

***WUTHERING HEIGHTS* ON THE SCREEN:  
EXPLORING THE RELATIONS BETWEEN FILM  
ADAPTATION AND SUBTITLING**

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**Abstract**

This essay aims to confront the literary text *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë with five of its screen adaptations and Portuguese subtitles. Owing to the scope of the study, it will necessarily afford merely a bird's eye view of the issues and serve as a starting point for further research. Accordingly, the following questions are used as guidelines: What transformations occur in the process of adapting the original text to the screen? Do subtitles update the film dialogues to the target audience's cultural and linguistic context? Are subtitles influenced more by oral speech than by written literary discourse? Shouldn't subtitles in fact reflect the poetic function prevalent in screen adaptations of literary texts?

Rather than attempt to answer these questions, we focus on the objects as phenomena. Our interdisciplinary undertaking clearly involves a semio-pragmatic stance, at this stage trying to avoid theoretical backdrops that may affect our apprehension of the objects as to their qualities, singularities, and conventional traits, based on Lucia Santaella's interpretation of Charles S. Peirce's phaneroscopia. From an empirical standpoint, we gather features and describe peculiarities, under the presumption that there are substrata in subtitling that point or should point to the literary source text, albeit through the mediation of a film script and a particular cinematic style.

Therefore, we consider how the subtitling process may be influenced by the literary intertext, the idiosyncrasies of a particular film adaptation, as well as the socio-cultural context of the subtitler and target audience. First, we isolate one of the novel's most poignant scenes – 'I am Heathcliff' – taking into account its symbolic play and significance in relation to character and plot construction. Secondly, we study American, English, French, and Mexican adaptations of the excerpt into film in terms of intersemiotic transformations. Then we analyze differences between the film dialogues and their Portuguese subtitles.

**Keywords:** Screen translation, film adaptation, subtitling

Subtitles are only the most visible and charged markers of the way in which films engage, pressing matters of difference, otherness, and translation.

Atom Egoyan

## **Introduction**

By confronting film adaptation with subtitling, we aim to see not only the text behind the image but the text and image behind the subtitles. What transformations occur in the process of adapting, or 'transadapting' (Gambier 2003), the original text to the screen? Do subtitles update the film dialogues to the target audience's cultural and linguistic context? Are subtitles influenced more by oral speech than by written literary discourse? Shouldn't subtitles in fact reflect the

poetic function prevalent in screen adaptations of literary texts? Although these issues are the backdrop of this study, they function as guidelines instead of as questions to be answered.

Using these questions as guidelines, we have decided on an approach that includes the comparison and analysis of five different adaptations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century novel *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë: William Wyler's *Wuthering Heights* (1939), Luis Buñuel's *Abismos de Pasión* (1953), Jacques Rivette's *Hurlevent* (1985), Robert Fuest's *Wuthering Heights*, and Peter Kosminsky's *Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights* (1992). In order to narrow our field of analysis, we have chosen for the purpose of this study an excerpt of the novel that we found to be representative of its literary and symbolic potential, and which is seen as contextually significant in terms of plot. The excerpt we will focus on is taken from chapter 9 of the novel, namely, the scene here onwards referred to as "I am Heathcliff". Since the film adaptations present particular features, each version is read and dealt with from different perspectives.

Though it might seem a futile task, if not an impossible one, to determine the extent to which an adaptation of a literary text might influence subtitles, we believe our hypothesis might nonetheless shed some light on a fundamental issue screen translation studies must soon face, lest it should stop growing and evolving as a scientific discipline. This issue pertains directly to the problem of intersemiotic translation and verbal translation and how these two modes must somehow meet. We are all aware that a subtitle is intimately connected to the image it is written on, but it isn't often that we broach this connection by going directly to its source: the relation between the film end-product, script/film dialogues and, in the case of screen adaptation and transadaptation, the literary text it was based on.

Owing to the broad scope of this study, our methodological approach is clearly experimental and empirical, focusing on the object and on peeling away its

layers<sup>1</sup>, attempting to apprehend the objects as regards their qualities, singularities, and conventional traits, based on Lucia Santaella's interpretation of Charles S. Peirce's phaneroscopy and sign theory. Preceded by a concise introduction to Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, the second section of this essay will reflect on intersemiotic translation or transposition as defined by Jakobson (1979: 79) as it relates to the nature of visual signs, and we will attempt to illustrate how each of the film versions beholds the original literary text<sup>2</sup>. Following a brief overview of Portuguese subtitling standards, the last section will concern the subtitles in terms of transformations as brought on by linguistic and extra-linguistic factors.

## 1. Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

*Wuthering Heights*, a novel published for the first time in 1847, was soon to be distinguished by reviews emphasising the strength and originality of its author in contrast with the book's sombre and violent quality, and its apparent disrespect for social and moral conventions<sup>3</sup>.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when moral considerations were no longer a criteria in literary review, the novel was the object of diversified analysis and criticism that interpreted it from different viewpoints: for some the novel performs a social function and Heathcliff's anger and rebellion is contextualized within the workers Marxist rebellion against capitalism (Kettle, 1971: 200-16), for others the true theme of the book – the physical union of Cathy and Heathcliff – is always disguised (Moser, 1971: 181-98). Then again, others consider the hero couple represents a woman's feminine and masculine halves (Gilbert, 1979: 248-308), or

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<sup>1</sup>For the same reason, we purposefully left out theoretical considerations and major works in the field.

