

**ROMEO AND JULIET'S REWRITING IN THE WALT  
DISNEY'S ANIMATED MOVIE *POCAHONTAS*:  
ADAPTATION STUDIES, COMPARATIVE LITERATURE  
AND THEORY OF INTERTEXTUALITY**

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**Abstract:** Intertextuality has been a driving force for Adaptation Studies, but few scholars have highlighted its relevance, rather prioritizing issues such as audience reception, cinematographic technique or aesthetics and, occasionally, fidelity. However, the starting point for any audiovisual production (be it film, television or theater) is the written matter, the text. Inserted within the field of Adaptation Studies in dialogue with Comparative Literature and Theory of Intertextuality, the present papers assesses the extent to which there are points of contact between William Shakespeare's tragedy *Romeo And Juliet* and the Walt Disney animated motion picture *Pocahontas*. The paper initially discusses the adaptation of Shakespeare's text as a starting point for film productions, proceeding to theoretical reflections between Comparative Literature, Adaptation Theory, intertextuality and rewriting, and to the comparative analysis between the tragedy and the motion picture, which leads to the conclusion of a retroversive movement between source and adapted texts, which invites to the question of intertextual rewriting in Adaptation Studies.

**Keywords:** Pocahontas; Romeo and Juliet; Walt Disney; William Shakespeare; Rewriting



## A REESCRITA DE *ROMEU E JULIETA* NO FILME DE ANIMAÇÃO DE WALT DISNEY *POCAHONTAS*: ESTUDOS DE ADAPTAÇÃO, LITERATURA COMPARADA E TEORIA DA INTERTEXTUALIDADE

**Resumo:** A intertextualidade tem sido uma força motriz para os Estudos de Adaptação, mas poucos estudiosos têm destacado sua relevância, priorizando questões como recepção do público, técnica ou estética cinematográfica e, ocasionalmente, fidelidade. Porém, o ponto de partida para qualquer produção audiovisual (seja cinema, televisão ou teatro) é a matéria escrita, o texto. Inserido no campo dos Estudos da Adaptação em diálogo com a Literatura Comparada e a Teoria da Intertextualidade, o presente trabalho avalia em que medida existem pontos de contato entre a tragédia *Romeu e Julieta*, de William Shakespeare, e o filme de animação de Walt Disney, *Pocahontas*. O artigo discute inicialmente a adaptação do texto de Shakespeare como ponto de partida para produções cinematográficas, procedendo a reflexões teóricas entre Literatura Comparada, Teoria da Adaptação, intertextualidade e reescrita, e à análise comparativa entre a tragédia e o filme, que conduz à conclusão de um movimento de retroversão entre textos fonte e adaptado, que convida à questão da reescrita intertextual nos Estudos de Adaptação.

**Palavras-chave:** Pocahontas; Romeu e Julieta; Walt Disney; William Shakespeare; Reescrita

### Introduction

*Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy written by William Shakespeare, marked by both romanticism and eroticism of its characters and by the quarrel between their families, resulting in the death of the title couple, who found in suicide the only solution to stay together, being represented in the most varied artistic expressions. In the four centuries that separate Shakespeare from our time, the play has been adapted to the multiple languages, as well as to the various audiences, enchanting generations and amassing varied critical responses; however, it is necessary to acknowledge the playwright's talent in representing human individuality in two

complex characters, which were in a very delicate stage to be dealing with themes such as love, marriage and, despite careful work with poetic language, Romeo and Juliet continue to be appreciated as endearing characters.

Their forbidden love journey has served as background in literature, film and television, either in homonymous productions or as intertext. Such intertextual echoes may be found in the Walt Disney animated motion picture *Pocahontas* which, in our view, shows nuances of the Shakespearean text in its portrayal of the relationship between an American native and an English settler, John Smith, through metaphors, songs and characters' attitudes. The Disney version of the story of Pocahontas dialogues with the style of *Romeo and Juliet*; in the animated movie, against all odds, a witty and courageous young woman falls in love with an Englishman and saves his life, appeasing relations between natives and settlers. It is indisputable that the film is fraught with historical inaccuracies, such as the romance between the leading couple, their ages and the nature of most of the conflict.

