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### *A Case Study for Cinematic Adaptation: Jindabyne by Ray Lawrence*

«Stories [...] propagate themselves when they catch on; adaptations – as both repetition and variation – are their form of replication. Evolving by cultural selection, traveling stories adapt to local cultures, just as populations of organisms adapt to local environments. We retell – and show again and interact anew with – stories over and over; in the process, they change with each repetition, and yet they are recognizably the same. [...] In the workings of human imagination, adaptation is the norm, not the exception».

Linda Hutcheon (2006), *A Theory of Adaptation*

#### **Literary and cinematic text**

The purpose of the present work is to contribute to the critical appreciation of a significant contemporary cinematic adaptation: *Jindabyne*, a 2006 film by the Australian director Ray Lawrence<sup>1</sup>. *Jindabyne*<sup>2</sup>, whose ensemble cast features Gabriel Byrne, Laura Linney, Deborah-Lee Furness and John Howard, is the screen adaptation of *So Much Water So Close to Home* (from now on *SMW*), one of Raymond Carver's most widely acclaimed and frequently anthologized stories.

In transposing to the screen Carver's short story, as we shall see, Lawrence invites the spectator into the complexity of the multiple dimensions and multiple layers of meaning in the relationships of a community of the Australian continent, whose story «bears traces of long suppressed traumas which inevitably resurface to haunt the present»<sup>3</sup>. This is not a unique or isolated case of

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<sup>1</sup> Ray Lawrence was born in London in 1948, but he moved very early to Australia, where he has been living since 1958. Lawrence has directed only three films in two decades, yet his works have been highly acclaimed by the critics during that time. In 2001 he achieved popular recognition with *Lantana*, which was awarded with the prize for Best film by the Australian Film Institute (AFI). *Jindabyne* is the third feature film of this non prolific director, whose other works include *Bliss* (1985), from the homonymous 1981 novel by Peter Carey, and the above mentioned *Lantana*, which was inspired by Andrew Bovell's play *Speaking in Tongues* (1996). Lawrence started to think about the adaptation of *So Much Water So Close to Home* during the shooting of his second film, when the Australian singer-songwriter Paul Kelly introduced him to Carver's short stories. It took six years to complete the film, two of them spent negotiating with the Aborigines the use of the sacred sites that are the setting of some of the film's most suggestive shots.

<sup>2</sup> *Jindabyne* (2006), *directed by*: Ray Lawrence; *produced by* (in alphabetical order): Philippa Bateman (executive producer), Gary Charny (executive producer), Catherine Jarman (producer); *written by* (in alphabetical order): Beatrix Christian, Raymond Carver; *starring* (in credits order): Gabriel Byrne (Stewart), Laura Linney (Claire), Deborah-Lee Furness (Jude), Chris Haywood (Gregory), Tatea Reilly (Susan), Sean Rees-Wemyss (Tom), John Howard (Carl), Rocco (Stelios Yiakmis), Simon Stone (Billy), Leah Purcell (Carmel), Alice Garner (Elissa); *original music by*: Paul Kelly, Dan Luscombe; *cinematography by*: David Williamson; *editing by*: Karl Sodersten; *distributed by*: Roadshow Films; *release dates*: 20 July 2006 (Australia), 27 April 2007 (United States); *running time*: 123 minutes; *country*: Australia; *language*: English.

<sup>3</sup> LAMBERT – SIMPSON (2008).

adaptation on screen of Carver's work: indeed *SMW* is also the basis for one of the storylines in Robert Altman's *Short Cuts*, which was distributed by Fine Line Features and released in 1993 to strong critical acclaim<sup>4</sup>. Whereas Altman substitutes a Los Angeles setting for the Pacific Northwest backdrop of Carver's stories and chooses as a leading motive the role of death and infidelity in human relationships, Lawrence operates a far more drastic and effective shift in the literary source, which is transformed into «a sharp dissection of race and gender in a corner of New South Wales where whites and Aborigines cohabit in mutual unease»<sup>5</sup>.

To start with, we should firstly point out that there are at least five different versions of *SMW*: from a structural point of view, however, the most significant hiatus can be found in the passage from the first – the manuscript version of *Beginners* (originally produced in 1980, but unpublished until 2009)<sup>6</sup> – and the last draft (*Where I'm Calling From. New and Selected Stories*, 1988) to the ambiguous and elliptical version of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981). Even if the interviews granted by Lawrence seem to refer to the version of *What We Talk About* as the primary source of the film, this paper will make reference chiefly to the draft of *Beginners*<sup>7</sup>, whose significant discursiveness provides us with a wider range of analytical details which will reveal useful for marking out the differential value between the film and the short story.

The story of *SMW* is narrated in the first person by Claire Kane, whose marriage becomes seriously compromised when she realizes the manner in which her husband Stuart reacted to the discovery of the body of a young woman, raped and then brutally murdered, near the Naches River, where he and his friends had set up camp for a week-end of fishing.

Despite their horrific discovery, the men agree to postpone reporting the murder to the police and spend the night by the river as they had initially planned, both because they are exhausted and because by the time they arrive it is too late to do anything for her: «the girl “[is]n't going anywhere”» (Carver 2009, 116)<sup>8</sup>. The next morning, therefore, instead of making the long trek back, they spend the whole day fishing as if nothing had actually happened, their only concern being to

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<sup>4</sup> The adaptations of Carver's short stories are numerous. See for example: *What's in Alaska?* (2009) by James Arrabito, *Cathedral* (2002) by Bruce Schwartz and *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (2000) by Scott Stewart.

<sup>5</sup> TAYLOR (2007).

<sup>6</sup> Two decades after Carver's death, the stories of the present manuscript have been published in their original version thanks to the support of the author's widow Tess Gallagher. The editors William Stull and Maureen Carroll, who are responsible for the choice of the collection's title (*Beginners* corresponds, in fact, to the title story of *What We Talk about When We Talk About Love*), have added only a short preface and a few endnotes to Carver's text, restoring it to the form it had before the editor of Knopf, Gordon Lish, excised and condensed it radically.

<sup>7</sup> In its overall narrative and thematic features this version is substantially identical to the previous longer versions that Carver produced between 1976 and 1988. As Günter Leypoldt points out: «Carver first wrote a longer version that appeared in the Pushcart Prize anthology of 1976 and was included in his second collection of stories, *Furious Seasons* (1977). Subsequently, the material was rewritten into a miniature version, which Carver published in his reductionist collection *What We Talk About* (1981); eventually, he republished the longer version with minor changes in *Fires* (1984) and *Where I'm Calling From* (1989). [...] Carver's four longer versions [differ only] in minor aspects that have to do with copy-editing [...]» (LEYPOLDT 2002, 323).

<sup>8</sup> All *SMW* quotations are taken from CARVER (2009, 114-33).

secure the girl's body to the riverbank by her wrist, so as to prevent it from drifting downstream and getting lost in the rapids.

From the outset, Stuart's disarming indifference pushes his marriage to the brink and, as further details gradually emerge, Claire's peace of mind is increasingly undermined by his persistent callousness. The distance between them becomes unbridgeable, in particular because of Claire's growing sense of alienation from her husband, who persists in his selfishness and only makes matters worse by attempting to ease the strain through awkward sexual advances.

