

## NARRATOLOGICAL APPROACH OF THE FILM ADAPTATION OF THÉRÈSE DESQUEYROUX BY FRANÇOIS MAURIAC

*Despina Gialatzi*  
*Aristotle University of Thessaloniki*  
*despinagialatzi@hotmail.com*

### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to examine translation as a phenomenon from literature into movies through isotopies. In particular, the research concentrates on the intertextual phenomenon between the original classic version in literature and the two film versions (1962 and 2012). In Gideon Toury's work, *translation* is seen as an intertextual phenomenon. The three "texts" form an intertextual triangle. Mauriac's classic novel is at the top of the triangle as a significant guide, and at the same time the two films rest on the triangle's base. In 1927, the French writer, François Mauriac wrote his iconic work, *Thérèse Desqueyroux*. In his novel, the writer describes the tragic story of a poisoner. This is a woman who hovers between the ro-

mantic of the past and the realism of the present. The young heroine lets herself go psychically into her dreams, and she does not see reality in its logical dimension. Her marriage is not a romantic, happy and ideal union taken from the romantic works of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is a cold, cruel and indifferent marriage. In a way, Thérèse is a victim of herself. Unveiling the psychographic image of this fatal woman called Thérèse D, the application of Greimas's narratological method offers a fertile field of research, and the examination of the transformation into a double cinematographic portrait. Thérèse is a woman prisoner in her name: Desqueyroux. The narrative structure of the work turns on the fragile psyche of the heroine. Is she really a fragile female figure or, a cruel poisoner in a search of mental freedom?

**Keywords:** liberty, nature, crime, justice, isotopies, Thérèse Desqueyroux, intersémiotique translation

## 1. Introduction

A film is difficult to explain because it is easy to understand, remarks Christian Metz. The film articulates a kind of speech, a discourse (*parole*) under a certain filming language (*langue*) which constitutes the language (*langage*) of the cinema. So, the most important challenge is exactly that. A deep and substantial understanding of cinema as discourse, that is, an understanding of the enunciation of the film text. Stephen Heath<sup>1</sup> makes a reference to the analysis by Metz: “insisted on a correspondence between the filming image and the sentence in natural language; the image is always actualized”. And also, he adds: “this is not a purely virtual lexical unit [...] but at the very least, and without speaking of the connotations, it signifies [...]”. In this case study, there is the cigarette as an example. It means that a close-up<sup>2</sup> of a cigarette does not mean a cigarette. In this study, the cigarette is not just a cigarette, but takes on another dimension as the heroine always has one in her mouth. The narrative technique is the *point de vue*<sup>3</sup>;

<sup>1</sup> See the study Questions of Cinema of Stephen Heath (Professor of English and French Literature and Culture), (Heath, 1981, 93); See also *Essais sur la signification au cinéma: tomes I et II* (ed. 2013 [2003]) by Christian Metz.

<sup>2</sup> See the example from the *gros plan de revolver* p. 72, Metz, C. 1971. *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*, T. 1. Paris: Klincksieck; Also, Metz, C. 1964. “Le cinéma: Langue ou langage?” *Communications* 4, 52–90.

<sup>3</sup> See the chapter *The auteur theory In Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* by Peter Wollen, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019 (Wollen, 2019, 74–115); And as said Jean Yves Tadie *Real-*

this is the key to the interpretation and understanding of the meaning of the film. The aim of this paper is to review the literature of translation to films through isotopes. In particular, the research focuses on the intertextual phenomenon between the original classic version in literature and the two film versions (1962 and 2012). The three “texts” form an intertextual triangle. Mauriac’s classic novel remains at the top of this triangle as an important guide, and at the same time the two films rest on the base. The heroine claims the power or right to act, speak or think as she pleases without hindrance or limitation. One risks nemesis by uttering words like freedom, as it is precisely the inevitable factor in the downfall of someone or something. The state of being free (acquittal / non-lieu<sup>4</sup>) within society from oppressive restrictions (provincial maintenance) imposed by authority on one’s lifestyle, behavior or political views is precisely the core of the novel. In 1927, French writer François Mauriac wrote his landmark work, *Thérèse Desqueyroux*. In her novel, she describes the tragic story of a poisoner. Due to unveil the psychographic image of this fatal woman<sup>5</sup> called Thérèse D, the application of Greimas’s narratological method offers a fertile field of research, and the examination of the transformation into a double cinematographic portrait. Thérèse is a woman prisoner in her name: Desqueyroux. The narrative structure of the work turns on the fragile psyche of the heroine. But, is she really a fragile female figure or, a cruel poisoner in a search of mental freedom?

## 2. The novelist François Mauriac and the quality of the novel

### 2.1 A Catholic who writes Nobel novels

François Mauriac<sup>6</sup> was a French writer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>7</sup> and was born in Bordeaux in 1885. He studied at the University of Bordeaux, but decided to devote himself to writing. He quickly distinguished himself as a novel-

---

*ism is disturbed by prophecy, freedom by tragedy and narration by the interventions of the author* (Tadié, 1990, 209).

<sup>4</sup> *Non-lieu*: In French, he declares that the case is closed and that the accused is innocent.

<sup>5</sup> *femme fatale* as Sphinx; As a female figure, it is associated with the fatally passionate woman and is thus identified with the sphinx. A motif that is often found in art. Thérèse experiences the passions silently, but they exist and are manifested by her apathy.

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Luc Barré. 2009. *François Mauriac: biographie intime, 1885-1940*. Fayard.

