

Cinema, literature and technology in favour of the teacher education: a media rereading of Frankenstein

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Abstract

*It is discussed that the Brazilian teacher education needs to be reformulated due to the world has changed and also the school clientele. According to a technological world and the increasing widespread use of media, the proposal, which will be described here, emerged. Through the movie **I, Frankenstein** (2014), a media rereading of the book has been proposed. It is a fact that the cinema is a tool that mobilizes mental schemes and one of its characteristics is to appropriate a spontaneous pleasure. Consequently, the project aimed at develops proposals that the undergraduate students could use with their future students in the classroom. Then, the project gathered media, literature and technology, demonstrating that the cross-cutting themes can be significantly developed, considering the reality of the students' lives.*

Keywords: Cinema; literature; higher education; Frankenstein.

1. Introduction

It is discussed that the Brazilian teacher education needs to be reformulated due to the world has changed and also the school clientele. However, what is seen, in practice, is that a large part of the professors who minister classes in graduation courses keep classes guided in theories raised of a long list of references, often outdated, creating a huge distance between the class and the alliance among technology and media present in Elementary and High School students' everyday life.

If the clientele changed, the teachers need to change, of all stages of the formal education, since the Kindergarten until the University. Freire had already alerted to the fact that is "thinking critically today's practice, or yesterday's practice, it is possible to improve the next practice". [1]

The teachers in Basic Education should reflect about their practice and verify if they are reaching or not all the objectives – previously proposed in their syllabus – with their students; if they are interacting and assisting in the true education of children and adolescents which are, nowadays, inserted in a world surrounded by media and technology. Likewise, professors need to alert undergraduate students about this reality and the actual needs of the Basic Education students.

The teacher must think that

new pedagogical proposals are urgent, indispensable and necessary to post modernity, which is touched, every second, by technological advancement. At the digital era we can't stay where we are, fixed on the sonorous, verbal ideas, which performs the object part that the student must memorize instead of really learn. [2]

2. Development

It is due to a vastly technological world and the increasingly widespread use of various media, which the cinema raises as a didactic-methodological possibility. Nonetheless, the educator has to be prepared to use this tool, as “[...] the teacher plays an essential part mediating the use of the film and the students’ learning process”. [3]

Poorly trained, misinformed, deficiency of love for students and unenthusiastic teachers use technological tools with no clear propose. According to Moran, “there is no doubt that technology allows us to enlarge the concept of class, space, time, audio-visual communication and establish new connections between the physical and the digital, between being together and being connected online”. [4]

In fact, currently, a wise and concerned teacher rethinks and, if necessary, this educator changes strategies for the classes not to fall into monotony and boredom. Numerous professors complain about the students who use cell phones in classroom. However, this is a reality that normally occurs when the activities are boring and repetitive. Expository classes, for example, can be a total disincentive for all students. Thus, several students become unmotivated by having classes with equally uninterested teachers.

A conscious educator should not wait for miraculous strategies. The teacher must reflect, discuss with the colleagues, create proposals, develop projects and evaluate the results.

The cinema is on people’s routine as well as on the students’ everyday life. Freire demonstrated the necessity to insert the universe of television in the classroom considering that a critical analysis of what it is conveyed by it would be advisable: “[...] what is said, what is shown and how it is shown seems to me more and more important every day”. [5]

The same can be done with another audio-visual narrative: the cinema. Why do not utilize movies as a didactic-methodological tool to work with the cross-cutting themes needed for the full and complete formation of the citizen? According to Piovesan, Barbosa e Costa, the “films allow the teacher to work with many different concepts, themes and meanings used in their students’ everyday life”. [6]

From this idea, the proposal to be described emerged. Through the movie **I, Frankenstein** (2014), directed by Stuart Beattie and based on the graphic novel by Kevin Greivoux, inspired on **Frankenstein**, written by Mary Shelley, a media rereading of the movie has been proposed.

3. Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797 – 1851), popularly known by Mary Shelley, was author of short stories, playwright, essayist, biographer and writer of travel literature.

