

Hemingway's Hard Luck with the Cinema: Visualisation Challenges

T. Nekryach¹, R. Dovganchyna^{2*},

¹Kyiv National Linguistic University, Kyiv, Ukraine

²Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine

*Corresponding author. E-mail: dovganchna@ukr.net

Paper received ; Accepted for publication .

Abstract. The article presents an instance of intersemiotic analysis of visualization strategies in E.Hemingway's prose and Hollywood adaptations of his works. E.Hemingway's deep subtext contributes to the polivisuality of fiction as opposed to the monovisuality of screening. The techniques of the cinematographic genre "noir", which helped to find the stylistic "tuning fork" to E.Hemingway's short story *The Killers*, are in the focus of discussion. The main lexical groups of E.Hemingway's language spectrum accountable for the "cinematographic effect" are pointed out, alongside with the genre elements of "noir".

Keywords: intersemiotic translation, visualization, screening, cinematographic technique, language spectrum, film genre "noir".

The visualization of literary images is an integral part of fiction that excites the reader's imagination. In order to enhance the visualization effect creative authors often resort, textually, to different art media: painting, music, dancing and even cinematography. E.Hemingway stands out against other well-known masters, who also gravitate to visualized imagery. After reading his prose you can visualize the story in the minutest details as an actual participant. E.Hemingway could skillfully switch on his reader's senses, from tactile to visual – and visual perception is known to be the brightest and longest-living. He accentuated directly on the affinity between his style and cinematographic techniques and even pointed it out in his works:

"Then everything commenced to run faster and faster as when they speed up a cinematograph film" [5, p. 387].

Modern scholars have been constantly trying to unravel the cinematographic mystery of E.Hemingway's works and understand why so few film directors ever succeeded in their screening (see F. M. Laurence [7]; D. Letort [8]; G. D. Phillips [11]). Among the most profound researchers of E. Hemingway's film adaptations is G. D. Phillips, a prolific author of biographical books on American and British filmmakers (Alfred Hitchcock, Stanley Kubrick, Fritz Lang, and Joseph Losey). He has served on juries at the Cannes, Berlin, and Chicago International Film Festivals. He has been a member of the editorial board for the journal *Literature/Film Quarterly* since its founding in 1973. This journal claims to be "the longest standing international journal devoted to the study of adaptation" [9].

André Bazin, a renowned and influential French film critic and theorist, pioneered the studies on the relationship between various arts and cinema: painting/photography and cinema, theater and cinema, literature and cinema, etc [2]. He emphasized that the epoch of technical civilization greatly contributed to people's cinematographic perception of the world. Recent investigations on visualisation have resulted in theoretical endeavours to consider the screen adaptation of fiction as an aspect of intersemiotic translation. The American scholar G. Bluestone initiated the research in early 1960s in his book *Novels into Film* [3]. Today his ideas are being developed in *Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen* [4], *L.Hutcheon Theory of Adaptation* [6], *B.McFarlane Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* [10] and *Screening Text : Critical Perspective on Film Adaptation* [12].

The present article is an attempt to look closely at E. Hemingway's literary techniques which create visualization and cinematographic effect in his works and see whether these dominant features can be preserved in intersemiotic translation, in film adaptations particularly.

Numerous reviews highlight E. Hemingway's cinematographic perception of the world which was moulded by the 20s century's poetics of modernism in general, as well as by the author's worldview and his rich professional experience in journalism. The cinematographic effect as a dominant feature of E. Hemingway's prose proceeds from his sensory world perception and desire to influence the reader's feelings and make the fictional events more dynamic. The cinematographic quality of E. Hemingway's prose owes its accuracy, documentary attributes, visualization, authenticity, close ups and capacity for making the reader "live" the events to the writer's choice of words and their appropriate placing.