<sup>7</sup> See François Mauriac (1885–1970) in *Dictionnaire de la Littérature française du XXe siècle: Les Dictionnaires d’Universalis*.

ist, essayist, poet, theatrical writer and journalist. After 1933 he appears as an Academician, as he was elected a member of the French Academy. In addition, he received the first prize of the Grand Prix du roman from the French Academy in 1926, while in 1952 he was awarded the Nobel<sup>8</sup> Prize for Literature. In the year 1958 after the war, he was awarded the Grand Cross of the Légion d'Honneur and General de Gaulle himself made him a Grand Officer. He was always a worker of the human spirit and a man of the restless faith. *Thérèse Desqueyroux*, his most famous work, was published in 1927. He died in Paris in 1970.

## 2.2 The story of a crime: *Thérèse Desqueyroux*

This fascinating novel by the French author Mauriac is a literary portrait of a woman imprisoned in solitude, an entity cut off from everything, a tragic figure from all sides, a dark heroine who will try so suddenly, at any cost, and without more critical reservations, to be freed from the unbearable yoke of her marriage and the torture imposed on her without even being asked first. Mauriac's enigmatic "religious" novels have puzzled many critics, as they abound in complex elements of human existence, the dark side of human life. The dark side of the human soul and their religious spiritual content is not immediately apparent. A fundamental issue in Mauriac's novels, as in his personal life, was the conflict between passion and religious virtue<sup>9</sup>. He really knew how to write about women. Of his most famous novel, *Thérèse Desqueyroux*<sup>10</sup> (1927), he said, echoing Flaubert's remark about *Madame Bovary*, "Thérèse Desqueyroux, c'est moi." The whole work is nothing more than the confession<sup>11</sup> of a criminal wife, who is ultimately judged by her "judge" husband. It is the testimony of a heroine, where her crime is hushed up because her family does not allow the scandal to be seen. The hypocrisy of the provincial bourgeoisie suffocates the heroine. Her

<sup>8</sup> François Mauriac: The Nobel Prize in Literature 1952: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1952/mauriac/biographical/>.

<sup>9</sup> Also, *Le romancier, l'écrivain et Dieu* de Dominique Rougé Université Pédagogique de Cracovie, *Romanica Cracoviensia*, Tom 9, Numer 1, 92–100: <https://www.ejournals.eu/Romanica-Cracoviensia/2009/Numer-1/art/3237/>.

<sup>10</sup> See *Thérèse Desqueyroux* in *Dictionnaire des oeuvres de tous les temps et de tous les pays: littérature, philosophie, musique, sciences* by Robert Laffont, S. E. D. E., 1968.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapitre II *La Confession De Thérèse Desqueyroux* in François Mauriac, *Les paroles restent*, Grasset, 2014.

grave and her eternal cell are both the family and the conjugal hearth. She is imprisoned, buried in her house. In this novel, the reader searches: Why did Thérèse Desqueyroux marry Bernard Desqueyroux? Why did Thérèse Desqueyroux turn into a monster? Why did Thérèse Desqueyroux want to kill Bernard Desqueyroux? Mauriac had throughout his life a passion for human justice. He presents the vitality of man and his transformation into a monster and at the same time, looks for the humanity of the world in his work. The family itself takes the law into its own hands in hiding the truth: namely, the crime between the spouses. The novel of discontent could be an alternative title for the tragic story of Thérèse. However, the author chooses the title to be a female main name, telling the reader how confident he is about his literary portrait. Thérèse 's family tragedy shows the author's desire to turn the literary writing towards tragedy through different stages of dehumanization of the hero. Family dynasties annihilate the individual. Everyone knew he had tried to do it, but the honor of the family was more important than the truth.

### **3. Narrative analysis : Thérèse Desqueyroux by François Mauriac**

#### **3.1 Thérèse Desqueyroux: summary**

In Arzelouse, a small village in the French countryside surrounded by pine trees, weddings are organized to unite local families and above all to unite their land. Somehow, the young woman Thérèse Larroque also becomes the married woman Madame Thérèse Desqueyroux. This is the tragic story of an unhappy woman, a wife of a simple young rich country man. She's really trapped in supposed decency and fame, in hypocritical duty and lies. She is trapped in her loneliness, in the burden of this peasant society and also, in the interests of her conservative family. So, in order to avoid scandal and to protect both their personal interests and those of their family, Monsieur Larroque's father and her husband Bernard Desqueyroux, whom his wife Thérèse tried to poison, decide to cover up the crime with a true lie. One autumn evening, the young woman walks out of the courthouse accompanied by her father's lawyer and, of course, her father himself, as testimony and confessions drop the charge against her. During this endless journey that must bring her back to her marital home, Thérèse resurrects the past with her memories and seeks to discover the reasons why she tried to poison her husband. Completely

indifferent to the young woman, her family keeps her locked in her room and Thérèse falls into such utter loneliness that her frightened husband no longer knows what decision to make about the continuation of their marriage and their life and whether he would have to set her free after all. The marriage finally consummated, Bernard frees Thérèse and takes her to Paris where he intends to settle, avoiding any attempt to explain her guilty crime. Thérèse is finally free and walks completely alone in the busy streets of the capital.

### 3.2 Thérèse Desqueyroux: narrative syntax

Although the narrative structure of a literary text is more easily analyzed in simple and short texts, this narrative study attempts to present the narrative structure of a classic novel from French literature. Mauriac tried to write contemporary tragedies with a particular narrative ethic, a classic novel with a Rakhine identity from the French 17<sup>th</sup> century. François Mauriac's French novel, *Thérèse Desqueyroux*, is the principal example of this narrative analysis by Greimas<sup>12</sup>.

#### 3.2.1 Actantial roles and actors

The first stage of analysis is the distribution of active roles to active individuals. From the distribution, it seems that the subject is obviously Thérèse, after all her name is the title of the work. The most important element of distribution is the object of value, which for Thérèse is none other than her freedom.

