his widow and children will be left destitute. Finding husbands for the five daughters of the family, who will be able to support them financially after the death of their father, is thus a matter of first importance. The novel's protagonist, Lizzie, is mentioned in the conversation in a way that makes it clear that she is her father's favourite. The dialogue between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet makes the reader privy to their fractious relationship, and this is brought home in the last paragraph, in which the omniscient narrator offers an insight into their personalities:

Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three-and-twenty years had been

insufficient to make his wife understand his character. *Her* mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper.

(Austen 1991, p. 4)

The narrative structure of the first chapter of the novel displays transmedial characteristics that can easily be transferred to audiovisual cinematic narration, specifically because the presentation of conflict and the characters are based on dialogue. Just like a well-written exposition scene in a film, the opening chapter immediately sets up the story. The very first lines of the novel contain the inciting event (the arrival of a wealthy young man in the neighbourhood), and the dialogue between the Bennets makes it possible for the reader to infer what kind of a world the story is set in. The main characters are a middle-class family living quietly in the country, where the arrival of a new neighbour is exciting news. From the way in which her parents discuss Lizzie, the readers also get a hint of what kind of a girl the protagonist is going to be. From her parents' conversation, we can sense that there is something unusual about Lizzie that sets her apart from her four sisters. All this information is revealed to us in fast-paced dialogue, which gives us insight into the personalities of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet and sets up the dynamic of their relationship, which will later be exploited for comic effect.

Interestingly, even though the first chapter is so effective in capturing the reader's interest and presenting the main premise of the story, no major screen adaptation of the novel has faithfully portrayed this conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. The opening scenes of all existing film and television adaptations are different, and each finds a way to present the audience with the key piece of information ('Netherfield Park is let at last!'), but the first scene is never just a faithful depiction of the conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet.¹

The opening of the 2005 film adaptation focuses on the heroine from the very first seconds. The audience enters the world of the film with Lizzie (Keira Knightley) quite literally acting as our guide. The long Steadicam shot, which takes up most of the opening sequence, tracks Lizzie's steps as she comes back from her solitary walk, and we see her family from her perspective. Let us now go through the five-step procedure outlined above to analyse how the opening sequence of the film as a work of adaptation.

1 Delimit the scope of analysis

After reading the first chapter and watching the opening sequence, we decided to focus our analysis on the shift from the omniscient narration in the novel to the 'heroine-centric' storytelling in the screen adaptation. Why does the opening scene of the film shift the focus from the parents' conversation to Lizzie, and how is this shift achieved?

2 *Comparative close reading*

What information is preserved in the film version? What has been omitted? A marked difference between the novel and the film is that Joe Wright's adaptation opens with Lizzie taking a solitary walk in the countryside. In terms of Leitch's five adjustment strategies, this could be seen as an expansion. For the first two minutes of the film the camera follows Lizzie coming home from her morning walk. As Lizzie approaches her home, the audience gets the first glimpse of the Bennets' residence through her eyes. We see a large, if slightly run-down house, which is messy and full of life. It is only when she passes by the window of her father's study and overhears the famous line 'Netherfield Hall is let at last', after which she and her sisters start eavesdropping on the parents' conversation, which is a compressed version of the dialogue from the novel.

Despite these differences, the opening scenes of the film convey the same crucial information to the audience as the first chapter of the novel: Lizzie's walk towards the house shows her family's social position, she is also introduced as an intelligent young woman with a book in her hand. The dialogue is compressed but also distributed between the parents and the daughters, presenting a close-knit family, discussing exciting news of a new neighbour.

3 *Transmediality and medium specificity*

Out of all of these pieces of information about the Bennets, only the last one is conveyed in dialogue. The remaining four are presented primarily via moving images. The reasons for the change are rooted in the basic media types of film. The moving images, the dialogue and other auditory media types, *show* in a film what a narrator of a novel can *tell*. The scene described in the novel is completely static, with two characters talking with no background information about the setting. The film privileges movement over description and replaces the scene in the novel with a more dynamic sequence. Put simply, the literary text *describes* with words (using conventional signs), whereas the cinematic images and sounds *show* by way of iconic similarity. What the narrator of a novel tells us, the film will have to show.