One of the most significant elements of the plot is Claire's progressive, almost epiphanic identification of herself with the dead girl, whose terrible story stirs up the memory of a series of events that compounds the sense of menace triggered by the Naches River murder. Indeed, another river had also been the scene of a similarly heinous crime, committed a long time ago by other men, the Maddox brothers, «[who] killed a girl named Arlene Hubly [...] cut off her head and threw her into the Cle Elum River» (Carver 2009, 120).

Prompted possibly by the desire to restore stability to her broken family and thus return to an appearance of normality, Claire decides to attend the young woman's funeral and makes the hundred-and-twenty-mile drive to the community where the service will take place.

In the draft written for *Beginners*, Claire's return home is followed by the exacerbation of the difficulties in her relationship with Stuart, to such an extent that their marriage is inevitably pushed to the brink. In the "official" version of the story, which appears in *What We Talk About*, Claire, although incapable of banishing the ghost of the dead girl and everything it has come to represent for her, passively surrenders to her husband – the only feeling she is left with is that of being swept away by the lingering sound of the floating water, described by Arthur Saltzman as «a welcome oblivion, a shrinking from insight»<sup>9</sup>.

In the light of the significant differences present at the surface level of textual structures between the literary and the cinematic texts, I shall first give a short synopsis of Lawrence's film, mentioning only in passing those details which show a closer consanguinity with the source text.

In contrast to what happens in Carver, the plot of *Jindabyne* goes hand in hand with its fabula, enriching it at the same time with a series of narrative segments which in the short story are either omitted or presented analeptically.

Generally speaking, at first glance *Jindabyne* seems to be a sort of replica of the fabula of *SMW*, even though it disregards those elements of "suspense" that play a prominent role and exhibit multifarious characterizations in Carver's original plot, where the identity of the supposed murderer

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<sup>9</sup> SALTZMAN (1988, 90).

is alluded to only at the end<sup>10</sup>. To this fundamental change may be added the insertion of new characters, of a subplot running parallel to the main story and the choice of a different ending.

The film, which is entirely set in the Australian town of Jindabyne and its surrounding area<sup>11</sup>, opens with a sequence that leads the spectator to anticipate the imminent assault on an Aboriginal girl by an anonymous middle-aged man (later identified as the local electrician Gregory). The consequence of what turns out to be an inauspicious encounter is shown shortly after, when the camera closes in on the unknown man in the act of throwing the girl's naked body into the river Jindabyne.

As happens in the source story, the discovery of the body takes place during the annual fishing expedition that Stewart – an ex-car racing champion and the manager of a petrol station – has organized with his old friends Carl, Rocco and Billy<sup>12</sup>. What follows is known or, at least, predictable.

The initial shock soon vanishes, replaced as it is by the grotesquely selfish remark about the uselessness of going back home immediately, and the men agree to spend the night by the river, comforted by the fact that it is too late in the day for them to hike back to the road and alert the authorities about the body<sup>13</sup>.

As in Carver's story, the men spend the night huddled around the fire and the next morning, instead of making the long trek back, they go fishing. While their partners are away, Stewart's wife Claire, Carl's wife Jude and Rocco's girlfriend Carmel gather together. During their conversation, Claire remarks that she doesn't think her husband Stewart would want more children and Jude explains to Carmel that after the birth of her son Tom Claire suffered a mental breakdown that compelled her to leave her family for eighteen months.

After reporting the body to the police, the men return from their trip on Sunday night. When Stewart comes back home, he briefly exchanges a few words with his wife and then initiates intimacy without mentioning the discovery of the dead body. The next morning, the police turn up at their house and ask Stewart to answer some more questions; all the friends are summoned to the police station, where the police officer voices his profound disgust at their decision («We don't step over bodies to enjoy our leisure activities. Pack of bloody idiots. I'm ashamed of you. The whole town's ashamed of you», he says). But rather than their white fellow citizens – whose general opin-

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<sup>10</sup> After the funeral, one of the girl's acquaintances comes up to Claire and tells her: «Well, they got him. [...] They arrested him this morning. I heard it on the radio before I came. A guy right here in town. [...] He's admitted having relations with her that night, but he says he didn't kill her» (CARVER 2009, 131).

<sup>11</sup> Jindabyne is a town in south-east Australia (New South Wales) that overlooks Lake Jindabyne. Originally situated on a land that is now part of Lake Jindabyne, the town was transferred to its present location in the 1964 due to the danger of eventual dammings. Jindabyne has been also the setting of the recent *Somersault* (2004) by Cate Shortland.

<sup>12</sup> In *SMW* the names of the men are: Stewart (Stuart in the original version), Gordon Johnson, Mel Dorn and Vern Williams.

<sup>13</sup> In *Jindabyne* it is Stewart that finds the girl's dead body and secures it to the riverbank, while in Carver's story is Mel Dorn the first to catch sight of «the girl floating face down in the river, nude, lodged near the shore against some branches» (CARVER 2009, 115).

ion is pithily expressed by the local newspaper headline, «Men fish over dead body» – it is the Aboriginal community that condemns the men's actions by vandalizing their businesses in the belief that neglect of the dead girl stemmed from racism.

While Jude defends her husband Carl, Elissa, Billy's girlfriend, and Claire are the only members of the group who express remorse and condemnation for what happened. But it is especially Claire who, stunned by Stewart's behavior, tries to fathom the reasons for his selfishness («That's the point», she says to him, «She was dead. But don't you see? She needed help»).

Rather than concentrating on the quest for the girl's murderer, *Jindabyne* revolves around the details of the troubled dynamics which regulate the relationships between men and women, and even more so, between whites and Aborigines, which will also be the topic of the last part of my critical analysis.

The specific role played in structuring the plot by the interactions between the whites, descending from the first English settlers, and the Aborigines, whose communities are indigenous to most of the Australian continent – with which, as we shall see, they feel an atavistic bond – emerges clearly in the second part of the film, where public opinion builds up against the white men because of the negligence (probably due to racial prejudice) which they have shown towards the dead girl<sup>14</sup>.

Claire is the only one who realizes something fundamental is not being addressed. This is why, in her determination to put things right, she sets herself up not only against her own family and friends, but also against those of the girl («I need to know that my husband's a good man», she confesses to the victim's relatives): against their will, she collects money for the girl's funeral, and introduces herself to her family in order to give them the donations she has received, which, she hopes, will help to ensure as decorous a service as possible.

In the final scene, Claire goes to the memorial service to pay her respects, and later on she is joined by her husband and the people involved in the events. During the funeral, Stewart apologizes to the girl's father on behalf of the men, in an atmosphere of apparent catharsis and reconciliation that both written versions of *SMW* conspicuously lack.

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<sup>14</sup> Later on we will discover that the girl's name is Susan, as in Carver. The script alters only her surname, which changes from Miller into O'Connor.

## Idiosyncrasies of the cinematic enunciation

In any adaptation, the transposition of words into that expressive syncretism which is one of cinema's distinguishing features – a syncretism Lawrence declares he is availing himself of in order to delve into the existential dilemma which constitutes the film's thematic focus – allows for the shift from the verbal codes of literary texts to the codes of moving visual representations (audiovisual codes), which can contribute in many cases to the amplification of the source's textual complexities.

