ADAPTIVE LIBERTIES IN ROBERT ALTMAN’S FILM ‘SHORT CUTS’

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Abstract: This study aims at analysing the 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 on Carver’s short story “So Much Water So Close to Home” (1981). The interdisciplinary investigation conducted here problematizes traditional notions of fidelity and originality for the purpose of characterizing film adaptations as intermedial transpositions in which multiple intersemiotic codes interact. In order to substantiate such concepts, I argue that although *Short Cuts* changes portions of the adapted text, it re-accentuates the psychological crisis and gender-based violence experienced by the female characters by means of a cinematic construction of visually shocking images and shifting perspectives.

Keywords: Adaptation; Intermediality; American Literature; Minimalism.

Resumo: O presente estudo objetiva analisar o filme *Short Cuts: cenas da vida* (1993), a adaptação confusa e controversa feita a partir de nove contos e um poema narrativo do escritor norte-americano Raymond Carver. A investigação, entretanto, enfoca o conto “So Much Water So Close to Home” (1981) do referido autor. A investigação interdisciplinar empreendida neste trabalho problematiza as noções tradicionais de fidelidade e de originalidade visando caracterizar as adaptações fílmicas como transposições intermidiais em que múltiplos códigos intersemióticos interagem entre si. Com o intuito de fundamentar tais conceitos, argumentamos que, apesar de *Short Cuts: cenas da vida* alterar passagens do texto adaptado, ele reacentua a crise psicológica a violência baseada no gênero vivenciadas pelas personagens femininas do conto por meio da construção cinematográfica de imagens visualmente chocantes e de perspectivas oscilantes.

Palavras-chave: Adaptação; Intermidialidade; Literatura norte-americana; Minimalismo.

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 an adaptive “infidelity” to the Raymond Carver’s stories which inspired the film. In order to develop their screenplay, both Altman and his cowriter Frank Barhydt had supposedly been “unfaithful” to the “original” by changing compositional elements of the “source-texts” and introducing characters and situations that had never been “originally” conceived by Carver. Although the critic Canby (2015) welcomed Altman and Barhydt’s adaptation, he states that

[…] it is in no way a conventional adaptation. It is Carver as re-imagined by the filmmaker [Altman], the locations transplanted from the Pacific Northwest to Los Angeles, which Mr. Altman knows so well that he and Mr. Barhydt create Carver characters the writer never wrote.

Inspired by nine short stories and a narrative poem by Raymond 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 less fidelity-oriented approach to their adaptation. 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 though some purists and Carver fans may be upset, 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]](#footnote-1)

As Altman’s insight into his adaptive process might suggest, readers and viewers who keep a watchful eye on the “purity” of an artwork through its intermedial transposition may feel “betrayed” by the creative “liberties” taken by the screenwriting duo. This seeming demand on the need to stick “faithfully” to the adapted book is a sort of idealization on the readers and fans’ part, especially when it comes to Carver, who has become almost a legend. In a recent work, Jameson (2015) examines the distinctive nature of Carver’s writings:

[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 (p. 208).

For this and other reasons, a portion of viewers and some more fidelity-oriented critics tend to feel “affronted” when a film director “dares” to adapt (i.e. alter, transpose, re-imagine etc.) the literary work of an author who has become so legendary. Stam (2006, p. 21) associates this resistance towards adaptations with a form of logophilia according to which the literary work transforms (among specialists and/or aficionados) into a cult object whose words acquire a quasi-holy status. Because of this, any adaptations of such a text might be regarded as a virtual “sacrilege”.

I will cite one example, which clearly demonstrate how an adapted story can result in a slightly different film transposition. 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. 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, Claire becomes more independent. She hits the road and attends the drowned woman’s funeral. Even though she overhears somebody say the police has 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, 1989, p. 213-237).

It has been noted that this more mature Carver demonstrates an immense 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 its 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 depicted 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 pisses in the water. He is shown on top of a huge boulder, holding his penis and urinating 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. But obviously Claire does not know that. Claire 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 of 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 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 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).

However, it would be wise not to see Robert Altman’s cinematic transposition of Raymond Carver’s literature as simply misogynistic or as disturbingly unfaithful to the “original”. As Jameson’s recent study 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 single most important writers in the pantheon of contemporary American fiction” (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 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[[2]](#footnote-2) and stylistically unadorned stories. The quality of his works caused critics to compare it 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). 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).

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). Even though 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 years, as one of the most significant filmmakers in the whole American industry. As a *realisateur*, 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 an individual 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 a myriad of 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).

Although Jameson does not further elaborate these definitions, he 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.[[3]](#footnote-3) As Barth 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 *versus* maximalism. This may be one of the reasons why some commentators deemed Altman’s cinematic adaptation of Carver’s meagre prose so unconventional or, as Jameson more radically puts it, “a monumental betrayal” (2015, p. 209).

