

ATTEMPTING A GENDERED CULTURAL SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS THROUGH THE TRANSMEDIAL STUDY OF THE MYTH OF CARMEN

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Abstract

The story of Carmen is perhaps one of the most translated, adapted, culturalized, indigenized and re-produced stories in the western world's canon. Carmen herself has become a myth, an icon, a strong sign of female independence, eroticism and threat. Although suggested to be read as an Orientalistic story of a femme fatale, later readings and reproductions have turned the story of Carmen into a discourse regarding gender, class, race and systems of power. "Whether the adaptation portrays Carmen as victim or victimizer, in short, depends on the politics of the particular contexts of creation and reception" (Hutcheon 2006: 154).

This study, however, does not aim to contribute to this vast discourse on femininity, sexuality and violence¹, all issues raised by Carmen's story, but rather track the adaptations and trace the cultural ideologies manifested through female representation. Women in culture, in this case Carmen, act as a counter mirror, reflecting the culture's Other. Quoting Pollock (2003: 210) "woman is the sign, not of woman, but of that Other in whose mirror masculinity must define itself". In this case study of Carmen's adaptations, cultural semiotic theory will be used as a methodological and analytical tool in the attempt to understand how the sign "woman" is used almost metonymically as the embodiment of counter-culture.

Adaptation and transmedial transfer

"Storytelling is always the art of repeating stories" (Benjamin 1992: 90)

Christian Metz argues that "there is a reason for the possibility as well as for the necessity of adaptations" (1974: 44). One of the reasons is, of course, in capitalist terms massive financial gain based on the desire to repeat acts of consumption in the form of texts (audio, visual, verbal, etc). Another reason is the necessity of the person or culture to re-tell an old story in a new way, in order to conceive and understand it through the new culture's mechanisms of cognition and meaning making. The adaptations are not newly invented stories which aim to speak only of the culture producing them, but have an overt and defining relationship with the prior text and its culture. The palimpsestous nature of the original work(s) has an obvious "haunting" effect to the adaptations and transfers, but it is exactly those differences in comparison that can signify to the scholar and "speak" about the intentions of the new text. Hutcheon (2006: 7) argues that "adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication. There are manifestly many different possible intentions behind the act of adaptation: the urge to consume and erase the memory of the adapted text or to call it into question is as likely as the desire to pay tribute by copying". Adaptations are both an act of repeating, in order to underline a story already told, while preserving acquired knowledge and cultural heritage by "re-animating" them, so they can speak to "now and here", while also an act of questioning and redefining their meanings and knowledge production.

¹ See Catherine Clement's feminist study of the operatic medium in Clement, C. 1988 [1979]. *Opera, or The Undoing of Women*. (transl. Betsy Wing). University of Minnesota Press.

Regarding transmediality, the author is interested in exploring not only the way in which the circulation and exchange among media affect the constitution of both the literary or artistic procedures that bring about the transformation of a pre-existing product, but also more importantly the ideology that imbues this transformations. According to Picornell (2014: 6) “this phenomenon is related to the ability of cultural communities to agree to new conventions that govern collective identification processes, to create new products with which the individuals who share a baggage of cultural references identify, regardless of whether such references stem from an ancestral past or from a recent consumer product”.

An adaptation into a different media is a semiotic translation, a transcoding into a different set of conventions. “Each medium, according to the ways in which it exploits, combines, and multiplies the ‘familiar’ materials of expression – rhythm, movement, gesture, music, speech, image, writing (in anthropological terms our ‘first’ media) – each medium [...] possesses its own communicational energetics” (Gaudreault & Marion 2004: 65). A study of transmedial transfer, as process as well as product, has to take into account not only the form but the social and communication dimensions of media too. It is not only a matter of turning the mode from telling to showing, for example, but also of adopting and adapting representational politics and communicational strategies.

Petrilli (2014: 211–212) underlines the problem of translation and sense-making as inevitably governed by ideological issues. “Translation theory cannot avoid the problem of ideology [...] it necessarily involves the problem of the relation among signs, and to semioethics [...]” (Petrilli 2014: 212). And she continues by saying that “[...] to translate in one way rather than in another [...] is rich with ideological implications” (Petrilli 2014: 215). Although Petrilli is referring to interlingual translation, a reduction can be made to intersemiotic translation practices, such as adaptations and transmedial transfers. What and how is translated into the new text, what is included and what is omitted, what is faithfully translated and what is freely adapted, is strongly imbued by culture and politics, thus ideology.

Political, aesthetic, and autobiographical intentions of the various adapters are potentially recoverable, and their traces visible in the text. The political dimensions, for example, feminist, postcolonial, race, ethnicity, etc., are all inscribed onto the texts body and are communicated to the reader/audience through signification. In art, intention determines what text the artist chooses to adapt and how. A reading to the adaptation must not though be merely reduced to an autobiographical attempt. As R. Krauss (1981) suggests, an artist’s style, and conscious choices in rep-

resentation, cannot be inextricable from his biography, but “this maneuver of finding an exact (historical) referent for every pictorial sign, thereby fixing and limiting the play of meaning, should be questionable with regard to art” (Krauss 1981: 21). Yet as Hix (1990: 81) argues, “it is arguably no easier to separate the creating agent from the creative act than it is to separate the ethical agent from the ethical act”. It is still highly problematic to root meaning and value and motive in the artists’ personal desires and creative needs (as of course interpreted by the critic), as well as in their relations (conscious or not) to the dominant artistic movements and conventions of their age.

“In the act of adapting, choices are made based on many factors, as we have seen, including genre or medium conventions, political engagement, and personal as well as public history. These decisions are made in a creative as well as an interpretive context that is ideological, social, historical, cultural, personal, and aesthetic”, according to Hutcheon (2006: 108). When the adapted text is differentiated to a greater extent than can be explained by generic requirements or personal circumstances, the variations function as indicators of the socio-cultural voice. Each new version of the story of Carmen (taking the argument back to our case study) appropriates aspects of history, in order to suit the “author’s” particular beliefs, which can be psychological, political, personal-historical, aesthetical, etc. However, we still have to rethink one more aspect, the function of the adapter’s intention towards the audience.