The effects of the adaptation process – as Brian McFarlane reminds us – appear on the level of the complex apparatus which regulates the presentation and reception of the story, in other words on the level of enunciation<sup>15</sup>. In these terms film enunciation contains elements belonging both to the cinematic or filmic field proper (camera movements and cutting) and to the profilmic field (everything that exists and is done in front of the camera).

If one applies Gérard Genette's theory on the wide-ranging relations existing between two texts to the analysis of those aspects which are peculiar to the cinema's semiotic system<sup>16</sup>, it is possible to point out in the first instance how the film transforms the narrative mode in accordance with the categories of time (the cinematic text/hypertext removes the anachronisms in the short story/hypotext, modifies the story's narrative speed by filling in ellipses or cutting out narrative segments, and inserts descriptions), mode (the adaptation alters the source's link between direct and indirect discourse), and voice (the change in the story's focalization also changes the kind of enunciation).

In the question of voice, in particular, Lawrence's adaptation removes the autodiegetic narrator of *SMW* so that the point of view is split mainly between Claire e Stewart, whose decisions and actions represent one the main thematic cores of the story. Such a choice is nevertheless ascribable to the problems the cinematic *medium* encounters when it has to transpose a single enunciative subject. As Gianfranco Bettetini has convincingly argued, in the process of transposition into a different semiotic system:

Audiovisual language [...] does not normally allow for the explicitation of an empirical subject, even if this subject is reduced to the mere narrative enunciation, and only with difficulty does it produce an evident subjective origin in the story and, consequently, an equally evident instance of a possible narratee-receiver. [...] Generally speaking, audiovisual translation must do without

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<sup>15</sup> I subscribe to McFarlane's restrictions concerning the use of the term «enunciation»: «Film enunciation, in relation to the transposition of novels to the screen, is a matter of adaptation proper, not of transfer. [...] it will be considered in relation to how far the films [...] exhibit the interaction of cinema-specific and extra-cinematic codes, and to what extent they provide – or seek to provide – equivalences for the enunciatory procedures of the novels on which they are based» (McFARLANE 1996, 20).

<sup>16</sup> For further details see GENETTE (1997).

the potential personalizing instances of the written text and “transcribes” the narrative subject, the plot, in an “objective” version<sup>17</sup>.

Therefore, in *Jindabyne* all those discourse markers of a character’s thoughts and behavior which can be extrapolated in *SMW* from the verbal interactions as well as from the narrator’s words are inferred generally from dialogues or, more frequently, from the details of the *mise-en-scène*, which function as the visual equivalent of the descriptive prose of the original.

Moreover, if we consider the theoretical distinction between *showing* and *telling*, which is often referred to when describing the various modalities of film shooting (the former focusing on a more or less explicit authorial mediation, the latter directly concerning the performance of actions), we may also assume that Lawrence’s film resorts primarily to “telling”. In spite of this, the film certainly displays a variety of enunciative elements, through which the twin components of enunciator and enunciate are presentified.

In *Jindabyne* these enunciative marks are primarily activated through subjective shots. Here the camera is positioned at an angle, or there is something in the content of the shot which suggests that it is seen from the viewpoint of a single character (usually portrayed as someone in an abnormal frame of mind), such as in the scene of the discovery of Susan’s body, where Stewart’s eye and that of the camera overlap as he lingers, with almost scopophilic pleasure, over the details of her naked body. There are also frequent cases of semisubjective shot: an excellent example is the opening sequence itself, in which Gregory (the girl’s murderer, as the spectator will later discover) follows with his eyes the car driven by the girl whom shortly afterwards he will assault.

There are also many instances of pure narration, where the director provides more precise information about the setting, which in Carver – as already pointed out – coincides revealingly with the oppressive space of the protagonist’s home.

A case in point is the pan shots, which encourage a suspensive and mythic vision of the Australian *outback* and which Lawrence, maybe reminiscent of the way Peter Weir has evoked the sense of mysteriousness and fascination surrounding Hanging Rock in the homonymous film (*Picnic at Hanging Rock*, 1975), uses to highlight the mysteries hidden behind the landscape’s desolate beauty: even the trip to the river the four friends undertake is presented by the camera’s expert eye as a slow and hypnotic immersion into the Australian wilderness, which overwhelms both the protagonists and the audience with its grand vastness and its warm colors, masterfully conveyed by David Williamson’s photography.

Given that it is impossible to lay any claim to completeness or normativity in the examination of an adaptation and the degree of its closeness to the source text, it is likewise impossible to

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<sup>17</sup> BETTETINI (1984, 81). Translation mine.

evaluate precisely the presence of stylistic equivalences, which are the most difficult to identify, because of the way they trespass «on the field of expressive subjectivization and even on the literary or audiovisual idiolect»<sup>18</sup>.

Although the source text belongs to the American literary background, *Jindabyne* must be viewed on the one hand in the wake of films such as *Jedda* (Charles Chauvel, 1955), *Walkabout* (Nicolas Roeg, 1971), the above mentioned *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *The Last Wave* (Peter Weir, 1977), with which it has close symbolic and thematic associations, ranging from the topological data to a taste for visual rather than verbal metaphors, and – on the level of content – to its haunting reflection on the crimes of the postcolonial past<sup>19</sup>. On the other hand, however, *Jindabyne* also connects, thanks to its recurring subjects and leitmotifs, to Lawrence's previous films, such as *Bliss*, which concentrated on the suffocating reality of modern society and on mid-life crisis (the same crisis Stewart experiences in *Jindabyne*), and the much acclaimed *Lantana*, which investigated introspectively the subject of solitude and the fallibility of interpersonal relationships destroyed through lack of communication or faithfulness.

We should not, in any case, dismiss the idea that Lawrence chose to render the expressive and content structure of the short story by employing specific cinematic codes, among which stand out his use of photography and cinematic punctuation. First of all, it is the film's choice of lighting techniques that lends itself particularly well to analysis. *Jindabyne* adopts two main approaches to photography, both of which exhibit a consistent respect for the natural sources of light that characterize both the outdoor and the indoor locations: the external lighting is aimed at enhancing an overall realistic effect (the so-called "natural" effect), while the internal lighting – probably by means of a very soft strip lighting – bestows on the entire setting an aseptic and dull appearance.

The alternation of these kinds of lighting, together with specific idiosyncrasies in the use of camera movements, underscore the film's subject matter: the outdoor light maintains intact, "untainted" as it were by technical devices, the evocative landscape, which towers above men, dwarfing them with its magnificence and imperturbability. The cold light adopted for indoor settings, at the same time, conveys the idea of the coldness of all human relations marked by incommunicability, which, on the level of performance, shines through the long and exasperating pauses scattered throughout the dialogues between the various characters or their brief, almost explosive, exchanges. This, it would seem, is one of the most telling devices the film resorts to in order to evoke the cryptic and indirect style which Carver had used to capture on page the last heirs

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 89f. Translation mine.

