THE SEEN AS OBSCENE: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ROBERT ALTMAN'S FILM 'SHORT CUTS'

Ricardo Sobreira
Universidade Federal dos Vales do Jequitinhonha e Mucuri

In loving memory of Prof. Carlos Daghlian (1938-2016)

ABSTRACT: This study aims at analyzing Robert Altman's film *Short Cuts* (1993), the equivocal and disputed adaptation of nine short stories and a narrative poem by American author Raymond Carver. The investigation, however, centers specifically on Altman's revisitation of Carver's short story "So Much Water So Close to Home" (1981). The study conducted here examines negative responses to the intermedial transposition of the narrative concerning violence against women. Grounds are provided to support the contention that the gender issues are due to the different styles of both Carver and Altman, the change in the mode of engagement (cf. HUTCHEON, 2006, p. 22-27) on the part of the audience and a certain "anti-corporeality" (STAM, 2005) reaction to graphic scenes involving gender-based violence. In order to substantiate such concepts, it is argued that although *Short Cuts* changes portions of the adapted text, it re-accentuates its psychological crises and gender antagonisms by means of a cinematic construction of visually shocking images and shifting perspectives.

KEYWORDS: Adaptation; Minimalism; Maximalism; Robert Altman; Raymond Carver.

RESUMO: O presente estudo objetiva analisar o filme *Short Cuts: cenas da vida* (1993), a adaptação ambígua e controversa feita por Robert Altman a partir de nove contos e um poema narrativo do escritor norte-americano Raymond Carver. A investigação, entretanto, enfoca especificamente a recriação fílmica realizada por Altman do conto "So Much Water So Close to Home" (1981) de Carver. O estudo empreendido neste trabalho analisa reações negativas à transposição intermedial da narrativa no tocante à violência contra mulheres. A argumentação apoia-se na noção de que as questões de gênero se devem às diferenças estilísticas entre Carver e Altman, à mudança dos modos de engajamento (cf. HUTCHEON, 2006, p. 22-27) do público e ao sentimento de "anti-corporalidade" (STAM, 2005) em relação ao detalhamento de cenas envolvendo ataques às personagens femininas. Com o intuito de fundamentar tais conceitos, argumentamos que, apesar de *Short Cuts: cenas da vida* alterar passagens do texto adaptado, o filme reacentua crises psicológicas e antagonismos baseados no gênero por meio da construção cinematográfica de imagens visualmente chocantes e de perspectivas instáveis.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Adaptação; Minimalismo; Maximalismo; Robert Altman; Raymond Carver.

When Robert Altman's film *Short Cuts* was released in 1993 it received positive reviews from most critics but some of them criticized what they saw as a blunt attack on women. In order to develop their screenplay, both Altman and his cowriter Frank Barhydt had supposedly focused too much on gratuitous female nudity and on traumatic episodes of violence against women. By doing so, some commentators claimed that they had replaced the slight tenderness toward female characters in the Raymond Carver's stories which inspired the film with masculine brutality and abusive treatment of women. Although the critic Grijs (2015) welcomed Altman and Barhydt's adaptation, she states that

> As I re-evaluated 'Short Cuts,' I could not help but come to the conclusion that its central theme was misogynistic. The message conveyed is that men are powerless in the face of women's sexuality, and that women are to be resented and blamed for this.

Inspired by nine short stories and a narrative poem by Carver, the film traces the actions of twenty-two characters whose lives occasionally encounter loose points of connection. These somewhat random actions are ruled by chance and / or luck especially since the film substitutes the Pacific Northwest backdrop of Carver's stories with a Los Angeles setting. *Short Cuts* features an ensemble cast which includes Robert Downey Jr., Julianne Moore, Frances McDormand, Tim Robbins, Lily Tomlin, Matthew Modine, Fred Ward, Anne Archer, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Madeleine Stowe, Chris Penn, Jack Lemmon, Lori Singer, Andie MacDowell, Buck Henry, Annie Ross, Huey Lewis, Lyle Lovett, Tom Waits, among others.