In the novel, the dialogue between the Bennets is used to present the conflict and the social context and to introduce the protagonist. In the film, the moving images, dialogue, music, and sound effects communicate information about the family. For example, the view of the house and the characters' costumes allow the audience to gauge their financial status. When Lizzie enters the house, the camera also moves around, emphasizing the bustle of the everyday life of the Bennets. Furthermore, other, auditory media types such as sound design and music add new information. Lizzie's walk is accompanied by music in the style of early nineteenth-century piano music, which builds the atmosphere of the first scene and which even drowns out the sound of Lizzie's sister Mary playing the more old-fashioned harpsichord.

All in all, the visual and auditory media types add up to a rich portrait of Lizzie as the protagonist. In the scenes in which she is shown with her sisters, she is always presented at the centre of the group, which subtly enhances her central role.

4 *Qualified media type: Conventions, production and dissemination*

The creative decision to open the film with Lizzie walking home also follows the golden rule of screenwriting to open the film by showing the protagonist. Joe Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* is the story of Lizzie, showing her journey as a character, and this journey begins from the first seconds of the film. This means that other elements of the storyworld (e.g. setting, characters) play a supporting role and their most important function is to strengthen and highlight the heroine's journey, which can explain the decision to shift the focus from the conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet to Lizzie's experience of witnessing the conversation.

We can also consider the broader production and reception context for this version of *Pride and Prejudice*. What was the film landscape in the early 2000s? What films were box office hits; what genres were fashionable? In the early 2000s, the British film industry scored two global hits in the romantic comedy genre: *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001) and *Love Actually* (2003). Their phenomenal success led to a renewed vogue for romantic comedies. In fact, the promotional materials for Joe Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* highlighted the fact that the film was produced by the same studio that was responsible for *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Love Actually*, and the marketing campaign practically disregarded the fact that the film was set in the nineteenth century, promoting it as 'the ultimate chick flick'.

Additionally *Pride and Prejudice* went into production eight years after the explosion of 'Austenmania', which started in 1995 when several films and television series based on works of Jane Austen became box office hits. Especially the 1995 BBC television series made a great cultural impact and developed a passionate fan following, which was also incidentally referenced in *Bridget Jones's Diary*. The film adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* in 2005 was thus eagerly anticipated, and instantly began to be compared to the earlier BBC version. The contexts of the romantic comedy boom and Austenmania prove relevant for the analysis of the 2005 *Pride and Prejudice*. In fact, we could argue that the film has a dual identity as both a (post-) heritage adaptation of a canonical novel and a romantic comedy. It is especially tempting to analyse Lizzie, played by Keira Knightley, as a version of a romantic comedy heroine. In the opening sequence of the film, she is singled out thanks to camera movements and framing, suggesting that, in the great tradition of romantic comedy heroines, she is 'not like the other girls'.

5 *New perspectives*

Every adaptation can potentially influence the interpretation and reception of the source text. After watching an adaptation of a novel, audience members who choose to (re)read the source text will usually imagine the characters and settings as they were presented in the film.

Taking into consideration that step 5 is more suited to analysing complete films than individual scenes, we can still argue that the focus on the heroine in the film's opening scene makes the audience more strongly identify with Lizzie. As the protagonist, she is, literally, presented as the most beautiful and most brilliant of the five sisters. This may change the perception of the character for those people in the audience who will read the novel afterwards.

Ekphrasis, or: What words can make us see

In Ancient Greece and Rome, ekphrasis was a rhetorical term, to mean the art of describing a work of art or other things with *energeia*, with *vividness*. In the twentieth century, the term ekphrasis has begun to specifically denote a verbal description of a work of art (Webb 2009), for example, a literary text, prose or poetry, that in some way represents a painting, a drawing or a photograph, either real or fictitious. One of the most famous examples is Homer's description in the *Iliad* of the making of the shield of Achilles as an outstanding piece of artisanry. Like many other remarkable pieces of art described in literature, the shield is fictive, and Homer vividly describes a piece of work that has never existed, and invites the reader or listener to imagine it (see Heffernan (1993) and Krieger (1992)).