<sup>19</sup> For a more extensive and fully referenced discussion on films which focalize on the alienation and the racial discrimination of Aboriginal people, see GRUNERT (2008).

of the American dream – men and women inexorably resigned to their imprisonment within an inert and emotionally stagnant existence<sup>20</sup>.

It seems also valuable to note how the *mise-en-scène*, which does not strictly concern the reconstructed setting itself, but rather the purpose underlying the preparation of such a setting, is deeply imbued with the concept of credibility, since in *Jindabyne* the stage setting is structured according to naturalistic parameters, in line with the situation represented and close to the viewer's own experience.

Lawrence, accordingly, dissociates himself from the sensationalism of the Hollywood film establishment, to the extent that he brands it as hysterical, preferring «the European sensibilities involved in filmmaking»<sup>21</sup>, which stimulate the audience rather than imposing its one-sided vision of facts and situations.

The director, in other words, “peeps” into his characters' lives much in the manner of Raymond Carver himself, that is without being empathetically drawn into their dramas, but nevertheless successfully communicating the intimate nature of certain atmospheres and the sense of a progressive emotional lethargy undermining human relations. The spectator's gaze is “directed” towards the characters and the story only by means of the camera movements, which are generally realized through broad pan or zoom. The camera is held almost always at eye level (thus avoiding the effects created by low and high angles), the use of dolly shots is moderate, and the director uses neither the steadycam, nor the hand-held camera, so that the cinematic eye can be said to both observe and distance itself from what it sees<sup>22</sup>.

Lawrence, who possesses a highly individualized style, resorts to natural light for his shots, but also shoots each scene only once (one take shoot), in order to make the characters' acting as natural and direct as possible: as a result, his dialogue and situations are extremely realistic, and a higher degree of freedom is reached in performance and improvisation.

The transition from one shot to another adheres to the same poetic principles, with fadings (such as the shift from the sequence of Susan's encounter with her murderer to the sequence where he dumps her body by the river) characterized by the skillful augmentation of the feeling of suspense experienced by the observer and the separation of what has been already shown from what has yet to come: this is the technique used by the film to express relations of consequentiality

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<sup>20</sup> On many an occasion the film reflects the most common feelings of Carver's characters («fear, indifference, alienation, solitude»), whose characteristic silence «is not a byword for mediation, but rather the signal of a potentially explosive inner unease» BIAGIOTTI (1999, 76). Translation mine.

<sup>21</sup> FAIRWEATHER (2007, 49).

<sup>22</sup> Moreover, camera movements prove to be useful for instituting appropriate links among profilmic elements (girl's body/water, girl's body/Claire, nature/electricity, etc.), which are qualifiable – from the point of view of reception – as metaphorical connections among the subjects of a particular image. On this last point, see in particular GAUDREAU (2000, 133).

between the various sequences<sup>23</sup>, which are generally obtained through a moderate and essential use of cross cutting.

From the point of view of cinematic syntax, we should also note that the absence of flashbacks or flash-forwards and the resulting linearity of cutting exemplify the director's limited recourse to intellectual *découpage*<sup>24</sup>: as a consequence, the most frequent shots are those which American cinema is traditionally fond of, that is close-ups, full shots, medium shots, long or extreme long shots, which Lawrence employs for short but reiterated description of landscapes.

The film's syntactic linearity and the use of natural light therefore work together to charge the story's surface meaning with additional meanings, but the process of cinematic narrativization also involves – with a conspicuous increase of in the number of enunciative configurations – music (the soundtrack proper) and sound effects (the noises made by people and objects within the scene). These, besides operating as structural links throughout the episodes and evoking the characters' inner feelings, serve to emphasize the story's sense of mystery, as in the case of the ambient sound of floating water.

Significantly, the soundtrack for *Jindabyne*'s most poignant sequences was composed by Australian songwriter Paul Kelly, who at the end of the '80s wrote a song entitled *Everything Turning to White* (1989), inspired by the same story Lawrence chose to make into a film. In a film with such a rich symbolic *substratum*, it is ultimately the music element that best complements the pursuit of pervasiveness and spirituality on which the narration is predicated. As Linda Hutcheon explains:

When theorists talk of adaptation from print to performance media, the emphasis is usually on the visual, on the move from imagination to actual ocular perception. But the aural is just as important as the visual to this move. [...] there are separate soundtracks that permit elements like voice-overs, music, and noise to intermingle. For the adapter, music in film “functions as an emulsifier that allows you to dissolve a certain emotion and take it in a certain direction” [...]. At best, it is “a collector and a channeler of previously created emotion”. [...] Soundtracks in movies therefore enhance and direct audience response to characters and action [or] can be used to connect inner and outer states in a less explicit way than do camera associations<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Linda Hutcheon argues that «literature's “meanwhile”, “elsewhere”, and “later”, find their equivalent in the filmic dissolve, as one image fades in as another fades out and time merges with space in a more immediate way than is possible with words. With the time-lapse dissolve, not only time and space but also cause and effect are synthesized» (HUTCHEON 2006, 63f.).

<sup>24</sup> This claim does not deny the presence of intellectual *découpage* in Lawrence's adaptation. As in any other film, in fact, montage effects are unavoidable: for example, cutting from clear flowing water, to a body dumped in it, sets up intellectual oppositions of nature vs. culture, life (feminine/passive) and death (masculine/aggressive), purity and pollution, good and evil, and by extension Australian and Aboriginal, which indeed become oppositions dealt with later in the paper.

<sup>25</sup> HUTCHEON (2006, 41).

### «Men fishing over an Aboriginal dead body»: a postcolonial reading of *Jindabyne*

The analysis of the relationship Lawrence's film maintains with *SMW*, as we have suggested so far, involves «a dimension of intermediality» that extends far beyond the mere study of the influence exercised on the film by its literary matrix, since «it no longer corresponds to the more superficial level of technical devices, but to the very categories and structures that constitute the communicational and discursive framework within which [this influence] should be situated»<sup>26</sup>. In fact when translating a novel or, as in this case, a short story into a film,

not only do we produce a translation, more or less complete, into the second text of the meaning and values immanent in the first text, but we construct, even perhaps involuntarily, a new communicative strategy, subordinated to completely different circumstances of fruition (whether from a physical, physiological, perceptive, psychic, social or anthropological perspective)<sup>27</sup>.

These circumstances entail the choice of specific expressive strategies, whose palatability – reference to topical issues, insertion of social themes such as violence against women, interrelationships between the sexes, ethnic and racial biases – tends to be set in relief vis-à-vis its first discursive manifestation.

Despite appearing to be a faithful reproduction of *SMW*'s surface structure, it is on account of its director's sociological and ideological objectives that *Jindabyne* stands out as an autonomous product with respect to its source text, whose connotative implications it noticeably enhances.

According to Hutcheon:

Not only what is (re)accentuated but more importantly how a story can be (re)interpreted can alter radically. An adaptation, like the work it adapts, is always framed in a context – a time and a place, a society and a culture. [...] Fashions, not to mention value systems, are context-dependent. Many adapters deal with this reality of reception by updating the time of the story in an attempt to find contemporary resonance for their audiences<sup>28</sup>.

