

From Princesa to Princess with a Prince: 1994 and 2001 Fernanda's Stories

Polina Shvanyukova

Clear and lucid as it is, Linda Hutcheon's definition of adaptation as «a derivation that is not derivative - a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing» (2006: 9), brilliantly captures the essence of this complex phenomenon. Moreover, the scholar's in-depth discussion of adaptation as being simultaneously a process and a product, with the proposed three-dimensional model that is drawn up to account for its palimpsestic, multi-layered structure (*ibid.*: 7-8), provides new perspectives on the study of social and communication dimension of media.

The analysis of a specific case study of a cinematic adaptation that is discussed in the present contribution has been profoundly informed by Hutcheon's ambition to challenge the widespread critical denigration of the phenomena of adaptation across the media. Her refusal to treat adaptations as *a priori* secondary, derivative, inferior, subordinate to the original, is the central premise of the present study.

The theoretical framework that is developed in the collection of essays published in the volume *Cultural Ways of World-making: Media and Narratives* (Nünning – Nünning – Neumann 2010) has been another major influence. The different essays in the volume explore, expand, supplement, and apply the framework of theory of symbol systems as discussed in the philosopher Nelson Goodman's seminal 1978 book *Ways of Worldmaking*. To summarise it briefly, what is meant by the term 'ways of worldmaking' are the specific procedures that help any

single individual build different, often conflicting worlds or 'world-versions', an activity that we face in our everyday life, in the absence of one, 'given' version of the world. The general scope of the volume can be presented as an attempt to explore the question of how worlds are made and how the relation between worldmaking and orders of knowledge can be described. Specific attention is paid to the discussion of how the ways of worldmaking operate in particular cultural, literary and historical contexts, analysing synchronic and diachronic issues as well as the question of what functions specific ways of worldmaking fulfil in each case and in varying cultural contexts¹.

Seemingly taking a completely different perspective, the authors of these essays nonetheless succeed in setting up a broader cultural framework for Linda Hutcheon's work on adaptation. More specifically, in the chapter entitled "Media as Ways of Worldmaking: Media-specific Structures and Intermedial Dynamics", Birgit Neumann and Martin Zierold (2010) present an enlightened analysis of the intermedial dynamics of processes of worldmaking.

The backbone of this analysis is «the idea that media do not only mould forms of social knowledge, norms, and values by intermedially representing and debating stereotypes, narratives, images etc.» (*ibid.*: 116). Media, according to the German scholars, are also agents of worldmaking and cannot be treated as mere artifacts or products (*ibid.*). The starting-point for Neumann and Zierold's analysis is the distinction between two perspectives on intermediality, introduced by German media theorist Rainer Leschke. Any investigation of technological differences between different media and their consequences has been defined by Leschke as "primary intermediality". "Secondary intermediality", on the other hand, refers to more complex phenomena of «interrelation of aesthetic forms, topics

¹ For an analysis of a literary work that successfully applies the theoretical framework as developed in Nünning – Nünning – Neumann 2010 see Seligardi 2012.

or motives between different media offers² and different media systems» (*ibid.*: 106).

Given the importance attributed to specific media products and their ability to generate, reiterate and diffuse «forms of cultural knowledge, norms, and values by constantly re-narrating, re-mediating and re-constructing them» (*ibid.*), the research on phenomena connected to secondary intermediality is of particular interest for Neumann and Zierold, as well as for the scope of the present contribution. The German scholars pinpoint the fact that existing research on intermediality that investigates the role of media in processes of worldmaking has so far focused mainly on individual media such as literary texts and films. The most valuable contribution of this kind of research, in their opinion, is represented by the analysis of the role of genre- and media-specific structures in the construction of cultural knowledge. This analysis sheds light on the impact of genre- or media-specific devices in creation of «powerful, aesthetically condensed worlds, worlds that are bound up with cultural norms, predispositions, and values» (*ibid.*: 107). The impact of different genre- or media-specific devices³ is due to the role that these play as constitutive elements of worldmaking, i.e. as highly semanticized structures, that convey values reinforcing or reshaping our constructions of the world.

As such, this line of inquiry helps establish specific practices and trace strategies that different media use in order to shape and diffuse

² Media offers (or, alternatively, media products) represent the fourth constitutive element in the model of modern mass media as elaborated by Siegfried J. Schmidt. In his distinction, media offers are the actual material products of media systems that however lack any intrinsic social or cultural which these products acquire only once they reach and are used by potential recipients (*ibid.*: 104-105).

