Krzysztof Kozłowski

Feature Film as a Literary Work

ABSTRACT. Krzysztof Kozłowski, *Feature Film as a Literary Work*. "Przestrzenie Teorii" special issue. Poznań 2024, Adam Mickiewicz University Press, pp. 205–221. ISSN 1644-6763. https://doi.org/10.14746/pt.2024.special.10

The relationships between feature film and literature are typically conceptualized from the perspective of film adaptations. Although numerous shared points between them are noticeable, typically feature films are not treated as literary works *tout court*.

The paper focuses on the difference between the medium and literature, which allows us to look at any feature film as literature in the film medium. "Empirical media studies" (U. Saxer, W. Faulstich) provides the methodological foundation for the paper, and three representative examples are discussed. The first two are extremely different from each other: a feature film preceding a novel (*Alien* by R. Scott and *Alien* by A.D. Foster), and the opposite variant, i.e. a feature film based on a novel in the book medium (*Barry Lyndon* by S. Kubrick and *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon* by W.M. Thackeray). The third example (*Love Story* by A. Hiller and *Love Story* by E. Segal) is intermediate: the feature film and the novel were released at the same time (Segal wrote the novel based on his own scenario during the production of the film).
The examples analyzed, together with theoretical considerations, show that it is not the so-called "language of film" that makes a film a work of art, but its "literary-logical continuum" (Faulstich), which supports the thesis that all literature is mediated, and that traditional considerations regarding film adaptation should include the issue of literary media to a greater extent.

KEYWORDS: media, literature, adaptation, feature film, novel, mediation, literary-logical continuum

Werner Faulstich never believed in the so-called "language of film" – a common concept among his contemporary film theoreticians – which *nota bene* lingers even today. Even if he did not state it as such, he clearly treated it metaphorically, albeit extending that "language" beyond film, to other areas of the audio-visual culture. He wrote: "Compared to other media, the language of film, which includes means of film representation, means accumulating special effects: as an arsenal of rhetorical ways of «talking», today it is not exclusive to film (bus also e.g. comic books and television)."[1]

---

[1] W. Faulstich, *Estetyka filmu. Badania nad filmem science "Wojna światów" (1953/1954) Byrona Haskina* [Film Aesthetics: Studies on *The War of the Worlds* (1953/1954) by Byron Haskin], trans. K. Kozłowski and M. Kasprzyk, foreword K. Kozłowski, Poznań 2017, p. 43 (Biblioteka "Przestrzeni Teorii"). In his *Der Bastard als Zombie*, published in the same year as *Estetyka filmu* (1982), Faulstich added: "the language of film" is not artistic in any way, similarly to "body language" or "verbal language." Attempts at treating "the language of film" as an artistic language – and thereby treating film as a work of art – will necessarily

According to Faulstich, understood in this way, the "language of film" (equated with the dead end of theoretical-film considerations, whereas it is a synonym of a simple consequence of individual frames, which resulted from a recourse of film to photography, initiated by Siegfried Kracauer) serves "a purely practical function, being a realistic language; despite what Kracauer says, there are no film or non-film shots";[2] feature films are always about their *totum*, i.e. integrity of their elements, rather than separating individual "photographs" for aesthetic reasons, and secondarily arranging them as if they were a verbal language. For Faulstich, it is "mirrored realism" rather than words which constitutes film as a medium – the same realism that Rudolf Arnheim saw as the biggest obstacle in considering film an art. In the seminal *Film as art* (1932), he argued that if there was ever to be "the complete film", it would be "the fulfillment of the age-old striving for the complete illusion,"[3] which would be fatal for the art of film. Arnheim warned that

> the attempt to make the two-dimensional picture as nearly as possible like its solid model succeeds; original and copy become practically indistinguishable. Thereby all formative potentialities which were based on the differences between model and copy are eliminated and only what is inherent in the original in the way of significant form remains to art.[4]

For Arnheim, this fear of the non-artistic character of the so-called "complete film", which only reproduces the real world, stemmed from his conviction that art should "originate, interpret, mold"[5] reality rather than copy it. In other words, it is a "mechanical reproduction of reality," which has nothing to do with art. Hence Arnheim points to creative solutions related with creators' intentional activities. He is interested in camera work, such as changing the depth of field or an innovative perspective, the use of light and color, taking advantage of the limits of image or distance from the filmed object, lack of spatial-temporal continuity, leitmotifs, the whole spectrum of camera motion, mirrored images, and many other means of

---

refer equally to feature film, documentaries, and scientific films, as well as any other film genre: newsreel or silent film. In fact, this is about "audiovisual language," which falls into linguistics rather than film- or media-studies. See W. Faulstich, *Der Bastard als Zombie. Ein polemisches Statement zur sogenannten Film- und Fernsehsemiotik*, [in:] *Was heisst Kultur? Aufsätze 1972–1982*, Tübingen 1983, pp. 138–139. All translations of quotes into English – P. Zagórska, unless indicated otherwise.

[2] W. Faulstich, *Estetyka filmu, op. cit.*, p. 43.

[3] R. Arnheim, *Film as Art*, Berkeley 1957, p. 158.

[4] *Ibidem*, pp. 158–159.

[5] *Ibidem*, p. 157.

expression and methods of modeling which film shares with other forms of art. However, their usefulness here depends on the extent to which they can be referred to in order to reinforce the meaning of a film. Significantly, Arnheim tends to overuse the word "artistic," resulting in sentences like "artistic use of the absence of nonvisual sense experiences,"[6] which, to put it simply, is what his whole film theory looks like.