So, in the process of intersemiotic translation it is essential to study very thoroughly the part of the author's language spectrum which create the cinematographic effect of his prose. Upon studying his short stories and novels, we have singled out the following lexical groups of E. Hemingway's language spectrum which greatly contribute to the cinematographic effect in his work:

- concrete-descriptive words;
- colour words;
- sensory words;
- action words;
- gestures;
- sound-imitating words.

It is ironic, though, that over 40 film adaptations of E. Hemingway's works with their cinematographic world perception actually failed to render the dominant feature of his style. The films based on his prose have been continually released in Hollywood: *A Farewell to Arms* (1932), *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* (1952), *The Sun Also Rises* (1957), *The Old Man and the Sea* (1958) with the incomparable Spencer Tracy. However, when *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* was shown in Ukraine in the late 1960s, the majority of E. Hemingway's admirers were not merely upset but badly hurt by its pushy bright "technicolor" and Hollywood's money-making clichés. Commercially beautiful African scenes were treated as a "slap" in E. Hemingway's face, as they dramatically contradicted his essential aesthetic principle. The film turned the cruel and bitter self-trial of the creative author into a sloppy women's novel.

Despite plentiful film adaptations of E. Hemingway's works and even sporadic cinema awards, E. Hemingway was rather skeptical about film directors and their attempts. D. Letort writes that Hemingway's works started to arouse interest in Hollywood when *The Sun Also Rises* was published in 1929 and got a great public acclaim. When his reputation was confirmed and even enhanced by the publication of *A Farewell to Arms* in 1929, the Paramount Pictures producers were determined to buy the screen rights. From the very outset of his collaboration with Hollywood E. Hemingway felt deeply frustrated, as there was hardly any mutual understanding between them. Once a studio acquired the rights to a novel, they were not held accountable to the writer for any changes in the script. As soon as money was paid, producers and directors assumed a patronizing attitude towards his work [8, p. 53]. Frank M. Laurence pointed out that E. Hemingway felt disappointed with screen versions as far back as 1932, when Frank Borzage made his version of *A Farewell to Arms* for Paramount Pictures. It was then that Hemingway first learned that Hollywood only made the kind of pictures people wanted to see, and the public, according to E. Hemingway, had bad taste [7, p. 41]. In his novel *A Farewell to Arms* E. Hemingway wrote about the ordeal of the Great War which shattered the individuals' values and most personal beliefs. In the film, the war context is turned into nothing more than a background to dramatize the love story of Fred Henry and Catherine Barkley, who are cruelly torn apart by the conflict. E. Hemingway's pessimistic view of life was censored into a "melodramatic mash". This enabled G. D. Phillips to state that no film was ever able to capture the embedded layers of the deeper meaning permeating E. Hemingway's books [11, p. 22]. At the film preview of *A Farewell to Arms*, they say, E. Hemingway watched it imperturbably to the very end, and, seeing the birds in the final shot, who were supposed to symbolize hope and signify the inevitable happy ending, he stood up, murmured "Ah, here are the birds..." and resolutely went off.

That despair was not unfamiliar to other famous authors of the time – Raymond Chandler, James M. Cain, and William Faulkner. They felt their literary merits degrading on the screen, although they themselves happened to act as hired screenwriters. The thing was that producers and directors, who coveted a box office success, could only make the kind of pictures run-of-the-mill audience looked forward to, so they resorted to time-tested "catches" and stereotypes.

However, in some cases the negotiations between literary and cinema masters turned out to be a success. The birth of a new film *genre noir* can serve as a vivid example of such collaboration. The classic film *noir* developed during World War II and after, taking advantage of the post-war atmosphere of anxiety, pessimism, and suspicion, characteristic of the Western society of the time. It was the style of black-and-white American films that first evolved in the 1940s, became prominent in the post-war era, and kept on through the classic "Golden Age" period until about 1960. The criminal, violent, misogynistic, hard-boiled, or greedy perspectives of anti-heroes in film *noir* were a metaphoric symptom of social evils, with the strong undercurrent of moral conflict, purposelessness and deep sense of