Such a notion of “betrayal” when it comes to literature-to-film transpositions relates to an old-fashioned platitude in early film studies. As we shall see in more detail shortly, these fidelity-oriented approaches to adaptation have shaped for the last few decades the whole debate concerning literature-to-film adaptations (MÜLLER, 2013, p. 8). Because such fidelity/betrayal debate is often associated with commonsensical notions, this oversimplifying questioning of originality invariably seems to either distort the adaptive process or conceal deep-seated prejudices. Vanoye acknowledges that “une analyse un peu fine de ces conditions devrait en effet conduire les lecteurs à renoncer à l’idée de ‘trahison’ si fréquemment évoquée lorsque l’on compare des œuvres littéraires à leur(s) adaptation(s) cinématographique(s)” (1989, p. 17).

The difficulty to renounce the idea of betrayal often causes readers and moviegoers to feel frustrated and disappointed. Such frustration by a certain intermedial recreation of a particular book is due to a very simplifying and binary comprehension of adaptation. 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 phenomenology and in the reader’s or viewer’s modes of engagement. In general, intermedial transpositions include some “violence” in terms of the story reformatting as well as of the other intersemiotic aspects. For this reason, the apprehension of the essential values of a particular adapted work must be responsibly negotiated.

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 it is impossible to obtain an “absolute fidelity” (cf. MITTERAND, 2014, p. 16), the viewers who have already read and interpreted the adapted text cannot help but create her fair share of expectations. Hutcheon (2006, p. 8) points out that “we experience adaptations (as *adaptations*) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetitions with variation”. In other words, a particular “memory”, a certain “palimpsest effect” (GENETTE, 1982) of the adapted text remains in the reader’s mind when she watches a particular story being repeated (yet never replicated) in a new format.

However, more recent studies, especially those involving intermedialities (RAJEWSKY, 2005), have made an effort to examine more closely the interrelations detectable throughout the whole adaptive process in an attempt to demystify simplistic observations that a particular adaptation is worth less than the adapted text or vice versa. As it turns out, intermedial approaches have contributed to undermine the old asymmetrical hierarchy between the literary art and film — which is implicit in commonsensical assertions such as “the movie is always worse than the book — and to allow for a more comprehending investigation of literature-to-film transpositions in terms of intertextualities (cf. STAM, 2000).

That is the reason why terming Raymond Carver’s “So Much Water So Close to Home” (or any other adapted text, for that matter) as the “source text” is utterly inadequate. As it is known, Carver’s story is not the primary “source” of neither motifs like doubt, disconnection, identity, isolation, nor archetypical elements such as the death of an innocent girl whose body floats in the water. The above motifs could be illustrated with thousands of examples from literary history. In addition to them, 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) and Rimbaud’s poem “Ophélie” (1891) 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 it is difficult to determine what is “original” and what is “betrayal” in our highly semioticized societies.

Stam (2006, p. 24) concludes that within a comprehensively textualized world of images and simulations, adaptation becomes just another text, forming part of a broad discursive continuum. Given the complexity (and futility perhaps) of prioritizing so-called “originals” over “treasons”, 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 are 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 media combination in which different media (book and film) integrate to constitute and articulate a resulting intermedial product (the literature-to-film adaptation, for instance).

Despite the superficial differences identified between 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. A “purist” viewer or a Carver fan 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 girl. 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 be at once less literal and more faithful to the “sick” feeling experience 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 transforming a printed page into a three-dimensional audiovisual performance with visible and audible contours can result in a shocking sensation to more “sensitive” readers.

During the intermedial transposition from literature to film, adaptation contributes to endow the story with theatricality and even vivacity 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 an exact manner as it is put forward in written language (HUTCHEON, 2006, p. 68-71), Altman found equivalent performative forms of 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*. Although they do not get cinematically transposed in the exact same manner, there is a re-accentuation of at least some of them.

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-emphasized (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). 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 for that totality to emerge from the short fiction, 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, “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” (1993, p. 119).

By understanding *Short Cuts* not as a traditional adaptation but as a contamination — a hypertextual film composed of a variety of adapted texts, not as independent sketches, but as a whole with a certain thematic unity — it is possible to approach Altman’s film without the conventional fidelity-oriented preconceptions. By now I hope that I have provided some grounds to support the contention that the traditional notion of fidelity and originality for the purpose of characterizing film adaptations is very problematic and it leads to misconceptions. As intermedial transpositions, literature-to-film put into a play a plethora of multiple intersemiotic codes which results in an intermedial product that cannot be reduced to binary formalisms.

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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). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The term minimalism is often associated with visual arts (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 (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 style 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). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 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 Jameson puts it, 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” (CLARK, 2014, 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). Although a list of precursors of maximalist fiction can be traced back to ancient times, Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973), Don DeLillo’s *Underworld* (1997) are among the most frequent examples in recent decades. As an aesthetically hybrid genre of the contemporary novel that develops exceptionally in the second half of 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).

   [↑](#footnote-ref-3)