³ The example given by the authors is the different choice of aesthetic devices to represent a war in literary texts versus documentary films. Ultimately, as the authors argue, these choices «will [...] affect the interpretation of the war in question itself» (*ibid.*: 107).

cultural knowledge. While the validity of this line of inquiry is not questioned by Neumann and Zierold as such, the scholars nonetheless draw attention to a major factor that is often neglected in the analysis of individual media products. This major factor is constituted by constant and continuous circulation of the contents of the individual media products, in the form of their inter- and transmedial adaptations which leads to their social institutionalisation:

[C]onstant processes of translation, appropriation, renarration, and remediation turn media offers into culturally potent media, i.e. media which create and mould cultural knowledge. The production and dissemination of culturally influential knowledge, hence, in a broader sense 'worldmaking,' is an ongoing process in which same messages, contents, values, or concepts are represented again and again, often over decades and centuries, in diverse genres and media. (*ibid.*)⁴

What this passage illustrates is that only a more complex analysis, that takes into account the cultural dynamics of a specific historical and social context, can tackle the question of how individual media offers acquire their cultural significance, seen as they are as part of a broad system of the cultural circulation of meanings, values, and norms:

⁴ On a similar note, Linda Hutcheon reminds us that «[a]n adaptation, like the work it adapts, is always framed in a context – a time and a place, a society and a culture; it does not exist in a vacuum. Fashions, not to mention value systems, are context-dependent» (2006: 142). She further speaks about modes of conveying “cultural information” (with a specific reference to the work of Michael Klein) through adaptations and on ways that the stories travel (quoting Edward Said's thinking on the subject). Hutcheon specifically dwells on what she calls the “cultural power” of Shakespeare's works (*ibid.*: 148-151) and it is my conviction that it is here that a connections exists between Hutcheon's thinking and the work carried out by Neumann and Zierold.

[T]he idea that the process which Nelson Goodman refers to as 'worldmaking' is part of the cultural circulation of meanings, values, and norms, and the idea that worldmaking as such is never fixed once and for all but is something that has to be processed and circulated time and again in different media and concomitant processes of inter- and transmedial translation: Adaptation, translation, reception, appropriation and remediation «have thus become key words» (Rigney 349), with the cultural power of a specific medium «being located in the cultural activities it gives rise to, rather than in what it is in itself.» (Neumann-Zeirold 2010: 107.)

By sustaining Linda Hutcheon's call to challenge the dominant view of adaptation as secondary or derivative of the original work and by drawing on Birgit Neumann and Martin Zierold's convincing analysis of the intermedial dynamics of the processes of worldmaking, the scope of the present contribution is to find evidence of circulation of determinate cultural values, ascribable to a specific historical context, reiterated and diffused in individual media products by means of intermedial procedures of adaptation, appropriation and remediation.

The central part of the following analysis is dedicated to the 2001 film *Princesa*, directed by the Brazilian Henrique Goldman. It will be argued that the presence of determinate cultural stereotypes in the film can be traced, on the one hand, to the eponymous 1994 book, co-authored by Fernanda Fariás de Albuquerque with Maurizio Jannelli, that the film is loosely based on, and, on the other hand, to one of the most successful Hollywood romantic comedies of all times, *Pretty Woman*, that came out in 1990. As such, the film *Princesa* will be interpreted as an adaptation of both the novel and the American blockbuster. More importantly, however, its relationship to the two sources will be explored in terms of the continuity when it comes to specific cultural contents that all of these media products transmit.

The novel *Princesa* was published in Italian in 1994⁵. A fictionalised (auto)biography of Fernanda Farias de Albuquerque, a transsexual Brazilian prostitute, the book is a first-person narrative written in the form of a diary in which the narrator, retrospectively and in a highly selective manner, recounts the key events of her life. The nickname *Princesa*, that lends the title to both the book and the film, is Fernanda's street name⁶.

⁵ It has to be mentioned that *Princesa* is commonly considered to be one of the now 'classical' works in the corpus of a very recent literary field, most frequently referred to as *letteratura italiana della migrazione* (Italian Migrant Literature). Italian Migrant Literature, as in literary production of immigrant authors, non-native speakers of Italian who write directly in Italian, emerged in the early 1990s. The discussion of *Princesa's* position in the corpus of Italian Migrant Literature, as well as the very special history of the book's genesis, in collaboration with the ex-Red Brigades' activist Maurizio Jannelli and a Sardinian shepherd called Giovanni Tamponi (the outcome of this collaboration is traceable in very original linguistic solutions adopted in the book), goes beyond the scope of the present analysis. Probably the best book-length study of the phenomenon of Italian Migrant Literature (together with Italian Migrant Cinema and Immigration Laws in Italy) at the moment is still Parati 2005. An insightful introduction to the field, with specific attention dedicated to the corpus from the perspective of Law in Literature, is also found in Mengozzi 2012. This article also contains an up-to-date and well-compiled list of reference texts on the subject. More specifically on Farias de Albuquerque-Jannelli's *Princesa* see Di Maio 2001, 2009, Portelli 1999 and Wood 2006.