<sup>12</sup> See for the narrative theory of Greimas:

Greimas, A. J. 1966. *Sémantique structurale: Recherche de méthode*. Paris: Larousse;  
 Greimas, A. J. 1968. Conditions d'une sémiotique du monde naturelle. *Langages: Pratiques et langages gestuels*, Vol. 3, No. 10, 3–35;  
 Greimas, A. J. 1970. *Du sens. Essais sémiotique*. Paris: Le Seuil, 49–91;  
 Greimas, A. J. 1973. Description et narrativité à propos de La Ficelle de Guy de Maupassant. In *Revue canadienne de linguistique romane 1*. Ontario: University of Windsor Press. [also published in Greimas, A. J. 1983. *Du sens II: Essais Sémiotiques*. Paris: Le Seuil 135–155];  
 Greimas, A. J. 1984. *Sémiotique figurative et sémiotique plastique. Actes sémiotiques*. Paris: Groupe de recherches sémio-linguistiques, VI, 60, 3–24;  
 Greimas, A. J., J. Courtés. 1979. *Sémiotique. [1] Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage*. Paris: Classiques Hachette.

**Table 1:** Distribution

<b>Actants</b>	<b>Actors</b>
Subject	<i>Thérèse Desqueyroux</i>
Object	<i>liberty</i>
Sender	<i>nemesis (divine justice)</i>
Recipient	<i>Thérèse (Thérèse Larroque)</i>
Helper	<i>cigarettes</i>
Opponent	<i>family justice</i>

### 3.2.2 Analysis of the narrative syntax

The next stage of the study is analysis of the narrative syntax. This analysis allows the individual episodes of the plot to be separated. At the same time, freedom as an object of value is verified in this case and the narrative structure of the literary portrait of Thérèse is analyzed.

**Table 2:** List of episodes

<b>Episodes</b>	
Episode 1: prologue	<i>Thérèse Desqueyroux</i>
Episode 2: <i>qualifying test</i>	<i>marriage</i>
Episode 3: <i>decisive test</i>	<i>poisoning</i>
Episode 4: <i>glorifying test</i>	<i>family justice</i>
Episode 5: <i>recognition</i>	<i>liberty</i>

### 3.2.3 Isotopies in the novel *Thérèse Desqueyroux*

In the next stage, the similarities of the literary text are recorded and the most important of them are distinguished. The isotopies<sup>13</sup> arise from the constant repetition of signs and regulate the flow of the plot, highlighting the main meanings of the text. The main isotopy is identified, i.e., the fixed

<sup>13</sup> See also for further informations Chapter 5 *Theory of isotopies* in Λαγόπουλος, Α.-Φ., Boklund-Λαγοπούλου, Κ.-Μ. 2016. *Θεωρία σημειωτικής: Η παράδοση του Ferdinand de Saussure*. Αθήνα: Πατάκης, 129–167; Lagopoulos, A., K. Boklund-Lagoroulou. 2021. *Theory and Methodology of Semiotics the Tradition of Ferdinand de Saussure*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 130–162.

contrast repeated in the text and a complementary contrast which is equally considerable due to constant repetition.

**Table 3:** List of Isotopies

<b>Isotopies</b>
<i>human vs nature</i> <i>people vs trees</i>
<i>judicial justice vs family justice</i> <i>human justice vs divine justice</i>
<i>liberty vs limitation</i>
<i>being vs seeming</i> <i>truth vs lies</i> <i>face vs mask</i>
<i>Capital vs Province</i> <i>Paris vs Argelouse</i>
<i>life vs death</i>
<i>predatory vs prey</i> <i>man, vs woman</i> <i>husband vs wife</i>

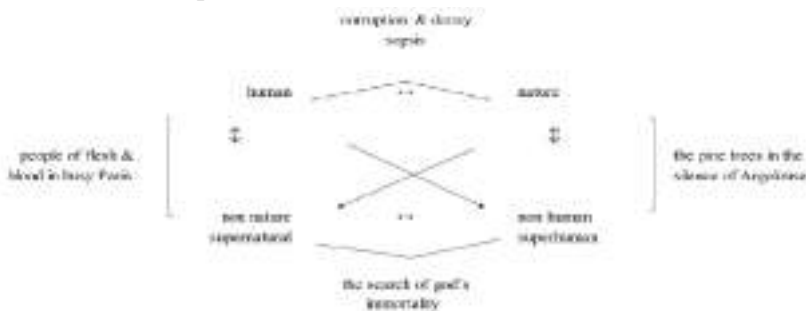
For Greimas, *isotopie* is founded on the concept of the *sign / signe*. The most interesting part of this analysis is the search for and identification of the isotopies in the novel, *Thérèse Desqueyroux*. The major isotopie is *human vs nature (people vs trees)*, and also the crucial isotopie *judicial justice vs family justice / human justice vs divine justice* as equal were identified. The minor isotopies were identified as an important factor of stability: *truth vs lies / face vs mask / life vs death, man vs woman / husband vs wife*. Isotopies in the novel such as *being vs seeming / Capital vs Province / Paris vs Argelouse predatory vs prey* have a supporting role. The isotopie *liberty vs limitation* is a considerable isotopie because it interprets the heroine's psychological condition and defines her *passion criminelle* by indenting her tragedy. The isotopie is created on the basis of the repeating signs in the words which appear in the literary text. Also for Greimas, the *isotopie* is, the mechanism that ensures the text's homogeneity and coherence.