Traditionally, ekphrasis has been seen as a way for verbal texts to compete with and to imitate images – by painting pictures with words – and this might be the reason why writing ekphrastic texts seems to be so alluring to poets and novelists alike. Just as the ekphrasis is a popular trope or genre for writers, it is an attractive subject area of study for literary and intermedial studies, and therefore the concept of ekphrasis is well researched and contested. Many definitions of ekphrasis have been suggested since the study of ekphrasis as a literary phenomenon took off about a century ago, but here we use intermedial scholar Claus Clüver's (1997) definition, which is that ekphrasis is 'the verbal representation of a real or fictitious text composed in a non-verbal sign system' (p. 26). This definition avoids a problem that Lars Elleström (2021, p. 45) has pointed to: a verbal (written) representation is also visual, and a term such as 'visual arts' is thus misleading – even though both images and text are perceived visually in the sensorial modality, they communicate differently in the spatio-temporal and semiotic modality. As Clüver's definition suggests, there are other relations between media that could be and have been defined as ekphrasis, including verbal representations of pieces of instrumental music, film, dance, theatre etc. In this text, however, we focus on the transmediation between a visual, static image and a written text, and for the sake of clarity, a poem is chosen for the analysis.

Ekphrasis is an example of a transmediation between a source media product and a target media product, belonging to different media types that are structured differently on the level of the semiotic modality. A graphic image is constituted by iconic signs, whereas a verbal text is constituted by symbolic signs. In the material and sensorial modality, text and images both appear on

surfaces and are perceived visually. However, in most cases the poetic text is structured sequentially (you have to read the words in a certain order for them to make sense), which gives verbal text a fixed sequentiality in the sensorial modality that a static, graphic image lacks. However, both iconic images and words can represent special relations and temporal events in the sensorial modality.

When analysing an ekphrasis there are certain questions that we need to ask. For example, does the ekphrasis describe the image or does it merely refer or allude to it? Does it take the image as a starting point for a narrative or does it linger in the depicted moment? Which aspects of the paintings are verbally represented? Which details are described? Does it describe the media representation – the painting – as a qualified media type or does it focus primarily on transmediating the content? These are all questions that can be asked to gain a deeper understanding of the specific ekphrastic relationship between the source and the target media product. Furthermore, the aim of an ekphrasis is seldom simply to faithfully represent an image – instead, it uses the image to reflect on other issues. What is the role of the image in the poem? How does the description of an image relate to the poem's theme, and the sentiments and the reflections it conveys?

So let's study how the ekphrastic poem 'Western Motel' by Anne Carson (2001) represents and transforms Edward Hopper's painting *Western Motel* (1957). In our analysis, we follow the five analytical steps presented above with some modifications.

1 *The scope of analysis*

As ekphrastic poems are often comparatively short, we start our analysis with the presentation of the complete target media product.

Pink bedspreads you say
are not pleasing to you
yet you sit very straight
till the pictures are through.
Two suitcases watch you like dogs.
You wear your hair parted
low on the right.
Mountains outside
look like beds without night.
Two suitcases watch you like dogs.
Glass is for getaway.
Hot is out there.
You seem to know
the road ends here.
Two suitcases watch you like dogs.

*Future things then are not yet: and if they be not yet,
they are not. And if they are not,*

they cannot be seen.

Yet foretold they may be

from things present which are already and are seen.

(Augustine, *Confessions* XI)

2 Comparative close reading

What are the similarities and differences between the painting and the poem? The source media product is Hopper's painting depicting a woman sitting on a bed by a large window. The walls, ceiling and floor of the room are green; one can see mountains and a blue sky through the window. In the left-hand bottom corner there are two suitcases, and in the right-hand bottom corner there is an armchair. Calmness dominates the painting; no motion is represented, despite the suitcases and the motel room, which might signal things like 'passing through' or 'travelling'. As for the ekphrasis, Hans Lund (2002) differentiates between two types: the *narrative ekphrasis* and the *ekphrasis of the frozen moment*, and even though it would certainly be possible given the transitory nature of a motel room, Carson's poem does not take the painting as a starting point for a narrative; instead it lingers in the moment, stretching it out over three stanzas separated by one recurring line: 'Two suitcases watch you like dogs'. The repetition in itself underlines the stillness of the painting since it illustrates the lingering and the lack of progression, as the poem concludes: 'the road ends here'. The poem describes some of the objects depicted in the painting: the woman, the bed, the window, the suitcases and the mountains and some of the spatial relations between them (the woman sitting on the bed – even though that is not explicitly stated in the poem, only implied – and the mountains outside, seen from the window). Some details are mentioned: how the woman parts her hair, that the bedspreads are pink and how the mountains look. Overall, the poem is not very descriptive. However, some scholars claim that an ekphrasis does not have to be descriptive as long as it relates to its source media product in a way that it is actualized in the mind of the reader.