Inserted in the field of Comparative Literature in line with adaptation Studies and Theory of Intertextuality, this paper proposes a comparison of the tragedy with the animated movie, using Andre Lefevere's concept of *rewriting* (1992), which will support our analysis. After these introductory remarks, section two tackles the relationship between Comparative Literature, Adaptation Studies and Theory of Intertextuality, followed by a discussion of Lefevere's theory of rewriting; section three undertakes the comparative analysis of the two pieces and section four presents our final remarks on the topic.

### **Comparative Literature, Adaptation Studies and Theory of Intertextuality: Rewriting in Focus**

Readers have naturalized the fidelity-based comparison between audiovisual productions and the texts upon which they were based;

however, fidelity no longer supports the analyses of adaptations, as Diniz (2005), Cartmell (1999) and Hutcheon (2013) show.

In its early years, Comparative Literature adopted a “monological look at literatures and cultures, favoring a method that integrates the list of cognitive processes that we activate when faced with the unknown” (Brandini, 2018, p. 68). In other words, this field of knowledge monopolized the influence of one particular literature over another; however, over the years, new perspectives were adopted to better understand comparatism, shying away from similarities and differences and demarcating a new type of text, meeting “a particular understanding of literature based on values such as the dialogue between cultures and knowledge, as well as the circulation of texts and ideas” (Brandini, 2018, p. 68). Intertextuality is therefore relevant to comparative studies, in which certain aspects and/or texts of a literary system find echoes in a new literary or artistic production, detaching itself from the aegis of originality.

Regarding the Theory of Intertextuality in dialogue with Comparative Literature, Leila Perrone-Moisés argues that Comparative Literature “not only admits, but proves that literature is produced in a constant dialogue of texts, through retakes, loans and exchanges”, implying that “literature begets literature; each work is a new continuation, by endorsement or dissent, of previously existing works, genres and themes. Writing is, therefore, a dialogue with previous and contemporary literatures” (Perrone-Moisés, 1996, p. 94). For Alfaro (1996), words and texts will always echo in new words and new texts; therefore, dealing with intertextuality makes us understand texts “not as self-contained systems but as differential and historical, as traces and tracings of otherness, since they are shaped by the repetition and transformation of other textual structures” (Alfaro, 1996, p. 268).

Perrone-Moisés also points that intertextuality, in the field of Comparative Literature, aims to “examine how this production of the new text occurs, the processes of abduction, absorption and integration of alien elements in the creation of the new work”

(Perrone-Moisés, 1996, p. 94), distancing itself from the issue of influence – a topic very in vogue in the beginnings of Comparative Literature –; for Perrone-Moisés, influences “are not reduced to a simple phenomenon of passive reception, but are a productive confrontation with the other, without establishing value hierarchies in terms of previous-subsequent, originality-imitation” (Perrone-Moisés, 1996, p. 94). Thus the text as raw material cannot be seen as a singular, unique product, but as writing made “from, on and within other texts” (Fernández, 2001, p. 74<sup>1</sup>), or, as Flávio Kothe (2019) puts it, the addition-subtraction duality between works of art “is a semantic gesture that structures them: it is the orientation of the meaning of their artifact, it is the delimitation of a space in contrast or approximation to spaces occupied by other works” (Kothe, 2019, p. 162).

In this context, Luiz (2022) pointed out that literary works stay away from closed reading and “open up for intertextual reading. This reading, by its nature, establishes a difference based on similarity, going against the current of attributing a homogeneous character to artistic production” (Luiz, 2022, p. 59). This reading is in dialogue with Julia Kristeva's essay on intertextuality; she pointed out that no text is complete on its own, since its writing is constantly revisited and updated. From this, we can say that the role of intertextuality in adaptation theory does not involve only a single word or a known source, it allows one to argue that intertextuality is a text which is hidden within another text and forms meaning, whether the author is aware of it or not.