Kracauer is not much better.[7] Although he does appreciate the "camera's recording tasks" that result from "the laws of the medium,"[8] he defends "film-like film", which communicates exclusively "images of material reality,"[9] ultimately stressing film's "revealing functions."[10] In other words, by referring to Luis Buñuel, who expected revelation from film,[11] Kracauer understands: (i) things normally invisible (he further distinguishes three phenomena: small and big, things that pass, and blind spots of the mind),[12] (ii) events which overwhelm consciousness[13] and (iii) special modes of reality.[14]

Such restrictions resulted in questioning the very notion of art. What is more, Kracauer saw it as misleading in the context of film. However, in order to soften that statement, he stressed that he meant it "in the traditional sense."[15] Referring to Arnold Hauser, who was amongst the first to notice this, he added: "If film is an art at all, it should not be confused with established arts."[16] However, he immediately added:

> There may be some justification in loosely applying this fragile concept to films such as *Nanook*, or *Paisan*, or *Potemkin* which are deeply steeped in camera-life. But in defining them as art, it must always be kept in mind that even the most creative film maker is much less independent of nature in the raw than the painter or poet; that his creativity manifests itself in letting nature in and penetrating it.[17]

---

[6] *Ibidem*, p. 102.

[7] S. Kracauer, *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality*, Princeton 1997.

[8] *Ibidem*.

[9] *Ibidem*, p. 71.

[10] *Ibidem*, p. 43 onwards.

[11] *Ibidem*, p. 43.

[12] Since the first two examples seem self-explanatory, only "blind spots of the mind" require an explanation. Kracauer uses three examples to illustrate this notion: unconventional complexes, literally understood garbage, and mundane objects. *Ibidem*, p. 53.

[13] Such as "elemental catastrophes, the atrocities of war, acts of violence and terror, sexual debauchery, and death". *Ibidem*, p. 57.

[14] "Physical reality as it appears to individuals in extreme states of mind". *Ibidem*, p. 58.

[15] *Ibidem*, p. 39.

[16] *Ibidem*, p. 40.

[17] *Ibidem*.

There is no doubt that contrary to Arnheim, Kracauer accepted realism as a property of the very medium, hence his efforts to defend film from critics denying it the right to be considered an art (and if they agreed, they would only do it on special terms). And Kracauer at least partially accepted this. Perhaps in some cases the notion of art could be extended to accommodate film (which he did with films by Flaherty, Rossellini, and Einstein), but he generally advised different paths. Ultimately, this is Kracauer's recipe for considerations regarding film; he must have found Arnheim's argument largely irrefutable.

It is therefore not surprising that Faulstich, who appreciated Kracauer's demands regarding reality in film, and who did not deny that film originated from photography (or rather, not only, but also from photography)[18] referred to his concept of film realism as "purist." His accusation was that taking film back to photography makes it impossible to recognize film as "a medium of visible reality"[19] and noticing in it "an individual work: as a whole which breathes life into the reality in motion it superficially reproduces,"[20] and that (eventually) it assumes that "the limits of film manifest themselves in its integral visuality."[21] The latter can be taken for granted only by someone who unknowingly assumes that film's possibilities as a medium are exhausted in its ability to visualize. Faulstich says that with this assumption, "analogically to photography and radio, film would be realistic through and through: «only» realistic."[22] And this is not the case; according to Faulstich, apart from what is visualized in film, there is an invisible reality, a "literary-logical structure."[23] It subjects reflected fragments of the real world, or the photographed reality staged in a film studio (so-called building blocks[24]

---

[18] In *Filmgeschichte* Faulstich enumerated: (i) "it took the live stage production from traditional theater and transformed theater actors into film actors," (ii) it took individual images, oriented towards authentic reality, from photography, and incorporated it in the continuous stream of images, (iii) from the primary medium of a storyteller (narrator) it took breaking free from here and now, and taking stories beyond empirical time and space. W. Faulstich, *Filmgeschichte*, Paderborn 2005, p. 18. Thanks to integrating those elements, the new medium was able to combine "illusion and imagination under the sign of pure reproduction of reality [...]. This duplication of life and the world – a functional simulation – quite openly proved to be a useful mechanism in the function of existential support for many: «cinema as an ontological prosthesis» [a term by Thomas Elsaesser – K.K.]". W. Faulstich, *Medienwandel im Industrie- und Massenzeitalter (1830–1900)*, Göttingen 2004, pp. 251–252 („Die Geschichte der Medien", vol. 5); see Th. Elsaesser, *Filmgeschichte und frühes Kino. Archäologie eines Medienwandels*, München 2002, p. 31.

[19] W. Faulstich, *Estetyka filmu, op. cit.*, p. 9.

[20] *Ibidem.*

[21] *Ibidem.*

[22] *Ibidem.*

[23] *Ibidem*, p. 143.

[24] *Ibidem.*

and constructive elements of reality[25]), to organization, which gives film, and especially feature film, the character of an art or literary work (if we use Faulstich's terminology). This does not mean abandoning the medium's reality, but – on the contrary – its full, shameless acceptance:

> This realism – as pure naturalism – should under no circumstances be abandoned. What is explicitly shown and said through image and sound, i.e. reality as a reflection, in a specific film or literary work is reduced to a mere element, a building block, something defining the whole film. The term "feature film" [Spiel-Film] is about playing [spielerisch]; it is only through playing [Spiel] that film becomes a work of art, which does not happen as a result of a selection of special fragments of reality or unique objects (neither is it determined by the so-called language of film). […] Although film shows reality as motion in time, that motion does not allow to recognize development peculiar to it as playing [giving it the character of art – K.K.]. In visual elements of film nothing is uncovered, but everything appears real. What is visible and audible in a feature film [Spiel-Film] […] is the material of which it is made and which it uses.[26]