3 Transmediality and medium specificity

The most important objects in the painting – the woman, the bed, the suitcases, the window and the mountains – as well as its silent and static atmosphere have been transmediated to the poem. However, due to the specificities of each media type, they are clearly not identical after the transfer: we would never mistake a painting for a poem or vice versa. This has to do with the semiotic sign systems used by each medium: the painting consists of iconic signs and the poem consists of symbolic signs. Therefore, what is depicted in a painting must in an ekphrasis be described by means of words. A motionless and silent atmosphere in a painting can be created by having a balanced composition, geometrical shapes, muted colours,

etc. In a poem it must instead be conveyed verbally, for example, by means of short sentences, repetition and a lack of narrative progress.

One way of reading and writing an ekphrasis focuses on how we interact with images, both real and imaginary ones. Some ekphrastic texts are structured so that they imitate how we look at a painting, for example, by means of zooming in and out (see Robillard 2007). In Carson's ekphrasis, two crucial lines are 'yet you sit very straight/till the pictures are through', which refer to the making of the painting: the artist painted the woman sitting on the bed, and she sat still until the painting was finished. These lines function as visual triggers for the reader. They are also intertextually linked to another ekphrastic poem, 'American Gothic' by John Stone (1998), after the painting *American Gothic* by Grant Wood (1930). In Stone's poem, the man and the woman stand patiently while their portrait is being painted, and the man 'asking the artist silently/how much longer'. The ekphrasis thus becomes a representation of the finished painting and of the process of its making, just as in the description of the shield of Achilles.

4 Themes and contexts

When analysing an ekphrastic text it is often fruitful to do a hermeneutic reading and to take relevant contexts into consideration. In this case, 'Western Motel' is one poem in a suite of several ekphrastic poems representing Hopper's paintings, 'HOPPER: CONFESSIONS' (Carson 2001). All of the poems are followed by a quote from Augustine's *Confessions*, Book XI, except for the last one ('The Glove of Time by Edward Hopper'), which is not an ekphrasis but a poem that lets Edward Hopper himself reflect on issues such as time, eternity and art. The 11th book in *Confessions* discusses the nature of time: how the present relates to itself, to the past and to the future. By letting a quote from the theologian Augustine (354–430) follow each ekphrastic poem in the suite and by finishing the suite with a poem that explicitly has the word 'time' in the title, Carson points the interpreter in a certain direction: the theme is time, and the nature of time. With that in mind, we might understand the motel room as a waiting room, where the focus is not the 'future things' that Augustine mentions, but the present, which is exactly Augustine's point as well: only the present exists. Paintings and other visual, iconic images are often said to represent just that: a constant now, a moment encapsulated in time. This alleged property of painting has inspired and frustrated poets and thinkers throughout history, and many ekphrastic texts, like this one by Carson, deal with the question of time and timelessness, and, by extension, of life and death.

5 New perspectives

What kind of transformations have taken place in this ekphrasis? Does the ekphrastic poem cast new light on the source media product? The poem performs a transformation from the painting *Western Motel* to a mental image of

what it represents. The images the poem conjures up vary depending on whether or not the reader is familiar with the painting. If she is, then the title and description of central aspects of the scene will most likely make her see the painting as a cognitive representation without perception, but not exactly as it is. We tend to forget details, or we transform them in our memories. As the American author Siri Hustvedt (2005) writes: 'Every painting is always two paintings: the one you see and the one you remember' (p. 12). Furthermore, the memories of the actual painting will merge with images conjured up by similes in the poem, for example, 'Two suitcases watch you like dogs' and 'Mountains outside/look like beds without night'. These similes (written comparisons) create a blend where the readers see suitcases and dogs, mountains and beds simultaneously and/or integrated: suitcases that look like dogs and mountains that look like beds.

Thus, much has changed in the process but much is still the same: the stillness emanating from the painting characterizes the poem as well. We still meet a woman in a motel room, her hair parted on the right, sitting on a bed with a pink bedspread. The window shows an outdoor scene that does not really concern her: in the painting she is turned away from the window, and the poem states that '[g]lass is for getaway'. She is not getting anywhere: 'the road ends here'. Is this a reflection on the static nature of painting (as the fictive Hopper says in the last poem of the suite: 'It so happens/paint is motionless')? Or is it an interpretation of this specific painting, or both? Either way, the poem is an interpretation of the painting, and media transformation processes go both ways, as Jørgen Bruhn (2013) points out: the target media product consists of a transformation of the source media product, but the source media product itself becomes transformed by the target media product. After having read Carson's poem, we see Hopper's painting in a new light, as part of the adaptational feedback typical of all media transformations.