Given the cast profusion and the screenplay filled with complex characters and interactions, Altman and Barhydt chose a more flexible approach to Carver's literary pieces. In Altman's own words:

> We've taken liberties with Carver's work: characters have crossed over from one story to another; they connect by various linking devices; names may have changed. And […] this film [*Short Cuts*] has been a serious collaboration between the actors, my co-writer Frank Barhydt, and the Carver material […] (ALTMAN, 1993, p. 7-8).[1]

As Altman's insight into his adaptive process might suggest, the intermedial adaptation had the legitimate purpose of favoring not only collaboration between the artists involved in the project but also the creation of different connections between stories and characters. Such imaginative creativity while rendering in film the tension and the violence underlying Carver's fiction may be the reason why *Short Cuts* results in a somewhat shocking experience.

In what follows, I would like to suggest in more depth that some of the physical attacks on women intimated in a very economical way by Carver's fiction may have resulted in shocking and revolting scenes when they were cinematically transposed in a more graphic language by Altman and his collaborators. It is the contention of this paper to argue that Altman was not particularly interested in exposing women in such a manner but that the very subject matters of some of the Carver's stories (rape, murder, infidelity, domestic violence and alcoholism) with which the filmmaker had to deal tend to result in disturbing scenes when transposed audio-visually to a totally cinematic code. Such transposition of Carver's terse prose into "showing mode" (cf. HUTCHEON, 2006, p. 22-27) has also proven to be slightly outrageous due to what Stam (2005, p. 6) calls an "anti-corporeality" prejudice, usually manifested by a number of moviegoers when confronted with the incarnated materiality of the characters.

[1] Following the release of his film, Altman compiled the anthology volume *Short Cuts* with the nine stories ("Neighbors", "They're Not Your Husband", "Vitamins", "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?", "So Much Water So Close to Home", "A Small, Good Thing", "Jerry and Molly and Sam", "Collectors", "Tell the Women We're Going") and a poem ("Lemonade") by Carver which inspired the screenplay (ALTMAN, 1993, p. 7-11).

I will cite one example, which clearly demonstrates how an adapted story can impact audiences in a slightly different manner when translated into the cinematic code. Carver's short story "So Much Water So Close to Home" was published in the 1981 collection *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* and then later revised and included in the 1983 volume *Fires* and in the 1988 collection *Where I'm Calling From*. Altman and Barhydt chose the latter as a source of inspiration for their screenplay.[2] In it, Stuart and his three fishing buddies find the naked body of a young woman in the first day of their three-day camping trip. Instead of reporting the dead body to local authorities right away, the four men enjoy their vacation. The men privileging their fishing trip over the murdered girl shocks Stuart's wife, Claire, when she finds out about it later. She feels progressively distanced from her husband and starts to identify with the drowned victim. Claire believes that maybe Stuart and his friends could have raped and then drowned her. She wonders why did they have to go so far away in order to fish with so much water so close to home. She seems to realize how men can dehumanize women. After experiencing this moment of epiphany (cf. SOBREIRA, 2013), Claire becomes more independent. She hits the road and attends the drowned woman's funeral. Even though she overhears somebody say the police have caught the killer she suspects they have got the wrong man. The story ends with Stuart making a sexual advance on Claire. She strongly rejects him by stamping on his toes. Feeling disgruntled, he pushes and insults her. Because of this, the emotional distance she felt then becomes a physical one: Claire moves her things into an extra bedroom of the house. Although Stuart breaks the lock on her door during the night, she does not give in to him (CARVER, 1989a, p. 213-237).

[2] This particular story by Raymond Carver has also been retold in the song "Everything's Turning to White" (1989) by Australian rock band Paul Kelly and the Messengers, and in the film *Jindabyne* (2006) by Australian director Ray Lawrence.

It has been noted that later in his writing career Carver demonstrates tenderness for his female characters (BENSON, 2009, p. 86-87). Despite the masculine brutality that permeates the story, Claire's concise narration constitutes an "affirmation of human worth" (BETHEA, 2001, p. 126). By representing Claire's predicament so poignantly, Carver shows that he "was inclined to stress the sensitivity of women and the incomprehension of men in emotional struggles between the two" (SCOFIELD, 1996, p. 397). Such authorial tenderness could also be noticed in the depiction of all of his characters. The writer has been recognized for respecting and caring for them (NESSET, 1995, p. 49-50) not only because several of them have biographical origins but also because he often demonstrates "human closeness to what his characters experience" (SCOFIELD, 1996, p. 392-393).