### 3.2.4 Semiotic square

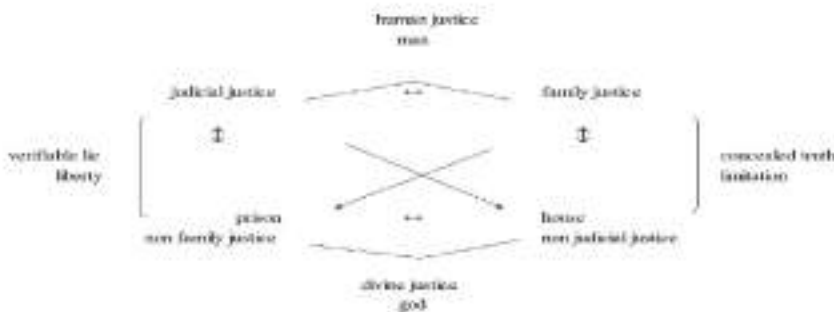
The final stage presents the meaning of the text, condensed with the development of the semiotic square. The first square is structured by the main isotope of the text, and the second is structured by the complementary one. In Greimas' narratology, this game of moral values emerges if we construct the so-called semiotic square of the play. The semiotic square shows how the key isotopies relate to each other and to the plot.

**Table 4:** Semiotic square I



The values presented by the author in the work can be placed around the structure of each square. The main characters of the plot, who support these values, can also be placed here. The semiotic square shows how the play mobilizes the values of its core theme. In this work, the passage is constructed through the symbols. They are not hidden but not exactly obvious, but need interpretation. They require an interpretation of the signs, which are obvious, but at the same time hiding something. Semiotics, therefore, sees each art rather as a “symbol”, that is, something that does not need a solution, but an interpretation.

**Table 5:** Semiotic square II



If the basic isotopie of the work is taken, i.e., the main contrast, it can form the first main semiotic square. In this literary work, human is con-

trusted with nature; they are opposite conditions. However, from these two opposite concepts, two contradictory concepts can be formed: non-nature and non-human. If these contradictory concepts are placed diagonally to the original, a square is created. Similarly, for the complementary square, the same procedure is followed for the contrast of justice and another square is obtained which works in addition to the first one. If the development process has been done correctly, there will be a relation of implication between the lower angles and the concepts immediately above. Here, indeed, it implies that this is because Thérèse finally hates the nature in which she grows up and wants to run away, as happens at the end of the plot where she appears free in Paris. At the same time the heroine is between judicial justice and family justice with the second to decide her fate. Judicial justice has acquitted her thanks to the false testimony of the family, and she is now waiting for divine justice and wondering if there is a chance for a redemption. The important thing is that in the end the subject acquires the object of value, the freedom and of course the pleasure with her faithful companion in life, the cigarette.

#### 4. Translating semantic isotopies with Thérèse 's point of view

##### 4.1 Intersemiotic translation

Gideon Toury<sup>14</sup> introduced the term semiotics of translation in 1980 by which he describes the translation process as a semiotic activity. According to Toury<sup>15</sup> (1986) *Translation* is divided into two parts: the *Intersemiotic translation* and then the *Intrasemiotic translation*. With its series the *Intrasemiotic translation* is divided also into two parts: the *intersystemic / interlingual* and the *intrasystemic / intralingual*. The phenomenon of *Intrasemiotic translation* covers the process of translation from the text to the film of 1962 and again from that text to the movie of 2012, i.e., it covers the two sides of the isosceles intertextual triangle, while at its base the interaction of the two films appears as *intrasystemic / intralingual translation*. The semantic isotopie of translation was carried out according to Thérèse's view. It is divided into three parts, according to the year of creation: starting with Mauriac's literary point of view, which is the basis, then Franzu's point of view in 1962 and Miller's point of view in 2012 are created and the inter-

<sup>14</sup> Toury, G. 1980. *In search of a theory of translation*. Tel Aviv: Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics Tel Aviv University, 11–13.

<sup>15</sup> Toury, G. 1986. Translation: A Cultural-Semiotic Perspective. In Sebeok, T. (ed.). *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics*, Vol. 2. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1111–1124.

action between them. In the following examples, the isotopies are found in the images translated from the literary text. It is a contemporary version of the book in 2012 and an earlier one from 1962.

#### 4.2 Mauriac's point of view

The perspective of the French author is directed towards the Eternal Solitude of Thérèse. In Thérèse Desqueyroux's novel, published in 1927, François Mauriac narrates the drama of a woman who comes face to face with family justice. The composition of the narrative is based on a long monologue, which is essentially an entire novel<sup>16</sup>. There is only one perspective in the text which is clear before the first chapter, where the author appears in a short prologue as another judge god of his own heroine. Thus, the theme of justice plays an important role in the work. Thérèse is the one who sees the desolation of her life and turns into a tragic figure similar to the heroines of Racine<sup>17</sup>. The novelist reads the mind of his female character, but his heroine sees nothing and is doomed to live her fate. The novelist's voice is the voice of divine justice<sup>18</sup>. Thérèse's point of view is combined with Mauriac's point of view, since we are talking about a well-known narrator. The art of the novelist in this literary work resembles the art of the director. As Thérèse recalls her past when preparing her apology, as a result of which she goes back in time and the author becomes the director of his heroine's past. Nature plays a leading role in the work, but for Mauriac from the beginning nature was essentially corrupt, dirty and fallen. He had to write about it as such and not about beautiful sounds, idyllic landscapes and pleasing smells (human vs nature). In his most famous work, Thérèse Desqueyroux, she is an ill-married woman and she wants desperately to break free herself from social pressures (liberty vs limitation). His central intellectual narrative concerns, obviously his exploration of the human soul

<sup>16</sup> For his novel technique, additional information in chapter *Narratology* (Mauriac F., Thérèse Desqueyroux, 1989 [1927], 157–165).

<sup>17</sup> This is a sort of tragic novel and seems as a tragic family story, linked in Racine's heritage of tragedy. As a genre, the tragedy brings out people's criminal passions. Racine Jean (1639–1699): one of the pillars of French drama. His work is inspired by the ancient Greek ideal of tragedy, it distinguishes itself from French literature.