“An adaptation, like the work it adapts, is always framed in a context - a time and a place, a society and a culture; it does not exist in a vacuum”, writes Hutcheon (2006: 142). Every media transfer, intersemiotic translation or adaptation is bound to be different from the source text. There are multiple causes of change, varying from form demands (medium specificity), the adapter’s intention, the audience’s cognition and of course the contexts of both creation and reception. The context can refer to the form of the medium (e.g. silent black and white cinema, HD television, etc.), or elements of presentation and perception, defined by cultural, historical and political time-space, and the time-space of society. When studying adaptations, the historical approach is inevitable. This is sometimes because visual imagery is historicized (which is the case of specific genres like historical drama) but mainly and most importantly because the signification processes which govern the adaptation process are inextricably connected to the society’s history (both synchronic and diachronic).

“When” and “where” are two main questions concerning adaptations. An “original”² text is translated usually into a different language, place or/and time period. Recontextualization of the adaptation is a form of transculturation. According to Hutcheon (2006: 147) “transcultural adaptations often mean changes in racial and gender politics”. Sometimes the intention of the adapter is to purge a text of elements that their particular culture in specific time or place might find difficult or controversial and at other times, the adaptation attempts to “de-repress” an earlier text’s politics (Stam 2005b: 42–44). In transcultural adaptations differences of philosophy, religion, national culture, gender, or race can create gaps which need filling. The way the adapter chooses to fill those gaps is rich in meanings and signs. Hutcheon (2006: 150) refers to the process of transcultural adaptation by borrowing the anthropological term “indigenization”, strongly implying agency. She writes “[...] people pick and choose what they want to transplant to their own soil. Adapters of traveling stories exert power over what they adapt” (Hutcheon 2006: 150), raising discourse on post-colonial politics.

Due to globalization or more specifically the cultural “Americanization” of the modern west, adaptations now days are made for wider audience, heteronymous, consisting of different cultures, languages and politics. In this case adapters tend to deemphasize national, regional, cultural, religious or historical specificities, an adaptational acts to which Hutcheon (2006: 158–160) refers to as “Historicizings/Dehistoricizings” and “Racializings/Deracializings”.

Gender and culture: a semiotic approach

We can all agree that a system of representation is a point of production for definitions and meanings. These can be both seen in the particularity of the “opera” but also in its relations with other systems. When dealing with an intended palimpsest of representations, such as the reworks, remakes, adaptations, translations etc of texts, the texts produced each time renegotiate the meanings produced by the former texts from which they draw the thread and weave a new plot of meanings and definitions. According to Pollock (2003: 160), the texts produced “do not record an individual man’s [or woman’s] personal fantasies or romantics obsessions. They are rather symptoms of and sites for the renegotiation and redefinition of femininity

² There is no such thing as an original text, invented anew. All texts are part of chains connected by intertextual relations. There is only a source text that the adapter is familiar with and consciously adopts and adapts.

and sexuality within the complex of social and gender relations” at the time of their making.

Through the language of romantic love, one can detect an attempt to stabilize the positions of masculinity and femininity. Through the visual representation, an attempt is made to organize and exorcize both the pleasure and the threat posed by the “troubling act of looking at an image of woman/difference” (Pollock 2003: 176). An enclosed, framed woman viewed through the cinema’s screen or the print of a photograph, with her eyes averted, floating on an undefinable background and chopped up into fetishistic body parts, poses no threat to the viewer. Her physicality is substituted by signification. Therefore, we must see the represented woman not as a “woman”, but as a sign, constructed through signification and representation practices.

Cowie in her essay “Woman as sign” was the first to coin “the term”. In her study she argues that the woman represented does not stand for herself, of her icon, in Peircian terms. It is a sign imbued by signification practices, standing for other than “woman”. It is therefore possible “to see ‘woman’ not as a given, biologically or psychologically, but as a category produced in signifying practices [...] The form of the sign, i.e. the signifier in linguistic terms, may empirically be woman, but the signified is not ‘woman’” (Cowie 1978: 60). The signifier ‘woman’ does not thus reflect pre-existent, real or social produced categories. The attention must be drawn to the signifying practices, in order to detect what the signified is. The object woman in relation to the object of representation of “woman”, is a relation between the linguistic signifier and signified, i.e. it is a relation of equivalence not equality. When these two are put together and woman is weighted with the form and meaning of the represented “woman”, woman is formed as a sign. It cannot be dissociated from the message that it inevitably carries. Woman can signify in many ways. However, if it is weighted with a definite signified, it becomes a sign, a sign other than “woman”, arbitrarily, historically and culturally constructed. So what does the sign “Carmen” signify?

The ideality of manliness and lady-like femininity is often demonstrated in art through the contact and the implied contrast between the bourgeois man and the fallen woman. Art, with its public and moral function contextualizes the morally fallen to demonstrate the ideas of its culture. The Ego of culture is thus defined as the opposite of the Other, through the mythical construction of the “fallen ones”.

According to O’ Sullivan et al. (1994: 193), myths serve the ideological function of naturalization, i.e. “to make the political natural”. In other words, in order to make the common cultural and historical values, stances

and beliefs of a culture look natural, normal, obvious, common sense and even real. Barthes (1972: 117) also argues that the “[...] myth has in fact a double function: it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us” at the same time. Structurally, the myth is constructed from a semiological chain. The materials of mythical speech, according to Barthes (1972: 114) are reduced to pure signifying function as soon as they are caught by myth. Language and pictures are all united in the same sum of signs. The myth superimposes on the signifiers of the chain of signs the meaning and form of the myth in a double way. In the signification process, the myth signifies through signs and the signs signify through the myth. The myth signifies through signs in a sense that the meaning is already complete, “it postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas, decisions” (Barthes 1972: 117). In the case of Carmen, it postulates a shared fear of the female inner Other and metonymically of the cultural Other, the one which resides beyond the cultural semiosphere or on the borders of the semiosphere, and is not subjected to its commonly shared values and stands.