<sup>2</sup> Audiovisual transcription was not needed at this preliminary stage. For a complete approach on transcription, see Anthony Baldry and Paul Thibault, *Multimodal Transcription and Text Analysis* (London: Equinox, 2006).

<sup>3</sup>See Lilia Melani,  
[http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_19c/wuthering/index.html](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/index.html)

that the main characters are the incarnations of Good and Evil (Bataille, 1957: 11-31) or, as in Lord Cecil's famous lines, of the "principles of storm" and the "principles of calm"(1975: 136-182).

Interestingly enough, the basic elements of the plot are quite common-place and straightforward: an abandoned orphan – Heathcliff –, adopted by a country gentleman, falls deeply in love with his adopted sister – Cathy Earnshaw-, engages in conflict with her brother and later with the girl's husband – Edgar Linton, son of a rich landowner –, goes away when she leaves him for his rival, returns rich and set on exercising revenge on everyone that had caused him trouble, does so, watches his love's death, continues his revenge on the second generation of Earnshaws and Lintons, until giving up life to reunite with his dead love's ghost. Still, the intertwined narrative patterns, the intensity and mysterious nature of Heathcliff and Cathy's kinship, the symbols, the dualities and, in the words of editor David Daiches, Emily Brontë's "domiciling of the monstrous in the ordinary rhythms of life and work" (Brontë, 1986: 28) have turned the novel into an acknowledged classic.

The scene analyzed was taken from chapter 9, and at a critical point in the narrative when Cathy agrees to marry Edgar and abandon the Heights. Although her intention is to maintain her bond with Heathcliff, while at the same time freeing herself and her love from her brother's tyranny, she fails to do so because Heathcliff overhears her confiding Nelly her secrets just up to the part where she says it would degrade her to marry him. He then leaves, she gets sick and, with him out of the way, Cathy is taken to Thrushcross Grange.

## 2. Brontë on Film: Semiosis and intersemiotic translation<sup>4</sup>

Cinema, like any other art, because art ultimately has to do with choice, is the art of the ellipsis (2001: 84). And we may add: all the more so when speaking of film adaptations. A novel like *Wuthering Heights*, if translated onto the screen in its entirety, would occupy multiple reels of film and take more than a few days to watch. On the other hand, it would also make for a bad movie – and an unsaleable one. To adapt a novel to the screen does not mean to simply transform literary images into visual ones.

Verbal language involves both the semiotic and semantic modes, for signs are recognized and the enunciation is understood, while music (as well as the plastic arts) only involves the semantic mode (Benveniste 1981: 64-65). Both cinematic and verbal language partake of both modes, and this reveals the great potential of film. Cinematic images are metaphorical, in the sense that they are analogical representations of reality, but they are also metonymic, because their meaning depends on the syntagmatic relations that hold them together. A literary text generates multiple interpretations – it is its very nature as a text where the poetic function is predominant – and therefore has the potential to generate multiple adaptations. In moving images connotation goes hand in hand with denotation: semiosis is virtually unlimited, just as in literary texts. From this we may conclude that film and literature have many common features<sup>5</sup> and that signs generate interpretants generating signs generating interpretants.

In Figure 1, Cathy's character for each film adaptation is seen at the exact moment when she says "I am Heathcliff". These signs, taken out of context, are indexical, in that they point to a moment lost in time (both internal and external to

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<sup>4</sup>To date *Wuthering Heights* has been adapted to the large and small screen thirteen times, including TV films and series and a musical. A new version directed by Peter Webber is in pre-production, to be released in 2010 (UK). See [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com).

<sup>5</sup>The Russian formalists explored these features soon after the birth of cinema, which makes for a fresh eye's view of the whole issue. See François Albera (ed.), *La Poétique du Cinéma: Les Formalistes Russes et le Cinéma* (Paris: Nathan, 1996).

the movie), iconic or hypo-iconic, because they are images in themselves, and symbolic, since they are both part of each of the film’s code and of an extensive cultural code. Ultimately each frame can be taken to function as a Dicot (Indexical) Sinsign, which also involves «an Iconic Sinsign to embody the information and a Rhematic Indexical Sinsign to indicate the object to which the information refers», as a photograph would (Peirce: 294). Accordingly, at this stage the shots are analyzed from a qualitative-iconic and singular-indicative point of view (Santaella 2002).

1939	1954	1970	1985	1992
				
“I am Heathcliff. Everything he's suffered, I've suffered.”	“Quiero a Alejandro más que a la salvación de mi alma”	“I am Heathcliff. All my thoughts, all my actions are for him.”	“Je suis Roch. Il est toujours présent pour moi, toujours.”	“He’s like the eternal rocks beneath. (...) I am Heathcliff.”