See also in Lagarde, A., L. Michard. 2004 [2002/ 1998/ 1985]. *XVIIe Siècle: Les grands auteurs Français anthologie et histoire littéraire*. Paris: Bordas/Seje, 283–316. & Salomon, P. 1993. *Littérature Française. Guides Bordas*. Paris: Bordas, 71–73.

<sup>18</sup> Jean-Yves Tadié, *Le roman au XXe siècle*, P. Belfond, 1990.

as catholic creature, and of course his deep commitment to human justice. These elements make him a man writer of our space and time and certainly, his famous intellectual novels<sup>19</sup> have very much to offer the modern reader. Although a deeply religious Catholic, this identity remains transparent in his work, and for this reason some have dismissed him as a common “pornographer”<sup>20</sup>, as Mauriac did not write about fundamental theological issues such as immortality, redemption and the salvation of souls (human justice vs divine justice).

### 4.3 Franzu’s point of view

Thérèse Desqueyroux, with Emmanuelle Riva in the title role; this is an adaptation (1962) of the literary work (1927) by George Franzu<sup>21</sup>. The director’s perspective does not match the era of the book, since the plot of the film does not take place in 1927. It stands in interesting contrast with the later adaptation which remains faithful to the chronology. Since the dialogues are written by the author of the literary work, there is considerable consistency in both the scenes and the text. The director chooses the courthouse, Palais de Justice, and the prison bars as the foreground (Figure 1). As expected, the filmic text follows the literary narrative with consistency, once again sketching a portrait of Thérèse. The heroine prepares her apology while returning to the conjugal hearth to confront her husband whom she poisoned (Figure 2). Well, Thérèse was acquitted by the judge, but at her house, another judge, her husband, is waiting for her. He will condemn her to an eternal prison, inside the house and inside the forest, as the isotopic *judicial justice vs family justice*.

---

<sup>19</sup> 1922 – *Le Baiser au lépreux* / «The Kiss to the Leper», 1925 – *Le Désert de l’amour* «The Desert of Love» / 1935 – *La Fin de la nuit* «The End of the Night» / 1938 – *Thérèse chez le docteur*, «Thérèse and the Doctor» / 1933 – *Thérèse à l’hôtel*, «Thérèse at the Hotel» / *Thérèse and the Doctor* and *Thérèse at the Hotel*.

See also in Lagarde, A., L. Michard. 2004 [2002/ 1998/ 1985]. *XVIIe Siècle: Les grands auteurs Français anthologie et histoire littéraire*. Paris: Bordas/Seje, 507–517. & Salomon, P. 1993. *Littérature Française. Guides Bordas*. Paris: Bordas, 187.

<sup>20</sup> See chapter 11 *the making and remaking of Thérèse Desqueyroux: one novel, two films* (Homer B. Pettey, 2019, 111).

<sup>21</sup> Raymond Durnat, *Franju: Movie Edition*, University of California Press, 1968 (Durnat, 1968, 141). & Kate Ince, *Georges Franju*, Manchester University Press, 2005 (Ince, 2005, 163).



**Figure 1:** Screenshot 00:02:05



**Figure 2:** Screenshot 00:04:59

In the literary text, in terms of the isotopie human vs nature, it is clear that Thérèse feels trapped in the customs of the countryside, like the prey that her hunter husband brings home every day. Thus, Thérèse becomes prey for her predatory husband (Figure 3).



**Figure 3:** Screenshot 00:35:50

Thérèse is transformed into a monster condemned to her loneliness, with only her cigarettes for company (Figure 4). Her faithful companion are her cigarettes and certainly the main helper of a prisoner to cope with isolation (Figure 5). Like a prisoner in a literal prison, looking for her cigarettes, Thérèse lives to smoke (Figure 5).



Figure 4: Screenshot 01:22:38



Figure 5: Screenshot 01:24:21

Again and again, the motif of the cigarette returns, but now for the last time, Thérèse is in Paris with her husband and smokes again and again. She puts out her cigarette on the sidewalk as the fidelity to the literary text dictates and as the text by Mauriac remarks in the final chapter XIII (Mauriac F., *Thérèse Desqueyroux*, 2013 [1959/1947], 108–115) and as confirmed by the isotopie *liberty vs limitation*. She is no longer worried about starting a fire, like when she put out her cigarettes in the forest (Figure 6). Now Thérèse is all alone in Paris, and she is free far from the provincial prison, and she is breathing again (Figure 6).



**Figure 6:** Screenshot 01:35:32

The director once again offers us a happy portrait of Thérèse and then closing the film he gives a shot of the cosmopolitan capital of Paris (Figure 7). One shot of the busy city continues the film narration (Figure 8). Of course, the last shot of the film is a shot of the countryside in the Province, Argelouse, declaring the opposition of the basic isotope *human vs nature* (Figure 9).



**Figure 7:** Screenshot 01:41:42



**Figure 8:** Screenshot 01:41:44



Figure 9: Screenshot 01:42:03

#### 4.4 Miller's point of view

In 2012, *Thérèse Desqueyroux* by Claude miller is another adaptation of the literary work from paper on screen. A brilliant film adaptation, nominated for the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. In this version, starring the famous actress, Audrey Tautou. This more modern version has particularly helped to bring the Catholic, Francois Mauriac, closer to a wider and not strictly literary audience. The director's point of view focuses on the portrait of Thérèse (Figure 10). It is a filmic portrait with a direct and continuous reference to her helper<sup>22</sup> / assistant, i.e., the only companion she has throughout the plot, the cigarette (Figure 11). The foreground of the film belongs to the happy face of the teenage Thérèse, where she is in the countryside and is happy with her friend Anna in the woods (Figure 12). They cross the forest with their bikes and the main isotopic *human vs nature* is located. Also, the director chooses to present first the first leg of the isotopic and either then or second to emphasize both the loneliness of man and the desolation of nature (Figure 13).