Chandler (2007: 102) adds a very interesting parameter in the mythical discourse. He states that “individual myths and cultural practices defy interpretation, making sense only as a part of a system of differences and oppositions expressing fundamental reflections on the relationship of nature and culture”. Polar oppositions, such as male/female, inside/outside, nature/culture, domestic/wild, are universal categories of the human perceptual-cognitive structure. They presuppose the universal human predisposition to draw a boundary between self and other, social and non-social, or else between culture and nature. These polar categories are often associated with each other. In this way, the female and male polarity also stand for the contrasting duality of nature and culture, chaos and order, civil and uncivilized, wild and tamed. Woman has often been identified as the Other of man, represented as Nature that needs to be tamed, in order to become productive by man/Culture. In the original story of Carmen, her alterity by gender is enlarged by her racial identity. For most European cultures, Carmen as a Gypsy is an “exotic” inner Other. “Inner otherness is an important factor in history, or rather, in the models that have contributed to form history. History would have been different without the moors in Spain, the gypsies in much of Western Culture, and, more obviously, woman in what has through most of history been the man’s world” (Sonesson 2004: 162–163).

In *Figure 1*, the contrasting relationship between Male and Female is depicted with the use of the cultural semiotic’s canonical model. Based on the canonical model of the Estonian school of semiotics, G. Sonesson draws a

schema to define the terms Ego, Alter and Allius, as well as their inter-relations (Figure 2.). According to Sonesson's extended model, we can perceive Ego as the center of the Culture's Semiosphere, Alter as the external subject of the Extra-Culture and Allius as a Non-person. Ego recognizes Alter as an Other and is in speaking terms with, while Allius is a non-person, about whom Ego and Alter only speak and not directly to (see Figure 3.). The kind of otherness that is of interest in this study is the non-reciprocal one, that which the Tartu school refers to asymmetrical. According to Sonesson (2004: 163) "[...] it is not only the relation of Culture to Non-Culture that is asymmetrical, but also that to Extra-Culture. The asymmetry concerns the relationship to the other Culture as non-subject, not only as non-person. There is a possibility to communicate, but the relationship is not reversible".

Bakhtin has argued that it is only the Other which is directly known, since only he/she can be seen in complete³. Therefore, the Ego is always constructed in opposition to the Alter. Taking this argument a step further, the Other is seen and understood only through the mechanisms of perception and recognition of the Self. Therefore, it is the Ego that is constructed as a projection of the Culture's ideal Self, while the oppositional Alter is constructed on its counter image, a counter *imago dei* to serve its purpose as a counter definition of the Ego. "Woman" as the opposite of "man" is shaped and defined by the male cultural Ego and "man" in its turn draws its power from the oppositionally constructed image of the female Other.

Sonesson (2000: 537; 2004: 153) very distinctively notes that cultural semiotics is not about individuals, nor about a culture per-se, it is about the model which the members of a culture make of their Culture. Bearing that in mind, through the translations, adaptations and reworks of an original text, one can trace the model the artists (as members of a culture that define and are being defined by it) make of their culture.

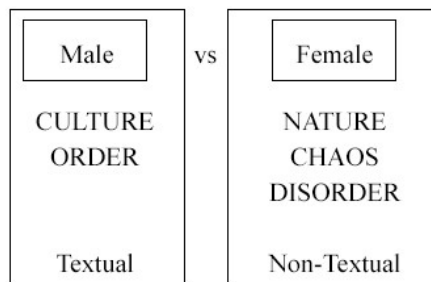


Figure 1: Male vs Female in canonical cultural semiotic model

³ Bakhtin (1990: 23) "precisely that which only I see in the other is seen in myself, likewise, only by the other".

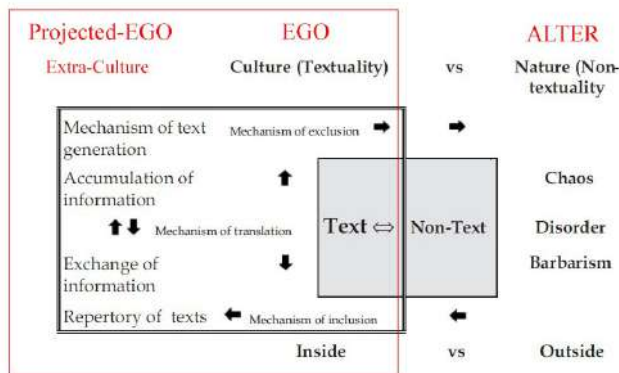


Figure 2: Extended canonical model.

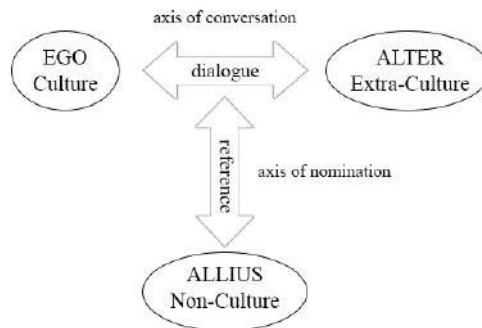


Figure 3: Sonesson's schema on the axis of communication.

Introducing Carmen

The story of Carmen revolves around a single protean figure, culturally stereotyped yet retrofitted in ideological terms for adaptation to different times and places. Prosper Mérimée's original novella was published in 1845. In 1875, Georges Bizet, in collaboration with the two librettists Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy, presented an adaptation of Mérimée's Carmen at the Parisian Opera. Mérimée's novel was translated from a written text into a multimodal performative text, adapted for the Opéra-Comique audience. The narrator's voice is silenced in the operatic version: the story is told through a combination of dialogue, song, music and dance by the protagonists. The story that is told is only a part of Mérimée's original text, focusing on the part where Don Jose, meets, falls in love with and murders Carmen. These two texts, Mérimée's novella and Bizet's opera play will both act as source texts for future translations and media transfers.