In the film adaptation of this story, however, portions of the narrative did not get transposed in their entirety. Most of the Claire-Stuart physically and verbally abusive interactions cannot be literally seen on the screen. Since Altman has a sharper sense of humor than Carver, the adaptation is a little less "serious". Claire (Anne Archer) is portrayed as a clown-for-hire at children's parties. Stuart (Fred Ward) is an out-of-work salesman who harasses a waitress (Lily Tomlin) at a diner with outrageous jokes. The scene in which the fishermen discover the dead body in the river is even more shocking than the one offered by the short story: she is found when Vern, one of Stuart's friends, inadvertently urinates in the water. He is shown on top of a huge boulder, holding his penis and doing it directly on the floating corpse down below in the river. His urine cascading down her body which is barely involved in torn clothing and moss. After having a vote on what course of action they should take, the men decide to leave the body in the water and keep on fishing. One of them takes pictures of the corpse in the water. When they return to their regular lives in suburban California, Stuart tells Claire about what they

did only after he had sex with his wife. She feels a sort of moral and sexual repugnance and then goes to wash her vagina right away. Even though she attends the funeral, her guilty conscience does not seem to last long. By the end of the film, Claire and Stuart join a well-off couple (played by Matthew Modine and Julianne Moore) for a barbecue party. While they are having fun, all of them drunk and wearing clown makeup, an earthquake strikes. When it stops, the two couples watch the news. The TV anchor (Jerry Dunphy) informs that a woman has been killed by falling rocks during the earthquake. As a matter of fact, the film shows that this particular victim was brutally murdered a few instants before the earthquake when the Chris Penn character bashed over her head with a rock.[3] But obviously, Claire does not know that. Then she stares at the television and says "Well, you know, that's really not bad, one person [killed]".

As we can clearly see, the Altman's Claire seems less shattered by men privileging their fishing trip over the dead girl than the Carver's Claire. Having initially felt sick for her husband's behavior and having felt some sort of identification with the dead girl, the Claire from the comedy-drama film suffers for a while but in the end she shows a similar cynicism in face of the loss of a human life when it is a different unrelated victim. Some of these literature-to-film "discrepancies" have caused a number of critics to consider *Short Cuts* a "blunt attack on women" (GRIJS, 2015) because basically the production unveils a certain degree of "female complicity in male violence and perversion" (SCOFIELD, 1996, p. 397). The recurring visual images of women being verbally or physically abused, exposed and dehumanized would invite us to think that Altman's film replaced Carver's "deep sense of wonder at the process of human feeling" with sensationalism and gratuitousness filled with "sardonic irony about social mores" (SCOFIELD, 1996, p. 397).

[3] This segment of the film comes from the Carver story "Tell the Women We're Going" (1989b, p. 66).

However, it would be wise not to see Robert Altman's cinematic transposition of Raymond Carver's literature as simply misogynistic or as a gratuitous attack on women. As Jameson implies, Altman's "monumental betrayal" (2015, p. 209) of Carver's writings is due to the fact that these are two very different American artists.

Before being recognized as one of the greatest American short story writers (JAMESON, 2015, p. 208), Raymond Carver (1938-1988) experienced failure and poverty for most of his life (NESSET, 1995, p. 1-2). He led a relatively short and tumultuous life with a series of underpaid jobs, an unhappy marriage, a serious drinking problem and a battle with lung cancer. None of these, however, stopped him from writing several short stories and completing his major prose collections *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* (1976), *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981) and *Cathedral* (1983) (cf. BETHEA, 2001, p. 1-6; BLOOM, 2002, p. 10-13). Carver enjoyed worldwide acclaim with his short, minimalist[4] and stylistically unadorned stories. A number of characteristics of his works caused critics to compare them to Ernest Hemingway's and Anton Chekhov's fiction (cf. BARTH, 1986, p. 69; NESSET, 1995, p. 3, 102-103; BETHEA, 2001, p. 209-210; BLOOM, 2002, p. 12-13; JAMESON, 2015, p. 208; KERMODE, 2016, p. 2) and to bestow upon him an almost legendary reputation. Jameson (2015) notes that:

[4] The term minimalism is often associated with visual arts (whose best-known exponents would be Frank Stella, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Carl Andre etc.), music (John Cage) and design (Mies van der Rohe), and it identifies a general tendency towards simplification and reduction of the media components to a bare minimum. Other characteristics of minimalism (also known as ABC art or minimal art), especially when it comes to paintings, sculptures and installations, refer to minimal composition inspired by basic geometric forms and abstract images whose styles tend to be deliberately impersonal and repetitive (KARMEL, 2004, p. 90-101). Minimalism has also been associated in the last few decades with literature in order to designate the short fiction of a specific group of American writers including Raymond Carver, Jay McInerney, Tobias Wolff, Bobbie Ann Mason, Frederick Barthelme, among others (For an extended argument on this topic, cf. BARTH, 1986; CLARK, 2014). Some characteristics frequently attributed to literary minimalism include not only a heightened vocabulary simplification, the creation of deliberately concise and impersonal sentences, the paring down of traits that might intimate sentimentality or excessive emotion but also a search for a certain erosion of poetic or metaphoric depth in words (cf. CALABRESE, 1999, p. 183-184; GREGSON, 2004, p. 142). The short story has been regarded as the minimalist genre *par excellence* due to its natural disposition to brevity and to the condensation of the totality of a given experience to minimal fragments (GREGSON, 2004, p. 142; JAMESON, 2015, p. 208, 219, 284-285, 291-292).

> [S]ince his death in 1988, Raymond Carver has become one of the single most important writers in the pantheon of contemporary American fiction; and his stories (he never wrote a novel) certainly project a distinctive world, to the point where picture books have been published purporting to illustrate what they call 'Carver Country', which is associated with the Northwest of the United States. At the same time his life — poverty, alcoholism, late success, the muse — has become something of a legend (JAMESON, 2015, p. 208).

Carver's texts, especially his short stories, use a terse, elliptical prose in order to represent an America devoid of glamour, peopled by working class characters who go through everyday yet disconcerting experiences and whose lives intersect in an almost random fashion, generating contexts of great tension (JAMESON, 2015, p. 205-220).

As partially mentioned before, Carver's works have been the object of several intermedial transpositions. When it comes to film, the following adaptations come to mind: Lawrence's *Jindabyne* (2006), Rush's *Everything Must Go* (2010), and Iñarritú's Academy Award-winning *Birdman or the Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance* (2014). However, the most significant and comprehensive Carver film continues to be *Short Cuts* by Altman.

Robert Altman (1925-2006) is one of the most difficult filmmakers to categorize. Part of this difficulty is due to the fact that he has created a seemingly immeasurable production during the course of a very long, uneven and diverse career whose highlights include works for numerous television networks, short films, Hollywood blockbusters as well as more independent authorial films. Altman's was a career filled with successes such as *M*A*S*H* (1970) and *Nashville* (1975), and some commercial "disasters" such as *Brewster McCloud* (1970) and *Buffalo Bill and the Indians* (1976). Although some of his productions did not meet with approval from the audience and the critics, Altman's name has consolidated itself, especially in the last few decades, as one of the most significant filmmakers in the whole American industry. As a *réalisateur*, Altman was able

to forge a very distinctive and clearly identifiable style, which was filled with a constantly moving and shifting frame (often enhanced by the use of multiple cameras), a multitude of characters and overlapping storylines in a single film, a restless change of points of focus and attention, a cacophonous soundtrack usually captured on multiple microphones placed around the sets, and an unsettling combination of realism and intense artifice (DANKS, 2015, p. 1-3). Having directed about 37 feature films, Altman has been the object of permanent tension with mainstream Hollywood studios mostly because his creations not only embody an intense hybridization of film genres but also insist on constructing an experimental mosaic of narrative plotlines played by a huge ensemble cast whose confusing dialogues tend to merge and interweave. Such a "panorama form" incorporated by the American director — notably in *The Player* (1992), *Short Cuts* (1993), *Prêt-à-Porter* (1994), *Kansas City* (1996), *Gosford Park* (2001) and *A Prairie Home Companion* (2006) — frequently fragments the narrative into many digressive or episodic scenes and sequences, which are likely to include a certain degree of imperfections, improvisations and spontaneous collaborations of the cast members (DANKS, 2015, p. 6-10).