Intertextuality, in our view, is a phenomenon which dialogues and contributes not only to Comparative Literature, but also to other forms of textual representation such as adaptations. As Linda Hutcheon (2013) and Gentil de Faria (2019) point out, film adaptations have borrowed from literary texts, resulting in criticism based on the aporia of fidelity, or rather *imago philia* versus *logophobia*. Fortunately, fidelity has become obsolete for

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<sup>1</sup> In the original: “sino por estar escrito desde, sobre y dentro de otros textos”.

evaluating film and audiovisual productions in general; specialized critics have begun to consider technical aspects such as actor interpretation, scenography, and the creative process as a whole, in which word and image are at levels of equality and not superiority (Desmond & Hawkes, 2005; Esslin, 1987; Westbrook, 2010).

Neubert & Shreve assert that intertextuality stems from a global pattern that readers compare to cognitive templates they've abstracted from past experiences (Neubert & Shreve, 1992, p. 117). These templates act as new originals to which readers attribute intertextuality. When a new text is intertextual to an older one, its creator may intend to challenge their audience or convey a particular message. However, this isn't always the case— especially if they're adapting semiotic systems. Rather, creating intertextual works requires a certain degree of complexity. Many different elements need to come together in order to create a cohesive piece. In addition to these verbal components, intertextual texts should incorporate other visual and sonic elements in order to reinforce the original message.

When it comes to remaking a novel into an animated film, viewers expect the narrative to closely match their original ideas of the story. However, many adaptations fail to deliver this effect and are instead seen as disappointing by the public. As a result, many films are seen as unsuccessful and are quickly forgotten by audiences. The reason is that viewers look for equivalence in the movie; they want their favorite literary work to be recreated into a film via filmmaking methods that are as close as possible (Diniz, 2005, 14)

This research object focuses on the creation of *Pocahontas*, a children's animated film that incorporates elements of the tragedy into its narrative. It also discusses *Romeo and Juliet*'s story, which was included in this research object. When creating an adaptation, viewers generally expect that the filmmakers will match their understanding of the source-text— which isn't usually the case. This causes disappointment in the adaptation, which then leads to perceived devaluation of the film due to the “search for equivalence, i.e. the filmmaker's successfully replacing literary means by filmic

ones” (Diniz, 2005, 14). However, Julio Plaza points out that this isn't possible and even if it were, it still wouldn't match public expectations of how the movies should look and feel (Plaza, 2010, p. 32-33). In fact, he argues that even the notion of mimicking a source material via filmmaking is impossible because something is always trying to make itself look non-equal in comparison (Plaza, 2010, 33). Despite these claims, people still try to make films that closely resemble the source material, which leads to a strange feeling for viewers in general.

The animation *Pocahontas* evokes the story of *Romeo and Juliet* in a way that makes it look like Native Americans and English settlers are fighting against each other. Along with this intertextual conversation, the animation also draws inspiration from the historical facts about Pocahontas. Regardless of what the real-world basis for the story is, American colonization has been altered to make it appear more positive in nature. Even though Pocahontas' historical reality was altered by animation, many scholars believe that this softens the negative ramifications of American colonialism. They believe this is due to miscegenated North American history that would result from a multicultural mixing of cultures among all continents (see Buescher & Ono, 1996; Edwards, 1999; Nelson, 2017; Woodward, 1969 for more examples).

Neubert & Shreve (1992) believe that translations are double intertexts due to their similarities with both the source and target texts. Kristeva's (2005) theory indicates that written language is ambivalent— it has two opposing natures. Writing has two aspects: it is a form of communication and subjectification. Due to this dialogism, writing loses its identity as a subject and instead becomes a representation of ambivalence. Kristeva likes this concept because it further supports her belief that written language is two-faced. Dialogism not only supports her ideas about the duality of writing, but it also makes way for the word “subject” to become less prominent in writing. Instead, writing would then become a representation of two narratives coming together in an ambiguous fashion (Kristeva, 2005, p. 70).