Analyzing the texts with the Cultural Semiotics Model

Carmen (1845), Prosper Mérimée, novella.

(Other by race, class and gender)

Prosper Mérimée travelled to Spain in 1830 and wrote about his travels in the *Revue de Paris*. In the issue of December 29, 1833, he tells the story of a young woman named “Carmencita”, a charming Spanish witch, translating the title “sorcières espagnoles”. At that time, neighbouring Spain was a major source of inspiration for the French, their exotic Other. Many writers (Gustave Flaubert, Victor Hugo, Alexander Dumas, among others) conceptualize their stories in the general orientalist climate of the time. They take the form of travel diaries focusing on the Third World provinces, moving between fantasy and arbitrary ethnography. Between 1830 and 1845, Mérimée combined various texts⁴, to finally come up with the final version of his *Carmen* in the travel biweekly specializing in exotic Third World travel journals, the *Revue des deux mondes* (October 1).

In 1845, Mérimée, combining all the above elements, wrote and published a novel entitled “Carmen”. It is the story of a French traveler and scholar who meets and describes Carmen, a young gypsy woman, attractive but not conventionally beautiful, with a deviant behaviour. She smokes (a particularly delinquent feature for the French upper and middle class readers), she is an outlaw and possibly a murderer. Then she meets Don Jose, a Basque ex-military man, from whom the reader reads a second description of Carmen. Don Jose falls in love with Carmen, follows her into illegality, becomes her companion in the gypsy society, and finally murders her, driven by his jealousy for her. Carmen is extravagant and capricious. She is accused (by both the narrator and Don Jose) of being a sorceress and diabolical. It is her fault that Don Jose is jealous and it is her fault that he must kill her.

The novel concludes with a quasi-ethnographic description of the minority group of gypsies in Europe and particularly in Spain. The Gypsy tribe is described as animalistic, violent, without principles and order, with particular, amoral internal laws, and no written language or specific religion. The Gypsies are identified as Nature and Chaos, they are non-textual, the binary opposite of French culture identified as the Culture, Order and textuality. In this view it becomes the Gypsies’ fault that Carmen must die;

⁴ In 1840, a friend, Eugénie de Montijo, told Mérimée the story of a brigand who killed his mistress; in 1844, he wrote to her that he had just read George Borrow’s *The Zincali* (1841) and *The Bible in Spain* (1843) (Hutcheon 2006: 154–5).

she is a non-person because she belongs to a non-culture and she cannot exist within the Culture’s semiosphere.

The author and first person narrator of the novella *Mérimée* is identified as Ego (white, male, upper class member of Culture). He tells the ego-culture mediated story of Don Jose, a *brigadier* whom he met in Spain. He himself recounts the story of him and Carmen, an Andalusian gypsy. They are both Others, as Spaniards to the author and the public/readers of France. However, Carmen as a woman, a Gypsy among Spaniards and an outlaw, is a triple alien, Allius, to both Don Jose and the author/reader. She is Allius by gender, class and race. Don Jose, in the beginning, a virtuous male soldier belongs to Culture. Later in the narrative, as he meets and falls in love with Carmen he shifts to Extra-Culture. This is a Culture that it is not his own but upon which he projects his Ego. Carmen on the contrary as a mysterious dangerous woman, a thief and a Gypsy is Non-Culture. As the narration progresses, Don Jose and the reader, become familiar with the Gypsy culture and she moves from the state of Non-Culture to that of Extra-culture, i.e. acknowledging a “culture” structurally different, but with its own internal laws, order and morality. (see Figure 4)

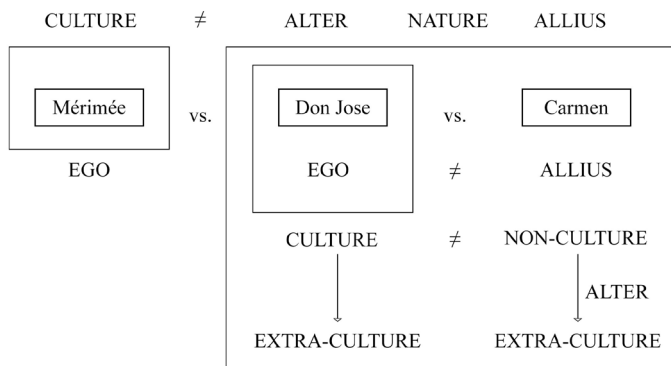


Figure 4: Cultural semiotic analysis: *Mérimée’s Carmen*.

First transmedial adaptation:

***Carmen* (1875) Gorge Bizet, Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy, opera in four acts.**

(Other by race, class and gender)

There is of course no record of the staged play of Bizet’s opera which would allow us to study and comment on aspects of props and scenery. The study of Bizet’s adaptation is only based on the opera’s libretto and musical compositions, retrieved from future re-executions.

Hutcheon (2006: 36, 40) argues that “a novel, in order to be dramatized, has to be distilled, reduced in size, and thus, inevitably, complexity” and that “in the process of dramatization there is inevitably a certain amount of re-accentuation and refocusing of themes, characters, and plot”. Bizet’s media transfer is characterized by great textual condensation and omissions. New parts and roles are created to serve the new play’s main goal, and spectacle. As the story transforms from the mode of telling to showing, the parts described are reduced. The first act takes place in the public area outside the cigarette factory. The second act evolves in Lilla Pastia’s inn, a Gypsy inn keeper and a smuggler. She is a character who, along with Carmen’s female gypsy companions -Zuniga, Frasquita and Mercédès- do not appear in the original text. The third act takes place in the mountains, in contrast to the original text’s plot that is mainly dramatized in the Spanish countryside. The operatic version chooses to limit the representation of the wild to a single act, probably due to the mediums restrictions. For the fourth and final act, in which Carmen’s murder occurs, a scene is added outside an ancient amphitheatre where the bullfights take place. One of the roles expanded for the sake of spectacle is that of the bullfighter, Escamillo. In the novel, there is only a brief reference to him, towards the end of the narrative, while in the opera he occupies a fairly large role. Bizet’s Carmen and Don Jose are somehow toned down. The digressive Gypsy is not a murderer or a thief, yet she is a smuggler. She is not married to a prison inmate, but she is free and emotionally unstable, according to her librettists. Carmen is a worker in a tobacco factory and a smoker, at a time (19th century) when smoking was an identifying sign used by French prostitutes. Don Jose, is neither a thief nor a serial killer, he is an honest man lured into illegality by Carmen. Both characters have been somewhat sanitized for the family-oriented Opéra Comique audience. In contrast to Carmen, as the female Other, a new character, Micaëla is introduced into the plot. Micäela is invented as a maternally approved rival for Don José’s affection and as a pure and innocent foil for Carmen. She is Jose’s childhood friend, virtuous, law-abiding and prudent, she is everything Carmen is not; she is an Other to Carmen.