Jameson (2015) implies that Carver and Altman belong to opposed artistic traditions: Carver — with his sharp paratactic sentences and highly implicative short stories — is a quintessential minimalist whereas Altman — with his prolix, improvised and all-inclusive cinema — can be loosely regarded as a maximalist.[5] As Barth (1986)

[5] Unlike minimalism, the term maximalism refers to a more expansive prose style which favors "fuller" narrative constructions (CLARK, 2014, p. 19-20). The novel tends to be the genre more frequently associated with maximalist forms of representation, having Faulkner as an early representative because of the author's great Southern rhetorical tradition that translates into his famous long sentences with "breathless piled-up adjectives powering an interlinked series of novels which map out the legend of an imaginary country from earliest times to the present" (JAMESON, 2015, p. 208). A maximalist novel, thus, can be seen as a long, hybrid, systemic, superabundant, hypertrophic narrative, both in form and content, which shows a voracious predisposition to the "multiform maximizing and hypertrophic tension of the narrative" (ERCOLINO, 2014, p. xi). Even though a list of precursors of maximalist fiction can be traced back to ancient times, Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) and Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997) are among the most frequent examples in recent decades. As an aesthetically hybrid genre of the

would put it, the writer and the filmmaker could be associated with these two opposite metahistorical attitudes of language related to the internal dynamics of the system of arts: minimalism and maximalism. Kolker (2011) explains that

> Carver's work would not immediately suggest Altman's films. The spareness of his verbal language and narrative, even the oddness of metaphor and event that captures emotion on a kind of sideband of relevance run counter to Altman's large, colorful canvases, filled with people coming and going, usually in the wrong direction. But the two share a dark, even misanthropic view of human behavior, and especially of gender relationships (p. 421).

This seeming stylistic incompatibility may be one of the reasons why some commentators deemed Altman's film adaptation of Carver's meagre prose not only unconventional but also rather shocking, due to its cinematic maximization of violent passages scarcely described in Carver's minimalist fiction. Seeing the men taking pictures of the victim's violated body and choosing to resume their fishing trip as an audiovisual performance in showing mode — that is, exhibited plainly and vividly — can be a disturbing experience which could cause some sensitive viewers, especially those familiarized with Carver's concision and general lack of details, to feel shocked and disappointed.

Gaudreault and Marion (2004, p. 68-69) explained that the disappointment associated with intermedial recreations — such as in a comics-to-film adaptation — is due to a lot of issues, including the differences in the processes of fictionalization and narrativization, as well as in the reading / viewing phenomenology and in the reader's or viewer's modes of engagement (cf. HUTCHEON, 2006, p. 22-27). In general, intermedial

contemporary novel that develops exceptionally in the second half of the twentieth century in the United States, the maximalist novel is an "art of excess", which includes the co-presence of the following features: extended length, encyclopedic mode, genre mixing, polystylism, diegetic exuberance, completeness, paranoid imagination, intersemioticity, hybrid realism etc (ERCOLINO, 2014, p. xiii-xiv).

transpositions include some "violence" in terms of the story reformatting as well as of the other intersemiotic aspects.

Vanoye explains that "pour revenir à la question des transpositions littéraires, certaines déceptions proviennent souvent de la confrontation de ces images d'autrui (les images agencées par autre que lui) avec celles qu'on s'était faites d'un personnage ou de l'ensemble d'un récit" (1989, p. 22). Even though the screenplay writers chose not to include in their script the most offensive passages from Carver — such as Stuart pushing and calling Claire a "bitch" as well as violently breaking the lock on her spare bedroom and making sexual advances on her (CARVER, 1989a, p. 236-237) — the graphic scene involving the fishermen finding the naked body of a young woman in the water is sufficiently revolting in itself.

In the particular case of Raymond Carver's "So Much Water So Close to Home", both Altman and Barhydt did not come up with additional forms of violence against the female characters. As a matter of fact, they even left out the couple's physical confrontation scenes. Thus, there is no reason to suppose that the "So Much Water" segments in *Short Cuts* glorify violence against women. It does not necessarily mean that the dehumanization of a poor girl's corpse in the river is by any means justifiable. The argument here is that there is a difference: such an abuse of women was already obscene in Carver's story but it turned into something obscener when it left the written page and it was seen on the big screen. The "seen" seems to have caused it to become obscener.

As it is known, neither Carver's story nor Altman's film are the primary sources of archetypical elements such as the death of an innocent girl whose body floats in the water. The above motif could be illustrated with hundreds of examples from art history. Just in literature one could find several similar examples of fiction works containing the aforementioned archetype: Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1599-1602), Poe's "The Mystery of

Marie Rogêt" (1842), Rimbaud's poem "Ophélie" (1891), Nabokov's poem "L'Inconnue de la Seine" (1934), Muschler's novel *Die Unbekannte* (1934), Kiernan's novel *The Drowning Girl: A Memoir* (2012) come to mind. Not to mention the factual newspaper accounts that probably inspired Carver's piece concerning the specific social trauma of the rape and murder of young women in the author's native Washington State by serial killers in the 1970s and 1980s (KLEPPE, 2006, p. 107-127). This contributes to show that newer performative revisitations of these particular texts by, say, Shakespeare, Poe, Rimbaud and Nabokov would probably result in similarly shocking scenes because they also contain young innocent women being brutalized somehow by men and they also describe their deaths by water. All of these literary source materials are prone to shock audiences when their violence against women gets visually and aurally transposed into different media.