Figure 10: Screenshot 00:00:41



Figure 11: Screenshot 01:26:42

<sup>22</sup> Drawing on the actantial model developed by Greimas.



**Table 6:** *The helper cigarette in action*



Then it presents both of them together, verifying the isotopie. Its approach differs from the previous adaptation, as it shows the happy world of the teenage Thérèse, before the cigarette enters her life, and she is likely to be sent to prison as a common criminal. The rest of Thérèse's portraits show her with her faithful companion, the cigarette (Table 6). In almost all the scenes, Thérèse appears with a cigarette in her mouth.



Figure 12: Screenshot 00:01:04



Figure 13: Screenshot 00:01:33

There is a climax in the filmic text as Thérèse oppressed by her life and before reaching the crime, dreams that she is running in the forest. She lights a cigarette and throws it in the pine trees. The main isotopie *human vs nature* of the literary text not only appears in the friendly filmic text, but also peaks to show the heroine's impasse and her need to destroy what limits her. For her husband and her father, the trees have greater value than herself, so she also seeks her own justification in a dream with fire (Figure 14).



Figure 14: Screenshot 00:54:30

The director especially emphasizes the heroine's relationship with cigarettes as a comforting pleasure by placing an introductory scene of the heroine. Thérèse walks in the forest with her future husband, and they talk to each other about the union of their fortunes, and not the union of their lives, as if it were not an emotional union of two young people but a joint commercial transaction (Figure 15). So, Thérèse extinguishes her cigarette in the middle of the woods and very carefully places it in a metal box. There is always the fear of fire, regardless of whether after her marriage she herself dreams of setting it on fire, igniting her desire for freedom. Similarly, at the end of the film she is once again with her husband in a café in Paris and of course she smokes happily and ostentatiously. She enjoys it and stubs it out on the pavement, no longer having the fear of fire (Figure 16). After all, no one can set fire to the pavement as written in the literary text (Mauriac F., Thérèse Desqueyroux, 2013 [1959/1947], 108).



**Figure 15:** Screenshot 00:05:38



**Figure 16:** Screenshot 01:36:47

Finally, the director closes the film and the last shot shows Thérèse walking through a river of people and slowly approaching the viewer. She is smiling because she is free among people and no longer unhappy among the trees. So, if the main semantic isotopie *human vs nature* dominates in this most recent film, it is because the other important isotopie *judicial justice vs family justice* culminated with the vital dream of Thérèse, although

transformed into a monster by committing a “crime”, in the end she wins her freedom and comes out of the family prison, far from the lifeless pines and next to people of flesh and blood (Figure 17).



Figure 17: Screenshot 01:41:19



Figure 18: Screenshot 01:17:49

Finally, it is worth noting that the director emphasizes again and again the heroine's unhappiness with her married life in the woods. More specifically, the main isotopic *human vs nature* is verified again, when Thérèse crosses the forest and finds herself in her car. Her outstretched hand violently touches the glass and hides her face, which is reflected in the image among the trees (Figure 18).

#### 4.5 Fidelity from literature to film

The issue of the film's fidelity<sup>23</sup> to the literary text is both a problem and a challenge for the filmmaker. The film adaptation of a book requires a great deal of freedom, in order for the subject matter to acquire its cinematic form. Greimas presents isotopic as a concept of textual semantics, mean-

<sup>23</sup> See further information in Corrigan, T. 1999. *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader*. Upper Saddle River N. J: Prentice Hall, 20. & Beja, M. 1979. *Film & Literature, an Introduction*. New York: Longman, 186., and also in Stam, R., A. Raengo. 2008. *A Companion to Literature and Film*. Malden MA: Blackwell Pub, 34, 69.

ing that analysis of isotopic concerns the content of the text, the signified, not the signifier. We are interested in the meaning of the image, that is, the form of the signified. The examination of the narratological<sup>24</sup> analysis aims at how this meaning is created, and interest also turns to the form of the signifier. The readers of the written text or the audience, the readers of the visual text encounter the figurative and descriptive language (verbal or visual) of the surface of the text, with its actors, its episodes, and its direction. From this surface of the text emerges interpretation by infiltration, through the semantic isotopies of the written language or the visual images and dialogue of the work, to the basic semantic contrasts activated by the narrative. The fidelity to the linearity of the novel betrays its spirit, but it is impossible for the filmmaker to avoid the consistency of the linearity of the text. It is not a metaphorical marriage<sup>25</sup> between the two genres, but a transformation of the literary text into a visual text, with the text always being more complete. The visual text focuses on certain points, such as for example the cigarette as an assistant, in some others it changes them and in others completely erases them.

## 5. Conclusion

A general finding is that a virtual message is fixed in a given semiotic system, such as for example the title of the work in synergy with the background, or even the name of the actress and again in synergy with the background. A specific absence in space or a specific placement in space affects the final interpretation both figuratively and intertextually, since it functions as a signifier or as an index. In the present case the title of the film, both the 1962 version and the 2012 version, is identical to the title of the literary work, i.e., the main name of the heroine, Thérèse Desqueyroux. The most important element is that in the background the bark of a tree, and the cracked bark of an old tree appear, giving the impression to the reader of the filmic text, that the feminine noun is inextricably linked to the tree (Figure 19).

<sup>24</sup> For further information see in Phelan, J. and P. J. Rabinowitz. 1994. *Understanding Narrative*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 160. & Phelan, J. and P. J. Rabinowitz. 2008. *A Companion to Narrative Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell, 319.

<sup>25</sup> Also, some furthest information for the fidelity in Cartmell, D. 2014. *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation*. Chichester West Sussex UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 114. & In Snyder, M. H. 2018. *Analyzing Literature-To-Film Adaptations: A Novelist's Exploration and Guide*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 143–144, 205., and see for the admirable and desirable fidelity in Costanzo Cahir, L. 2006. *Literature into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches*. Jefferson N. C: McFarland, 2.





