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Adaptation-induced Tourism for Consumers of Literature on Screen: the Experience of Jane Austen Fans

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ABSTRACT

My aim in this article is that of starting to relate the expanding research field of adaptation studies to the subject area of film-induced tourism. Adaptations are a specific typology of films: that is, films whose story was not originally intended for the screen but, more often than not, for the written page, and has, therefore, been 'translated' into a new medium. The phenomenon of adaptation has been at the center of a heated debate for a few years now, but the specific link between adaptation and tourism has not yet been studied in its own right. In my article I question why and how adaptations of literary texts for the screen can induce a desire to visit film locations (actual geographical places) in readers who are also inclined to enjoy the experience of "literature on screen". In order to do this, I focus on the case study of adaptations from Jane Austen's novels and on a specific kind of tourists, the so called 'Janeites', or Austen fans.

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In her "Introduction" to *The Advance of Film Tourism*, a special issue of *Tourism and Hospitality Planning & Development*, Sue Beeton calls repeatedly for "incorporation of multiple disciplines and perspectives into the study of film and tourism" (2010, p. 3). My aim in this article is that of trying to answer the call by starting to relate the expanding research field of adaptation studies to the subject area of film-induced tourism.

The term "Film-Induced Tourism", as is well known, was introduced for the first time by Beeton in her seminal book of 2005, which bears the same title. She proposed to use it instead of "Movie-Induced Tourism", a label which was already well-established at the time of her writing, because she aimed at enlarging the scope of the field by including "both [...] movies and [...] television films such as mini-series and even soap-operas" (2005, p. 8). Such a shift of the critical focus, therefore, paved the way to scholars who were interested not only in cinema, but in television, and in any audiovisual experience that could prompt and shape tourism practices. Hudson, Wang and Gil, for instance, highlight the results of a recent analysis stating that "after family and friends and the Internet, television shows and films were the next key influencer on the decision to travel to a particular country" (2011, p. 178), and yet they also admit that "we do not have a clear understanding of why and how" this happens, "and very few researchers have explored the phenomenon in any detail" (ibid.). Enrico Nicosia is among them (2012), and his convening of this special issue on "The Experiences of Film-Induced Tourism" is a welcome and long awaited opportunity for scholars to tackle the impact that different films can have on different categories of tourists.

Taking my cue from these premises, I would like to contribute to this special issue by focusing on a specific typology of films: that is, adaptations, or films whose story was not originally intended for the screen but, more often than not, for the written page, and has, therefore, been 'translated' into a new medium. The phenomenon of adaptation is, of course, very complex as witnessed by an articulate debate that has been constantly evolving and expanding for the last twenty years (see Leitch for a summary of different critical stands, 2008) to include theoretical concepts such as intermediality and remediation (see Bruhn *et al.* 2013, and Pennacchia 2015); the specific link between adaptation and tourism, however, has not been studied yet in its own right, even though it has, of course, been noticed in passing by some scholars (for instance, Higson, 2003, p. 62); it is to this relation that I would like, therefore, to address my investigation. More to the point, the question I would like to address in this article is why and how adaptations of literary texts for the big and small screen can induce a desire to visit film locations (actual geographical places) in readers who tend to enjoy the experience of "literature on screen", as Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan defined the phenomenon of film adaptations from literary texts few years ago (2007). In order to do this, I will focus on the case study of adaptations from Jane Austen's novels and on a specific kind of tourists, the so called 'Janeites', or the community of Austen fans.

It is a truth universally acknowledged among commentators today that the high tide of what has been called "Austenmania" (Woods, 2007) took place between 1995 and

2005. These two dates mark the release of two immensely successful adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*, probably the most beloved among Austen's novels: the BBC mini-series starring Colin Firth as the perfect Mr Darcy (1995), and Joe Wright's feature film where the British celebrity, Keira Knightley, played a restless Elizabeth Bennett (2005). It is important to notice that both adaptations were filmed according to the conventions of costume drama, with great care for historical details in setting and clothing, and an artful choice of English locations, showcasing charming landscapes of green pastures and ivy-covered old buildings.

The allure of traditional images of Britain, like those used in *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations, made of spectacular country views, magnificent National Trust properties and exclusive tea-time manners, has been the object of study analysis and marketing campaigns by the British tourist industry for decades, and have been part of the larger and much controversial debate concerning the so called "heritage industry" (Hewison, 1987). I agree with Amy Sargeant that "heritage is vital to the appeal of Britain as a tourist destination" (Sargeant 2000: 308); however if heritage is not only what has been objectively inherited from the past, but also a specific attitude towards it, then, as Andrew Higson puts it, "heritage is a selective preoccupation with the past" (Higson, p. 50), and accordingly "is as often invented or revised as it is conserved" (ibid.). Heritage, therefore, is not only a shifting notion, but a political approach to the past that depends very much on the attitude that each Government, be it Conservative or Labour, decides to adopt towards it. Historically speaking, this has meant passing from Margaret Thatcher's (nostalgic) ideals of tradition and continuity (that led to the institution of the "Department of National Heritage" in 1992), to Tony Blair's rejection of those ideals (and Department, quickly renamed "Department of Culture, Media and Sport" in 1997) in favor of an entrepreneurial image of 'cool Britannia', with its drive towards a new global economy (see Higson, pp. 48-56).