Figure 1

In the 1939 frame the rain and wind beat against the windows in the background, a clear metaphor of a melodramatic interpretation of Cathy’s overwhelming feelings. She stands at a distance, ready for action. In the 1954 frame Catalina’s eyes and expressions are brought nearer to the spectator by an emotional spotlight. In 1970 Cathy’s face fills up the screen, and she speaks to us through a close-up that verges on a detailed shot of her mouth. In 1985 Cathy’s crouched position is protected by Nellie’s figure. In 1992 we return to a close-up of her face,

fragile and engulfed by darkness. These frames, as tokens of the moving image, are representative of the different filmic, cultural and linguistic codes. They can also be defined as *affection-images*, all of them leaning toward the close-up shot (Deleuze: 103), even if to a lesser degree in some, namely 1939 and 1985. In effect, it is in the 1970 and 1992 examples where: «il n'y a pas de gros plan *de* visage, le visage est en lui-même gros plan, le gros plan est par lui-même visage, et tous deux sont l'affect, l'image-affection» (Deleuze: 126). What remains to be seen is whether their characterization as affection-images will bear upon subtitle creation. Beginning with section 2.1, each scene will be deconstructed from a conventional-symbolic point of view, particularly in relation to the novel.

## 2.1. William Wyler's *Wuthering Heights*

What first strikes us in the 1939 version of *Wuthering Heights*, directed by William Wyler and starring Merle Oberon and Laurence Olivier as the protagonist romantic pair, is the film's apparent detachment from the literary text it originates from. Set in the late 30s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the film depicts an ambience, characters, and a plot only vaguely resembling those of the novel to the learned viewer, and, as we see it, dislocates the drama to a different geographic and temporal context without specifically stating it is doing so. The house and surrounding areas evoke an American ranch rather than the Yorkshire moors, and the Grange is a typical stately American mansion.

Cathy and Heathcliff are in their thirties. Few traces in them remind us of Brontë's unruly, demon-like couple. Even Edgar Linton is stripped of the trait of weakness that characterizes him in the novel. In fact, instead of an adolescent Cathy, strong-headed and whimsy, toying around with her two friends to get the



best of the civilized and the natural worlds, the film presents a woman torn between the wills of two men<sup>6</sup>.

Socialization is clearly preferred to the predominance of the natural world. Cathy repeatedly asks Heathcliff to become rich and civilized, to rise socially and thus make it possible for her to choose him. In the same vein, scenes depicting the natural world are short, naïve and space-limited when compared to indoor scenes. The landscape is reduced to a rocky spot where the couple meets.

In the scene analyzed, Nelly is helping Heathcliff with his bleeding hand when a joyful Cathy enters. He hides in the kitchen, and the two women go in the parlour to talk. The striking difference between this scene and the novel's is in Cathy's attitude and state of mind. At first she seems happy whereas in the novel she is agitated. Her love for Heathcliff is depicted in a dramatic tone leading us to believe that she has decided she cannot marry Edgar. In the novel, though what she seeks is Nelly's approval of the decision she has made, her firm intent is to marry Edgar without giving up Heathcliff. Therefore, we can say that even with the same characters and the same location there are significant differences between the two scenes: in the film, emotions are softened and characters are more civilized and clean; the scene is much shorter and Nelly is at all times aware of Heathcliff's presence.

## 2.2. Luis Buñuel's *Abismos de Pasión*

In the credits to his movie Buñuel says "Ante todo se ha procurado respetar en esta película el espíritu de la novela de Emilia Brontë". Accordingly, this scene does not follow the novel's narrative sequence, for the movie begins with Alejandro's return, which means that Catalina is already married to Eduardo. Curiously enough, she is also pregnant with his child. Still, as we can see from the

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<sup>6</sup> Prior to the scene in question we watch Cathy asking Heathcliff to forgive her, and hear her calling him "My Lord", thus highlighting our interpretation that she inhabits a man's world.

transcription of the dialogue, it is where Catalina clearly reveals her unyielding passion for Alejandro, just as she does in the novel:

<p>I've no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven; and if the wicked man in there had not brought Heathcliff so low, I shouldn't have thought of it. <u>It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now</u>; so he shall never know how I love him: and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am. [...]</p> <p>My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. <u>My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I am Heathcliff!</u></p> <p>He's always, always in my mind: not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being.</p>	<p>No sé qué le pasa a tu hermano, no quiere entender.</p> <p>¿Porque no intentas tú comprenderlo a él? He sido una buena esposa, voy a darle un hijo. ¿Qué más quiere?</p> <p>Quiere poder vivir tranquilo. ¿Si siempre has querido a Alejandro y él te ha querido siempre, porque no te casaste con él?</p> <p><u>Porque mi hermano Ricardo lo odiaba, porque lo odiaba Eduardo, porque siempre lo han odiado todos.</u></p> <p>Yo no lo he odiado nunca.</p> <p>Lo despreciabas como los demás. <u>¡Si nos hubiéramos casado, habrían hecho de nosotros unos mendigos!</u></p> <p>Yo creía que cuando se ama, no se piensa en esas cosas y que no importan las privaciones ni los sinsabores.</p> <p>Tu eres una estúpida romántica y repites las tonterías que oyes. <u>Quiero a Alejandro más que a la salvación de mi alma.</u></p> <p>¡Jesús, María y José! Llevas el demonio metido en el cuerpo. A veces creo que estás loca.</p> <p>¿Ves como no puedes entenderme?</p>
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The dialogues, however, are the least important elements in the film as a whole. Transported to a new geographical and cultural context (the scene is transported to a Mexican *hacienda* in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century), *Abismos de Pasión* does justice to its title, a noticeable description of Catalina's emotional turmoil and ambivalence: on the one hand her love for Eduardo, on the other, her sexual passion for Alejandro, sublimated by religion. The situation is adapted to the different circumstances at hand: most of Cathy's comments would make no sense at this point in the movie, and there is also no need to find a reason for Alejandro's disappearance. As for specific differences, there is one more character involved, Isabel, Eduardo's sister; the scene takes place not in a kitchen but in a laundry room; María is not rocking a baby but folding linen; Catalina does not insult Alejandro and Alejandro does not listen in. Given all of the disparities, one may question whether *Abismos de Pasión* is in fact an adaptation in the strict sense of the word, or whether its existence is simply based on hypertextuality (Genette 1982: 7). Yet there are similarities: a dialogue ensues about Catalina's feelings for Alejandro, and so Catalina's unruly passion for Alejandro is clearly portrayed. Then again, we must take into account Buñuel's surrealist background and filmmaking (e.g. the quintessential surrealist *Un Chien Andalou*), and that his intention was to portray the novel's mood and spirit more than to tell its story<sup>7</sup>.

### 2.3. Robert Fuest's *Wuthering Heights*

Robert Fuest is known mostly for his work in the horror/suspense genre, with hints of black comedy. It might be surprising to find this movie in his filmography but upon a closer look it seems only just. This adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* might be the most realistic, but in no way does it put aside the poetic-symbolic aspects so pervasive in the novel. Although the film is not shot in black

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<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, *Abismos de Pasión* cannot be compared linguistically to Brontë's novel, so there is no reason at this point to include it in the last section of this article.

and white, its color palette is anchored in soft hues with grayish undertones, emphasizing visual aspects which would otherwise go unnoticed.

The scene takes place in the kitchen where Nelly and Cathy meet and a short conversation ensues. Just as in the novel Heathcliff listens in. But there are several differences in relation to the novel: Nelly is not rocking a baby, but peeling potatoes; Cathy is happy in telling Nelly that Edgar's asked her to marry her; Nelly warns Cathy right off of Heathcliff's presence. She is disturbed only when she finds out Heathcliff heard her and has run away. It is in the outside scene, which in the novel happens much later, that she conveys her true feelings for Heathcliff. The outside scene is symbolic of Cathy's despair, the sky filled with the foreboding clouds of an impending storm. Cathy's face of tragedy (Figure 1) strongly contrasts with her previous expression of contentment when she was in the kitchen, so there is a clear separation between society (inside) and nature (outside), with nature assuming a prominent role.

As for the dialogues, the source text is adapted to accommodate the significance of extra-linguistic and paralinguistic elements, but the underlined ideas are maintained and at times expanded:

<p>I've no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven; and if the wicked man in there had not brought Heathcliff so low, I shouldn't have thought of it. <u>It would degrade me</u> to marry Heathcliff now; so he shall never know how I love him: and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am. [...]</p>	<p>Nobody could marry Heathcliff. I mean, he's a wild animal. It would be a disaster. I mean where would we go? What would we do? We'd be forced to live like beggars. It would be... Well, it would be degrading. [...] You don't mean you'd take Edgar's money?</p>
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<p><u>My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods</u>: time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I am Heathcliff! <u>He's always, always in my mind</u>: not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being.</p>	<p>Of course. Why else do you think I'd marry Edgar? I know he loves me, and it will be very nice to be his wife. And I love him, too, but differently. I don't just love Heathcliff. I am Heathcliff. All my thoughts, all my actions are for him. He's my only reason for living.</p>
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2.4. Jacques Rivette's *Hurlevent*



As Jacques Rivette says in an interview included in the Arte DVD Collector's Pack, he first decided to film *Hurlevent* in 1984 after a Balthus exhibition at the Beauborg Center. Balthus, a surrealist painter, produced a number of drawings for

an edition that Gallimard intended to publish in 1930. Awestruck by these drawings, Rivette filmed an adaptation with very young actors, adjusting Cathy and Roch's ages, who are in their late teens, and Nelly and Guillaume's (Hindley), who are both in their mid twenty's.

With this context in mind, and inspired by Buñuel's story of "amour fou" more than by Wyler's dramatic transposition, Rivette decided to adapt solely the first chapters, condensing a 34 chapter novel, simplifying a plot which accumulates several narrators, multiplies flash-backs and the complex environment of nineteenth-century Victorian society. Hurlevent shifts the action to the *Cévennes*, a region of France historically associated with a stern rural Protestantism, where the characteristic landscape is the "garrigue", wild, sun-drenched, arid. While the Earnshaw Property was shot on a farm or "mas" located in *Ardèche*, the Linton's Mansion is in *Sommières*, 100 kilometers below. Rivette transposes the plot to another country and also to another century; the action now takes place in 1930, again probably because of Balthus. The characters' names are also adapted to French: while Catherine and Nelly remain unchanged, only phonetically transposed to French, Hindley turns into Guillaume, Edgar into Olivier and the meaningful Heathcliff is re-named Roch.