Of course, the larger issue here is that it is important to understand that literature-to-film transpositions are intricate adaptive processes consisting of intersemiotic translations, namely, a set of operations and permutations involving signs which is developed within very different systems (VIEIRA, 2005, p. 119) through inter-relations associated with different types of languages pertaining to a multiplicity of semiotic codes. Besides, film adaptations of literary works combine different levels of intermedialities (RAJEWSKI, 2005, p. 51-52) when they enable medial transposition of the substratum of a given media product into another medium and / or when they invite medial combination in which different media (book and film) integrate to constitute and articulate a resulting intermedial product (the literature-to-film adaptation, for instance). And all these processes involving intermedial transcoding are naturally expected to invite a different reading or viewing phenomenology depending on the mode of engagement

(telling, showing or participatory modes) on the part of the audiences (cf. HUTCHEON, 2006, p. 22).

Despite the superficial differences identified between the adapted text and the adaptation, it is very hard to sustain that the motifs and the archetypical elements found in "So Much Water So Close to Home" did not get transposed at least partially into Altman's film. One might argue that the writer did not include in any of the versions of his story a passage in which a man in a literal position of superiority urinates on the dead naked (and possibly raped) corpse of a young woman. Although shocking and provocative, Altman, in collaboration with his cowriter, producers and the cast, probably chose to include this visually dramatic and violent scene in order to re-accentuate the "sick" feeling experienced by the literary Claire in face of the abominable immorality of her husband and his friends. The filmmaker declared that "it is not [his] business — nor was it Carver's business — to moralize about these things" because he "resent[s] in art the definitive explanation for people's behavior" since "there isn't any" (cf. TRAVERS, 2016).

Still, as mentioned earlier, the mere action of transcoding a printed page into a three-dimensional audiovisual performance with visible and audible contours can result in a shocking sensation to some sensitive viewers. As stated before, Stam (2005) describes a similar phenomenon involving the showing mode and impacting the audiences when they are confronted with clear lifelike or vividly realistic depiction of literary characters and narrative details on the movie screen. He calls this sort of subjective reaction "anti-corporeality", which is

> A distaste for the unseemly 'embodiedness' of the filmic text; *the 'seen,'* […] *is regarded as obscene*. Film offends through its inescapable materiality, its incarnated, fleshly, enacted characters, its real locales and palpable props, its carnality and visceral shocks to the nervous system (p. 6, my emphasis).

Throughout the intermedial transposition from literature to film, adaptation contributes to endow the story with vivacity and even theatricality by means of the audiovisual resources available to this particular medium. In spite of the fact that it is difficult to find common denominators between literature and film in terms of cinematic representations of a character's inner psychologic states in the same manner as it is put forward in written language (HUTCHEON, 2006, p. 68-71), Altman found equivalent performative forms of, for example, rendering Carver's psychologically unstable Claire fully audible and visible on the big screen. In addition to the fundamental diegesis details and the psychological questions, the gender issues offered by the adapted text permeate *Short Cuts*. The situation implicating the dead woman had to be represented cinematically in such a graphic and violent way so that Claire's strong reactions (depression, anger, disgust etc.) would feel plausible to the audience and so that the fishermen's sick behavior could be questioned not only by their families but also by their community.

Thus, the asymmetrical gender relations, the repulsive brutality of the girl's demise, the cynical hedonism of the fishermen who completely disregard the victim's helplessness, the marital crisis and the subsequent feelings of isolation and mental instability experienced by the fisherman's wife — all present in the short story — are re-accentuated (in a more or less successful manner) in the adaptation. I go as far as to say that the intermedial transposition added a few layers visually as well as subtextually to a number of motifs and issues mentioned above. It is perhaps difficult to apprehend them or even to find one's way in the film due to Altman's maximalist narrativization, which is notorious for providing the viewer with a prismatic tapestry of massive observations and interlacing plots (very much unlike the perfectionist, controlled and concise Carver, for whom less was more). As a matter of fact, as Jameson puts it, Altman's adaptation necessarily involves the emergence of *totality* from the *short* story (2015, p. 214, my

emphasis). In order to get the most out of the least, gaps had to be necessarily filled with interpretations, which can differ radically from one reader to another. Jameson adds that:

> [film adaptation] can only work if the two artifacts are radically different in their spirit and in the truth they convey; if each one speaks for itself and in effect is no longer a replica of the other, so that in a sense the very meaning of the term adaptation is completely undermined (2015, p. 207).