However, it is fair to say that all Governments, be they Conservative or Labour, have always been strategically aware of the inspirational power of British heritage on screen, that is of the strong connection between film and tourism. It will suffice here to say that The British Tourist Authority, the tourist board of Great Britain, issued a "Movie Map" of the UK, the first of the kind and soon to be imitated by other countries, as early as 1998. Andrew Higson acutely reminds us that this was a huge marketing campaign to sell British tourism overseas, with "[m]ore than 250,000 of these maps were sent to travel agencies in North America, the Far East, Australia, and Europe" (Higson, p. 59); Higson also highlights not only that many films on the map were costume dramas, but that many of them also happened to be adaptations from British literary classics, including Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility*, starring Emma Thompson and Kate Winslet, released three years before (1995).

Although a traditional image of England is skillfully packaged in Austen's adaptations to attract general viewers, I think that its impact can be particularly effective on readers of Austen's novels, and this for reasons that have to do with her style of writing. To start with, Austen is interested, as a writer, in developing socially and psychologically intriguing situations as they are revealed through a subtle use of language in

conversations, but descriptions are not her main concern; consequently, they are very scanty or given with few strokes of the pen when absolutely needed. Adaptations for the screen of her novels, therefore, do help the reader to visualize a world that she makes 'speak' but upon which she looks only by side-glances, leaving to others the task of fully imagining it. In other words, the actual locations chosen in adaptations as setting for Austen's verbal "conversation pieces", can strongly appeal to the desire of 'seeing' and therefore 'possessing' Jane's elusive world.

The actual visualization of an already known fictional world is, as far as I am concerned, also part of the specific impact of adaptations on tourism, an impact that is based, I think, on the pleasure of repetition. When Sue Beeton, for instance, describes the motivations for tourists to visit film locations, she writes that they do so in order "to re-live an experience (or even emotion) encountered in the film, reinforce myth, storytelling or fantasies, or for reason of status (or celebrity)" (2010, p. 2). Glen Croy and Sie Heitmann, on the other hand, in their overview of the main themes in the current debate on film tourism, maintain that the film's role in tourist pre-visit experiences is that of informing viewers about places and bringing new potential destinations in mind, either showing that these places existed or adding to pre-existing images of places: "increased exposure, via viewing the film again or viewing other films produced (or set) in the area, allows even greater levels of image familiarity and complexity" (p. 191). Film-induced motivations, therefore, appear to me very much alike those that prompt people who are particularly fond of a specific work of literature to re-live the experience of it over and over again, in different media, thus enjoying what Linda Hutcheon – in her seminal book, *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006) – calls a "mixture of repetition and difference, of familiarity and novelty" (Hutcheon, p. 114). The enjoyment of adaptations *as adaptations*, she writes, "comes simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise. Recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation" (4). Those who love to watch their favorite stories adapted for the screen (or for the stage, or, lately, even as graphic novels) are probably also inclined to visit the locations where adaptations were shot in order to re-live, in one more different way, similar emotions, thus reinforcing myth and storytelling.

To better understand the process, we may recall what Linda Hutcheon usefully describes as the three modes through which people can engage to stories: telling, showing, interacting. In the "telling mode", that of literature, "our engagement [with a story] begins in the realm of imagination, which is simultaneously controlled by the selected, directing words of the text and liberated" (p. 23); in the "showing mode", as in film adaptations, "we are caught in an unrelenting, forward-driving story. And we have moved from the imagination to the realm of direct perception – with its mix of both detail and broad focus" (ibid.). The third mode is the participatory mode that happens when we become agents and engage with a story in an interactive way, either rewriting it, for example in fan fiction, or plunging into it, as in videogames or theme parks, "where we can walk right into the world of a Disney film, and virtual reality

experience, where our own bodies are made to feel as if they are entering an adapted heterocosm” (p. 51).

Many readers love to further expand the ‘pleasure of the text’ by actually engaging the text not only in the telling mode, but also in the showing mode, through film adaptations, and finally in the participatory mode, choosing an ‘immersive experience’ that means entering the location of the story in order to become part of it. More importantly, visiting the place where a story is set, and its adaptation has been located, can transform a solitary pleasure into a sociable experience to be shared with a ‘community’ of people with similar interests, as is the case with Janeites (or fans in general). Choosing film locations as tourist destinations is, in this case, just the last step of a progressively increasing involvement of the consumers’ bodies into the storyline, from telling to showing to interacting.