In the particular case of the chapter, the *mise en scène* divides it into two parts: "Je suis Roch", the scene where Roch overhears Catherine saying it would be degrading for her to marry him, and "La tempête...", the irruption of the storm. While in other versions both scenes coincide (1939, 1992), and in another the inside/outside scene is separated (1970), Rivette's transposition closely follows the action of the novel; and therefore, the scene duration is much longer. "Je suis Roch" takes place in the kitchen, where Hélène/Nelly is ironing<sup>8</sup>, revivifying the *leitmotif* of domestic chore that underlies the plot and that we can find in other versions, as we have mentioned before (1954, 1970).

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<sup>8</sup> "I was rocking Hareton on my knee, and humming a song that began: 'It was far in the night, and the bairnies grat,/ The mither beneath the mools heard that'".

The linguistic transposition analysis that we have performed upon these scene excerpts clearly shows that the script adapts, almost word for word, *Wuthering Heights*' dialogues (Figure 1). Firstly, it recovers the song that Nelly is humming while rocking baby Hareton, which is now transposed in a song that accompanies Nelly's domestic chores. If, in the novel, Emily Brontë chose an Irish ballad, evoking the mystical and fantastic theme that embeds the entire action, in the particular case of Rivette's adaptation it's a melancholic song, a reminder of a past long gone, representative perhaps of Nelly's consciousness in opposition to Catherine's immaturity. Secondly, *Hurlevent* is the only version that extensively focuses on Cathy's dream. Obviously, the aim is to emphasize the oneirism underlying an adaptation clearly influenced by surrealism. Dreams, psyche, Eros and Evil are constantly omnipresent in *Hurlevent*, following a trend of interpretation sustained by a great number of critics. Rivette introduces three dream sequences: one at the beginning, inspired by a painting by Poussin, another at the end of the film, and the most poignant is inserted in the middle and marks a turning point in the action, Roch and Catherine's three-year separation. In addition, the language is closer to current speech; dialogues are simplified, as well as costumes and locations, avoiding the over-dramatization typical of Wyler's movie.

Emily Brontë's <i>Wuthering Heights</i>	<i>Hurlevent</i>
Why do you love him, Miss Cathy?	Qu'est-ce que tu veux que je te dise ? Tu l'aimes?
Nonsense; I do -- that's sufficient.	Bien sûr que je l'aime.
By no means; you must say why.	Ah, bon ! Et pourquoi tu l'aimes ?
Well, because he is handsome and	Quelle question! Je l'aime, ça suffit!
pleasant to be with.	Pas du tout ! Il faut dire pourquoi.
Bad! was my commentary.	Bien, parce qu'il est beau.
And because he is young and cheerful.	Mauvais!
Bad still.	Il connaît une foule de choses.
And because he loves me.	Mauvais

Figure 2

## 2.5. Peter Kosminsky's *Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights*

The 1992 film version of *Wuthering Heights* is one of the few adaptations of the novel that present Brontë's complete story of the two generations of Earnshaws and Lintons, a task rarely undertaken due to the difficulty in containing the novel's complexity and extension in one or two hours of film. Anne Devlin, responsible for the screenplay, chooses as narrator the writer herself, either to justify the picture's complete title or else to illustrate its intricate narrative technique<sup>9</sup>. The director's choice seems also to have been a faithful adaptation of a classic story, which might account for the elaborate and careful reconstruction of indoor and outdoor ambiances – Cathy's room in the Heights is a paradigmatic example in the similarities it bears to the novel's description – and the literal transcription of entire dialogues to the script.

It is the prevalence of the natural world functioning almost like a character in itself that, as we see it, conveys this picture's interpretation of the novel: set in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, filmed on location in the Yorkshire moors, and emphasised by a traditional soundtrack, the film's depiction of natural elements and of what they symbolize takes on great significance. The contrast between the two houses – the Heights and the Grange – and between interior and exterior planes adds on to this impression. The landscape of the moors is filmed several times and during several minutes. The image is granted an important place in the narrative, which is not uncommon in modern cinema.

As for the main characters, though Ralph Fiennes' Heathcliff is intense and bitter in his gaze, and Binoche a whimsy Cathy, they both lack the passion that drives the novel's couple and their obsessive love for each other.

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<sup>9</sup> We found another possible explanation for the film's long title: "The film's clumsy title (after all, how many other authors wrote a book called "Wuthering Heights"?) came about because the Samuel Goldwyn Co. threatened to sue Paramount as they own the rights to the title via the 1939 film. Upheld by the Motion Picture Association of America, Goldwyn was legally permitted to fine Paramount \$2,500 every time they neglected to add the 'Emily Brontë' prefix to the title of their version." See Trivia for *Wuthering Heights* (1992), <http://www.imdb.com/>.