⁶ Fernanda's story has also been the subject of a 1997 documentary entitled *Le strade di Princesa - ritratto di un trans molto speciale* (dir. Stefano Consiglio). In this documentary Fernanda is interviewed while she is in prison on charges of attempted murder. An extremely interesting fact is that the novel has been subject to yet another adaptation. In fact, Fabrizio De Andrè's last 1996 album *Anime salve* opens with a song entitled "Princesa". The lyrics of the song are, of course, a largely reduced but still a very faithful transposition of the first part of the book and the source is duly acknowledged by the authors of the song. This adaptation would deserve to be explored more in detail in a separate article. Sanna (2009) briefly discusses the genesis of the song.

The narration starts with the episodes from Fernanda/Fernandinho's early childhood when the little boy realizes how much he would like to be treated as a girl. The first diary entries recall first sexual experiences with slightly older boys, then with men, joys of cross-dressing during the Carnival. The narration is chronological and follows Fernanda/Fernandinho journey of forced migration and quest for a female body and identity. A boy who leaves his home village in the remote Brazilian region, after a series of intermediate destinations, ends up working as a beautiful transsexual prostitute in the streets of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. In order to earn the money needed for the final sex-change operation, Fernanda/Princesa decides to go to Europe. Italy becomes her final destination and the place where the narration ends in an abrupt and confused way.

Illustrating the most significant differences between the film and the book might seem quite an easy task in the case of Henrique Goldman's cinematic transposition of *Princesa*. At first glance, Goldman's choice to cut out approximately three-fourths of the book that take place in Brazil and recount the earlier stages of Fernanda's life, may lead one to conclude that the film can be presented as a major, if not complete, rewriting of the book. It would be likewise reasonable to immediately recognize strong intertextual connections of this cinematic adaptation with the 1990 romantic comedy *Pretty Woman*⁷. The romantic plot, almost absent in the novel, has become the major story-line in the 2001 film.

Goldman's narration starts with Fernanda's arrival in Milan and the main part of the film is dedicated to the love story between Fernanda and an Italian customer of hers (who, in his turn, is given significant space in the film). The development of this relationship follows determinate stages (from first awkward encounters to falling in

⁷ In fact, and it hardly seems to be a coincidence, even the covers of the DVD/videotape recordings of the two films bear strong resemblance.

love with each other) that reaches its apex when Fernanda leaves the street to move in with her lover.

In other words, a superficial reading of the film would probably produce a reading of "Princesa" in its quality of a straightforward modern-day (queer) adaptation of "Pretty Woman", although, of course, it has to be mentioned that unlike the latter, the romantic relationship in Goldman's film does not have a happy ending. In this light, what is left of the novel itself in the cinematic adaptation⁸, is arguably just the figure of the protagonist herself.

However, by granting complete autonomy to these three works in the name of Hutcheon's principle of "second, but not secondary" and, at the same time, by attempting to judge the cultural power of these three media products in reiterating, diffusing and shaping determinate cultural values, strong underlying affinities of cultural contents in the films and the novel come to surface.

The new romance plot, introduced by Goldman and that so faithfully recalls the fairy-tale like story memorably performed by Julia Roberts and Richard Gere, does not represent, if analysed more thoroughly, a rupture with or a transfiguration of the source novel. On the contrary, the romantic relationship between Fernanda and Alberto that the film focuses on, is a collage of the fragments of several serious

⁸ Many would probably argue that Goldman's film can hardly be considered an adaptation of its literary source at all. Taking into consideration, for example, Robert Stam's wide range of other solutions when it comes to the definition most suitable «to account for the mutation of forms across the media», such as «reading, rewriting, critique, translation, transmutation, metamorphosis, recreation, transvocalization, resuscitation, transfiguration, actualization, transmodalization, signifying, performance, dialogization, cannibalization, reinvisioning, incarnation, or reaccentuation» (2005: 25), a more precise definition could reflect director's choices more aptly. However, the focus of the present study is not on the specific relationship between two (or three, in this case) individual media products, but rather on the reciprocal relationship between the media products, in their capacity of agents of worldmaking processes, and the given historical and cultural dynamics. Hence, such terminological questions are of minor importance here.

relationships that Fernanda-protagonist-of-the-novel recounts in her diary. And yet, it is not quite like any of the love stories that Fernanda has had in the book. The relationship with Alberto would have been the Love story of her life, full realization of her dreams because it depicts exactly the kind of experience that the book's protagonist's has never had but has always dreamt of. According to Fernanda's diaries, for her becoming a *real* woman has the ultimate goal of having a serious romantic relationship with a man. To fall in love, to form a couple, to start a family is on top of Fernanda's agenda in the novel (and there are several episodes in which Fernanda reflects on her relationships) and what the film does is to represent Fernanda coming very close to achieving these goals. The film is very explicit in showing how Fernanda enjoys simple pleasures (presumably) associated with being a woman. She is most happy in the sequel that shows her life as a perfect housewife: doing some food shopping, together with other *real* women, cleaning the house, cooking dinner for her partner, etc.. Unfortunately for her, the dream of a quiet family life is shattered because of the presence of another woman, Alberto's ex-wife, who is pregnant with his child. Fernanda decides to let Alberto go to be a father by re-uniting with his wife. Seemingly heartbroken, yet helpless, Alberto does not stop her and she has no choice but to return to working the streets.