In 1816, Mary and Percy Shelley, who would become her husband in that year, visited the famous British poet Lord Byron in a village beside Lake Geneva in Switzerland. In a stormy night, Byron challenged his guests, proposing that each one of them write their own supernatural story. Inspired by a dream, and with the encouragement of Percy Shelley, Mary expanded her story, creating **Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus** or simply **Frankenstein**, published in 1818.

Frankenstein is a novel of gothic horror with inspiration from the Romantic Movement. The book reports the story of Victor Frankenstein, a student of natural sciences who builds a monster in his lab from the junction of remains of human corpses.

Thus, the Shelley's novel reveals the romantic aspects such as the search of the identity, freedom, the relationship between death and life, the connection among creator and creature and the abandonment.

Victor Frankenstein came in contact with theories about the ability to give life to human corpses and felt competent to create, or rather, recreate life from dead people. The scientist looked for remains of corpses, rode his creature and the result was a monstrously disproportionate, frightening creature that just scared and chased away its own creator.

After the death of Victor's younger brother, he came to conclusions that the monster was the murderer and he wanted revenge. Upon meeting the creature, the monster told to Victor all the events since his birth and its struggle for survival. The monster took refuge on the estate of a family who never suspected its presence and it was there that the creature learned how to be a person.

The creature believed that Victor was unscrupulous to create a human being and then abandon it. So, the monster asked the scientist to create a companion to itself. Victor was touched with the story and decides to fulfill his promise. But in a fit of anger, Frankenstein destroyed everything he had built and the monster felt once again betrayed by its creator.

The monster looked for revenge. After the marriage of the scientist, the creature killed Victor's fiancée and caused the death of Mr. Frankenstein, the scientist father. So, Victor decided to leave in pursuit of the monster. Among the search, appeared Captain Robert Walton, an explorer, who collected Frankenstein between the glaciers and cared for him. Victor told to the explorer his story and Walton was touched with it. The captain decided to rewrite the story in the form of letters to his sister, Margaret Saville. In those letters, Walton mentioned that would be as faithful as possible to the narrative of Victor.

The Shelley's novel was translated to audio-visual narrative at the first time in 1910, produced by Thomas Edison. In 1931, performed by Universal Pictures, one of the most famous adaptations of the novel was made, directed by James Whale and the British actor Boris Karloff interpreted the monster. Several other translations were produced, but in 1994, Kenneth Branagh directed *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, with Robert De Niro, as

the creature. Finally, in 2014, the Lionsgate Company and Stuart Beattie adapted from cinema, the graphic novel by Kevin Greivoux, **I, Frankenstein**: Aaron Eckhart as the Monster, named Adam, and Aden Young as Victor Frankenstein.

4. Cinema and the class room

At the end of the 19th century, in the Grand Café Hall, in Paris, the Lumière brothers presented **L'Arrivée d'un Train à La Ciotat**, which featured a reproduction in motion of a train arriving at a train station, which with nine other narratives started what now is called cinema.

The cinematographic screening room environment, in which the movies are screened in a no light space with loud sonority, leads the spectator to experience the uniqueness sensation of the audio-visual narrative and interact intensely with it to the point of taking the place of the characters.

Angélica Piovesan, Lívia Barbosa and Sara Bezerra Costa, presented that “films allow the teacher to work with many different concepts, themes and meanings used in their students’ everyday life” [7]. Thus, the cinema can also be considered a pedagogical tool:

The cinema can be used in the classroom as a pedagogic tool to help the teaching-learning process. According to Carmo (2003), educate through cinema or use it in school is teaching to see things differently, it is educating the look, decoding modernity in the frame of the space of a picture. [8]

In this way, the official documents that direct the teacher’s pedagogical practices, as the **Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais**, detach strongly the use of multiple languages besides the verbal in school.

Through the cinema, there is the opportunity to enlarge students’ critical reading potential and offer them the knowledge about different worlds, cultures and realities, through senses that are not featured in the act of verbal reading.