In the chapter 9 scene we analysed, the same characters are present, the kitchen is very similar to the one described in the novel, Nelly's rocking baby Hareton and the sequence of events follows the book's, apart from the obvious cuts and reduction in time frame. It is in Cathy's disposition and attitude that we found the most significant difference: she seems happy and carefree, and even when she – in sentences transcribed from Brontë's – proclaims her love for Heathcliff, she does so in a soft, unconvincing tone.

Figure 3

<i>Wuthering Heights</i> (1847)							<i>Wuthering Heights</i> (1970)	<i>Harlevent</i> (1985)	<i>Emily Bonnie's Wuthering Heights</i> (1970)
-----	Duration	3.21	1.27	5.12	5.26	5.18			
Late 18th century	Temporal context	19th century	19th century	Late 18 <sup>th</sup> century	20 <sup>th</sup> century (1930's)	19 <sup>th</sup> century			
Kitchen	Location	Kitchen/Victorian England	Kitchen/Rural Mexico	Kitchen	Kitchen/Stern rural protestantism of Cévennes	Kitchen/Victorian England			
Cloudy evenings; thunderstorm at midnight	Time of day/ weather	Rain outside window; thunder and lightening	Late afternoon; ----	Dusk; very cloudy (impending storm)	Daylight, -- --	Rain; Thunder and lightening			
	Character profile								
In their teens; Heathcliff: tall, dark skinned, pitiless, and animal-like. Catherine: dark-haired and wilful.	Heathcliff and Catherine	In their thirties; Cathy: good natured and delicate; Heathcliff: uncouth but civilized.	Catalina and Alejandro: typical Mexicans in their late twenties; obstinate, high-tempered; Alejandro: quasi amoral. Catalina: deeply knows herself and Alexandro.	Heathcliff: dark hair, has renounced civilization. Cathy: light brown; torn between the Grange and Wuthering Heights.	Cathy and Rochi; late teens, fair hair, impulsive lovers.	In their thirties; Cathy: fair skinned, dark hair, well-manered and generally content; Heathcliff: dark skinned, blue eyes, dark hair.			
Several years older, full of common sense.	Nelly	Older and mother figure.	María: much older, distant and religious.	About the same age and a confident.	Mid-twenties, a confident.	Older and mother figure.			

### 3. Words Become Visible: Subtitling *Wuthering Heights*<sup>10</sup>

Film dialogues can never compare to dialogues in a book. But there is something magical about seeing words on the screen, as testified by Atom Egoyan when thinking back on his role as movie-goer:

I was much more forgiving of words that were imposed on a screen that displayed a gorgeous black and white cinemascope scene, than if those same words had come out of a mouth whose language I understood. (2004: 36)

We may venture to say that subtitles could and should be a meeting point for verbal and visual forms of communication, especially when the readers of yesterday are the viewers of today. Though we agree that in subtitles “only the linguistic element of an audiovisual text is transferred” (Linde & Kay, 1999: 4), we believe that they relate as much to the source text as to the source utterance.

Many important and relevant studies have come about in the last few years concerning subtitling standards, norms, practices and strategies, especially from a linguistic standpoint. Despite Portugal’s status as a subtitling country, little has been done to agree on generally accepted subtitling standards. Subtitles vary from TV station to station, from movie to movie, from DVD to DVD. There are however a few guidelines that seem to be common to Portuguese subtitling practice(s). One rule is that a complete utterance must always include a punctuation mark, regardless of it being at the end of a subtitle. Graphically they are always white on a transparent background, usually using the arial or helvetica font. Strategies of condensation and elimination seem to be avoided, though it is uncertain whether this is so for stylistic reasons or whether it can be ascribed to some subtitlers’

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<sup>10</sup> Our acknowledgments go to the subtitlers and to Jenny Carmona, for her transcription of Luis Buñuel’s dialogues.

inexperience. In general, Portuguese subtitles attempt a communicative stance, but not always successfully.

### 3.1. 1939/2005

When comparing the literary text and the film dialogues, as expected, the second is a much shorter text in which significant parts are chunked, Cathy's long speeches are turned into dialogues with Nelly and dialogues are simplified. Even though the movie dialogues transcribe some of the most famous or climactic lines of the literary text, there are omissions and alterations that reflect the change in the characters pointed to earlier<sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless, even when the linguistic matter is simplified and chunked, the literary and poetic functions are recovered in Cathy's passionate tone, and the expression of her eyes, in the lightning that strikes behind her back or in the music that accompanies her speech<sup>12</sup>.

The subtitling of the 1939 version of *Wuthering Heights* was done by a recent graduate with a degree in Translation and Interpreting, instructed to subtitle the scene in question for purposes of an academic study. She was told that the film was an adaptation of a famous novel, but not asked to carry out any reading or research on the subject. She was also not briefed on the context of either text.