Bizet’s Carmen is murdered by Don Jose in a festive atmosphere and in a spectacular manner. The ending is inevitable, as it is written on the Gypsy woman’s tarot cards. Mérimée’s Carmen dies because she was born a Gypsy and she cannot escape her race and thus fate. Bizet’s Carmen is murdered because in 19th century Paris her liberated sexuality and independence are conceived as diabolical and evil predisposition. To Carmen’s –“*Ce que je veux, c’est être libre et faire ce qui me plaît.*”, : “What I want is be free to do

whatever I want”, Don Jose responds by asking her : “*Tu est le diable, Carmen?*”, “You are the devil Carmen?” (Carmen, act III, scene II), leading the plot to her legitimized murder.

In this first adaptation, the story is not told from the point of view of the author, but that of Don Jose. In this version of Carmen we can see and hear her, unmediated by overt male intervention. She speaks/sings for herself. Hutcheon (2006: 8) describes it as “a change of frame and therefore context: telling the same story from a different point of view. For example, it can create a manifestly different interpretation”. In the original text the narrator of the story is a white, French, educated and prosperous male (who is being identified probably as Mérimée himself). The readers of the novel were originally intended to be the upper and middle class French, women and men alike. The audience of the Opéra Comique of Paris when the novel was adapted into an opera play were upper class bourgeois families. Is this very significant change of viewing point just a “medium specific” choice, or a conscious intention by the adapters (Georges Bizet and the two librettists Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy)? According to the author, Carmen, although unmediated and self-expressive, is still a construction made as an inverted *imago dei*. Although it is probably just a medium specific choice, Carmen attains a voice for the first time. However, almost a century of adaptations will have to pass until she is given her own voice.

In this adaptation Don Jose, the white male brigadier, stands for the Culture’s Ego. Micaëla, the new female character, along with Don Jose’s mother, are Others as women, but Culture as white, virtuous, lady-like females. Although Bizet has smoothed out the edges of Carmen for the Opéra Comique audience, Carmen is still an Allius, as a woman, a Gypsy and an outlaw. Carmen is an Allius by gender, class and race. Don Jose swifts from Culture to Extra-Culture as the plot progresses and the white male brigadier enters the Gypsy community and becomes a murderer driven by passion (see Figure 5). If compared to the novella, this operatic version lessens the Orientalistic hues of the plot, based upon the colonialized viewing of the Spanish countryside and the Gypsy culture. Both Spaniards and Gypsies are still represented as exotic Others for the French audience. However, a big semantic difference can be spotted compared to Mérimée’s wild characters. In Mérimée’s version, the author-narrator holds the position of the culture’s Ego. In Bizet’s adaptation, the audience, the upper class bourgeois men and women, stand for the culture’s Ego. It is suggested by the adaptor that they identify with the two more “cultured” characters of the plot; Don Jose and Micaëla. However, the bourgeois family audience of the Opéra Comique in 1875 Paris was not ready for such an excess of lovers, passions and female

murder on stage. They were unable to identify with the Ego suggested by Bizet and for this reason the play was a popular failure.

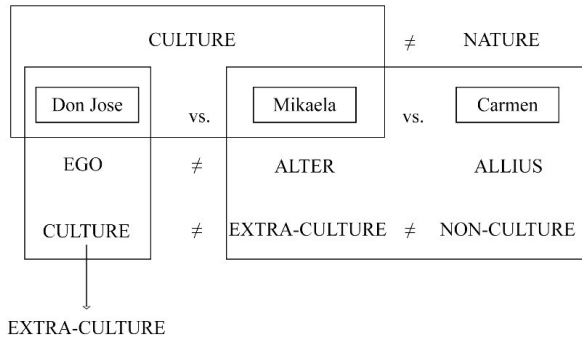


Figure 5: Cultural semiotic analysis: Bizet's Carmen.

“Transcultural” adaptations:

Carmen Jones (1954) Otto Preminger, musical film.

(Other by class and gender)

Carmen's racial identity as an Hispanic Gypsy was the basis of the plot for the ethnographic portrait constructed by Mérimée. This identity, although partially refined, remained central in the Orientalistic operatic version created by George Bizet. When Carmen's story traveled across continents, it was translated into American English and adapted into a Broadway musical by Oscar Hammerstein II, entitled *Carmen Jones* in 1943. By shifting continents she also shifted race. The American Carmen, brought to the screen later on by Otto Preminger in 1954, is of African descent and so is the entire cast of the film. At that time the Afro-American for the Americans was the inner Other, in the same way as the Gypsies were for Spaniards. Hammerstein's intentions sound patronizing and essentializing today: “The nearest thing in our modern American life to an equivalent of the Gypsies in Spain is the Afro-American. Like the Gypsy, he expresses his feelings simply, honestly, graphically. Also as with the Gypsy there is rhythm in his body, and music in his heart” (Hammerstein 1945: xviii). As stated by Hutcheon (2006: 94) “an adaptation can obviously be used to engage in a larger social or cultural critique”. Adapters have vastly used adaptations to articulate their political positions and comment on synchronic ideologies. Otto Preminger's *Carmen* partly chooses to avert the political discourse and direct it towards gender politics.