John Bryant's 2013 work declares that all adaptations must reference the source text they're borrowing from. The only difference is that borrowings from other texts are considered to be more intertextual than non-borrowings. This is because all adaptations are necessarily intertextual and partial in nature (Bryant, 2013, p. 48). Bryant also concurs with Samoyault (2008) that adaptation represents literature by moving its memory and inscribing it into different texts through various procedures of retakes, recollections, and re-scriptures. This causes intertextuality to appear in the adapted text by way of an effect on memory (Samoyault, 2008, p. 47).

Regarding the role of the adapter in this process, Neubert & Shreve (1992) reinforce that the adapter – as a translator – cannot be unaware of this correspondence between source and target texts, that is, this professional “is not free to ignore intertextuality; source-centered translation simply uses source-text intertextuality as its procedural control” (Neubert & Shreve, 1992, p. 118).

We agree with Neubert & Shreve's (1992) hypothesis that film and all other media are texts and serve as comparatively accommodating objects of study that function as intertext. Aware that cinema enjoys a so-called classical literature due to its translation into audiovisual languages, we agree that creative presentations of classical and contemporary European texts are fertile ground for intertextual reading. As seen in the recent study, Shakespeare's work is signified in Disney, his work isn't just performed; it also gets written out. This is because of the way it's written mirrors other texts and the conventions of history and society. It's because of this that the Bard can live in history and make his work relevant to current times (Nitrini, 2010, p. 162).

Carvalho (1996) stresses the significance of intertextuality to Comparative Literature through her observations about the relationship between the two disciplines. As she sees it, intertextuality allowed Comparative Literature to develop new “interliterary relations” that reduced its reliance on originality, precognition or dependence. It also helped them reshape “the



modes of appropriation, absorption and textual transformation” as well as changing how people perceive literary elements’ continuous movement. In fact, Carvalhal believes reversing traditional ideas about literary influences and sources is essential to this process (Carvalhal, 1996, p. 13).

Carvalhal (2003) said that Comparative Literature sought out relationships between texts by using intertextuality. Through this practice, they freed themselves from originality or influence. Carvalhal believes that intertextuality is an essential aspect of studying text relations. It also helped people to challenge their beliefs about what texts mean (Carvalhal 2003, p. 19). Adapting someone else’s work can lead to a new original. Carvalhal suggests that this happens because intersemiotic adaptations<sup>2</sup> create a new text that’s distinct from its original. Some of the text’s possibilities must be realized in the new adaptation, rather than merely copied or translated from the original (Carvalhal, 2003, p. 227).

Most film studies focus on the film adaptation process from the literary side to the artistic. While trying to represent the work as accurately as possible, filmmakers interpret and translate the story into a visual medium. This unidirectional research direction has changed thanks to the evolution of thinking. People now compare films and books instead of just one side to the other. Instead of comparing art to art, people compare both art forms with a third entity: plot, characters and a climax. Because both works attempt to represent truth, some filmmakers choose to translate or not translate these elements when creating their films.

Italo Calvino comments on classics and the memory inscribed in them. Every text is both individual and collective memory; when it is relocated in another socio-cultural scenario and context, this memory is reviewed and complemented by its welcoming audience’s reading background. In Calvino’s words (2007, p. 10-11), the classics have a special impact when they impose themselves

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<sup>2</sup> In her text, Carvalhal discusses literary translation, but her reflections are consistent with intersemiotic adaptation.

as unforgettable, and when they hide in the folds of memory, imitating themselves as collective or individual unconscious. In this sense, Andre Lefevere (1992) defends and proposes the concept of *rewriting*, which is outlined by the ideological context. According to Lefevere, it means adapting a work to a different audience; this adaptation is conditioned by socio-historical values, that is, a “preservation” of foreign content to the parameters of the welcoming language. The Belgian theorist defends that rewriting plays a relevant role in the development of literatures and that it filter into the literary polysystem. The theory of rewriting prioritizes the commitment of cultural agents in the source-text’s welcoming context, resulting in a reformulation and a new image of authors and source-cultures, as well as in the elaboration of literary canons. Thus, not only translations but also adaptations – literary and intersemiotic – “produced within the ideological and poetological limits of the receiving culture, also have a retroverse effect by creating images of the original culture and cross-cultural canons” (Vieira, 1996, p. 138).