What is then at stake here, in terms of the circulation of cultural contents in between these individual media products? As the examples above show, representation of women⁹ and their relationship with men bears witness to the very visible triumph of what Sara Ahmed calls «the invisibility of normative heterosexuality» that «functions as a background, as that which is behind actions that are repeated over time and with force, and that insofar as it is behind does not come into view» (2006: 88). Ahmed's reflections on heteronormativity can help provide valuable insights on the cultural dynamics in which this case-

⁹ Even if neither in the film nor the novel does Fernanda undergo the final sex-change operation, she is constant in referring to herself as a woman and as a woman only.

study positions itself. More specifically, in *Queer Phenomenology* (Ahmed 2006) the scholar argues that bodies within a given community follow shared directions that have been formed by the act of repetition of certain actions that shape the ways in which we come to inhabit spaces. In other words, bodies tend toward certain objects, which are placed within one's reach and this action of "tending toward" shapes the contours of one's bodily and social space. The mechanisms of "tending toward" certain objects is often hidden from the view and thus even collective directions may seem casual rather than organized.

In order to illustrate this argument, Ahmed uses the example of a shop selling furniture. Furniture, as she observes, seldom attracts our attention because its purpose is to make us feel comfortable, let us "sink" into it and to take the shape of our bodies. If the furniture fulfils its purposes, we often do not even notice it or feel the need to make any comments on its presence. Yet, precisely at the same moment that it disappears from view, furniture functions as a powerful "orientation device" in that it directs «life by deciding what we do with what and where, in the very gesture toward comfort, the promise of 'that sinking feeling'» (*ibid.*: 168)

We can see the mechanism of "producing arrangements" if we look closer at the way furniture shops are organized. Rigid conventions are at the work here. Certain objects are placed within our reach in certain spaces only and this rigid repetition shapes the spaces that we are invited to inhabit.

We do not notice the compulsory heterosexuality that functions as the invisible background of such arrangements. We get oriented around heterosexuality even if it disappears from view. The field of heterosexual objects discretely on display in a furniture shop aims at reproducing heterosexuality as "a social and familial inheritance" (*ibid.*: 86). In other words, when we walk into a furniture shop, we hardly ever realise that rather than just shopping for tables or beds, we get "invested" by a certain line of doing things, that is we are shopping for a lifestyle rather than for single objects.

Ahmed further talks about the naturalization of heterosexuality that can be interpreted as a «requirement to follow a straight line, whereby straightness gets attached to other values including decent, conventional, direct, and honest» (*ibid.*: 70). This straight line would be the one that leads one sex directly to the other while the discontinuity of queer desire within the framework of compulsory heterosexuality is to be re-described as “going off line”.

In the case-study presented here, the strong continuity between the two source-texts (the novel and the romantic comedy) and the 2001 film *Princesa* is evident if their relationship is explored in terms of (explicit) reiteration and diffusion of certain cultural contents. The key term here is (in)visible normative heterosexuality which, as Sara Ahmed argues, «as a compulsory orientation reproduces more than “itself”: it is a mechanism for the reproduction of culture, or even of the “attributes” that are assumed to pass along a family line, such as whiteness» (*ibid.*: 162).

Thus invisible heteronormativity becomes, to borrow Neumann and Zierold’s terminology, the most powerful form of cultural knowledge, disseminated through transposition and adaptation. In this light, Hutcheon’s defense of the originality of any adaptation, to be judged as a stand-alone work worthy of its own evaluation and independent of the source text, has to be complemented further by a more detailed analysis of the underlying cultural dynamics and different strategies employed for the dissemination of specific cultural norms and forms of cultural knowledge. In the specific case-study discussed in this contribution, the theoretical frameworks developed by Sara Ahmed in the fields of the Gender Studies, Queer Studies and Critical Race Theory, have proved exceptionally fruitful to help us illustrate the shaping power of (still) dominant (white) heteronormative ideologies.

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The author

Polina Shvanyukova

Polina Shvanyukova ha studiato presso le università di Novgorod e Bergamo. Attualmente è dottoranda in Letterature Euro-americane presso l'Università degli Studi di Bergamo e partecipa al

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programma dottorale internazionale PhDnet "Literary and Cultural Studies" coordinato dalla Justus-Liebig Universität Giessen.

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