Transforming drama to opera

Studies that compare adaptations of literary works in opera have a long tradition that goes back to the nineteenth century. Film and literature studies seem to be rather unaware of this rich body of texts about opera and music theatre that has been written during the past one-and-a-half centuries. The results of studies of, say, adaptations of novels into films overlap in many instances with those of opera adaptation studies. But opera has its genre- and media-specific features as well (addressed, for example, by Stenström (1994)).

Compression and convention: The work of the librettist

As virtually all writers on opera adaptations have pointed out, writing the words for an opera after the model of an existing literary text – which was the work of the librettist – means shortening the original narrative massively, a compression in terms of Leitch's five adjustment strategies. Common

compression strategies that librettists pursue are condensing the plot by reducing the action to a handful of crucial scenes, eliminating subplots and minor characters, deleting any retrospective and prospective telling of the story to create a strictly chronological order of events, and sharpening the profiles of characters. These transmedial strategies can also be found in film and dramatic adaptations of novels.

More media-specific is the role of music in the adaptation process. In opera, musical, vaudeville and other forms of music theatre and film, the characters sing, and their songs, the dances and the action are accompanied by instrumental music. Playing music requires time. Instrumental music and singing may sometimes be more in the background – like in melodrama or its modern successor, the spoken dialogue in film that includes background music – or sometimes more in the foreground, like in a virtuoso opera aria. An experienced opera or musical librettist will consider where to put such music highlights when writing the text. Another tradition is that of the choice of the voice range, for instance, tenor parts for the heroes and soprano parts for heroines. When writing a libretto the choice of a certain type of character is implicitly also that of a certain voice range. Conventions also exist about the instruments associated with certain characters. Following or not following these traditions and conventions will give the experienced listener valuable hints about possible interpretations of the opera

Limitations and possibilities of opera

The qualified medium of opera implies certain conventions but also certain limitations of space, time and voice. The natural venue for experiencing an opera is the stage. In a live context, the singers' voices and the orchestra are in precise acoustic balance (see Chapter 14). Composing operas that were not written for live performance, such as the radio operas of the first half of the twentieth century, had to happen within the acoustic limitations that transmitted radio signals offer. This point can be addressed either in step 3 or in step 4 of the adaptation model, depending on whether the media specificity (step 3) or the production conditions (step 4) are in focus.

Opera, perhaps even more than spoken drama, only exists within the very moment of its performance. Its meaning derives from performing and listening to a tone or sound in the very moment of its transitory existence. A composer therefore seldom writes vocal parts that put the success of a performance at risk technically; he or she has to know what can be sung and what cannot. There are limitations of time. An opera should not take longer than a few hours to perform because the voices of the singers as well as the lips of the brass players in the orchestra cannot be overused.

While drama can be performed with very limited resources, such as just one or two actors and a stage, opera involves a large instrumental and sometimes vocal ensemble. This makes opera much more time-consuming and expensive to rehearse and perform. Opera therefore has always required generous

sponsorship. These limitations and requirements need to be considered when analysing an opera adaptation. For instance, if a character displays different features in the opera compared to the drama, this may be due to the political view of the sponsors or to the specialization of the singers. Also, a composer may change the profile of a character and add some musical means that change the interpretation of the plot because the music was written in another historical period or for a different audience from the one the drama was aiming at.

Opera adaptation therefore highlights the fact that all adaptation not only relates to a specific source media product but always adapted to a specific target audience and into a new context. The librettist's medial opportunities are musical structures and sounding reality. Opera, for the most part, consists of non-diegetic music (cf. Gorbman 1987 regarding this term), which means music that only exists for the listener and not for the characters on stage. Lines are sung and actions are executed with an orchestral accompaniment. The role of the music can in some instances be compared with that of the narrator in literature because it gives the actions and words a clarity in terms of expression that the spoken word can barely achieve. The action may shift between various emotions within seconds thanks to the instrumental accompaniment or the vocal delivery of a singer. The orchestra may even reveal things that are hidden from the characters on stage, revealing their inner life. The orchestra may look forwards or backwards in the narrative by quoting or anticipating material from other parts of the score, thus creating narratives that run parallel.