The adapter of a source text must recontextualize the sights, sounds and feelings from the original work in a new matrix. They must also recontextualize the cultural beliefs and narratives of the original culture into new ideas in a new cultural framework. This leads to a new understanding of intertextuality; it helps the adapter understand the ideology behind their work and how it relates to other cultural texts (Rabadán, 1994, p. 132). Disney films are an effective example of this concept; Imelda Whelehan (1999) notes that their animations target children. Because they are intended for children, Disney films are seen as harmless and appropriate for children to view— which makes it easier for them to avoid questioning the specific ideological bent of their enterprise (Whelehan, 1999, p. 215).

Rewriting the textual source to a new context requires creative manipulation. There’s a chance this new text won’t be accepted by its intended audience, but adapters must successfully transpose the text to match the standards of their audience’s culture. This is

important because it will help ensure that the adaptation is well-received. The connection the translated text has with its original culture is important to consider when considering intertextual relations “in their broadest sense, and in its interaction with the target culture’s different subsystems” (Rabadán, 1999, p. 138<sup>3</sup>). Finally, we may assure that the manipulation of this text does not constitute a “rejectable text, but rather that its validity is so relative that, in a given context, it may become a standard of correction” (Rabadán, 1999, p. 138<sup>4</sup>), given the fact that the concept of *translation/adaptation* is variable for each cultural system and there is not always agreement between them.

In a respectful way to Rabadán’s position on correction, we may say that allowing a standard of correction implies a norm to be followed and disregarding the other as a receiver of this text. This is because Disney’s plot deviates from *Romeo and Juliet* despite the similarities between the two works. Furthermore, if we believe that Shakespeare is being followed as the standard, then Disney’s *Pocahontas* film should be considered incorrect despite its accurate portrayal of her true story.

We do not agree that this link to the norm is a primary condition for making an adaptation, but that there must be an acknowledgment of this norm and that it will be resized into another type of cultural system, another context of reception, by other agents. This is not meant to belittle *Romeo and Juliet* and sublimate *Pocahontas*: these works are in constant dialogue, which are properly situated in different times and intended for different audiences. There are nuances of the tragic play in the animation, which does not mean to say that *Pocahontas* is an equivalent translation of *Romeo and Juliet*, but an intertextual recreation that dialogues with Shakespeare’s tragedy.

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<sup>3</sup> In the original: “relaciones intertextuales del texto meta en su más amplio sentido e y su interacción con los distintos subsistemas de la cultural de llegada”.

<sup>4</sup> In the original: “texto rechazable, sino que su validez es tan relativa que en un contexto dado puede convertirse en norma de corrección”.

According to Allen (2011), meaning is something that “exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations. The text becomes the intertext” (Allen, 2011, p. 1). The idea of the text and, therefore, of intertextuality, depends on the way adapter re-elaborates the plot and narrative based on what has already been written and read and what is being rewritten and re-read. The purpose of intertextual reading, according to Allen, is to allow the reader – in the case of this work, the viewer – to disconnect from a linear reading and be subject to multiple readings, since there is no exact reading of a given text and that each reader “brings with him or her different expectations, interests, viewpoints, and prior reading experiences. Each reader [...] is encouraged to read it in whatever order best suits his or her purpose” (Allen, 2011, p. 7).

Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne & Sandy Flitterman-Lewis (1999) state that cultural intertextual dialogue occurs between adaptations. They point to the many possibilities intertextual dialogue provides for different cultures. They also suggest that artists need to consider the effect their art has on people by creating subtle patterns of communication through the art itself.

Given the above, we see that intertextuality is an important concept for Adaptation Studies, as it establishes a simultaneous relationship of connection between texts, and that it will continue to be a crucial element in the attempt to understand literature and culture in general, since every text, even when assigned to a certain author, is, in fact, a combination of the author’s own creativity and the implicit or explicit influence of the surrounding environment.

### **Comparative Analysis between *Romeo and Juliet* and *Pocahontas***

Many adaptations involve love stories between settlers and natives, and while such a connection has never been recorded in any

of the colonial writings, the love between a Native American girl and an English colonizer actually seems fascinating but implausible, just as we see in *Romeo and Juliet*: two adolescents from respected feuding families in Verona (and whose reason for the quarrel is unknown), by chance of Fate, end up falling in love and living a forbidden love, the result of which is death, as a symbol of union between lovers.