The transcontinental transfer of *Carmen* demanded a change of medium: from the elitistic form of the Parisian opera to the popular medium

of cinema, albeit preserving the musicality of the mode of narrating and thus the musical genre. The adaptation from a bourgeois targeted audience operatic play to a populist American musical with an all-black cast, was a radical move, since it was the time before the Civil Rights Movement. Black performers were not necessarily welcome in mainstream stages. Black performers (musicians) were forced to play for a white audience with their face averted, while separate all-black theaters flourished at the time. Due to racial and political tension, a mixed-race love relationship presented on stage or on screen would not have been acceptable. By giving the characters of the plot, the same racial identity, Carmen has lost her racial otherness as a Gypsy between Spaniards and shifted the narrative discourse from racial politics to gender. This shift is contexted in the synchronic new discourse of women's rights, empowerment and fight for liberation towards the end of the WWII.

Carmen Jones is an example of what Hutcheon (2006: 158) refers to as *indigenization* of the adaptation. The verbal text of the opera is not simply translated, but transformed and adapted to the "Afro-American" dialect. This dialect is not recognized by the white American audience as language but a non-cultural form of communication used by the belittled Afro-Americans. In this adaptation, Don Jose, becomes Joe, but retains his military identity. Carmen, remains a worker, this time in a parachute manufacturing factory (the plot is dehistoricized by being dramatized during the WWII). Micaëla's character name is changed: it is Afro-Americanized to Cindy Lou. The Spanish bullfighter is now a famous boxer and Carmen's Gypsy companions are no more smugglers but sexually liberated women working in the cabaret. When Joe deserts the army for Carmen's sake, instead of the Spanish countryside, he flees and hides in a Chicago motel. There, Carmen takes some of her jewelry to a pawn shop, in order to ensure their survival. Joe is restrained in his motel room, while Carmen dwells in the public sphere, in order to economically support both. This shifting of roles provokes a reaction in the interwar male sensibility of both the protagonist and the viewer. Carmen's fate cannot be surpassed in her musical version. She is murdered by strangulation (a change with a stereotypical reference to the animalistic nature and cruelty of the Afro-Americans), by her lover Joe. The American Carmen is not condemned as an immoral, evil woman, but as a femme fatale who is too liberated for her time. After violently murdering Carmen, Joe sings to Bizet's tune "String me high on a tree/so that soon I'll be/ with my darling, my baby, my Carmen." and the inevitable echoes of lynchings and other forms of racial violence would have resonated with the U.S. audience at the turn of the century (Hutcheon 2006: 162).

The choice of actors of mixed descent for the main roles signifies an intention on the part of the director to make the play as identifiable and acceptable as possible to white American audiences. Dorothy Dandridge, with her light skin, European-like features, fashionable contemporary hairstyle, and the distinctive beauty spot on her upper lip, appears to be a black version of the very popular Marilyn Monroe. Likewise, her co-star, Harry Belafonte, an American of Caribbean descent, is characterized by his light brown skin and delicate features, which contrast with the deep dark colour of skin, broad structure of nose and full lips, stereotypical characteristics of the African-descent. Ellis in his "Studies in the Psychology of Sex" (1921), provides a very interesting insight into the Western perception of the sexuality of the Other. He states that it is difficult to evoke sexual attraction between two people structurally different on a racial basis (Gilman 1985: 237). He also argues that "inferior" races admire Western women more than women of their own class and race (Gilman 1985: 218). Thus, it can be said that the director Otto Preminger intended to make his "exotic" characters more appealing to a white audience and to tone down the otherness of his "Afro-American" protagonists, thus creating the illusion of a relative closeness of the Other.

Carmen Jones in an all-black cast movie loses her alterity as a Gypsy. Both Carmen and Joe are African Americans, at a time when in America they are as much Others as the Gypsies in Spain. The transformation of Carmen into an "Afro-American" story subtracted the internal relation of otherness between the two main characters. It is transposed to the relationship between characters and audience. As the figure (Figure 6) demonstrates, the white American audience, as well as the filmmakers, identify with Ego and Culture and classify the subjects of the story as their oppositional Others, as Nature. A different system of oppositions is constructed between the main characters, Carmen, Joe and Cindy Lou. Both Cindy Lou and Carmen are Alter to Joe, by gender, but Carmen is a double alien, due to gender and class, an *Allius*. Her liberated sexuality, the idea of the fallen woman, places her on the level of Nature, Chaos and thus Non-Culture. Cindy Lou, the translated character of Bizet's Micaëla, is a woman of similar class, race and ideology and moves in the semiotic scale between Extra-Culture and Non-Culture, when compared to Joe's Ego. Carmen's place in the semiotic system is not shifted: it is Joe who moves to the domain of Non-Culture and is being identified as Nature (the stereotypically perceived Nature of the Afro-American), governed by lawlessness, disorder and brutality. As the plot evolves, Joe moves from Culture to Nature, due to his animalistic display of violence. The focus is shifted from the Orien-

talistic view of race (and post-colonial racial politics) to sexual liberation. From Bizet’s and Mérimée’s bourgeois ideology - racial and class politics of the mid 19th century - the adaptation travels in time and space imbued by post-war middle class American ideology, were both Afro-Americans and women are equally Culture’s inner Others. As clearly stated by Leicester (1994: 250), *Carmen Jones* is a film that highlights “[...] war time and postwar anxieties about the decay of masculine power and authority when women are allowed to work”.]

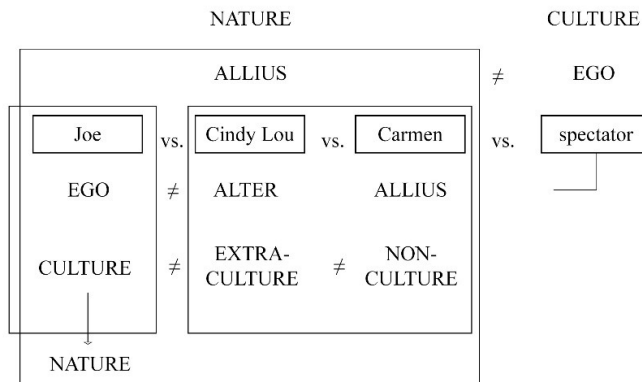


Figure 6: Cultural semiotic analysis: *Carmen Jones*.