The possibilities of using the orchestra's timbre, harmony, rhythm, tempo, volume, instrumentation and so on to create a soundscape with a certain meaning are infinite. Even though the orchestra is usually invisible, it is at the heart of opera, and the tradition of opera music has a successor in mainstream film with its wall-to-wall orchestral soundtracks (cf. Howard Shore's film score for *The Lord of the Rings*). When an opera is an adaptation of a piece of literature, the composer – and thus the music – can be seen as an interpretation of the source text, and the opera may often change the audience's view on this particular piece of literature (cf. step 5 of the proposed analytical model); in some instances, the musical version of the piece may even outshine the literary source, such as Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata* (1853) or George Bizet's *Carmen* (1875).

A media-specific possibility that is unique to music drama is the simultaneity of events. Characters can sing different or sometimes completely contrary texts at the same time in the ensembles (duets, trios, quartets, etc.). This would be hard to accept in traditional spoken drama and film. The different texts with their different meanings can be mirrored in the simultaneity of different musical events. European music is essentially polyphonic, which means that different melodies can be sung and played simultaneously, and there is no upper limit for how many acoustic events can occur at the same time. At the turn of the twentieth century, the number of instruments playing together became excessively large, confronting the audience with sometimes dozens of different musical events played and sung at the same time. In short,

composing an opera means giving the drama a certain direction, emotional power, clarity in terms of events and hence sometimes a different content. It is an act of interpretation.

Box 9.3 From transmediation analysis to opera adaptation

Each form of transmediation addresses the relation between source and target media product slightly differently. In order to address drama to opera adaptation, you have to consider the following questions that 'adapt' the analytical model to the medium specificity of opera.

- Decide on the scope and form analysis. Do you want to compare the drama text to the musical score and libretto in a more *text-based analysis* compare the drama and the opera as *performed artworks*?
- Spoken drama and opera share a lot of features. Both present human bodies and their voices to an audience, they are performed on stage and they present a narrative. However, drama and opera integrate the same basic media types and transmedial features in a media-specific way. Especially the way how music contributes to the narrative and its interpretation in opera is a central part of analysing an opera adaptation.
- In order to grasp how music transmediates the plot, conflict and themes of the drama, you focus on:
 - a the main characters: what does their voice range reveal about their gender, age and role in the drama? How do the tempo, range and expression of their vocal delivery differ from each other? Are the characters singing long tones or do they merely speak their parts? Are their psychological profiles similar to or different from those in the source?
 - b the orchestra: what 'role' does it have in a certain situation? Does it describe or comment on the action like an external narrator would or does it focalize and tell the story from the perspective of a character? Do you recognize certain melodies that return several times, themes or leitmotifs? Do central themes change shape over time and how? Are there certain solo instruments or instrument groups that are linked to a certain character, situation or action? Where does the composer put climaxes in volume and instrumentation and where does the orchestra remain silent? Does the orchestra follow the movements of the actors' bodies – for instance, like in a cartoon – or does it perhaps tell a story that is different from the one that is visible on stage?

Richard Strauss's (1864–1949) opera *Salome* (1905) is part of a whole chain of transmediations. The story of Salome (who lived during the first century AD) is partly factual and goes back to the New Testament and Flavius Josephus's *De bello judaico*. The legend of Salome's dance in exchange for the head of John the Baptist became part of the medieval literary canon in the early fifth century. What followed was an extraordinary intermedial career of the subject that involves chains of transmediations. Starting in the Renaissance, Salome became popular among painters. At the end of the nineteenth century – parallel with the early women's rights movement, and with symbolism – several painters and writers presented their versions of it. The most infamous one became Oscar Wilde's (1854–1900) eponymous prose drama. Wilde's scandalous play triggered a new era for representing Salome's dance in ballet and opera. Its best-known musical version became Richard Strauss's eponymous opera.

1 *Delimit the scope*

Richard Strauss's *Salome* belongs to the category of *Literaturoper* (cf. Istel 1914), a musicalization of a drama that leaves the words unchanged. In the opera, the text is a compressed version of Wilde's drama, but there are no major changes in terms of plot. The adaptation of *Salome* can show especially well how music works as a dramatic device; understanding how an opera score is structured also means understanding how a film's soundtrack is structured. The aim of the next sections is to get to grips with the medium of dramatic music – its communicative functions, structures, modes and means of production and reception, and, most importantly, its relation to the action and the story. We delimit our scope of analysis to the question: how does Strauss's music modify the content of Wilde's drama?