Pocahontas is considered the American princess in the Disney filmography. She is Chief Powhatan's daughter, has two animal friends – the raccoon Meeko and the hummingbird Flit – and wants to know more about the world where she lives. Juliet is Lord Capulet's only daughter and has the yearnings of a young woman in love, although in her first appearance (1.3) she does not show as much romanticism, as she is being coerced by her mother and Nurse to marry Count Paris, a relative of Prince Escalus'. Although Pocahontas is shown to have some freedom within her community, Juliet is surrounded by the ideology of the patriarchy, to the point that her mother and Nurse agree with her marriage.

Juliet is promised to Paris, and Pocahontas to Kocoum, her tribe's best warrior; however, the two leading female characters are neither fond of nor interested in marrying their suitors. In the tragedy, in 1.3 – which precedes the Capulet ball –, Lady Capulet and the Nurse convince Juliet, by means of metaphors and obscene puns, that Paris is the ideal suitor for her, without letting her choose for herself; however, Juliet indicates that she may fall for Prince Escalus' young relative: "I'll look to like, if looking liking move; / But no more deep well I endart mine eye / Than your consent gives strength to make it fly" (1.3. vv.99-101; Shakespeare, 2005, p. 375).

In the Disney animation, more precisely in 10:56 to 11:50, the leading character is surprised to learn the exciting thing that was "about to happen" was her father promising her hand to Kocoum, one of her tribe's bravest warriors. She considers the warrior too serious, while her father argues that such a strong and brave young man would make a good husband and protect her; however, Pocahontas says that his dream "is pointing me down another

path”. The father affirms that the right path is marriage to the warrior, but she questions why she cannot choose – ambiguously pointing to both choosing her destiny and her husband –; her father gives her the following natural metaphor for answer: “You are the daughter of the chief. It is time to take your place among our people. Even the wild mountain stream must someday join the big river” (*Pocahontas*, 11:53-12:02).

The Chief presents Pocahontas with a necklace that once belonged to her mother and tells her that, as her mother had worn it on her wedding day, he hopes his daughter will also wear it on hers. In 12:43-12:52, Pocahontas ponders about her father’s desire that she be metaphorically as stable as the river but recognizes that the stream is not as stable as it may be thought to be. In 12: 53-15:10, Pocahontas sings “*Just Around the Riverbend*”, in which she questions what awaits her at a riverbend, as a metaphor for her eventual marriage to Kocoum and how she, as a curious young woman, may follow other paths down the stream or, rather, her destiny.

Soon after, we see her meeting Grandmother Willow, who would be the counterpart of the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*. Unlike the tragedy’s character, characterized by the use of connotative and obscene language, Grandmother Willow also takes on the role of the protagonist’s advisor, but with a denotative language, giving her a degree of autonomy and parsimony in listening to the spirits of nature, who will indicate the path to be followed.

Another common point at which both works meet is John Smith’s encounter with Pocahontas and Romeo’s encounter with Juliet. In the animation (28:51-31:12), we see Pocahontas being shrouded in a mist; John Smith thinks she is some wild animal and points his gun, but, as the mist fades, we see Pocahontas’ face, and her beauty enchants the young settler. In the play, the meeting of the title couple takes place at the Capulet ball in 1.5, in which the young Montague admires Juliet’s beauty, and she also corresponds to him – with the touch of their hands and the kiss as ambivalent signs of sin and forgiveness.