The Wild, Wild Rose (1960) Wong Tin-Lam, film.

(Other by gender and culture)

The Wild, Wild Rose (original *Yeh-mei-kui chih-lien*), is a Hong Kong film directed by Wong Tin-Lam, released in 1960. This movie can be examined as another case of *dehistoricization and indigenization* of “Carmen”. It is mainly based on Carmen’s American adaptation, *Carmen Jones*. It is also a case of what Sonesson (2004: 169) calls the Americanization (instead of globalization) of culture. According to Sonesson (2004: 169), “this concept of sender culture is different from what the Tartu school calls sender versus receiver orientation: a culture with the former is one in which the sender adapts to the level of understanding and knowledge of the receiver. In the latter kind of culture, the receiver has to adapt”. He adds that “what the North Americans distribute are ‘deformed texts’ extracted from other cultures” and none of these texts would have reached the other cultures if haven’t formerly been made popular by North-American culture. The by now popular story of *Carmen* gets a postmodern reading when transposed to the noir-like setting of Hong Kong’s Wanchai district. All cast and language is Mandarin.

The movie belongs to the genre of the romantic musical. The main characters are Hanhua, Sijia and Suxie. Hanhua is a pianist, he is moral and faithful. He is betrothed to a simple Chinese lady (Suxie) and is a good son to his mother (an important attribute for Chinese culture). His counterpart is Sijia or The Wild Rose. She is a cabaret singer not a thief, a smuggler or a prostitute. She is also not as wild as her western versions. She does not sell herself to the cabaret's customers like her coworkers do, and she is very compassionate and proud. She is a liberated, independent woman with a strong temperament, until she falls in love with the male main character. After she becomes "engaged" to Hanhua, Sijia neglects herself, she renounces her work as a cabaret singer and her independence. She becomes a wife and a householder. Sijia is forced to live in poverty, while patiently and faithfully waiting for Hanhua to be released from prison. It is a time when love still signifies women's submission to legal and moral control and definition of their sexuality by men (Pollock 2003: 197). Hanhua from the other hand starts off as a virtuous, hardworking man, engaged to the lady-like Suxie, but as he gets involved with the liberated Sijia, evolves into a drunk, becomes violent, a murderer, a thief and a liar.

Sijia wears western clothes and sings famous opera songs adapted with mandarin lyrics. She metonymically signifies Western Culture. The director uses not only the *Habanera*, but other famous western opera songs, like *La donna é mobile*, *The Merry Widow* and *Madame Butterfly*. In order to maintain some of the original's Spanish essence, the director employs a scene of flamenco dancing. The indigenized "Carmens" with same race characters are appropriations which in effect deracialize some of the play's tensions, but the changes in time and place have other political repercussions. It is the time before Mao's Cultural Revolution (1966), when the West still exercised a significant influence on Asia's culture but at the same time was considered to pose a threat on Chinese culture's traditional values and morality.

The cultural semiotic relations between the characters are demonstrated in figure 7. Hanhua is identified at the beginning of the plot with Ego and Culture, which is the modern Chinese culture. Later on, corrupted through his exposure to western culture, nightlife and illegality, Hanhua moves to the Sphere of Nature and Non-Culture. Suxie, just like Micaëla is an Other to Ego as a female, and is identified along with Hanhua's mother as Extra-Culture. They metonymically stand for traditional Chinese culture. Sijia, is an Allius, an exotic, dangerous female that belongs to Nature, Chaos and thus Non-Culture. Sijia signifies for western modern Culture. Through contact of the two worlds, Hanhua and Sijia, the East and the West, the

virtuous and the morally fallen, the Traditional Chinese Culture and the Culture of the West, the ideality of masculinity and femininity is demonstrated, and the ideas of culture are contextualized. In this way, the movie cautions the viewer that the western Culture although appealing may be dangerously corruptive for its Culture, for the moral, ethical values that constitute Chinese tradition.

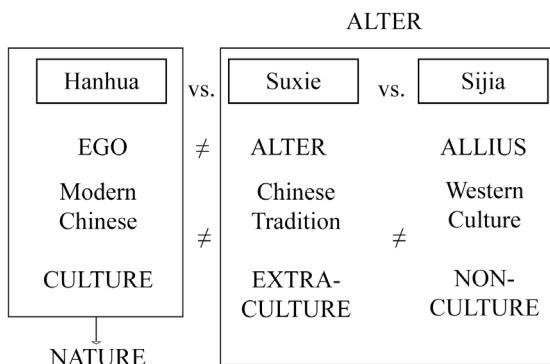


Figure 7: Cultural semiotic analysis: The wild, wild Rose.

Globalized adaptation:

Carmen Sandiego (2019) Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

(Other by individuality)

“Carmen Sandiego” is a very distinctive case of transmedial transfer. It started off as a series of computer games created by the American software company Broderbund in 1985, entitled “Where on earth is Carmen Sandiego”. In the 1990s, the franchise was extended into three television shows, books and comics, board games, a concert series, two planetarium shows, and two music albums. In 2019, HMH Productions co-produced the animated Netflix TV series Carmen Sandiego which ran for four seasons up to 2021.

This media franchise is classified as “mystery exploration”. Carmen Sandiego began as a thief of Latino origins and the ringleader of the criminal organization, V.I.L.E.. The protagonists which included the in-game character controlled by the computer user, are agents of the ACME Detective Agency who try to thwart the crooks’ plans to steal treasures from around the world, while the ultimate goal is to capture Carmen Sandiego herself. In HMH’s transfer into an animated TV series, Carmen Sandiego is not a villain or an antihero, but the heroine. She is recruited to V.I.L.E. in infancy and trained as a master thief, only to turn against them and seek to

undo their thievery. The story is told (for the first time) from the perspective of Carmen. Carmen, the *Femme Rouge*, steals valuable artifacts from the crooked company and donates them to humanitarian causes. She is a modern female version of Robin Hood⁵. The third party in this conflict is the ACME Detective Agency. The head of the agency and a foil to Carmen is an Interpol Officer acting together with his assistant, a female Other to Carmen.