In general, the student's subtitles follow the original film dialogues closely. Condensation and elimination are practically absent from the translated text<sup>13</sup>, and

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<sup>11</sup>From Cathy's speech, we chose as illustration: "It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now; so he shall never know how I love him;" (Brontë, 1985: 121), which reads in the 1939 dialogue "He's sunk so low. He seems to take pleasure in being brutal." and "My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning;" (Brontë, 1985: 122), adapted as "Everything he's suffered, I've suffered. The little happiness he's ever known, I've had too."

<sup>12</sup>The following is an example of simplification in the film dialogue: "If all else perished, and *be* remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger." (Brontë, 1985: 122), adapted as "If everything died and Heathcliff remained...life would still be full for me."

<sup>13</sup>In fact, we only found one omission in the subtitles: "-Oh, the kitchen's no place for that, come into the parlour."(transcript); "Oh, menina Cathy..." (subtitle).

the overall result is a fairly literal target text<sup>14</sup>. The recourse to archaic vocabulary and structures was noted in some of the lines, but we were unable to conclude if it derived from any preoccupation in reflecting the literary text or simply from an attempt to recreate the speech of characters from the past<sup>15</sup>. On the other hand, modern usage of language was also noted in several subtitles<sup>16</sup>. In the end, we were convinced that the student didn't know the literary text, and that such fact accounted for some odd translation solutions:

Film Dialogues	Subtitles	Our Comments
It would be heaven to escape from this <u>disorderly</u> , comfortless place.	Seria divinal fugir deste lugar <u>desordenado</u> e desconfortável.	Translation only conveys sense of out of order, leaving out undisciplined and unruly.
The angels were so angry, they flung me out in the middle of the <u>heath</u> ...on top of Wuthering Heights.	Os anjos estavam tão zangados que me atiraram para o meio do <u>feno</u> no topo do Monte dos Vendavais.	Instead of a low evergreen shrub with pink or purple flowers, translation points to grass mowed and cured to use as fodder.

Figure 4

<sup>14</sup>The following is an example of literal translation: “on top of Wuthering Heights” (film dialogue); “no topo do Monte dos Vendavais” (subtitle); a more fluent translation would be “cimo/cume/alto do Monte”.

<sup>15</sup>We chose an informal direct-order sentence “I wish he hadn't come back” to illustrate how the subtitler uses formal, archaic structures: “Tomara ele não tivesse voltado”.

<sup>16</sup>An example is the recourse to the adjective tola to translate silly, which reflects updating of vocabulary in the Portuguese text, as in the following line: “That's a silly question, isn't it?”/”Essa é uma pergunta tola, não é?”.

### 3.2. 1970/2005

The images of this *Wuthering Heights*, unlike the 1939 version and perhaps more like the French 1985 version, are overpowering in their simplicity and beauty. Against this backdrop, dialogues gain a life that is not their own. When transposed to the written mode, they jump off the screen interspersed with meaningful silences.

Subtitles A of the 1970 version are clearly more in synch with the novel, and seem even to refer constantly back to its literary features rather than to the film dialogues (see Figure 5). The awareness of the film's literary context defines the language used in the subtitles and the subtitler's attitude towards the significance of the particular film adaptation, though this fact might not always compensate for a lack of discursive smoothness. Subtitles B, done by a recent graduate with a background in translation studies and a subtitling course, with no previous knowledge of Brontë's work, display fewer archaisms and markers of formality, as attested by the examples in Figure 5 (B3 and B4). Subtitles B also follow the dialogues more than the images themselves, which makes for less condensed subtitles, applying fewer condensation and elimination strategies (B5/6). Subtitles A tend to relate more to the images, perhaps in an attempt to refer back to the images' poetic function, though not always successfully.

Film Dialogues	Subtitles A	Subtitles B	Our comments
Edgar Linton has asked me to marry him.	1-Edgar Linton pediu-me em casamento.	1-O Edgar Linton pediu-me em casamento.	A1- Formality of written text signaled by the absence of definite article.
I shall have maids, servants.	2-Terei criadas. Serei a mais fina senhora destas	2-Terei empregadas, criados.	A1 and B2/3- Verb form indicates archaic speech patterns.

I'll be the finest lady around here for miles. Here and here, I'm convinced I'm wrong. Nobody could marry Heathcliff. I mean, he's a wild animal.	partes. 3-Aqui e aqui, estou convencida de que estou errada. 4-Quem casaria com o Heathcliff? Ele é um animal selvagem.	3-Serei a mulher mais fina daqui e arredores. 4-Aqui e aqui, estou convencida que estou enganada. 5-Nellie, ninguém poderia casar com o Heathcliff. Quero dizer, ele... 6-Ele é um animal selvagem.	B3- "Mulher" is typical of current speech. A3-Ellipses signal gesture. B4-Absence of "de" typical of informal speech. A4-Statement turned into a more idiomatic question; elimination of oral markers. B5/6- Dialogue followed closely, as signaled by the evocative and ellipses.
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Figure 5

### 3.3. 1985/2005

The subtitler of this version had no previous contact with the novel and viewed *Hurlevent* for the first time, and only then did we let him know that it was an adaptation of *Wuthering Heights*. These constraints led to some specific strategies and aspects that we were able to observe and to discuss with him. The Portuguese subtitles of *Hurlevent* are more colloquial than the original film dialogues, due to the need, according to the subtitler, to “adapt the dialogues to a more current speech, nearer to Portuguese oral speech”. Therefore, for instance, he translated “tu m’*en* veux” for “estás chateada”, or “tu m’*ennuies*” as “estás-me a chatear”. The subtitler’s ignorance of the novel also made him use the strategy of elimination, with the song Nelly is humming, because the literal translation, which he performed on paper, “made no sense whatsoever in Portuguese, on the screen”,

even if stating the importance of translating every word and being adverse to strategies like condensation. Finally, not knowing the literary text, the subtitler felt the dream told by Catherine as rather strange, interpreting it as a poetic sequence.