Figure 19: Screenshot 00:01:20

This is an element which does not appear in the earlier version of 1962, but is emphasized in the version of 2012. Likewise in the previous shot the name of the actress appears and, in the background, a deserted path with tall trees on the right and left appears (Figure 20).





Figure 20: Screenshot 00:00:59

There are two elements which verify both the main isotopic of the text and the complementary one. As of course, the main isotopic is expressed by the opposition human as nature and indicates the heroine's close relationship with nature. The most interesting element is that although the complementary isotopic is not obvious in the first minutes of the cinematographic film, it can be said to work as a plus, like a connotation. Therefore, since the complementary isotopic is expressed by the dual nature of justice, *judicial justice vs family justice*, and of course in the literary work it appears as judicial justice and as family justice, it can symbolically exist implicitly in the filmic text. For the reader of course who has read the literary text and can proceed easily and spontaneously to this association, the desolate landscape of the countryside as a plus, like a connotation, refers to isolation in prison. For the reader – viewer who watches the cinematographic film

without having previously read the literary text. it will be a logical and reasonable conclusion at the end of viewing the film (Table 7)<sup>26</sup>.

**Table 7:** *The mythological dimension of penitentiary*

<b>myth</b>	<b>langue</b>	1. Signifier	2. Signifiant
		 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Figure 23</b></p>	<p><i>a series of elongated iron elements with which we enclose a space</i></p>
	<p>3. Sign</p> <p><i>prison</i></p> <p><i>jail bars</i></p>	<p>II Signifiant</p>	
		<p>I Signifier</p> <p><i>a series of elongated iron elements with which we enclose a space</i></p>  <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Figure 24 ibid</b></p>	<p><i>behind prison bars</i></p> <p><i>limitation and isolation</i></p>
		<p>III Sign</p> <p>the myth of incarceration</p>	

<sup>26</sup> It is about a connection of Barthes's theory from *Elements of Semiotics* and the function of mythology in the framework of ideology (Barthes, 1964, 132). Barthes, R. 1964. "Éléments de sémiologie". *Communications*, 4. *Recherches sémiologiques*, 91–135; See also the chapter *Denotation / Connotation* in *Σημειωτική του κινηματογράφου* by Steven Heath Αιγόκερως 1990 (μτφρ Δημήτρης Κολιοδήμος) Αθήνα Αιγόκερως / Κινηματογράφος, (επ. Πάννης Σολδάτος), σελ. 37–40.

The tall dense straight trees remind the bars of the prison from which the heroine has escaped thanks to the false testimony of her family. However, the real prison of the heroine is that imposed on her by her family. It, it is the very nature that surrounds her, her roots, her family pine tree forest (Table 8)<sup>27</sup>. So, the loneliness of the heroine is declared from the very first silent shot, and at the same time the eternal forest functions as an allegorical eternal prison for the tragic figure of the heroine.

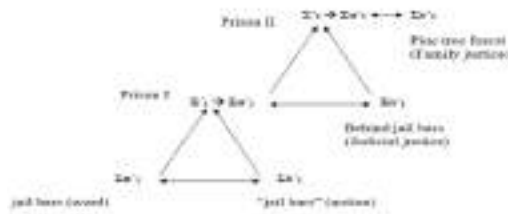


Table 8: Connotation and isotopies

The newer version of the movie focuses on the main isotopic *human vs nature* and additionally carries the isotopic *judicial justice vs family justice*. The older version focuses on the isotopic *judicial justice vs family justice* and also carries the isotopic *human vs nature* at its core. In each case, both isotopies are translated verbatim by the directors, always guided by the literary text. After all, the adaptation differs from the original, but the main meanings dominate and are understood by the viewer-reader. From an ontological point of view, the methodology of translation studies is based on the fact that no translation is essentially a single text, but one of the many possibilities of restoring the original text. The uniqueness of the original contrasts with the multiplicity of the translation (Torop, 2008: 255). The information load, as it is transferred from one system to another, “drags” certain elements along and repeats them. At the same time, at this point of repetition, the study of isotopies before the study of transmutation is important, since it finally proves that the performances of the same literary work, the two different contexts, the two semiotic translations with a common point of reference use the same isotopies but in a different way. The two versions of the film follow the linearity of the literary text with consistency in the core of the narrative, which is why the same isotopies are found. Since the medium changes, the important isotopies are transformed into specific virtual

<sup>27</sup> For additional information (Lagopoulos & Boklund-Lagopoulou, 2021, 72–81) & (Λαγόπουλος & Boklund-Λαγοπούλου, 2016, 75–81).



isotopies according to the inspiration of the director. Obviously the viewer will either choose to identify with the director, or will create in his mind, a version of his own, whether he has read the book or not.

## 6. Epilogue

Every literary work is considered both entertainment and spiritual food for the human brain. Similarly every film work is also a cultural product for intellectual consumption. Every story written in ink on paper, like every good old wine, is meant to delight, that is, to please the reader. Like any story told through a series of images and projected on a cinematic white banner, it is meant to entertain the viewer. The book wants to please the ears, if it is read aloud, and the heart and mind of the reader. Similarly, the filmic text also wants to please the viewer-reader. The human brain, and more specifically the neocortex, likes to make mental pictures with its imagination<sup>28</sup>. As for reading literary texts, it is a mental pleasure for the human brain, and even more so as a construction of individual, personal mental<sup>29</sup> images. It is also another kind of mental pleasure that has been proven in its 7,000 years of existence. Entertainment for ancient people, for example in the time of Homer (1100–750 BC)<sup>30</sup>, was to gather around the fire and listen to travelers tell stories, and basically exchange experiences through mental images. Instead, today, people usually with their cell phone as an extension of their hand are bombarded by ready-made static and moving images and advertisements, i.e., poor quality junk “brain” food for their brains. As a result, the neocortex gets bored and falls asleep. So, then, there is absolutely no cerebral progress. Literary texts offer this construction of mental images through reading. Film texts as well as television series are a type of linear narrative that strongly resembles literary linearity, but it does not cease to be only a perspective of the literary text, i.e., a specific reading of the work which does not belong to the reader of the book itself. Thus, if the reading public prefers books to being bombarded with ready-made images, then they are nourishing their brains with good quality food. After all, instead of greedily devouring ready-made images and deactivating one’s

---

<sup>28</sup> See in *The Neurobiology of Imagination: Possible Role of Interaction-Dominant Dynamics and Default Mode Network* by National Library of Medicine: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3662866/>.