Although cinematic adaptations from one culture to another are not a new phenomenon, they have seen a considerable increase over the last few years with the production of heteroclitic transpositions which, like *Jindabyne*, have opted for a significant change in the setting (time and place) of their principal source.

What takes place in these cases is, according to Hutcheon's well-known definition, a *transcultural adaptation*, which, by changing the context of the original story, at the same time changes its underlying values, attaining a far more complex worldview – a case in point is represented by Mira Nair's 2004 adaptation of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, or by Patricia Rozema's

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<sup>26</sup> NÖTH (1997, 363f.).

<sup>27</sup> BETTETINI (1984, 73). Translation mine.

<sup>28</sup> HUTCHEON (2006, 142).

1999 version of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, where she depicts the intricacies of gender and race<sup>29</sup> –, through which the spectator is metaphorically provided with «a safe arena in which to explore difficult ideas that still have relevance: “contemporary anxieties and fantasies of national identity, sexuality, class, and power”»<sup>30</sup>.

The director of *Jindabyne* turns away from the short story source as regards its inventive premises, in that he elaborates its key issues through a set of predominant characteristics patently unrelated to the production context but strongly influenced by a personal desire to provide matter for reflection for audiences much too often Eurocentrically biased against Aboriginal culture: «I had the pleasure of giving an Aboriginal writers' and artists' workshop», claims Lawrence, «and all their stories were about going home and family, cultural things. I put these ideas into the film; *I hope there is a sense of mystery surrounding the Aboriginal culture, which inspires the audience to find out more*. These cultures are still so strong, despite what has been done to them. *I want people to be more interested in different cultures, not afraid of them*»<sup>31</sup>.

In addition to the introspective analysis of a series of troubled interpersonal relationships, deeply affected by the topographical element<sup>32</sup>, *Jindabyne* deals with issues related to what might be termed the *postcolonial theme*, a mark of Lawrence's ethical and social commitment. In this respect it is worth noting that the film may be regarded as a modern allegory of the colonization which was the cause of the Aborigines' removal from the lands they had been living in since time immemorial – the fact that the male characters in the story are incapable of acknowledging the abomination of Susan's murder reflects Australia's current inability to reconcile the past with the present.

More specifically, a crucial aspect of understanding Lawrence's idiosyncratic (re)elaboration of his source material is the way in which, by dramatizing the events related to the girl's finding, he foregrounds the dilemma which shapes the interactions among individuals from different cultural, social and ethnic communities.

So the director is primarily interested in transforming *SMW* into a film whose main concern is to reprise and enact the effects «of a paradigm shift in Australian historical Aboriginal consciousness»<sup>33</sup>. The *Mabo* decision (3 June 1992), which overturned the doctrine that the Australian continent was *terra nullius* when the first Europeans settlers arrived, has played a central role in this shift, since it has forced Australians «to rethink “race relations” and the colonial past as

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 152.

<sup>30</sup> CARTMELL – WHELEHAN (2007, 87f.). For further investigation on transcultural transposition see FOSTER (1999); DENNISON – HWEE (2006); HEFFELFINGER – WRIGHT (2011).

<sup>31</sup> FAIRWEATHER (2007, 49). Emphasis added.

<sup>32</sup> According to Lawrence «Australia is an odd country; in the small towns like Jindabyne people are surrounded by the landscape and are clinging to each other in order to survive. [...] The sense of isolation really affects people» (*ibid.* 48).

<sup>33</sup> COLLINS – DAVIS (2004, 3).

integral [...] to a morally illegitimate national identity»<sup>34</sup>. As Felicity Collins and Therese Davis opportunely point out:

Racist assumptions about Aboriginal culture provided the basis for the continued non-recognition of Indigenous ownership of the land. [...] Despite a history of Indigenous resistance to dispossession, supported at different times in the nation's past by a number of non-Indigenous Australians, the story of the nation's origin, in the occupation of land belonging to no one, remained intact until the High Court's *Mabo* decision in 1992. This landmark legal decision to recognize the pre-existing property rights of Indigenous Australians created shock-waves across the nation as non-Indigenous Australians were forced to confront the fiction of *terra nullius*. [...] Events over the past decade have shown, however, that neither the *Mabo* decision nor its subsequent enactment has settled issues of land rights between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. On the contrary, non-Indigenous Australians find themselves on unsettled ground as we come to terms with the fact that [Australian] democratic society has a serious flaw<sup>35</sup>.

The question of the Aboriginal land rights, then, has prevailed over the public scene as one of the most important legal matters of the last few years, together with the problems concerning the long process of reconciliation between white and Aboriginal people: it should be remembered that it was only recently that the Australian Prime Minister apologized formally for the so-called Stolen Generation<sup>36</sup>, the children of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent who, between the end of the eighteenth and the second half of the nineteenth century, were removed from their families by the Australian State government and church missions. In the “aftershock” of colonialism, it is dramatically and palpably evident that the issue of unacknowledged loss and discrimination has strongly defined Aboriginal experience: until a decade ago, Collins and Davis explain, «Australians remain[ed] divided on a range of post-*Mabo* issues, including [...] the legal and financial implications of recognition of Indigenous Australians' prior ownership and sovereignty; the idea of collective blame and the need for an official apology for past injustices; proposals for what the Howard government calls <practical reconciliation> [...]»<sup>37</sup>.

These discourses can shine light upon Lawrence's adaptation and the specific way it configures the conflictual relations within local communities in a small town of New South Wales (a metonym for the nation as a whole)<sup>38</sup>. Drawing on Anthony Lambert and Catherine Simpson's conclusions about the engagement of the film with Australia's past, we can argue that «as a starting

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 4. For further information on this topic, see <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/1301.0Feature%20Article21995> (*The Mabo Case and the Native Title Act*, Australian Bureau of Statistics).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> On 13 February 2008 the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has offered a public apology to all the Australian Aboriginal people and to the Stolen Generations. The full text of Rudd's parliamentary statement is retrievable at: <http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples> (*Apology to Australia's Indigenous People*).

<sup>37</sup> COLLINS – DAVIS (2004, 4f.).

<sup>38</sup> Cf. LAMBERT – SIMPSON (2008).

point, a film such as *Jindabyne* invites us to work through the productive possibilities of postcolonial haunting; to move from *backtracking* (going over old ground) to imaginative *backfill* (where holes and gaps in the ground are refilled in unconventional and creative returns to the past)<sup>39</sup>.

In *Jindabyne*, it is a series of “infringements” against the rules and beliefs of the Aborigines that can be regarded as particularly emblematic in relation to the representational scope of the film, where it has the function of surreptitiously anticipating the fraught relations between the white and black community which is only later made explicit by girl’s murder and the failure to report it: «The shift from dead white girl in Carver’s story to young Aboriginal woman», Lambert and Simpson comment, «speaks of a political focus on the “significance” of the alpine region at a given moment in time. The corpse functions “as the trigger for crisis and panic in an Australia after native title, the stolen generation and the war-on-terror” [...]. The process of reconnecting with country and history must confront its ghosts if the community is to move forward. [...] In the post-colonial, multicultural but still divided geographies and cultures of *Jindabyne*, “genocidal displacement” comes face to face with the “irreconciled relation” to land “that refuses to remain half-seen [...] a measure of non-indigenous failure to move from being on the land to being in country” [...]»<sup>40</sup>.