### 3.4. 1992/2003

The faithful adaptation of a classic novel that would have been in the minds of both screenwriter and director of the 1992 version is corroborated by the various parts of dialogue transcribed literally from the novel's. Particularly in famous speeches – such as Cathy's definition of her love for the two men, or when she describes the quality of their souls – or in climactic moments, linguistic proximity to the novel is always there. Still, dialogues are not long and are filled with silences and camera work – the image's ever present power that also conveys the novel's poetic function.

The subtitler's identity is unknown, since the subtitles were taken from the DVD edition. Most of the translated text follows the film dialogues closely, though after careful analysis concern with careful formulation of speech<sup>17</sup> as well as with fluent translation<sup>18</sup> becomes evident. The subtitler seems to be familiar with the literary text and interested in letting some of the novel's atmosphere show in his/her text, though at the same time we are left with the impression that those attempts derive from the knowledge that the film is based on a classic rather than from knowledge of the literary work<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup>For example in: "Where's your obstacle?" / "Onde está o entrave?"

<sup>18</sup>See for example: "I accepted him." / "Eu disse que sim."

<sup>19</sup>The subtitler mistranslates an important part of Cathy's speech: "My love for Heathcliff is like the eternal rocks beneath. A source of little visible delight, but necessary." / "O meu amor pelo Heathcliff é como as pedras eternas sob uma fonte com pouco encanto aparente, mas necessária."



If archaism is present only in the forms of address, the same is not true of recourse to updated vocabulary that does not, in our opinion, disrupt the overall quality of the subtitles, but makes them more dynamic. Examples follow:

Film Dialogues	Subtitles
Well, because he's <u>handsome</u> and pleasant to be with.	Porque ele é <u>atraente</u> e porque é agradável estar com ele.
It would <u>degrade</u> me to marry Heathcliff now.	Seria uma <u>despromoção</u> para mim casar com o Heathcliff, agora.
...and <u>took off</u> across the moors.	...e <u>disparou</u> pela charneca.

**Figure 6**

**Conclusion**

We found the text behind the image to be identifiable in all instances of *Wuthering Heights*'s 'I am Heathcliff' on the screen, even if to a lesser extent in Luis Buñuel's version. As for the subtitles, they too reflect the underlying text(s): first, the original film dialogues; second, the original literary text; third, the images, a text in themselves. During the transference to the screen, the dialogues present in the literary text underwent cuts, or a process we could call 'cut, adapt, and paste': dialogues transmuted from one place in the sequence to another, key words and symbols re-placed strategically, language updated and verbal discourse shortened. And we must not forget that we are dealing with audiovisual texts, and that therefore elements like gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice and background music atone for the missing portions of the literary text.

Subtitles, on a whole, respected the characters' speech as a part of their profile. Some unnecessary colloquialisms were noted, but especially in the case of the 39 and 70 versions what George Steiner (1992: 365) calls *déjà vu* was evident, i.e. the use of archaic expressions and vocabulary in order to give the sensation of 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century discourse. It is our belief that this is due in part to the cinematic style of the versions in question.

Therefore, we may tentatively conclude that, first, film adaptation indirectly influences subtitling through the way the original literary text appears on screen: i. e. the more poetic the adaptation, the more the dialogues will be interpreted as literary, even when the subtitler is unaware of their literariness. Second, screen translation studies might better be served if text typology and differences between text types (literary, scientific, etc.) were discussed in detail. That is, why is it that we tend to speak of subtitling in general, when we divide translation in general into technical and literary? Textual modes, interconnected with audiovisual and film genres and cinematic styles, might be just as significant.

As a result of films' multisemiotic code and time and space constraints, translating for the screen also always involves some sort of adaptation. But how far should this adaptation go? How communicative should the translation be? In our view, there is a limit to catering to the viewer's reading abilities and current tastes, for fear this attitude might make the underlying verbal texts completely unrecognizable. If there are films in which the verbal merely complements the visual, there are also those in which the opposite is true, and this should be made aware to translators/subtitlers during their training. In subtitling, localization is not the only viable solution.

So our conclusion is an open one: dealing with this type of material is virtually like peeling an onion. In fact, by far the ultimate conclusion to be reached is that screen translation studies and film studies should meet at some point, even when not engaging in the study of film adaptation. Much has been left unprobed, but we feel that film versions of literary texts are an excellent place to start, since

they make it feasible to compare subtitling for different types of audiovisual texts with less source text disparities, but greater room for reflection.

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