Box 9.4 Word and tone in opera

At the beginning of opera history, operas were seen as a form of drama, and hence the writer of the words, the librettist, was regarded as being the author of an opera while the composer was seen as assisting to a greater or lesser extent with the creation of a version that could be performed. The words were the essence; the music was accidental until around 1800. After that, this hierarchy was turned upside down. The music was regarded as essential and the author of the words was only assisting the composer. In contemporary discussions about opera, the fact that it was created in distinct steps by different persons was seen as an aesthetic problem because the quality of libretto and score appeared to be heterogeneous in some instances. Richard Wagner (1813–83) presented a more organic form of music theatre than was produced by following these earlier conventions. He wrote both the libretto and the music himself; vocal lines were to be spoken rather than sung and there were elaborate orchestral parts. This approach was different from the contemporary Italian or French compound form of opera.

2 Comparative close reading

We focus our analysis on the comparison of Wilde's drama text with Strauss's musical score. Strauss drew on Richard Wagner's more organized form of music theatre as a model (see Box 9.4). Strauss took the German translation of Wilde's piece and set it to music without seeking help from a writer (Deppisch 2001, p. 84). If we look at the text, the only change Strauss made was to shorten the text by about half. The action was left intact, with stage directions in their original wording. There are no new scenes and characters added. Strauss's one-act music drama is therefore in many aspects identical to Wilde's one-act play. Its playing time of about one hour and 45 minutes may correspond to that of the spoken drama. Both versions adhere to Greek philosopher Aristoteles' demand for unity of time and space in drama and present their respective version of the events 'in real time'. However, there are more differences than similarities in the distribution of time and the appearance of the work on a detailed level.

3 Transmediality and media specificity

When comparing drama text and opera score, we can notice how Strauss stresses structural patterns that already can be found in the text of Wilde's drama. Salome asks Jochanaan three times to touch one part of his body and he refuses thrice. Herodes asks Salome three times to come close to him and she refuses thrice as well. Salome's wish for a kiss from Jochanaan is repeated ten times ('I will kiss thy mouth, Jochanaan'), and her demand for his head ('Give me the head of Jochanaan') eight times, with the very same words. Symbols, for instance, the half-moon, and identical phrases, recur throughout the work. These repetitive structures in the drama text are enhanced in Strauss's musical setting. Musical structures need repetitions to build relations between the different parts of a piece, on several levels: periods and phrases can be repeated, measures are repeating metric structures, sometimes over a long period of time, and words or lines are repeated in opera arias. In Wagnerian music drama, one important device for creating an instrumental 'subtext' of the drama is the leitmotif, which can comment on a dramatic situation by way of repetition. Strauss presents several leitmotifs and weaves dense thematic structures with them in *Salome*. Some are clearly linked to characters, such as Jochanaan's horn leitmotif (heard for the first time when he enters the stage), and some emphasize some aspects of the characters, such as the rising fourth motif, which is linked to his prophecy (or to that of the Messiah). It is the latter motif that appears at the end of the Dance of the Seven Veils and gives insight into Salome's thoughts while she is dancing.

The choice of voice parts and ranges contributes to the characterization. Salome is a 16-year-old girl, so the lyrical soprano – signifying youth in opera – was a natural choice. The choice of a serious baritone for Jochanaan – the Hebrew name for John – signifies seriousness, masculinity and tranquillity.

Jochanaan has the slowest declamation tempo of all of the characters, which lends serenity to his prophecies. Herodes is a tenor but, as in many other Strauss operas, this tenor part is not heroic. On the contrary, this sick and half-drunk character is presented as weak, unmanly and a coward through his musical declamation. His singing includes squeaking, yelling, barking and shrieking. The young captain of the guards, Narraboth, who is in despair because of his unanswered love for Salome, is also a tenor, but a lyrical one who has to sing expressive melodies rather than declaim and shout like the other tenors in this opera.