Altman's *Short Cuts* took certain liberties with Carver's work that it is even inconvenient to term it an adaptation. Actually, a more accurate terminology would be a "contamination". According to Mouren (1993),

> il s'agit […] d'une pratique hypertextuelle, qui consiste à prendre comme point de départ *deux* textes (ou plus) de fiction et à en faire *un film unique* de fiction, étant bien entendu que partir de *plusieurs textes* écrits (nouvelles, pièces de théâtre, récits, etc.) et en faire *un film à sketches* ne constitue pas une *contamination*, puisque chaque sketch est, narratologiquement parlant, autonome, même si l'unité thématique des sketches peut être soulignée (p. 119).

By understanding that *Short Cuts* is not a traditional adaptation but a contamination — a hypertext film composed of a variety of adapted hypotexts, not as independent sketches, but as a whole with a certain thematic unity — it is possible to approach Altman's film as an interconnected, vivid collaboration of stories and storytellers.

By now I hope that I have provided some grounds to support the contention that characterizing *Short Cuts*, especially when it comes to the "So Much Water So Close to Home" segments, as a gratuitous attack on women is not only reductionist but also incorrect. The film can be interpreted as obscene because some obscene behaviors are shown audio-visually. But most of the negative reaction seems to stem more from preconceived notions of anti-corporeality (cf. STAM, 2005, p. 6) than from the film itself, which did not include the "worst" aspects of Carver's story: verbal and physical abuse

and attempted rape (cf. CARVER, 1989a, p. 236-237).[6] As intermedial transpositions, literature-to-film productions put into play multiple intersemiotic codes which result in an intermedial product that may be offensive to some viewers, especially when they make visible and audible things so traumatic and condemnable that we would choose not to see them. And even if we grant that Altman's approach to gender relations in *Short Cuts* is stereotypical, consciousness-raising studies about film stereotypes argue that they can be turned to positive ends. Even stock situations and social types can make us more knowledgeable about the very areas the stereotypes presume to delimit (cf. MANCHEL, 1990, p. 467).

In conclusion, it is important to point out that regarding Altman's treatment of female characters in *Short Cuts* as misogynistic is a narrow-minded interpretation because Altman's cinema, Kolker (2011) asserts, is one of multiplicity, as demonstrated persistently by his unrelenting zooms to, from, and through characters with their fractured narratives which invite our gaze "into spaces we usually go to the movies to avoid" (p. 420). Due to the fact that his films — especially *Short Cuts* — insist on a complexity of points of view by looking at gender-based violence as "a cultural phenomenon, heir to all of culture's ideological contradictions" (KOLKER, 2011, p. 420), it would be incoherent to classify as misogynistic (or as any other label for that matter) a filmmaker whose motion pictures were constantly attempting to avoid classifications, definitive explanations and univocal points of view.

[6] The Australian director Ray Lawrence seems to have also caused similar shock and outrage when he later directed *Jindabyne* (2006), another film adaptation of Carver's "So Much Water So Close to Home" set in Aboriginal territory. The movie retells the story of Stuart and Claire (played by Gabriel Byrne and Laura Linney), only this time the murdered body found in the river belongs to an Aboriginal girl. In her analysis of the graphic depictions of the dead female in the water, Knopf (2016) notes that "the close-up on her lower legs [...] somewhat *disturbs the voyeuristic gaze* at the woman's body because of its fragmented *presentation* of one body part" (p. 72, my emphasis). Knopf adds that in this Australian version by Lawrence "the camera itself, and subsequently the audience, become *complicit in a voyeuristic gaze upon the Aboriginal woman's body*" because the film "*visually presents* this disregard [for women's bodies] […] and fleshes it out from the *perspectives of the rapist and murderer*" (2016, p. 73, 78, my emphasis).