In the media theory of feature film, the logic of a literary work replaces the metaphorical "language of film": as a film's internal reality, it determines its organization. However, the discovery of that logics is related to the viewer's experience, who needs to recognize it;[27] whereas for the filmmaker it is everyday life, regardless of whether their feature film is based on some literary work. In both cases, the "literarylogical whole"[28] is obviously the same. It does not need to be limited to printed literature, because it constitutes the meaning of an artistic utterance and allows to include feature film in literature understood in the broad sense. After many years, Faulstich explained the historical context of his own theory:

> […] at the time, there were attempts at founding the artistic character of feature film on literary studies based on the language of film, as if e.g. a poem was a work of art due to verbal language. Many literary scholars tried to distinguish feature film as an artistic object, to equate "film" with "feature film" and simply classify it as a discipline of art (painting). But an individual work of art – I think – displays a logic peculiar to it, i.e. specifically defined structure, and it is that structure which

---

[25] *Ibidem*, p. 36.

[26] *Ibidem*, pp. 9–10.

[27] Faulstich argues that this means that "film depersonifies [vereinzelt]; cinema confronts viewers as *individuals* with a film's reality and its meaning, as – strictly speaking – it is no longer acquired in terms of projection, as is the case of printed literature, or introjection, as is the case of radio drama, but absorbed – in a way peculiar to the medium – rather substitutively". *Ibidem*, p. 65.

[28] *Ibidem*, p. 64.

constitutes meaning – in a poem, feature film, TV series, radio drama, naturally also in opera or painting. My intention was to enlist all works of art in all media for literary studies.[29]

And so the conviction that all literature is subject to media mediation, that there is no literature without a medium, proved decisive here.[30] The reality of a specific medium, in which a literary work is hidden like in a shell, and which constitutes both a limitation and chance for that work, makes itself known with literature manifesting itself. It releases the creator's need to know the rules: "literature is literature only as media communication."[31] Thanks to the notion of medium, it is possible to distinguish radio drama from the radio, a novel from a book, a drama from the theatre, a film from a feature film, etc. This explains why any analysis and interpretation of a literary work should start with categories defining the specificity of a given medium – and this is not about the notion of a medium present in different fields of knowledge, nor the theory of medium *in abstracto*, in the case of feature films, about theory (more or less) independent of empirical experience, but about:

[…] theory of literature in a medium (here: film aesthetics). It also refers to other media, such as the radio or television. Each time we should ask: what specifically media rules and regularities do literary works follow? How much did the author manage to use them? To what extent does the listener-viewer-reader have to submit to them, recognize them?[32]

All this leads straight from literary theory in the medium of film to the media aesthetics of an individual film. The latter can be explained by an analysis of film as a "complex aesthetic product" (literature),[33] taking into account film genres, action, characters, forms of construction, norms and values which culminate in seeking the message: "an interpretation of a film, preceded by an analysis, methodologically organized, oriented towards reflection, can be compared to «glasses», which allow us to see certain aspects of a film better, or inspect elements which we did not notice before."[34]

---

[29] Cited from: K. Kozłowski, *Przedmowa* [Foreword], [in:] W. Faulstich, *Estetyka filmu…*, *op. cit.*, p. xxvii.

[30] W. Faulstich, *Der „Krieg der Welten" und die Stilmittel der Medien*, [in:] *Was heisst Kultur?*, p. 75.

[31] *Ibidem*.

[32] *Ibidem*.

[33] W. Faulstich, *Grundkurs. Filmanalyse*, Paderborn 2008, p. 18.

[34] *Idem*, *Die Filminterpretation*, Göttingen 1988, p. 13.

Each of these areas of activity includes all layers of a film simultaneously: audial, visual, verbal. In research, it is further scrutinized, which is clear even from a glance at forms of film construction, such as camera work (framing, image composition, size of shots and types of montage), dialogue and sound, music, space, light, and color (elements of *mise-en-scène*[35]). The diversity of notions which appear here, and the semantic regions they belong to, as well as all other terms which emerge over the course of research (such as a static versus dynamic character), are collectively referred to as "the language of film,"[36] but, in fact, this does not say much about film as a medium, as it does not go beyond metaphors. This language contains both notions taken from literary studies and different types of creative work, and even terms from different arts which have been autonomous for a long time now. Painting and elements associated with it (such as light and color) are placed on the same level. There is a simple explanation for this abundance of forms and notions offered by the media film theory, which could function as literary theory in film, or more specifically: in feature film.

However, first we would need to define the main aesthetic-medial features of film (realism, violence, technique, goods, myth), and then all other terms which can be used to describe a feature film in a complete way and treat it like literature. Another important example: an analysis of action includes the screenplay, protocol, division into sequences and scenes, reflection regarding the time of storytelling, structure, and phases of action ("acts"). For example, the protocol allows to recognize time and space in a film. It allows an insight into subsequent sequences (*story*) and makes visible (as film on paper) rules for grouping sequences into logical units and parts of the plot. In such a protocol, the literary structure of film, and with it the problem of the time of telling and time told, which often spans over days, weeks, months, and years, comes to the fore. Moreover, filmmakers eagerly subject it to different devices. Such a way of how time functions in literature was analyzed by Eberhard Lämmert, who demonstrated how it is condensed, how retrospections and anticipations manifest themselves, and what causes time jumps and shifts.[37]

The analogy with literature in printed media (books, magazines, newspapers, etc.) is unsurprising, as many notions connect feature film with literature and art, as exemplified by e.g. literature's affiliation via fiction.

---

[35] See B. Beil, J. Kühnel, Ch. Neuhaus, *Studienbuch Filmanalyse. Ästhetik und Dramaturgie des Spielfilms*, München 2012, pp. 35–48.

[36] A. Bienk, *Filmsprache. Einführung in die interaktive Filmanalyse*, Marburg 2008.