The filmic narratives have, as one of its characteristics, a narrow connection between languages, specifically among the visual and the sonorous ones. It is necessary to highlight, however, that this two languages have several significant nuances in their syntactic structures; nuances that are amplified when the languages dialogue in favour of a creative interaction.

The visual language participates of the humanity history. Through the petroglyphs, Antiquity’s people left recorded some of their forms to see and to think about the world. Allied with the technical and technological evolution, the imagistic writing changed and with some apparatuses as the Magic lantern, the Phenakistoscope, the Praxinoscope, the Kinetoscope and, finally, the Lumière’s Cinematograph, the image gained movement. An inert image, such as the photography and the painting, allows an enormous variety of readings, evidently due to the reader’s cultural framework. The same occurs with the image in motion that changes the meaning when there is a summation of the movement.

Resources are basic to the filmic narrative’s construction, such as changes of focus, depth, field and framings. Also, the countless forms of editing may grant particular meanings for each cinematographic fragment.

The same process occurs with the sonorous language, that comprehends voices, music, noises and extends the meaning of the movies, what is extremely interesting as an educational tool for the formation of the spectator and the critical reader.

5. The media rereading of Frankenstein: a didactic-methodological proposal for higher education

Having in mind that exists some options of cinematographic movies' reading, the possibility of broadening the cultural repertoire, the significant role in the stimulation for different textual forms and, evidently, not leaving aside the guidelines for Brazilian Education, were the basis to develop this project. Initially, the undergraduate students watched **Frankenstein**, the version directed by James Whale, produced in 1931, followed by **Mary Shelley's Frankenstein**, directed by Kenneth Branagh, exhibited in 1994 and finally, **I, Frankenstein**, directed by Stuart Beattie, in 2014.

The film based on a graphic novel, describes the creature in the modern days. The movie starts when Victor Frankenstein (Aden Young) creates a Monster (Aaron Eckhart), a soulless creature formed by parts of human corpses, which he rejects it. Throughout the centuries, the Monster that is immortal, gained a name, Adam and nowadays, he is being hunted by demons that want to learn the secret of his creation in order to build an army of the same type of process reanimating corpses to which Adam was subjected. Then, Adam has the mission to protect the world from this imminent danger.

Posteriorly, there was a round table to promote reflections about the movie and the Mary Shelley's book. This round table was composed by three professors: a professor in the area of Literature, with studies and publications that deal with themes of English Literature and American one, who exposed the issues concerning the historical and literary context over Shelley's book; another professor who transits between the areas of Communication and Humanities, with several studies highlighting the dialogue between these areas, which addressed issues such as the reading of the image, the visual narrative and the various possibilities for dialogue with other languages of the Literature and the other professor guiding the entire process, who transits between the areas of Education and Humanities, with an extensive teaching experience in all stages of the Education.

This last professional was responsible to list all of the positions of the other professors and lead them, in such a way that the undergraduate students could understand the sum of the different points of view, which can unite towards a pedagogical project, oriented for the Basic Education audience.

During this debate, between professors from different areas and students, the prospective teachers had a chance to recount their impressions about the movies and the Shelley's novel. They even made reflections about the production of the film adaptation and they concluded, as Johnson explained, that "with a visual image, the spectator has the illusion of noticing objects represented as if they were real objects, but with the written language readers can create their own mental images of the narrated facts". [9]

Thus, the students have earned voice; they could reflect and express themselves. Among the undergraduates, one of them stood out, who developed the project in conjunction with the other professors. Besides, he participated as audience on the round table and critically accompanied all stages of the project around the movie **I, Frankenstein**.

At that moment, emerged questions about the validity, appropriateness and originality of adapting the book to the cinema. A number of other works, which born in the literary pages and migrated to the film were part of a long discussion.

Several issues, as the choice of characters, the fragments selection that composed or no longer included in films and the fidelity to the original stories gained space and generated some controversy in a dialogue established between the professors and undergraduates.