Another indication that Juliet does not consent to marrying the Count is in 3.5: soon after spending their only night together, Romeo leaves Verona, exiled for the murder of Juliet's cousin Theobald, however, moments after he escapes, Lady Capulet appears to warn her daughter that her father "hath sorted out a sudden day of joy": her wedding to Paris on Thursday (3.5 v.109; Shakespeare, 2005, p. 391). Juliet is reluctant and expresses that she is amazed by this hasty decision, and that, if she is going to marry, it will be to Romeo rather than Paris

Now, by Saint Peter's Church, and Peter too,  
He shall not make me there a joyful bride.  
I wonder at this haste, that I must wed  
Ere he that should be husband comes to woo.  
I pray you, tell my lord and father, madam,  
I will not marry yet; and when I do, I swear  
It shall be Romeo – whom you know I hate –  
Rather than Paris. These are news indeed.  
(3.5 vv.116-23; Shakespeare, 2005, p. 391)

Then Capulet and the Nurse enter her room, and soon after Lady Capulet informs her husband that "she will none, she gives you thanks" (3.5 v.139; Shakespeare, 2005, p. 391), a discussion breaks out between father and daughter, in which she kindly shows gratitude to the proposal, but refuses because she does not love the Count, while the father tries to argue that such is the beauty of the young suitor that many women would want him, however, he chose Juliet. To his displeasure, she says: "Not proud you have, thankful that you have. / Proud can I never be of what I hate, / But thankful even for the hate that is meant love" (3.5 vv. 146-148; Shakespeare, 2005, p. 391).

However, the father exalts himself and rejects her for such ingratitude:

I tell thee what: get thee to church o' Thursday,  
Or never after look me in the face.  
Speak not; reply not; do not answer me.  
My fingers itch. Wife, we scarce thought us blest  
That God had lent us but this only child,  
But now I see this one is one too much,  
And that we have a curse in having her.  
Out on her, hilding!  
(3.5 vv. 161-8; Shakespeare, 2005, p. 391)

In the animation, from 58:07 to 1:00:10, Kocoum catches Pocahontas kissing Smith. He furiously advances against the English settler, and, during their fight, Pocahontas asks Kocoum to stop, but Thomas, Smith's sailing companion, protects him by shooting the young warrior. Pocahontas condemns Thomas for killing Kocoum, being prevented by Smith from advancing against him. When he orders his companion to flee – they are inside Grandmother Willow's grove –, Smith is captured by Pocahontas' tribesmen, regarded as the murderer of one of their own. In the tragedy, more precisely, at the end of 3.1, Romeo is exiled for the murder of Theobald, Juliet's cousin. Together, these scenes show that both leading female characters are taken by double sadness – their doomed loves and the murder of their loved ones.

Finally, in this comparison, we may say that the Disney animation rewrites Shakespearean tragedy, in the terms proposed by Andre Lefevere (1992). For the Belgian theorist, regarding the concept of rewriting, in line with the Theory of Intertextuality, there is not a single source-text as individual creation, because, if we think of intertextuality as a relationship between a conglomerate of textual practices, the film adaptation is an imagetic and textual rewriting in which readings and impressions of the adapter converge before the source-text, creating a version of that text.

For Lefevere (1992), rewriting helps revise the literary canon, as it is also a way of introducing the reader to this type of literature, because authors are not presented by their texts as originally



conceived, but by a rewrite – an anthology, a piece of literary criticism or an adaptation, as is the case in the present study. As he explains, translation/adaptation<sup>5</sup> perpetuates the reinvention and reinsertion of a given text in a new polysystem<sup>6</sup> – that is, a heterogeneous and dynamic space, in which sociocultural aspects will influence the process of composition of a literary and/or artistic production. In the case of this work, we are dealing with an intersemiotic adaptation that dialogues with a completely different polysystem – Shakespeare transitioning from his place of origin and inserting himself into a literary polysystem that encompasses both children and adults – in a relationship “full of tension and contradictions, because the content has intertextual construction and is represented at the same time by two perspectives: that of the original signifying system and that of the second language system” (Gentzler, 2009, p. 116).

In the present study, we see a canonical work reinserted in a semiotic literary system (the Disney universe), proposing a new polysystem – intertextual animation directed to adult and child audiences, with tangible marks of the first literature (Shakespeare, adult literature) present in the second (Disney, literature directed to children and adult audiences). Rewriting allowed us to infer that, in the case of filmic rewriting, there was a change in repertoire – in this case, how the plot of *Romeo and Juliet* is represented –, allowing us to say that a tension is established between the Shakespearean text – which is at the center of a canonical polysystem – and Disney's animation, situated in the children and adult's polysystem, which may still be seen as literature.