[37] E. Lämmert, *Bauformen des Erzählens*, Stuttgart 1967.

Jerzy Ziomek discussed the community of arts as "a fictional community."[38] He understood fiction as a change "in the state of things, in which (a) at least two subjects actively co-create (b) a meaningful system of events, which is given to us as (c) an account from some perspective."[39] What is more, "a fictional literary work is always accompanied by the narrative gesture,"[40] which makes this term applicable to visual arts – and even more aptly – to theater and film.[41]

"Narrative gesture" makes the text dependent on its creator, and it also implies readiness to "take and accept different perspectives."[42] But first and foremost, it is the reason why nothing can be fully non-dietary in a feature film – neither script, nor music. Although such differentiations function in analytical practice, they are purely operational. They are like a ladder, about which Wittgenstein wrote that once it has been climbed, it immediately has to be rejected, as only then can the world present itself to us in the right light.[43] According to Alice Bienk, in film "a storytelling instance" is expressed – not an author in the sense like the narrator in printed literature, but "a sum of all the film devices used."[44] In short, in this case the dependence of a text on its creator is complete.

This brings us back to considerations about "literary work in film,"[45] forcing to notice an aesthetic structure in its narrative structure and to question the allegedly obvious division into feature films based on literature (adaptations), and those based on original screenplays. According to Faulstich, "the so-called literature adaptations (an awfully ideological word!) are only a special case of feature film."[46] None can not appreciate the weight of literary prototypes for individual films, concepts originating from printed literature, but – adapted or not – every feature film is fundamentally literature in the film medium.

Analyzing specific examples should make this regularity visible in a complementary way. This will be done using three examples of feature films which, due to their approach to their literary bases, are situated relatively to each other in model relationships: one assumes clearly indi-

---

[38] J. Ziomek, *Powinowactwa literatury. Studia i szkice* [Literature's Affiliations: Studies and Essays], Warszawa 1980, p. 8.

[39] *Ibidem*, p. 54.

[40] *Ibidem*, p. 60.

[41] See *ibidem*.

[42] *Ibidem*, p. 63.

[43] See L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, translation into Polish and foreword by B. Wolniewicz, Warszawa 2000, p. 83.

[44] A. Bienk, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

[45] W. Faulstich, *Neue Methoden der Filmanalyse*, [in:] *Was heisst Kultur?*, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

[46] *Ibidem*.

cated literary prototype, one reveals its obvious lack, although it initiates movement in the opposite direction ("novelization" of film), and one means simultaneous co-existence of a feature film and a book in the mediasphere.

The first example is *Barry Lyndon* (1975) by Stanley Kubrick, based on the 1844 novel *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* by William Makepeace Thackeray, which illustrates a standard relationship between feature film and literature. Kubrick was familiar with Thackeray's works; before he read *Barry Lyndon*, he considered filming *Vanity Fair* (1847–1848), but decided that the number of plotlines and events could not be accommodated in a feature film, even one longer than usual.[47] Yet he thought it would be possible with *Barry Lyndon*; he liked the characters and the plot, even though it was unsurprising. Kubrick thought that it was possible to adapt a book for the screen without destroying the literary matter (*Stoff*). He found the novel's narration helpful in writing the screenplay.

Thackeray wrote his book in the the first person, allowing readers to gradually uncover the true nature of Barry Lyndon's life story, which is told extremely subjectively. The readers are assisted by explanations given by a third-person narrator and several clues incorporated in Lyndon's diary as "editor's comments"; there is the "narrator's gesture," outlined more clearly than Barry Lyndon's account, hidden behind the objectivized narration. The reader understands that the protagonist's words are only one source of information; another one is the novel's silent (physical) author, who, using the editor's voice, teaches readers to stay vigilant, figure out a different course of events, and draw their own conclusions from contradictory judgments and opinions. Those are confirmed (or debunked) at the end, where the nameless editor and narrator intentionally mentions that: "the Sheriff and his assistant, the prisoner, nay, the prison itself, are now no more."[48]

It is impossible to fully recreate this narrative effect in the adaptation. A dense verbal narrative would deny the image's primacy, bursting its modest frame. Moreover, it would go against the assumption that "film is the medium of visible reality"[49]: this basic fact has major consequences for every adaptation worthy of this name. Camera does not lie, "in film, the viewer always sees the objective reality,"[50] regardless of whether this is POV or another solution in the content plan: the world of dreams or illusion. In

---

[47] See *Zweites Gespräch*, [in:] M. Ciment, *Kubrick*, trans. J.P. Brunold, München 1982, p. 169.

[48] W.M. Thackeray, *Barry Lyndon*, *s.l.* 2008, p. 282 ["Biblioteca Virtual Universal"]. The latter comment refers to the London Fleet Prison, demolished in 1846.

[49] W. Faulstich, *Estetyka filmu*, p. 9.

[50] *Ibidem*.

film, even the fantastic is real.[51] As a specific image, and together with all its appearances of people and things, because fantasticality is inscribed in "the image, and if the fantastic is presented visually and audially, it is no weaker than physical reality […], to the contrary – it becomes physical."[52]

Kubrick was forced to invert the narrative situation from Thackeray's novel and introduce a third-person narrator throughout the film to reveal his way of seeing reality. However, he did not feel obliged to maintain Thackeray's vision – he could allow one of his own. His adaptation follows the rules of "productive perception,"[53] for which (as the name suggests) productivity, postulated innovativeness,[54] is the most important rule. This was not at any cost, but with clear trust in own abilities to think artistically. This "concept talent" of Kubrick's manifests itself in every scene, out of which some do not have a basis in the novel; they stemmed from the film specification of Kubrick's mental images.[55] The seduction scene with Lady Lyndon is a great example, in which his "concept talent" is fully revealed via Schubert's *Piano Trio in E-flat major, Op. 100*, making this scene an important arch supporting the film's "literary-logical structure" and determining one arm of the dramatic arch;[56] another one is the epilogue, in which Lady Lyndon signs a loan note for her ex-husband.