The role of the orchestra connects to its four functions in the Wagnerian tradition: 1) the orchestra defines historical time and space acoustically, known as the *couleur locale*; Strauss was proud of being able to compose a humid sub-tropical night without referring to worn-out formulae in music which were typical of late nineteenth-century exoticism (Deppisch 2001, p. 84). 2) The orchestra gives psychological insights into the inner lives of the characters. While dancing and arousing her stepfather, Salome is thinking about the strange man in the cistern. The orchestra makes her inner thoughts audible. 3) The orchestra comments on what is happening on stage, for instance, through leitmotifs. Feelings and characters can develop over time; the neutral woodwind drill motif, for instance, is linked to the awakening of Salome's curiosity in the first scene that turns into sadism when the head of the dead prophet is shown to her in the last scene. 4) Wagner explained in his programmatic book *Oper und Drama* (1851) that the orchestra in modern music theatre had taken over one important function of the Greek chorus, namely the representation of the audience's emotions (Wagner 1907, pp. 190–1). One theme that is heard for the first time when Salome enters the stage and returns during her dance – a descending line in parallel thirds – may be seen as her personal leitmotif. It appears prominently one last time at the very end of the drama. Here it ends with a shocking bitonal dissonance – two different chords are played loudly and simultaneously, unleashing the entire orchestral force in a brutal way – that reflects the audience's horror at the confrontation with the princess's act of necrophilia when she kisses the dead body and expresses her sexual arousal. This double chord in the orchestra pit has the same hair-raising effect on the audience as the action performed on stage.

Strauss was known for his virtuosity in orchestration and his innovative orchestral effects. They are virtually innumerable in *Salome* and it is often difficult to tell whether the many expressive instrumental effects which resemble sighing, moaning, shrieking, bleating, shrilling, gagging and so on are related to the events on stage, the audience's reactions or perhaps both at the same time.

4 Different performances

Especially the analysis of the role of the orchestra demonstrates how Strauss did not just add music to Wilde's drama but gave it an entirely different shape as a performative artwork, which followed the Wagnerian aesthetic tradition (Knust

2018, p. 43). However, both drama text and opera score are a set of directions fixed in a script but resulting in different kinds of performances. A comparison of a performance of Wilde's drama as it may have looked – and sounded – like in his time and a performance of Strauss's opera could become the point of departure for another kind of adaptation study, which involves the sounds, body movements, stage decorations and lighting and so on with each other as experienced by the audience.

However, one fundamental performative difference that can be addressed based on the score is the disposition of time. Strauss wanted proportions that would give the piece order as a musical principle. This emphasizes his adherence to the forms of instrumental music (Werbeck 1996), which operate using regular proportions of time. He spoke about the 'symphony in the drama' of the *Salome* opera (quoted in Krause 1963, p. 307). Each of the four scenes has double the playing time of the previous one (Schreiber 2000, p. 252) thanks to the elimination of dialogues in the first scenes, the insertion of instrumental interludes and the deceleration of Salome's declamation tempo in her monologue at the end of the drama, which all puts the action in some kind of slow motion.

5 New perspectives

Although the text of the opera remains quite unchanged, the analysis of orchestra and voices has shown how Strauss interpreted the main characters differently from Wilde. The words and the defiant character of Wilde's Jochanaan fit well with those of an Old Testament prophet. In Strauss's opera, some of the musical features make him a little bit like a travesty. Wilde's play leaves it unclear what Salome's motives are for demanding his death. Is she really cruel or just naïve, is she attracted physically or spiritually by the prophet, is her ecstasy at the end just a kind of perversion or is it the symbol of her breaking free from her decadent environment? We don't know for sure in Wilde's drama. In Strauss's interpretation of the biblical legend, Salome ends her life as a pagan ecstatic (pp. 255–6), unaware and even uninterested in the moral values of the new time that is about to dawn. It is the first of his operas with a dominant woman at the centre who leaves no space for a male hero, announcing a new era in the history of the (in)equality of the sexes.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the very wide field of media transformations and transmediations, intermedial processes that are everywhere around us in our everyday lives, and which is a crucial aspect of all cultural development. This is not only an important aspect of our high-speed digital age; it is dating back – we must assume – to early human cultures where a story of a successful hunt was transmediated into perhaps a cave painting and possibly later on transformed into parts of a ritual dance performance.

Being less speculative in this chapter, three media transformation types have been described: novel-to-film adaptation, poetry representing aspects of a painting (ekphrasis), and finally operas transforming literary work. The chapter provides models for analysis that diverge slightly, partly depending upon the specific media types involved. What is common to our suggestions for analytical models is the focus on media-specific aspects and how these are being transferred and transformed in the process from a source media product to a target media product. It has been our aim to demonstrate in specific analysis the very abstract idea that all media transformation is an interplay or a negotiation between transmediality and medium specificity.

Notes

- 1 See Chapter 3, “‘First impressions’: the screen openings of *Pride and Prejudice*’ in Cartmell (2010).
- 2 For reasons of simplicity, we refer to the characters’ names in their German or English original but will only quote their lines according to the English version of Wilde’s play, not Lachmann’s translation.

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