<sup>29</sup> See in *Visual perception: Where is the mind’s eye?* By Graeme Mitchison *Current Biology*, Vol 6, No 5, 508–510, 1996, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0960982202005286>.

<sup>30</sup> See Mireaux Emile, *La Vie Quotidienne Au Temps D’Homère*.

brain, it is preferable, more pleasant and certainly more refreshing for one's brain, while reading a literary text, to create with one's own imagination and with one's own brain, his own unique<sup>31</sup> mesh of mental images.

## References

### Bibliography

- Barré, J.-L. 2009. *François Mauriac: Biographie Intime, 1885–1940*. Paris: Fayard.
- Barthes, R. 1964. "Éléments de sémiologie". *Communications*, 4. Recherches sémiologiques, 91–135.
- Beja, M. 1979. *Film & Literature, an Introduction*. New York: Longman.
- Cartmell, D. 2014. *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation*. Chichester West Sussex UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Costanzo Cahir, L. 2006. *Literature into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches*. Jefferson N. C: McFarland.
- Corrigan, T. 1999. *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader*. Upper Saddle River N. J: Prentice Hall.
- Dictionnaire de la Littérature française du XXe siècle*. Paris: Les Dictionnaires d'Universalis.
- Durgnat, R. 1968. *Franju: Movie Edition*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Heath, S. 1981. *Questions of Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Petty, H. B., R. B. Palmer. 2019. *French literature on screen*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Ince, K. 2005. *Georges Franju*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Lagarde, A., L. Michard. 2004 [2002/ 1998/ 1985]. *Xviiè Siècle: Les Grands Auteurs Français: Anthologie Et Histoire Littéraire*. Paris: Bordas/Seje.
- Lagopoulos, A., K. Boklund-Lagopoulou. 2021. *Theory and Methodology of Semiotics the Tradition of Ferdinand de Saussure*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Mauriac, F. 1989 [1927]. *Thérèse Desqueyroux*. éd. revue et corrigée ed. Paris: Bernard Grasset.

<sup>31</sup> 2018 Lois Isenman in book: Understanding Intuition (pp. 133–154) January 2018. Chapter 6 – Mental Imagery, Imagination, and Intuition Spontaneous Mental Imagery: Letting the Mind Do Its Own Thing, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B9780128141083000063?via%3Dihub>.

Mauriac, F. 2013 [1959, 1947, 1972]. *Thérèse Desqueyroux*. London: Penguin Books.

Mauriac, F. 2014. *Les paroles restent*. Paris: Grasset.

Metz, C. 1964. "Le cinéma: Langue ou langage?" *Communications*, 4, 52–90.

Metz, C. 1971. *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*, T. 1. Paris: Klincksieck.

Salomon, P. 1993. *Littérature Française. Guides Bordas*. Paris: Bordas.

Phelan, J. and P. J. Rabinowitz. 2008. *A Companion to Narrative Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Phelan, J. and P. J. Rabinowitz. 1994. *Understanding Narrative*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

Tadié, J.-Y. 1990. *Le roman au XXe siècle*. Paris: P. Belfond.

Torop, P. 2008. "Translation and Semiotics". *Sign Systems Studies*, Vol. 36, Issue 2.

Toury, G. 1980. *In search of a theory of translation*. Tel Aviv: Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics Tel Aviv University.

Toury, G. 1986. Translation: A Cultural-Semiotic Perspective. In Sebeok, T. (ed.). *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics*, Vol. 2. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1111–1124.

Snyder, M. H. 2018. *Analyzing Literature-To-Film Adaptations: A Novelist's Exploration and Guide*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Stam, R., A. Raengo. 2008. *A Companion to Literature and Film*. Malden MA: Blackwell Pub.

Wollen, P., D. N. Rodowick. 2019. *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*. 5th ed. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Λαγόπουλος, Α.-Φ., Boklund-Λαγοπούλου, Κ.-Μ. 2016. *Θεωρία σημειωτικής: Η παράδοση του Ferdinand de Saussure*. Αθήνα: Πατάκης.

### Sitography

François Mauriac: The Nobel Prize in Literature. 1952. Available at: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1952/mauriac/biographical/> (accessed 3 February 2023).

Spontaneous Mental Imagery: Letting the Mind Do Its Own Thing. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B9780128141083000063?via%3Dihub> (accessed 3 February 2023).

National Library of Medicine. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3662866/> (accessed 3 February 2023).

Graeme Mitchison Current Biology. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0960982202005286> (accessed 3 February 2023).

### **Filmography**

Original title: *Thérèse Desqueyroux*. 1962. Claude Miller (1h 49m). Available at: [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0056581/?ref\\_=nm\\_film\\_wr\\_27](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0056581/?ref_=nm_film_wr_27).

Original title: *Thérèse Desqueyroux*. 2012. Georges Franzu (1h 50m). Available at: [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1654829/?ref\\_=nm\\_film\\_wr\\_3](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1654829/?ref_=nm_film_wr_3).