(ii) The second example seems to illustrate the most common solution, as it concerns films based on original screenplays. This is the case of Ridley Scott's 1979 film *Alien*,[57] although with one reservation: this film had its media consequences. In the same year, a photo-novel *Alien* (edited by R.J. Anobile, screenplay by D. O'Bannan, London 1979), a monograph by Hans Rudolf Giger, which, according to Faulstich and Strobel, revealed the

---

[51] *Ibidem*, p. 11.

[52] *Ibidem*.

[53] See K. Kozłowski, *Przedmowa* [Foreword], *op. cit.*, pp. xiii-xvi.

[54] The significance of this action can be seen thanks to a comparison to *The Birds* (1952) by Daphne Maurier and *The Birds* (1963) by Alfred Hitchcock. In his concluding remarks Helmut Korte wrote: *The Birds* – apart from a few points – has little in common with the short story under the same title". H. Korte, *The Birds*, [in:] *Literaturverfilmungen*, hrsg. von F.-J. Albersmeier, V. Roloff, Frankfurt am Main 1989, p. 297. And on the same page: "[…] a qualitative comparison of the film and its literary basis is impossible; the film is superior".

[55] On the subject of "mental cinema" which "is no less vital than that of the stages of actual production of the sequences as they are recorded by the camera and then edited on the Moviola". See I. Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millenium*, trans. G. Brock, Boston 2016, p. 88.

[56] See K. Kozłowski, *Stanley Kubrick. Filmowa polifonia sztuk* [Film Poliphony of Arts], Warszawa 2018, pp. 274–277.

[57] W. Faulstich, R. Strobel, *"Uksiążkowienie" jako problem estetyczno-medialny. Obcy – ósmy pasażer Nostromo – studium przypadku"* ["Novelization" as an Aesthetic and Media Issue: *Alien* – A Case Study], translated into Polish by M. Kasprzyk, translation revised by K. Kozłowski, "Przestrzenie Teorii" 2014, no. 21, pp. 231–259.

hidden message of the film (*Giger's Alien*, Basel 1979),[58] the popular science book *The Book of Alien* (London 1979) by Paul Scanlon and Michael Gross, the graphic novel *Alien. The Illustrated Story* (New York 1979) by Archie Goodwin and Walter Simonson, and the novel *Alien* (London 1979) by Alan Dean Foster [Polish edition: A.D. Foster, *Aliens: The Official Movie Novelization* (translated into Polish by J. Kraśko, Leszno 1992).[59]

Scott's film has two types of action: open and hidden. Since a lot of effort was put in meticulously motivating the open one,[60] it is not difficult to characterize. In *Lexikon des Science Fiction Films* we read:

> The space tug "Nostromo", fully loaded, is on its way back to Earth, when it is re-directed to a planet from which a weak distress signal is sent. The crew discover that it originates from a derelict alien ship with alien life forms on board. One of them (Alien) attaches itself to the face of a Nostromo crew member, thus getting on board of the tug, where it starts to develop and grow, eventually killing the Nostromo crew one by one, except for warrant officer Ripley, who manages to blast it away into deep space.[61]

Noticing the hidden action in *Alien* requires activation of the "symbolic mode": as Umberto Eco explains, without it, a text is deprived of its proper meaning, both on the literal and metaphorical (rhetorical) level.[62] But this is also the case when this mode is considered, although the co-existence of

---

[58] As Faulstich and Strobel explain, "Giger's book documents [...] stages of creation of a feature film, [...] especially those which belong to the hidden level of the plot. Initial concepts, drafts, early versions, changed variants allow an insight into different phases of development of a feature film project. We can easily identify such processes as forming the exotic landscape of a planet, or the formation of Alien's eggs (from a common egg box, to the eggs, to Graafian follicles). What is decisive on this occasion is the analytical potential of this "book to a film". *Ibidem*, p. 243.

[59] "As a novel, *Alien* is a typical representative of the science fiction genre understood not as trivial adventure literature like Perry Rhodan, i.e. Old Shatterhand in space, but as a literary conceptualization of utopia, extrapolation of what is known and unknown to a terrestrial universe, which becomes fragile and gets shifted via reader's dynamic experience of what is possible. The novel *Alien* presents a relationship between man and a monster, the typical and therefore well-known, and the alien, understood as an idea". *Ibidem*, pp. 253–254.

[60] This does not mean that there are no inconsistencies and illogicalities, which may indicate a hidden theme. Faulstich lists a few: (i) the ship's computer's inability to recognize whether the signal is a call for help or warning, (ii) the crew's outrageous recklessness in the face of danger, (iii) Ash the android suddenly tries to kill Ripley, without a reason, (iv) despite extremely advanced technology, a space tug transports to earth 20 million tons of refined ore, (v) people from distant future act like people from the present times (anachronous setting). See W. Faulstich, *Die Filminterpretation*, *op. cit.*, pp. 70–71.