The first transgression comes at the very beginning of the film, when Stewart and his friends choose to go fishing in a place sacred to the native people, who consider all waterholes and waterways as focal points for various kinds of political and spiritual activity, and believe that whoever crosses a water border without permission from a tribe member commits an act of sacrilege which constitutes a threat to the integrity of the balance of the local population<sup>41</sup>. So in a sense the men are actually re-enacting the crime previously committed by Gregory, which, though consisting primarily in the universally abominable assault on the girl, is forcefully compounded by the abandonment of her body (a body which, according to Lambert and Simpson, «bears the semiotic weight of colonial atrocity and non-indigenous environmental development»)<sup>42</sup> by the river running through a sacred site, thereby destabilizing the equilibrium of the place and the tribe guarding it.

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<sup>39</sup> LAMBERT – SIMPSON (2008).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Aboriginal spirituality entails a close relationship between humans and the land they belong to. The land, according to their traditions and beliefs, is a sort of objectification of their inner world and history, since it is from earth that any community derives its sense of completeness and unity. In Aboriginal people’s geographical view, the entitlement to places – which is explained by myths and common memories – affects also human identity, and it is not unusual that a clan and the area it occupies share the same name. The sacrality ascribed to places stems from the belief that some of the Aborigines’ ancestors metamorphosed into nature (as in rock formations or rivers), where they remain spiritually alive, making the territory they walked on at the beginning of the world (the *Dreaming* or *Dreamtime*) a promised land – real and mythic at the same time.

<sup>42</sup> LAMBERT – SIMPSON (2008).

The second transgression takes place when the discovery of the corpse is not followed by an immediate report to the authorities. This causes an interruption of the journey the young woman's spirit must undertake in order to be eventually reunited with its natural environment. The rivers and the mountains which constitute the background to the unfortunate fishing expedition are typical passageways of this spiritual journey<sup>43</sup>. The men's failure also prevents the girl's relatives from seeking solace in the traditional mourning practices which they use to express their sorrow for those they have lost.

Indeed, the spectator clearly perceives that a vague and uncanny presence drifts across the valley («valley» is precisely what the word *Jindabyne* means) stretching out before the four friends; this is hinted at by the director on the acoustic level, with both diegetic sounds (the strange “buzzing” of the wires coming from the electricity poles sunk into the ground) and extradiegetic sounds (the rich, evocative, music which helps to set the tone and the theme of the film, and serves as a commentary on the scene sequences). Finally, it is hinted at on the visual level, in a short scene where Billy momentarily turns away from the group to admire the extraordinary landscape, and suddenly has the feeling that something, or rather someone, is spying on him («Dead is not dead», are the words spoken by one of the girl's relatives soon after).

The way in which the girl is killed is equally significant: as the consequence of a violent action, death here cuts off human life before the body in which it resided has completed its natural cycle of growth and decline, and for this reason it is felt to be a far more tragic event by the entire community. The fatal drama which an early death signifies for the Aborigines would therefore also help to explain the act carried out during the funeral by one of Susan's relatives (possibly her father), who grabs a fistful of that very earth that Stewart – and his colonizing ancestors before him – have so carelessly desecrated, and throws it in his face. The gesture which the elderly member of the community uses here to convey his sorrow and repulsion at the whites' behavior might also appear to echo a common Aboriginal ritual in which the men held responsible for someone's death – which, according to native tradition, never depends on purely natural causes – are publicly accused and punished<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> According to Aboriginal beliefs, every spirit sets off on a worldly voyage before returning to the sky, after which it falls down again to the earth in the shape of shooting stars, as «new souls and new people». This is the explanation offered by Dean Freeman and Rod Mason, the two indigenous consultants Lawrence avails of during the shooting of the film.

<sup>44</sup> Françoise Dussart explains that «the accusation of murder is commonly cried out in these events even in the case of an old man's death» (DUSSART 2000, 73). Even the fact that the white men talk about the girl and remember her unhappy fate represents, according to Aboriginal rules, another kind of transgression. In fact, «[the] discussion of the deceased, especially in close temporal proximity to actual death, may jeopardize the reintegration of the deceased's spirit into the ancestral country whence it came. The “unnatural” and even murderous nature of death weakens all around it» (*ibid.*).

The predominant topics of the film are marked out by a strong metaphorical investment. Both Carver and Lawrence, for instance, concentrate the text's underlying symbolic structure on the water imagery. In *Jindabyne* this is predictably translated in a manner which takes advantage of the means provided by the cinematic apparatus – it employs, for example, the topological, chromatic and eidetic components of an allusive, but also immediate ostension – while in *SMW* the water element, the obsessive reiteration of which is easily demonstrated by an accurate lexical analysis of the short story, incisively conveys the floating of the protagonist's self:

I look at the creek. I float toward the pond, eyes open, face down, staring at the rocks and moss on the creek bottom until I am carried into the lake where I am pushed by the breeze (Carver 2009, 120).

I can hear the river somewhere down below the trees (*ibid.* 129).

I close my eyes and remember [Susan's] picture in the newspaper and on television. I see her leaving the theatre and getting into the green Chevrolet. Then I imagine her journey down the river, the nude body hitting rocks, caught at by branches, the body floating and turning, her hair streaming in the water (*ibid.* 130).

Although associated with death, water is not a chaotic and destructive force, but rather the means through which unsettling though enlightening truths come to the fore, both in the external world (where the *emerging* of Susan's corpse attests to the compulsive repetition of violence within the community), and in Claire's inner world (where repressed memories and feelings progressively *emerge*).

The short story's adaptation preserves the idea of a surface which distinguishes the visible from the invisible and the knowable from the unknowable, but it transforms water into a metaphorical isotopy with social, historical, political and mythic connotations. In *Jindabyne* the aquatic element and the constant reference to the existence of a submerged life become a haunting metaphor of the secrets hidden under the illusory surface of daily life (social isotopy)<sup>45</sup> and of a past which reveals itself through the present (mythic-symbolic isotopy), but is still invisible, like the Aboriginals are too much of the white (historical-political isotopy).

The history of the submerged city, as the film's screenwriter Beatrix Christian explains<sup>46</sup>, suggests the imperfect correspondence between external changes (the city's reconstruction) and internal changes (customs and racial biases) as well as the impossibility of escaping from History

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<sup>45</sup> According to Algirdas Greimas's well-known definition, an *isotopy* is the iteration of a unit of language (the *seme*) which is part of a signified. On the textual level isotopies, like the *semes* they are based upon, function to create frameworks of signification which may be classified as figurative, thematic or axiological. Cf. GREIMAS – COURTÉS (1979, 197ff.).

<sup>46</sup> In the 1960s the city was intentionally flooded, and its ruins remained from then on in the bottom of the lake which had formed. The history of *Jindabyne* is recalled in one of the last sequences of the film, where Stewart explains to his son that the clock which has got entangled in his fishing rod while he was fishing belongs to another world, buried under the lake.

(the old city/the crimes of the colonial past), whose truths – only seemingly concealed beneath mud and rock – may reappear on the surface, like the old clock which Stewart mistakenly fishes out of the lake and which represents the remains of a past that the mere passing of time cannot entirely erase.