With this, we can state that Disney's adaptation corroborates Lefevere's theorization on rewriting, in the sense that “the image of an author and/or a (series of) work(s) in another culture” is projected, “lifting that author and/or those works beyond the

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<sup>5</sup> Although Lefevere focuses on literary translation, his considerations apply to intersemiotic adaptations.

<sup>6</sup> Term coined by Itamar Even-Zohar.

boundaries of their culture of origin” (Lefevere, 1992, p. 9). Thus, intertextuality and rewriting may be studied both within a single text and between different texts.

We may point out that intertextuality and rewriting establish a dialogical relationship not only in a text, but also in texts of different formats, providing approximation and difference within a creative correspondence. This interaction will result in an end-text, linked to both its matrix and external aspects, such as ideology, context, and semiotic poetics, that is, combining the literary traditions that are incorporated from source and adapted texts.

### **Final Remarks**

While adaptation focuses on creating something from what is well known, intertextuality tends to use elements or symbols from another work to trace a clearer meaning to the new creation. Therefore, this dialogue denotes “open and infinite possibilities generated by all the discursive practices of a culture, in short, from the entire matrix of communicative utterances within which the artistic context is situated” (Diniz, 1999, p. 17).

Intertextuality is a literary device that authors use to retell or tell new stories using the text of other works. Adaptation is a method used in different media to achieve the same purpose; the concept of adaptation allows more artistic freedom when (re)telling a story. Therefore, scholars working with the relation between film and literature should abandon a fidelity-based approach favor of intertextuality in a more productive way, without clinging to the particulars of what was lost from the literary source.

Every adaptation is endowed a degree of autonomy and originality in the context in which it was produced, so the reader/viewer will not see it as a source-text equivalent, but as a creative resizing in a new medium that will reread and represent this text – in the case of the present study, going from the Elizabethan stage to the cinema screen. Consequently, every adaptation, as a text, becomes

an intertext for future re-readings and new filmic and audiovisual productions. As Bakhtin tells us, the senses are “recalled in renewed form (in a new context)” (Bakhtin, 2003, p. 410).

Given the overview of this comparison, it is obvious that there are differences and approaches that demonstrate dramatic writing when drawing up a film script, just as there is a constant dialogue with the British historical tradition, from the Renaissance to the colonial period.

Shakespeare has been reread, resized to other artistic media and translated and adapted into other languages, therefore, his text “becomes only one aspect of the intertextuality of the film, of greater or lesser importance, depending on the knowledge that the viewer has of it” (Diniz, 2005, p. 34), in a retroverse movement, which Lefevere (1992) calls as the double impact movement of the adaptation, by the intertextual force of *Romeo and Juliet* as source-text and how this basic text can be revised, transformed and re-read.

*Romeo and Juliet* is one of the pieces of the Bard that has been revisited and reread since its conception – thinking not only of the love of the title couple, its narrative arc –, but also of its intrinsic political issues, such as the feud between the two families, the intervention of church (represented by Friar Lorenzo) and state (Prince Escalus) as well as the social and sexual dimensions of the Veronese society, through Benvolio and Mercutio, and the Nurse, as representative of the working class.

The Disney animated film may denote both an adaptation and appropriation of *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as a creative manipulation of the tragic text in a new context and guise, hinting at an intertextual dialogue and reaffirming the plural character of reading the literary text and the very versatility of cinema. With this, we reinforce the foregoing of fidelity and highlight the palimpsestic character that exists in the adaptive and creative process of cinema towards the Shakespearean text. *Pocahontas* it is the fruit of Disney's creativity, in whose narrative development the dialogue between Shakespeare and the historical text about Pocahontas becomes visible, establishing a kind of bond and positive relationship in our

theoretical view of adaptation studies, that every adaptation will consist of a new imagery, a new textual production, a new rewrite and a new original.

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Recebido em: 24/07/2022

Aprovado em: 11/10/2022

Publicado em janeiro de 2023