[61] Cited from W. Faulstich, R. Strobel, *"Uksiążkowienie" jako problem…*, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

[62] U. Eco, *Czytane świata* [Reading the World], trans. M. Woźniak, Kraków 1999, p. 204.

different interpretations of a film may impose itself interchangeably. As in a trick drawing published in the humorous magazine "Fliegende Blätter": "We can see the picture as either a rabbit or a duck. It is easy to discover both readings."[63] In line with this rule, *Alien* "discusses the male fear of women as those who give birth"[64]: it describes all phases from conception to birth from the perspective of a man who remains outside of the process. According to Faulstich and Strobel, "he sees the female reproductive ability as something alien […]. As an aesthetic act or […] literature in the film medium, Scott's *Alien* is a highly diverse, sophisticated and ambitious «work of art» in the traditional meaning."[65]

This is uncovered in the symbolization of action, which can be conceptualized parallelly on both semantic surfaces,[66] and it is also expressed via individual symbols introduced to the film. They are so obvious that they are impossible to miss, even if the connections between them can be obscure. They are "meticulously shaped in all their details"[67]:

> It can be seen in the symbolism of names (e.g. "Mother" for Nostromo's computer), it can be heard in audial symbols (e.g. the unraveling events are accompanied by the sound of heartbeat), and it is most significant in visual symbols (e.g. an alien "spaceship" is shaped like a woman lying on her back with her les apart; "eggs" look like Graafian follicles – etc.).[68]

(iii) The third example is the rarest; moreover, it is possible to identify the exact moment it appeared in the history of media. It is *Love Story…* but whose? There are two possible answers: Erich Segal's or Arthur Hiller's, alternatively: Segal and Hiller's. The novel *Love Story* by Erich Segal (a professor of classical philosophy at Yale) was published by Harper&Row in New York on February 2, 1970.[69] The book's success exceeded expectations: it remained on "The New York Times" bestseller list for a full year, 40 weeks of which it was number one. On November 18, 1970 a pocket edition was published by New American Library, selling as many as 4,350,000 copies.[70]

---

[63] See E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, New York 1977, p. 4.

[64] W. Faulstich, R. Strobel, *"Uksiążkowienie" jako problem…*, op. cit., p. 237.

[65] *Ibidem*.

[66] See W. Faulstich, *Die Filminterpretation*, op. cit., p. 72.

[67] W. Faulstich, R. Strobel, *"Uksiążkowienie" jako problem…*, op. cit., p. 238.

[68] *Ibidem*.

[69] The novel was simultaneously published in instalments in *The Ladies' Home Journal*. See W. Faulstich, R. Strobel, *Innovation und Schema. Medienästhetische Untersuchungen zu den Bestsellern "James Bond", "Airport", "Und Jimmy ging zum Regenbogen", "Love Story" und "Der Pate"*, Wiesbaden 1987, p. 94.

[70] See *ibidem*.

The film *Love Story* (1970) by Arthur Hille, starring Ali MacGraw (Jenny) and Ryan O'Neal (Oliver Barrett IV), cost 2.26 million dollars, and, according to "The New Yorker," the preview screenings from the first week of December 1970 alone returned these costs. The film premiered on December 16, 1970. Over the next 12 weeks it grossed 36,000,000 USD in America, thanks to 17 million viewers; the film's profitability was spectacular, even more so because it was just as popular in Europe. In total, it was nominated for seven Academy Awards, winning in "the best original score" category (Francis Lai), which brought even more profit from the soundtrack sales.

It would seem that in this case, obviously, the book was first, which would make the film a typical adaptation. However, in fact, the film was shot from November 1969 to February 1970 (in Boston, New York, California and Biograph Studios in New York).[71] Of course, it was based on Segal's screenplay, who was paid 100,000 dollars for it and a share in profits (before *Love Story*, Segal wrote *Yellow Submarine* [1968] directed by George Dunning). Howard G. Minsky persuaded Segal to rewrite his own screenplay as a short novel[72] (the British pocket edition was a mere 127 pages long). Therefore, "Today, *Love Story* is considered the first story ever to be simultaneously published as a book and released as a film."[73] There is no doubt that this was indeed the case.

This parallel character can be seen in the structure of both works; after all, the 22 chapters do not correspond with the 48 film sequences, and the text's lines with the film's shots (635).[74] Moreover, the novel is written in first-person narrative – it is a memoir of the protagonist, Oliver. With one exception (sequence 22), the film consists of long retrospections, which start from the second shot and go full circle: in the last shot, Oliver goes to the stadium where we first saw him, sitting on a bench in winter. The main action, like a classical tragedy, is divided into five acts (from exposition to disaster – the climax is in Act III).[75] Its similarity to the film results from the close relationship of the two works, and the fact that the author of the book and the film's screenplay are the same person.

The intensification of condensing actions is analogous to the main action. In both the film and the novel, three comparable parts can be distinguished, although in the film this is directly connected with montage. Slower and faster sequences appear alternately.

---

[71] *Ibidem*, pp. 94–95.

[72] *Ibidem*, p. 95.

[73] *Ibidem*, p. 94.

[74] See *ibidem*, p. 100.

[75] See *ibidem*, p. 103.

Apart from action and its condensation, the protagonists are the same as well (both main and supporting). Oliver clearly dominates in both: he is the only character who always takes place in the action, and is present in 63% of all the shots. Jenny appears in 40%, Oliver's father in 8%, Jenny's father, Phil Cavalleri, in 5%.[76] The two fathers are contrasted equally strongly, but, due to the limitations of the medium, in the film this contrast is more obvious, although there is no oversimplification.[77]

Each case study presented here is a model example, clearly illustrating how feature film is literature in the film medium. The same aesthetic-media categories and literary studies notions, which require coherence, apply to each one. The seemingly noncongruent diversity of terms results from the "literary-logical" completeness of individual films, and the medium conditioning its existence; this diversity is not a peculiarity of some "language of film." Referring to such notions as "dramatization" or "adaptation" is of no use either, as – *nolens volens* – they refer to the process rather than the product. A specific feature film is treated here as if it was not literature, and a book as a medium, whereas it is clear as soon as "literature did its triumphant march through electronic media."[78] It turned out that "it left behind the book like a book jacket, thus proving that it was only a channel."[79]