As in *SMW*, water is also an implicit reminder of Claire's mental and physical condition. Firstly, as a mark of how she fluctuates between her desire to admit to herself the limits and the problems which assail her marriage and the passivity which has become habitual<sup>47</sup>. Secondly, because in *Jindabyne* her character comes to represent the liminal condition of someone who, though belonging to a community, does not share its opinions and allows herself be guided by the firm desire to establish a dialogue with the people towards whom she feels she owes a debt and whose forgiveness she has to ask («[she wants] to stay connected to the people»).

Thirdly, water functions as a nearly concealed hint at Claire's pregnancy: water as amniotic fluid where the foetus floats. This symbol fans out to include both her first difficult and destabilizing pregnancy, and a second, undesired, pregnancy, which she realizes she has to face up to in the course of the film. The birth of her first child, we learn, was followed by her abandonment of her family, in whose eyes she is now desperately trying to “redeem” herself.

If water performs a structuring function as a symbol of cyclicity and of the ineluctable repetition of History, the principle of binary opposition observable in the contrast between electricity and nature underlies a series of fundamental antithetic relations (good vs. evil, whites vs. Aborigines, past vs. present). These, working hand in hand with the water trope, contribute to the enlargement of the film's imaginative spectrum.

Lawrence makes electricity into an instrument of death and destruction. In fact, we discover early on in *Jindabyne* that Gregory, who embodies the prejudices of the whole community<sup>48</sup>, is an electrician, and as such is linked to the transformation of nature (a visual marker of this is the hydroelectric power station that has replaced the ancient town settlement, thereby modifying the original outlay of a territory held sacred by the Aborigines): it is in him, and in all the heirs of the imperialistic policy which inspired the colonization of the continent, that we find the symbol of a cruel “white” nature, and its attempt to dominate the indomitable “black” nature of the Aborigines.

This metaphorical line is the same that presides over the aforementioned scene in which the friends arrive at the river. Here Billy – the youngest member of the group, and therefore the most susceptible to the sublime beauty of the surrounding land and the least “accustomed” to the human

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<sup>47</sup> From a visual point of view, the floating of Claire's inner self concretizes visually – prefiguring *inter alia* her subsequent identification with Susan – in the scene which shows her in bed in the same position Stewart finds the girl's body.

<sup>48</sup> Even the man's physical and kinetic features (threatening glance, shabby and coarse appearance, markedly abrupt gestural expressiveness), contribute to give rise to a series of formants with the eminent meaning “danger” and “negativity”.

manipulation perpetrated by the white settlers on Australian uncontaminated territories – stops to linger with his eyes over the landscape. He is suddenly distracted from this activity and turns to look at the electric power lines, which are portrayed as an epitome of the conflict between man (progress/order/rule over the untamable) and nature (chaos/the untamable), between sacred (Aboriginal culture) and profane (the culture of the white people), and between past and present.

Finally, in the film's editing process, Lawrence established a disquieting parallelism between men and animals, whose images intrude from the very beginning. This specific trope is regularly employed by the director to reinforce the idea of the Aborigines' subordination and helplessness. Instances of this may be detected in the scene in which Claire's son Tom and his friend, Calandria, are shown killing the class guinea pig and a helpless bird, which functions as a sort of small-scale repetition of the crime with which the whites have soiled their hands.

This crime, exemplified by the coldness and the indolence towards the life of other human beings, is also the subtext of a close-up of Stewart during a fishing scene, which shows him intent on observing something revealed by the following shot to be a dying fish thrown onto the riverbank (nobody cares about its life, just as nobody has cared about Susan's).

Also, in *Jindabyne*'s final scene Gregory, shown once again lying in wait for a new victim, crushes with impunity a wasp, which both tropologically and narratologically enacts the connections between the first scene and the last: indeed the animal may be another possible reference to Susan's presence, because it recalls the scene of her discovery, where a furtive shot lingers over a wasps' nest on a tree near the river (we should also remember that, according to Aboriginal beliefs, animals may serve as stand-ins for humans or human characteristics).

These last images, where the symbolic correspondence between Aborigines and the natural world becomes so pointed, cast a shadow over the positive implications of the funeral's smoking-out ceremony<sup>49</sup> by hinting that the order which now seems restored to the community is circumscribed to this small group of people, who consequently are subjected to this bitter segregation. The epilogue of *Jindabyne* is highly polysemic and lends itself to a wide set of possible interpretations:

- 1) the natural world (the wasp) continues to claim control over men, who represent artificial power (electricity) and the ability to exploit the environment in order to conceal the crimes they have committed (Gregory hides his victim's body among the rocks);

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<sup>49</sup> Aborigines believe that smoke has the ability to ward off evil spirits and to dissipate the misunderstandings which overshadow men's hearts by metaphorically dispersing them through the air.

- 2) the series of murders and violence is doomed to continue (racial determinism), thereby sanctioning the arduousness of the task of eradicating evil when it lurks beneath the surface of an ephemeral and delusive reality;
- 3) the murderer, because he is still *alive*, reacts in the presence of the wasp, while the girl, who is dead, cannot prevent the insects from swarming over her body (murder *vs.* victim; life *vs.* death; power *vs.* helplessness; white man's force *vs.* Aboriginal girl's passivity);
- 4) killing a potentially dangerous animal (the wasp) is just like killing another human being whom we consider detrimental to our society on account of his/her different culture, ethnic group or gender (the victim is a woman, an Aboriginal, and belongs to a community whose rites and beliefs are clearly different from those of the whites).

Such a conclusion does not lead to aprioristically valid answers or interpretations. The veiled but forceful overview of the problems which undermined and still undermine the relationships between two communities who are compelled to share the same territory aims to give the spectator a series of interpretative instruments which may be employed to look beyond the images on the screen and understand the importance of tolerance and dialogue between cultures as a major determinant of progress and communal growth.

## Conclusions

The recurrent variations and insertions on kernel patterns detectable in Lawrence's film show how the shifts from Carver's text may be taken to signal the working-out of a different and supplementary story, which is not necessarily the complement of the original one.

The addition of "alien" elements to Carver's *ur-text* is *ipso facto* ascribable to two specific textual operations that the very nature of the source text makes possible: amplification and metadiegetic insertion. *Jindabyne* realizes amplification by means of a diegetic expansion, that is by means of a distension of details and descriptions (the attention devoted to details depends more on the very potentialities of the visual *medium*, than on a series of verbal items to which the literary text is naturally bound up), the multiplication of episodes and secondary characters, and finally the dramatization of an adventure hardly dramatic in itself (in the case in point the drama of incommunicability within the couple and the family evolves into the drama of the whole community). The metadiegetic insertions, described as «episodes that are extraneous to the initial theme»<sup>50</sup>, concur in expanding the narration and fostering the thematic resonance of elements such as the interaction between

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<sup>50</sup> GENETTE (1997, 264).

whites and the aborigines (postcolonial theme), which constitutes the fundamental deviation from the short story<sup>51</sup>.

As we have seen, it is the structural and content change of the story's ending, which is accompanied by the insertion of a first cinematic movement functional to the contextualization of the events, that affects in a symptomatic way the relation the film has with the short story.