Out of the many examples that can be brought as evidence to this hypothesis, I have chosen the advertisement of a “Jane Austen Walking Tour” called “Jaunt with Jane” in the small and picturesque sea-town of Lyme Regis, on the Dorset coast, where part of the story of *Persuasion*, Austen’s last novel, is set. The offer is advertised on the page of “Jane Austen Related Events” in “The Republic of Pemberly”, a famous website devoted to “Jane Austen addicts” (<http://www.pemberley.com/>), and visited by those who share interest in all things Jane. The advertisement poster shows a frame from the last adaptation of *Persuasion* (2007), starring Sally Hawkins and Rupert Penry-Jones as Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth in full Regency costume; a drawing of the Cobb Harbour, Lyme’s main landmark, is also displayed. The tour organizer, Natalie Manifold, who, after reading English at the University of Birmingham, founded a company called “Literary Lyme Walking Tours” (<http://www.literarylyme.co.uk/>), entices the followers of the Republic of Pemberly to join the “Jaunt with Jane” week-end with these words (<http://jauntwithjane.com/about/>):

“If you’re feeling like a break then this is the perfect restorative tonic for you! When Captain Wentworth first sees Anne Elliot after 8 years’ absence, he believes that she has lost her bloom, but a few days in Lyme Regis restores Anne’s colour & they are once again together.

Let the restorative tonic of re-enacting Regency Lyme give you a bloom. Whether watching the wondrous crashing waves, or watching the pattern of the seabirds. [...] For your own restorative & a fine time in Regency Lyme, book your Jaunt with Jane ticket now.”

According to the advertisement, therefore, the potential (female) tourist will very much benefit from the “restorative tonic” of “re-enacting Regency Lyme”; the novel and adaptation’s storyline, whose gist is the protagonist’s recovery of vitality (plus love and wealth), is therefore used as a hook to bring visitors to this small English seaside resort. As Mike Crang, who writes about the popularization of Jane Austen and tourism, states: “[f]aced with overseas competition and changing tastes, the English tourist industry has turned to specialist tourism as a means of selling places” (Crang , p.

117); a literary tourism offer like that of “Jaunt with Jane” is precisely the kind of specialist tourism Crang has in mind (even though the examples he makes are, of course, different); these offers are addressed mostly to overseas tourists, according to Crang, and consist of “touring sacred sites of secular saints in a modern-day reverential ritual that shares features of pilgrimage” (ibid.).

In the case of “Jaunt with Jane”, participants will literally follow in the footsteps both of Anne Elliot, the main character of *Persuasion*, and Jane Austen herself, who visited Lyme Regis on two separate occasions in 1803 and 1804; her decision to set the turning point of *Persuasion* in Lymes may even have been taken after walking along the awe inspiring Cobb Harbour, where she has the character of Louisa Musgrove fall from the steps and injure herself (tourists pose for pictures on the spot that, after having been chosen by 1990 and 2007 BBC productions, has become the ‘authentic’ place). In his article, and much to my surprise, Crang never mentions Austen adaptations, let alone their possible influence on tourism. In this respect, he seems adamant in separating reading (literary texts) from viewing (films). It is, apparently, the same approach embraced by Sue Beeton when she writes:

“[t]he main difference between literary and film tourism is that, in relation to the former, visitors often go to the regions that relate personally to the writer (such as place of birth and death), whereas film tourists visit the sites portrayed or places of the stars [...] by the beginning of the 21st century film has become so pervasive that its influence and effect outstrips that of literature. Film is to literary tourism what the Boeing 747 was to mainstream tourism – a major booster for mass tourism. We have moved from small, niche-based personal pilgrimage literary tours to the mass (and at times over-full) visitation of film sites” (Beeton, 2005, pp. 52-3).

With her words Beeton seems to endorse the idea of a gap dividing elite literary tourism from popular film tourism; but divisions are not so neat when adaptations of literary texts for the screen are at stake; in Adaptation-Induced tourism high art and popular culture, elite tourism and mass tourism, start to blur.

Adaptation-Induced tourists rely, in fact, both on the book and the film to make sense of their visiting experience, they are readers as well as viewers (and not necessarily in this order), as may be inferred by a couple of “Testimonials” of “Jaunt with Jane” (<http://jauntwithjane.com/testimonials/>):

“Thoroughly enjoyed this walk. Our guide (Natalie) had a wealth of information about Jane Austen’s stay in Lyme Regis, as well as the various ‘Persuasion’ locations. It brought the Musgrove’s visit to Lyme very much to life”

And:

“We went on the Jane Austen tour on a Sunday lunchtime – this is not usually the sort of thing I would do but I very much recommend it. Natalie

certainly knows her stuff and the tour was really interesting and enjoyable, full of historical insights. I hurried home to watch my Persuasion DVD!”

Through Austen’s novels and their adaptations, an imaginary Regency England is “brought back to life”, right on the sites where Austen’s stories unfold. The experience of Adaptation-Induced tourism is, therefore, not only intermedial, but also one of “interactive storytelling” (Hutcheon, p. 51), with consumers turning into agents through their desire of repeating the story on location and re-enacting it by means of their own power of imagination.

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