Carmen moves between continents like a female James Bond and belongs to no country or nation, although her Latino identity is strongly suggested. Like immigrants, Carmen Sandiego is non-territorial, she is a radical Alterity, an extra-text. The globalization of culture has diminished the boundaries between cultures, nations, races and intertexts. In the globalization of Ego, Carmen as an Allius, a nomad, a non-person, moves in the shadows, in the cracks of time, and between the urban gaps. Her counterparts, the Interpol officer and his assistant, are signs for Order, Ego and territorial Culture. While the crooked global Company of thieves V.I.L.E., stands for the Globalization of corporate capitalism, a non-territorial Culture, an ultra-Ego (see Figure 8). According to Sonesson (2004: 171) “[...] it is conceivable that we are now living in a phase of history in which the Nation model of Culture continues to exist, but a new model that already identifies it with the Big Company begins to prevail”.

Sonesson (2004: 166) underlines that, “globalization, then, is, among other things, the hypertrophy of the inner Other”. In the second scenario of globalization, he explains, a significant part of the population, for example the immigrants (like the Latinos in North America), are inner Others for the state-nation Ego and live “in a territory that others define for them as being not-textual” (Sonesson 2004: 167). The inner Others appear as being members of Non-Culture or Extra-Culture, deprived of territory. This deprivation is what constitutes, inter alia, the Alterity of the inner Other. In Sonesson’s third scenario of globalization, territory loses its significance as a definition of culture. The cultural semiosphere is no more defined by its territorial borders. “Now we are confronted with a case in which a culture does not relate to the state-nation at all. That is what happens in the third scenario of globalization [...]” (Sonesson 2004: 170). He adds that [...] in the long run, this may turn out to be the most dramatic model of globalization: when what defines the Culture, within the dialectics of cultural semiotics, it is no longer a state-nation with its territory, but something else, such as a company” (Sonesson 2004: 170).

⁵ “The little Red Robin Hood.”, 1 (1) [09:20].

Third model of Globalization

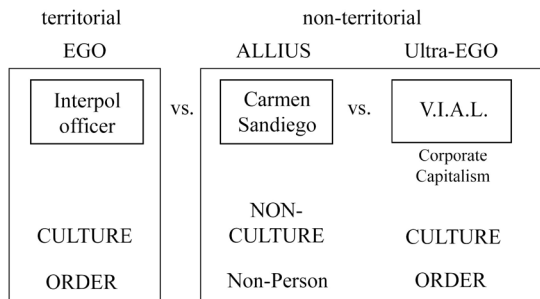


Figure 8: Cultural semiotic analysis: Carmen Sandiego.

Conclusion

In this paper, the author has attempted to demonstrate the way in which “Carmen” as a woman-sign has acted as a vehicle of cultural signification through two centuries of adaptations. Cultural semiotics has been employed to examine how “Carmen” as an alterity signifies the way in which Cultures see their inner Others. The research followed “Carmen” since her making, during the era of mid 19th century European bourgeois ideology, along the early 20th century mid and post war anxieties of the North-American and Chinese cultures. Two examples of Americanized texts of the 20th century were examined, followed by an analyses of a contemporary 21st century example of corporate capitalism as a scenario of globalization.

It has been noted that as *Carmen* is transmedially transferred through time and space, her Otherness is decreased. In her making, Carmen is an Other because of her gender, her class and her race. In 19th century colonial politics, the inner Other is constructed through signification practices, such as literature and representation, in order to serve the ideology of cultural/racial inferiority and legitimize white supremacy and exertion of power. As her story gets indigenized, Carmen loses her Alterity as a story of mixed-race love and becomes an Afro-American, an inner Other for the white American audience. Carmen Jones is an Other by gender, class and race, only to the white American audience. Her character, along with Joes, is constructed mediated by north-American ideology regarding the Orientalistic and colonial viewing of the Afro-Americans. As claimed by Said ([1978] 1996: 14), the European and thus western culture gained its strength and identity by contrasting itself with the East as a kind of substitute or even subliminal self. East is constructed as the Other of the West, through which European civilizations were defined “as its oppositional im-

age". Carmen Jones though is a two leveled signification system. The first concerns the way in which the white audience views the "Afro-American" culture and the second is about the relationships constructed between the all-black protagonists. Analyzing the second system of relationships, Carmen is an Other only by gender, giving room for discourse about the gender politics of the mid war era and male anxieties about the decay of masculine power and authority.

This schema is inverted when Carmen moves to the East and is adapted as a romantic film in late 20th century China. The model which the members of the Chinese culture make of themselves can be illustrated through "The Wild, Wild Rose". Carmen, or Sijia, sheds her racial identity to be metonymically constructed as the exotic, this time coming from the West, inner Other. She is still an Other due to her gender. Women in Chinese culture in the 1960's, before Mao's Cultural Revolution, were still considered to be inferior then men and bound to submission. Ethics and sexual morality were considered to be the highest of virtues within Chinese culture. The sexually liberated West of the 1960's thus posed a great threat to modern Chinese culture through their cultural interface. "The Wild, Wild Rose" was a warning of moral and cultural decay. It is also a suggestion to eliminate all corruptive contacts with the globalizing West, while regaining the lost identity by re-connecting with the traditional Chinese culture.

The last case study of this paper is an extreme leap in space and time. *Carmen*, through two centuries of several adaptations in all kinds of mediums, has become a myth, a cultural sign. In *Carmen Sandiego*, Carmen retains some of Mérimée's original inspiration, which are her Latin origins, lawlessness, fearlessness and independence. Carmen Sandiego is a "non-territorial text", she has no ethnic identity and neither do her narrative counterparts. Carmen Sandiego can be read as a modern example of the extreme scenario of Globalization, which is that of corporate capitalism.

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