REFERENCES

ALTMAN, R. Collaborating with Carver. In: CARVER, R. **Short cuts**. New York: Vintage, 1993, p. 7-10.

BARTH, J. A few words about minimalism. **The New York Times**, New York, p. 1, 28 Dec 1986.

BENSON, J. Masculinity as homosocial enactment in three stories by Raymond Carver. **The Raymond Carver review**, n. 2, p. 81-95, 2009.

BETHEA, A. F. **Technique and sensibility in the fiction and poetry of Raymond Carver**. New York and London: Routledge, 2001.

BLOOM, H. (Ed.). **Raymond Carver**: Bloom's major short story writers. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2002.

CALABRESE, O. **A idade neobarroca**. Tradução C. Carvalho e A. Morão. Lisboa: Edições 70, 1999.

CARVER, R. **Where I'm calling from**: new and selected stories. New York: Vintage, 1989a.

_____. **What we talk about when we talk about love**. New York: Vintage, 1989b.

CLARK, R. C. **American literary minimalism**. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2014.

DANKS, A. (Ed.). **A companion to Robert Altman**. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015.

ERCOLINO, S. **The maximalist novel**: from Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow to Roberto Bolaño's 2666. New York: Bloomsbury, 2014.

GAUDREAULT, A.; MARION, P. Transécriture and narrative mediatics: the stakes of intermediality. In: STAM, R.; RAENGO, A. (Eds). **A companion to literature and film**. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, p. 58-70.

GREGSON, I. **Postmodern literature**. London: Arnold/Oxford, 2004.

GRIJS, S. Robert Altman's 'Short cuts' is a blunt attack on women. **Los Angeles Times**. Disponível em: <http://articles.latimes.com/1993-11-29/entertainment/ca-61988_1_robert-altman> Acesso: 02 Feb 2015.

HUTCHEON, L. **A theory of adaptation**. New York: Routledge, 2006.

JAMESON, F. **The ancients and the postmoderns**: on the historicity of forms. New York: Verso, 2015.

KARMEL, P. The year of living minimally. **Art in America**, v. 92, n. 11, p. 90-101, 149, 2004.

KERMODE, F. No tricks. **London review of books**. Disponível em: <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v22/n20/frank-kermode/no-tricks> Acesso: 17 Jan 2016.

KLEPPE, S. L. Women and violence in the stories of Raymond Carver. **Journal of the short story in English**, n. 46, p. 107-127, 2006.

KNOPF, K. Jindabyne and the apology: intercultural relations, violence, ethics, and the precarious state of reconciliation in Australian cinema. **Zeitschrift für Australienstudien**, v. 30, 2016, p. 61-88.

KOLKER, R. **A cinema of loneliness**. 4th. ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

MANCHEL, F. **Film study**: an analytical bibliography. London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990.

MOUREN, Y. Le film comme hypertexte: typologie des transpositions du livre au film. **Poétique**: revue de théorie et d'analyse littéraires, n. 93, p. 113-122, 1993.

NESSET, K. **The stories of Raymond Carver**: a critical study. Athens: Ohio University Print, 1995.

RAJEWSKY, I. O. Intermediality, intertextuality and remediation: a literary perspective on intermediality. **Intermédialités**: histoire et théorie des arts, des lettres et des techniques, n. 6, p. 43-64, 2005.

SCOFIELD, M. Closer to home: Carver versus Altman. **Studies in short fiction**, n. 33, p. 387-399, 1996.

SOBREIRA, R. Et soudain tout est devenu clair pour lui: la prise de conscience exprimée par l'épiphanie littéraire. **Tabuleiro de Letras**, v. 7, p. 33-44, 2013.

STAM, R. Introduction: the theory and practice of adaptation. In: _____; RAENGO, A. (Ed.). **Literature and film**: a guide to the theory and practice of film adaptation. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, p. 1-52.

TRAVERS, P. Short cuts. **Rolling Stone**. Disponível em: <http://www.rollingstone.com/movies/reviews/short-cuts-19931003> Acesso: 29 Feb 2016.

VANOYE, F. **Récit ecrit récit filmique**. Paris: Nathan, 1989.

VIEIRA, J. A. Liminaridade e transdisciplinaridade. In: SILVA, R. S. (Ed.). **Discursos simbólicos da mídia**. São Paulo: Loyola, 2005, p. 107-124.

Recebido em: 19/02/2017
Aceito em: 11/05/2017