Overall, the discussion came to the conclusion that books and films are different languages which use different media. Each one of them has its own syntax and features that often cannot be translated to other languages. The debate also came to the consensus that the translation from one narrative to another language does not need to be trusted and this is not a pejorative trait, what is often analyzed by common sense.

From **I, Frankenstein**, questions were raised about the relation, for example, between the creator, creation and recreation, the lack of identity, the conception among death and life, the evil and good fight and the transformation of the person in all aspects.

After the round table, the undergraduates were oriented to create, through software of their own choice, a media reading based on all movies and the Shelley's book, in form of a one minute video. Subsequently, the students should post the video clip on a page of the social network **Facebook** named *Releitura Frankenstein* (Frankenstein media reading) created for this purpose. The **Facebook**'s page has surpassed the number of two hundred and fifty followers and the audience was primarily made up of Languages and Literature students and teachers with experience in the same course.

The videos created and posted on the **Facebook**'s page were mostly consistent with the proposed work. Read the comments were also interesting, because the students and the teachers talked about the videos postage. It is essential to emphasize that the opening of more spaces for discussion broadened the issues raised during the round table and, due to the media used, it was given more time and possibility of interactions among students.

As a last step, the students gathered once again to another round table composed by the same professors already mentioned, to discuss about the creation process of the confection of the videos and the various possibilities of interpretation that each undergraduate had to make their own video clip.

An interesting aspect of this last stage was the fact that the students displayed their audio-visual narrative to a real audience and they were questioned by the spectators. This activity gave the students the opportunity to discuss their ideas, their production stages and their points of view for the media rereading. The students gained voice in the university seats, a practice which is not always common.

According to Balázs (2003) [10], when we are watching a movie, the individual makes an interaction with the feature film and identifies with it, and the level of this interaction process reflects directly on the influence that it suffers. In the same way, it is variable depending on the level of perception and reality of each person. It is for this reason that the videos produced by undergraduate students deal with varied cross-cutting themes depending on the reading that they had about the book and the film: death and life, creation and recreation, reality, identity crisis, people way of life as a critic, and more.

Some of the videos reread the movie by the reflections of the reality, reporting that the society interferes directly in the way of people life, determining what they can be and what they can't be. Other videos exposed relations between some animated movies that retracts the identity crisis or the relation between creator and creature and stablish an approximation among all of the movies based on Shelley's novel.

On the other hand, other videos approached the cinematographic work to the funk ostentation, widespread musical style in São Paulo, which comes to luxury, wealth and power, and represents a way of the search of the identity of some people, who need to be belonged in some space, as the music tribe.

The activity finally provided the exchange of experiences and knowledge between teachers and students and among students themselves. It is significant to point that in the last meeting all of the students could report their production of the video, exposing their point of view and their personal reflection regarding students reading about the story. The proposal was developed according to a dialogical education. It is very useful when the opposition between teachers and students is surpassed in such a way that they are "both simultaneously, educators and students". [11]

6. Final considerations

It is a fact that the cinema is a tool that mobilizes mental schemes and one of its greatest characteristics is providing spontaneous pleasure. Through the media rereading, created by undergraduate students, it was a intention to develop proposals that the future teachers of Basic Education could use in their teaching practices and which would fascinate the students of Basic Education intensely, creating an atmosphere of creativity, enthusiasm, vibrancy and knowledge building in the classroom.

The experiment reported in this paper proved to be rich of possibilities. Interdisciplinarity – so advocated and poorly carried out by teachers – proved to be a path, not only possible but desirable, since the meeting of three professors enriched the discussions and the analyses. On the other hand, the same interdisciplinarity was widely used by students in their readings of the literary work, revealing a universe of analysis not imagined by the teacher who led the process.

Therefore, it is the responsibility of the Teacher Education's courses to create an environment with motivational elements, proposing activities to establish a coherent relationship between theory and practice, and these activities must be meaningful for the future teachers, such as the activity which was described in this research.

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