In *SMW* the text gravitates principally towards Claire's *quest* and her tireless attempt to find out the causes of her family unit's disintegration, so that the tragic happenings by the river, highlighting Stuart's emotional apathy, inaugurate a process shared by many of Carver's female characters, who – just like Claire – «start achieving an amount of control over their lives as violence seems to move them from one phase to another in the direction they wish to be going»<sup>52</sup>.

In *Jindabyne*, on the contrary, Claire's mental and physical captivity carries a different weight when considered in the background of the drama which has upset the whole town and deteriorated the relations with the Aboriginal community. This is especially clear if we consider the penultimate sequence of the film, where her character loses the leading role she plays in the short story to take part in a choral scene of mutual understanding and forgiveness (between her and Stuart, and between whites and aborigines).

The story pattern, according to the reading I have put forward, seems to follow an *iter* so structured:

- 1) harmony: the family unit appears to be close-knit, Claire's breakdown does not seem to have affected her marriage;
- 2) breaking point: the outburst of violence within the community and the emerging bias against the natives highlight the selfishness and callousness of others;
- 3) attempt to smooth out differences and reconstitute the initial harmony: on the one hand, Claire strives for communicating with Stewart, on the other for begging Susan's relatives' – and, *in extenso*, the whole Aboriginal community's – forgiveness;
- 4) removal of the destructive forces which shattered the initial harmony: Claire does not leave Stewart, and the community accepts the culprits' apologies;
- 5) restoration of harmony: by the end of the film, with the smoking scene, we are led to believe that new possibilities open up for the characters implicated in the story.

We can assume, then, that the macroscopic difference with respect to the ending of *SMW*, where Lawrence sees «a lack of compassion», depends on the chronological gap which separates

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 307-34.

<sup>52</sup> KLEPPE (2006, 109).

the source text from its adaptation («[the short story] was written thirty years ago [when] men were different back then»), which could even give reasons for a higher degree of confidence in the human capability of, metaphorically speaking, curing the wounds men have inflicted one another («I would like to think that men have changed a bit; I wanted to expand the moral dilemma and balance that with the entertainment aspect»)<sup>53</sup>.

Finally, an additional digression is required by the shifting of the story's setting from the American Northwest province to the suggestive backdrops of another continent, which Lawrence – who was born in England but grew up in Australia since he was eight – portrays with great familiarity and transport. The space the characters move along is charged, both in *SMW* and *Jindabyne*, of a semantic pregnancy which is worth analyzing: as often happens in Carver's short stories, Claire and Stuart are described within the claustrophobic domestic environment, which represents a sort of objective correlative of the family duties and habits bearing notoriously on women<sup>54</sup>.

Claire's liberation from the familiar stagnation and entropy seems to occur only when she turns from the confines of domesticity. As matter of fact, it is in all those places characterized by a sort of "otherness" in comparison with the settings which reflect – according to traditional stereotypes – her identity as a woman, a wife and a mother, that she becomes fully aware of her breakdown, her sense of estrangement from herself, and her sympathetic bond with Susan.

To the breaking up of the sclerotic repetitiveness of Claire's life concurs the murder's double image (a symbol itself of male brutality), together with the contact with the female "other" embodied by Arlene/Susan (a figure that stands for female frailty), with whom she shares the condition of helpless victim: the girl's ghost, despite her absence, is a positive and liberating presence which surreptitiously «affords new perspective or awareness to help [Claire] along, leading [her] at least away from the confining strictures of [her] self»<sup>55</sup>.

Therefore in the story the violence, callousness and selfishness peculiar to men's macrocosm is fatally reflected on the domestic microcosm, and the correspondence between Claire and the two murdered girls' condition allows the woman to recognize the limits of a marriage that her passivity prevented her from calling into question.

The film, though preserving the symbolism associated with the internal settings, gives the landscape a deeper significance, imbuing it – as we shall see – with mythic and metaphoric meanings.

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<sup>53</sup> FAIRWEATHER (2007, 48).

<sup>54</sup> On this topic see Ní ÉIGEARTAIGH (2009).

<sup>55</sup> NESSET (1995, 52).

Accounting for the way *Jindabyne*'s setting draws the attention to the story and its intrinsic meaning, Kristi Mitsuda explains:

As so often is the case in Australian cinema, the land quickly takes on a life of its own – most strikingly at the instant when Stewart [...] discovers the now-dead girl's body floating in the river. Awakening an acute consciousness of the physical environment, Lawrence imparts an impressive recognition of the pull the natural world exerts on individuals in a country defined by so much space. In doing so, he extends sympathetic understanding to the circle of men at the pivotal juncture<sup>56</sup>.

The setting's cinematic output, which plays a prominent role in the narrative and poetic development of the film, attests at last its degree of emancipation from the source text and Lawrence's capacity for expressing and resemantizing some nuances of Carver's story.

We can finally argue that *SMW* is a story with firm staying power, in the same manner as those living beings who «adapt better than others (through mutation) to an environment»<sup>57</sup>. The robustness and longevity of the short story, depending as it does above all on the topicality of its leading motifs and on the incisiveness of Carver's style, does not prevent us, however, from considering Lawrence's film as an autonomous semiotic unit, which by virtue of its acquired independence renders any debate about fidelity to the original text quite irrelevant.

With the passage from one semiotic system (the literary text) to another (the cinematic text), not only is there a change in the strategies resorted to by the film/hypertext to convey the source's content, but this manipulation also involves changing the short story/hypertext, which opens up to interpretations that can be envisaged as full-scale resemantizations<sup>58</sup>.

By suggesting an alternative system of values in those places where it re-writes a text from the past, *Jindabyne* does not fruitlessly adhere to its textual precursor (or precursors, if we consider the network of connections and intertextual references traceable on the diegetic level), but shows, on the contrary, how originality can be engendered by creative "repetition" and by the autonomous elaboration of pre-existent material. This material, as happens in all cinematic adaptations from a literary text, combines the transposition of events/actions, characters and general narrative characteristics, with

the recomposition, carried out within the new expressive *medium*, of elements which eschew the components of mere narrativity, drawing instead on source materials of a different kind: for instance the setting, the photography [...], the performance, the sound. These components [...] al-

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<sup>56</sup> MITSUDA (2006).

<sup>57</sup> HUTCHEON (2006, 167).

<sup>58</sup> As the technical devices adopted by Lawrence may already suggest, «a successful adaptation enters into a conversation with the original that animates the viewer's pleasure in both works. The goal of adaptation is not only to rediscover the prior text but also to find new ways of understanding it and to appropriate those meanings for the adaptors' own ends» (GERAGHTY 2007, 43).

so depend on other “sources”, which are singularly drawn during the translation process, and variously interpreted by the author of the target-text<sup>59</sup>.

It seems reasonable to conclude that, even though the film never really interrupts an ongoing dialogue with its literary legacy and, in particular, with Carver’s story, it eschews the interferences generated by its intrinsic verballity and firmly configures itself as a new narration and a new referential system<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> RUTELLI (2004, 81). Translation mine.

<sup>60</sup> AGARAY (2005, 92).

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