Therefore, we need to ask again about the limits and possibilities of literature. After all, it is not individual works that are able to tell us the most about what else we can expect from literature in terms of aesthetics.[80] On the contrary, the abstractness of media that it uses and without which it could not exist: what remains is not determined by poets… It lasts thanks to a single medium: "like a shell."[81] Faulstich suggestively illustrates this regularity:

> The fact that Narcissus fell in love with a face which ultimately proved to be a reflection of his own was possible thanks to the shore which made the pond a pond. This is not a coincidence that in the third part of *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* [Ernst Simon – K.K.] Bloch describes media as transitions, as hidden desires reflected in a mirror. But – unilaterally focused on keeping hope alive – he did not understand their limiting, destructive influence, which makes the utopian truly immanent.[82]

---

[76] See *ibidem*, p. 105.

[77] See *ibidem*, p. 110.

[78] W. Faulstich, *Medienästhetik und Mediengeschichte. Mit einer Fallstudie zu "The War of the Worlds" von H.G. Wells*, Heidelberg 1982, p. 18 ("Reihe Siegen. Beiträge zur Literatur- und Sprachwissenschaft", vol. 38).

[79] *Ibidem*.

[80] *Ibidem*, p. 37.

[81] *Ibidem*.

[82] *Ibidem*, p. 81.

Talking about utopia may seem somewhat misleading here. In fact, in this case "utopian" refers to a parallel, alternative reality made of dreams, hopes and longings. This is what all literary fiction is made of, which, as Roger Caillois put it, "the everyday world and fictional world, so close to each other, and at the same time so distant, are divided by […] a gulf – barely visible, but still impassable. One remains a show […], whereas the other one […] is a field of the irreversible […]."[83]

Since Faulstich did not limit fiction to the printed media, he adjusted the notion of utopia, so common in Bloch, for the purpose of his own reflections. He made it an important category of media aesthetics, which he perceived as a new theory of literature. He assumed that writing about literature in electronic media requires an extension of the scope and content of traditional notions. If literature was to be conceptualized as "a dialectics of utopia and medium,"[84] as a postulate of meaning, which cannot be resigned from, for him, the relationship between the "literarylogical whole" and the medium (film) in reference to feature film was fundamental. He decided that "literature is a result of the utopian in a medium: it has to be conceptualized as a crash of imagination with facts […]. A literary work means utopia in the sense of historical crossing of lines […]."[85]

Translated by Paulina Zagórska

REFERENCES

Arnheim R., *Film as Art*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1957.
Bazin André, *Film i rzeczywistość* [Film and Reality], trans. B. Michałek, Warszawa 1963.
Beil B., Kühnel J., Neuhaus Ch., *Studienbuch Filmanalyse. Ästhetik und Dramaturgie des Spielfilms*, München 2012.
Benjamin W., *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*, [in:] *Anioł historii. Eseje, szkice, fragmenty* [Angel of History: Essays, Drafts, Fragments], translated into Polish by J. Sikorski, selected and edited by H. Orłowski, Poznań 1996 ("Poznańska Biblioteka Niemiecka", vol. 2).
Bienk A., *Filmsprache. Einführung in die interaktive Filmanalyse*, Marburg 2008.
Caillois R., *Siła powieści* [The Power of the Novel], trans. and afterword T. Swoboda, Gdańsk 2008.
Calvino I., *Six Memos for the Next Millenium*, trans. G. Brock, Boston 2016.

---

[83] R. Caillois, *Siła powieści* [The Power of the Novel], trans. and afterword T. Swoboda, Gdańsk 2008, p. 74.

[84] W. Faulstich, *Medien + Utopie + Literatur. Thesen zu einer neuen Literaturtheorie als Medienästhetik*, [in:] *Was heisst Kultur?*, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

[85] W. Faulstich, *Medienästhetik und Mediengeschichte*, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

Ciment M., *Kubrick*, trans. von J.P. Brunold, München 1982.

Ciment M., *Kubrick*, Paris 1980.

Eco U., *Czytanie świata* [Reading the World], trans. M. Woźniak, Kraków 1999.

Eco U., *Kino i literatura. Sztuka narracyjnej intrygi* [Cinema and Literature: The Art of the Narrative Plot], trans. P. Salwa, [in:] *Sztuka*, Kraków 2008.

Elsaesser Th., *Filmgeschichte und frühes Kino. Archäologie eines Medienwandels*, München 2002.

Faulstich W., *Der "Krieg der Welten" und die Stilmittel der Medien*, [in:] *Was heisst Kultur? Aufsätze 1972–1982*, Tübingen 1983.

Faulstich W., *Der Bastard als Zombie. Ein polemisches Statement zur sogenannten Film- und Fernsehnsemiotik*, [in:] *Was heisst Kultur? Aufsätze 1972–1982*, Tübingen 1983.

Faulstich W., *Die Filminterpretation*, Göttingen 1988.

Faulstich W., *Estetyka filmu. Badania nad filmem science "Wojna światów" (1953 / 1954 Byrona Haskina* [Film Aesthetics: Studies on *The War of the Worlds* (1953/1954) by Byron Haskin], translated into Polish by K. Kozłowski, M. Kasprzyk, foreword by K. Kozłowski, Poznań 2017 (Biblioteka "Przestrzeni Teorii").

Faulstich W., *Filmgeschichte*, Paderborn 2005.

Faulstich W., *Grundkurs. Filmanalyse*, Paderborn 2008.

Faulstich W., *Medien + Utopie + Literatur. Thesen zu einer neuen Literaturtheorie als Medienästhetik*, [in:] *Was heisst Kultur? Aufsätze 1972–1982*, Tübingen 1983.