injustice. Rarely were there happy or optimistic endings in *noirs*. The genre mostly corresponded to stylistic features of hard-boiled fiction represented primarily by Dashiell Hammett. L. Letort claims that E. Hemingway's style has a lot in common with this genre: the same terse prose, sharp dialogues and vivid images pushing the plot on. So, the scholar is surprised that only one short story of E. Hemingway's was adapted as a film *noir*: Robert Siodmak made *The Killers* in 1946, working from the screenplay by Anthony Veiller and John Huston who expanded the story into a full-length scenario [8, p.54]. The director blended the features of the highly emotional German expressionism with Hollywood's tricky techniques. The film launched the careers of Burt Lancaster and Ava Gardner, who later became world famous players.

The first 20 minutes of the film, showing the arrival of the two contract killers, and the murder of "Swede" Anderson, present a close adaptation of Hemingway's short story, which, in itself, can be regarded as a dramatic fragment of a well-written play. The rest of the film, showing Detective Reardon's investigation of the murder, is quite original. According to Hemingway's biographer Carlos Baker, *The Killers* was the first film based on his works that the writer could genuinely admire [1]. Despite the fact that a short story was turned into a full-length film, it preserved all the tension, fear, mistrust, bleakness, loss of innocence, despair and even precision of E. Hemingway's writing.

The characteristic features of *film noir* are as follows: expressionistic lighting, deep-focus or depth of field camera work, disorienting visual schemes, jarring editing or juxtaposition of elements, ominous shadows, skewed camera angles (usually vertical or diagonal rather than horizontal), circling cigarette smoke, existential sensibilities, and unbalanced or moody compositions. Settings often present **interiors** with low-key (or single-source) lighting, venetian-blinded windows and rooms, dark, claustrophobic and gloomy appearances. **Exteriors** are often urban night scenes with deep shadows, wet asphalt, dark alleyways, rain-slicked, miserly streets, flashing neon lights, low key lighting and *suspense* versus *action*.

The latent obsession with death or the dynamism of cruel death found its embodiment in *genre noir* owing to striking visual decisions. The killing of the hero is not shown in the short story *The Killers*, whereas this scene is one of the most striking and impressive in the film: the flashes of the gangsters' gun shots break through the darkness of the room – and the victim's loose-hanging hand signifies that the killers' work has been done. The viewer, as well as the reader, can feel the atmosphere of dismay, estrangement, claustrophobia, and fatality. All of these notions are fundamental for both E. Hemingway's writing and *genre noir* films.

FATE as the key concept of *noir* is a crucial instigator of the plot: it can ruin the characters' plans entirely and acts quicker than the police. The moral determinism has its revenge as soon as the principal character stumbles on his way. More often than not, one of the main reasons for his wrong-doing is the spell of *femme fatale*. The hero does not anticipate the inevitable effect of her evil influence, and when he does, it comes up too late. Burt Lancaster's character realizes that he has no time to escape and waits for his death submissively. The moral

code of life is the fundamental philosophy of *genre noir*. And though life tends to be ethically-challenged, everybody has to pay for their misconduct. The readers are aware of the prevalence of fatality in E. Hemingway's short story, but they can come up with different reasons for it. So there are various interpretations, which can serve as a prequel. The viewer, on the other hand, is inevitably restrained by the film version which only presents the vision of its makers.

However, the profound appreciation of the author's worldview and the felicitous cinema techniques help to render a lot of the writer's ideas. E. Hemingway weaves quite a few symbolic colour words into his writing, but the reader tends to visualize "the picture" in black and white, due to the pessimistic frame of mind among the representatives of *lost generation*. The black-and-white technique of *genre noir* creates the so called *noir-look* and is in full accord with E. Hemingway's style. The favorable *noir* technique is the character's half-lit face, which helps to juxtapose the Dark and the Light. It can be interpreted as a visual representation of eternal ethical dilemmas.