Faulstich W., *Medienästhetik und Mediengeschichte. Mit einer Fallstudie zu "The War of the Worlds" von H.G. Wells*, Heidelberg 1982 ("Reihe Siegen. Beiträge zur Literatur- und Sprachwissenschaft", vol. 38).

Faulstich W., *Medienwandel im Industrie- und Massenzeitalter (1830–1900)*, Göttingen 2004 ("Die Geschichte der Medien", vol. 5).

Faulstich W., *Neue Methoden der Filmanalyse*, [in:] *Was heisst Kultur? Aufsätze 1972–1982*, Tübingen 1983.

Faulstich W., *Was heisst Kultur? Aufsätze 1972–1982*, Tübingen 1983.

Faulstich W., Strobel R., *Innovation und Schema. Medienästhetische Untersuchungen zu den Bestsellern "James Bond", "Airport", "Und Jimmy ging zum Regenbogen", "Love Story" und "Der Pate"*, Wiesbaden 1987.

Faulstich W., Strobel R., *"Uksiążkowienie" jako problem estetyczno-medialny. Obcy – ósmy pasażer Nostromo – studium przypadku* ["Novelization" as an Aesthetic and Media Issue: *Alien* – A Case Study], translated into Polish by M. Kasprzyk, translation revised by K. Kozłowski, "Przestrzenie Teorii" 2014, no. 21.

"Film na Świecie" 1993, no. 3/4.

Foster A.D., *Obcy: decydujące starcie* [*Alien. The Official Movie Novelization*], trans. P. Cholewa, Czerwonak 2021.

Gelmis J., *Stanley Kubrick*, trans. A. Kozanecka, [in:] *Stanley Kubrick w opinii krytyki zagranicznej* [Stanley Kubrick – Opinions of Western Critics], selected by A. Kozanecka, Warszawa 1989.

Gombrich E.H., *Art and Illusion A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, New York 1977.

Helman, A., *O dziele filmowym. Materiał – technika – budowa* [On Film: Material – Technique – Construction], Kraków 1981.

Kolker R.P., Abrams N., *Kubrick. An Odyssey*, London 2024 [e-book].

Korte H., *The Birds*, [in:] *Literaturverfilmungen*, hrsg. von F.-J. Albersmeier, V. Roloff, Frankfurt am Main 1989, pp. 281–299.

Kozłowski K., *Przedmowa* [Foreword], [in:] W. Faulstich, *Estetyka filmu. Badania nad filmem science "Wojna światów" 1953 / 1954 Byrona Haskina*, trans. K. Kozłowski and M. Kasprzyk, foreword K. Kozłowski, Poznań 2017.

Kozłowski K., *Stanley Kubrick. Filmowa polifonia sztuk* [Stanley Kubrick: Film Poliphony of Arts], Warszawa 2018.

Kracauer S., *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality*, Princeton 1997.

Lämmert E., *Bauformen des Erzählens*, Stuttgart 1967.

Praz M., *Mnemosine. The Parallel Between Literature and Visual Arts*, Princeton 2023.

Segal E., *Love story, czyli O miłości* [*Love story*], trans. A. Przedpełska-Trzeciakowska, Poznań 1992.

Stanley Kubrick. Interviews, ed. G.D. Phillips, Jackson, Miss. 2001.

Thackeray W.M., *Barry Lyndon*, *s.l.* 2008 [Biblioteca Virtual Universal].

Thackeray W.M., *Targowisko próżności. Vanity Fair* [*Vanity Fair*], trans. T.J. Dehnel, Warszawa 2022.

The Stanley Kubrick Archives, ed. A. Castle, Hong Kong, et al. 2005 [2008].

Wittgenstein L., *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, trans. into Polish and foreword B. Wolniewicz, Warszawa 2000.

Wysłouch S., *Literatura a sztuki wizualne* [Literature and Visual Arts], Warszawa 1994.

Ziomek J., *Powinowactwa literatury. Studia i szkice* [Literature's Affiliations: Studies and Essays], Warszawa 1980.

Krzysztof Kozłowski – Full Professor, Institute of Film, Media and Audiovisual Arts, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań; scholar in film studies, theatre and literature. His research interests include aesthetics, film theory, history of American and German cinema, history of European theatre from the 16th to the 19th century, film music and media history and theory. Author and editor of publications in Poland and abroad. The most germaine being: *Teatr i religia sztuki. "Parsifal" Richarda Wagnera* [Theater and Religion of Art: "Parsifal" by Richard Wagner] (Poznań 2004), *Barry Lyndon* (Poznań 2006), *Richard Wagner, Dramaturgia opery. Wybór pism z lat 1871–1879* [The Opera's Drama: Selected Texts from 1871–1879], introduction and academic editor, jointly with with Anna Igielska (Gdańsk 2009), *Szekspir. Teoria lancasterska – domysły i fakty* [Shakespeare: Lancaster Theory – Speculations and Facts], academic editor together with Tomasz Kowalski (Warszawa 2012), *Stanley Kubrick. Filmowa polifonia sztuk* [Stanley Kubrick: Film Polyphony of Arts] (Warszawa 2013, 2018), *Werner Faulstich, Estetyka filmu. Badania nad filmem science fiction "Wojna światów" (1953 / 1954) Byrona Haskina* [Film Aesthetics: Studies in the Science-Fiction Film *The War of the Worlds* (1953/1954) by Byron Haskin], translation, introduction and academic edition (Poznań 2017). In preparation: *Radio i Bayreuther Festspiele w latach 1933–1944* [Radio and the Bayreuth Festival 1933–1944]. ORCID: 0000-0002-2736-044X. E-mail address: <krzysztof.kozlowski@amu.edu.pl>.