Genre noir, as well as E. Hemingway's writing, is marked with its own intonation, tone, manner and style. The recurrent use of concrete-descriptive words in E. Hemingway's *The Killers* gets the reader to visualize the events of the short story. For instance, the repetition of the word "**arc-light**" makes them feel terrified by the night, with its vague, foreboding and sinister shadows:

"The two of them went out the door. George watched them, through the window, pass under the **arc-light** and across the street. In their tight overcoats and derby hats they looked like a vaudeville team..." [5];

"Outside the **arc-light** shone through the bare branches of a tree. Nick walked up the street beside the car-tracks and turned at the next **arc-light** down a side-street. Three houses up the street was Hirsch's rooming-house. Nick walked up the two steps and pushed the bell. A woman came to the door..." [5];

"Nick walked up the dark street to the corner under the **arc-light**, and then along the car-tracks to Henry's eating-house. George was inside, back of the counter..." [5].

The use of **low key** lighting technique in the film *The Killers* helps to render this function of repetition. The strong light falling from above accentuates the actors' figures and creates dark shadows, while the soft dispersed light in front of the actors focuses on the shadows themselves and makes them distinctive and contrasting. This technique makes the light and the dark collide, darkens all faces, interiors, town landscapes, thus creating the mysterious effect of anxiety and suspense. The variation of upper and front light enriches the lighting possibility and enables to create dark strips. The night shooting and special lighting in the initial scene in the film *The Killers* is overtly metaphorical: the killers look like two malignant, ominous, fatal figures cropping up from the dark.

E. Hemingway seeks to refrain from direct description, just as *noir* seeks to avoid **close-up** faces. But as long as the close-up technique is used, it should be employed with almost mathematic precision. The face of Ava Gardner, the *femme fatale* in *The Killers*, is highlighted only once, while she was urging the gangsters to kill the detective. Close-up helps to see the eyes of the woman-killer and

shows that the Evil is total, even if hidden in those beautiful eyes.

Genre noir tends to utilize deep-focused and wide-angled shooting with bright lighting. It allows film directors to widen a frame, create multifunctional compositions and escape the **180-degree rule**. The 180-degree rule always makes the first character appear in the frame to the right of the second character in a dialogue scene, thus enabling them to look straight at each other. Characters in *genre noir* avoid the direct eye contact to emphasize that they have to face the danger all alone.

Existentialism as the main tendency in *genre noir* brings about the *noir look*. It is consistent with the 20-eth century American culture of the postwar period which leaves no room for eternal values and ethical absolutes. The feeling of detachment and loneliness characterizes both E. Hemingway's works and films *noir*. And they both resent the absurdity and cruelty of life. The main character in *The Killers*, Ole Anderson, a former boxer, demonstrates his sensitivity and unreasonable obstinacy, when, despite his friends' warning, he makes no attempt to escape and despondently waits for his death. He also shows his marginal isolation from the existing social order. His strength lies in his seclusion and minimal display of emotions. The *mise-en-scène* technique in *genre noir* is highly apt for transferring this seclusion: the characters repeatedly go into and out of shadow, which is a typical symbol of impending danger. For most characters there is no safe place in the entire world. The only temporary place they occupy is a tiny rented room, or the detective's Spartan office – until either the police or killers burst into.

The laconism of E. Hemingway's prose has a lot in common with the style of silent films in which the absence of sound is made up for by very impressive visual effects. Undoubtedly, the motley and entertaining Hollywood did not strive to render the world perception of *lost generation* with its deep pessimism and frustration. It seems reasonable to suppose that the main task of film adaptations should be the search for a stylistic "**tuning fork**" concordant with the author's style. It became possible to find this stylistic "tuning fork" to E. Hemingway's *The Killers* with the cinematographic techniques of *genre noir*.

However, the next film version of 1964 has very little in common with the story *The Killers* in particular and E. Hemingway's esthetic programme in general. The single allusion to the short story can be spotted at the beginning of the film, when one of the characters shies away from the very idea of escape and listlessly accepts his end. The killers become the main characters in this screen version: not only do they try to find the money hidden by the murdered man (a former motor racer), but also wonder why the victim never tried to escape. The story unwinds in the best traditions of action films: the killers untangle the story, find the lady-friend of the victim and also the man who has ordered the murder. Both screen versions of E. Hemingway's *The Killers* present the views and insights of the film-makers rather than the author's. And, to be sure, there is nothing to be done with the fact that E. Hemingway's underlying plot, which enables the reader to develop various interpretations, is usually reduced to a single-direction

event, often different from the original conception. The polyvisuality of the text is, by and large, opposed to the monovisuality of the screening. However, if the filmmakers indicate that a film is based on a story of a particular writer, the author is by no means to be ignored in this kind of intersemiotic translation.

Sometimes the plot of a literary piece allows a sort of monovisual interpretation, but it does not guarantee the success of the screening. For example, the screen version of E. Hemingway's short novel *The Old Man and the Sea* directed by John Sturges in 1958 did not live up to E. Hemingway's expectations, although he himself took

part in making the film. E. Hemingway coveted authenticity so much that he himself went fishing in order to catch a real big fish, feeling resentful to whatever imitations. No authenticity, however, succeeded in rendering the symbols, implied meanings and parabolic nature of the literary text.

Multiple and ambiguous messages constitute the philosophic symbolism in E. Hemingway's works. The writer could handle words very skillfully and effectively to create his inimitable world. It takes a commensurate artist to transfer that world into a different artistic dimension.

REFERENCES

1. Baker C. Hemingway : The Writer as Artist. – USA : Princeton University Press. – 1972. – 464 p.
2. Bazin A. What is Cinema? // Essays selected and translated from the French by Hugh Gray. – Berkeley and Los Angeles: University California Press. – Volume 1. – 1967, 2005. – 183 p.
3. Bluestone G. Novels into Film. – USA : University of California Press, 1961. – 229 p.
4. Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen. – Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2007. – 290 p.
5. Hemingway E. The Essential Hemingway. – London : Arrow Books, 1993 – 522 p.
6. Hutcheon L. Theory of Adaptation. – New York : Routledge, 2006. – 304 p.
7. Laurence F.M. Hemingway and the Movies. – New York : Da Capo Press, 1982. – 329 p.
8. Letort D. The Writing of a Film Noir: Ernest Hemingway and the Killers // Screening Text : Critical Perspective on Film Adaptation // Ed. by Wells-Lassagne Sh. and Hudelet A. – North California : McFarland and Company, Inc., 2013. – P.53-66
9. Literature/Film Quarterly. – Salisbury University. Retrieved 2011-06-20. – <http://www.salisbury.edu>
10. McFarlane B. Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation. – Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1996. – 296 p.
11. Phillips G.D. Hemingway and Film. – New York : F.Ungar Pub. Co., 1980. – 129 p.
12. Screening Text : Critical Perspective on Film Adaptation // Ed. by Wells-Lassagne Sh. and Hudelet A. – North California : McFarland and Company, Inc., 2013. – 256 p.

Почему Э. Хемингуэю не везло с экранизациями: проблемы визуализации

Т. Некряч, Р. Довганчина

Аннотация. Статья представляет интерсемиотический анализ приемов визуализации в прозе Хемингуэя и голливудских экранизациях его произведений. Глубокий подтекст Хемингуэя создает поливизуальность текста, которая противопоставляется моновизуальности экранизации. Особое внимание уделяется кинематографическому жанру “нуар”, техники которого помогли найти “стилистический камертон” к рассказу Хемингуэя “Убийцы”. Выделяются основные лексические группы языкового спектра Хемингуэя, которые обеспечивают “кинематографический эффект”, интерпретированные в жанре “нуар”.

Ключевые слова: *интерсемиотический перевод, визуализация, экранизация, кинематографичность, языковой спектр, киножанр “нуар”.*