

Adaptation as expanded fiction in contemporary series^a

A adaptação como ficção expandida na série contemporânea

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I discuss how contemporary serial fiction has led adaptation to another stage, no longer characterized by plot or characters condensation, but by the expansion of the fictional world. Based on the analysis of the series *The haunting of Bly manor*, created by Mike Flanagan from Henry James' work *The turn of the screw*, I aim at understanding how expanded fiction democratizes the fictional population without breaking the intrigue thread, in dialogue with a contemporary sensibility and reception condition.

Keywords: Adaptation, TV series, *The haunting of Bly manor*, created by Mike Flanagan

RESUMO

Neste artigo, discuto como a ficção seriada contemporânea levou a adaptação a outro estágio, não mais marcado pela contração da trama ou da psicologia das personagens, mas pela expansão do universo ficcional. Por meio da análise da série *A maldição da mansão Bly*, criada por Mike Flanagan a partir de *A outra volta do parafuso*, de Henry James, busco compreender como a ficção expandida democratiza a população ficcional sem romper o fio da intriga, em diálogo com uma sensibilidade e condição de recepção contemporâneas.

Palavras-Chave: Adaptação, ficção seriada audiovisual, *A maldição da mansão Bly*, criada por Mike Flanagan

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“Yet even though we have them’, he returned, still with his hands in his pockets and planted there in front of me, ‘they don’t much count, do they?’”

Miles in *The turn of the screw*, by Henry James

IN THE ESSAY *L’adaptation ou le cinéma comme Digeste* [*Adaptation, or the cinema as digest*], originally published in 1948, André Bazin refutes the then current criticism which argues that the transposition of literature to cinema, by reducing the complexity of novels, always results in artistically inferior works. Bazin, known for his advocacy of the mixed cinema, positions himself, in this text, in favor of condensed adaptation, which, according to him, facilitates the access of the broader public to literary art. This can occur by simplifying the psychology of the characters and actions, but also “[...] because the mode of expression itself, as if the aesthetic fat differently emulsified, were better tolerated by the consumer’s mind”. (Bazin, 2000, p. 26).

This is an essay that, read in the light of the contemporary theory of adaptation, has imprecise notions such as essence or spirit of the work of art, and is too attached to the rhetoric of fidelity. However, the essay has the merit of pointing out the elitism of those who propose the hierarchy between literature and cinema based on cultural effort. “As far as I am concerned, the difficulty of audience assimilation is not a priori criterion of cultural value”. (Bazin, 2000, p. 26). The text also has the virtue of, by breaking with the understanding of the work as a necessarily singular artifact, introducing thinking about extended fictional universes, composed of various arts.

I argue that contemporary audiovisual serial fiction, or at least part of it, leads the adaptation to another circumstance, no longer marked by the condensation of the narrative, but by the expansion of it. If, on the one hand, the immediacy of the audiovisual remains as a means of expression as identified by Bazin (1948), on the other hand, the contemporary poetics of the series, marked, as defined by Jason Mittell (2012, 2015), by the articulation between the episodic and seriality, allows the development of the characters, inventing them life stories that densify perspectives and interiorities, and the democratization of protagonism, in which a secondary character—sometimes only mentioned in literary fiction—becomes worthy of a chapter all of his/her own. The field of events and actions is also expanded.

In this article, I will analyze *The haunting of Bly manor* (2020), by the American *showrunner* Mike Flanagan, adaptation of *The turn of the screw*, a novel by Henry James, originally also published serially in 1898. Although I focus on this series, the intention is that the study of the storytelling contributes to the understanding of the poetics of audiovisual serial fiction and its relationship with literature,

also manifested in works such as *The handmaid's tale*, *My brilliant friend*, *Big little lies*, among other adaptations of novels or novellas made in recent years.

I do not intend, in investigating this expanded fiction, to propose another category of value based on the capillarity of characters and actions. I would like to quote here Italo Calvino (1990) who, in his praise of the speed in literature, in the *Six memos for the next millennium*, pondered that he did not intend to deny the virtues of slowness. Of course, conciseness too, as a counterpoint to expansion, has its relevance. Narratives such as those of Raymond Carver and Ernest Hemingway operate by suppression and, by editing, leave the reader the full weight of an unspoken event¹. The literary strategy of keeping the narrative confined to the first person of a character has its specific effects, which can, for example, establish ambiguities in a story whose narrator is implicated in the events he/she tells, undermine the positivity of an objective reality, or even provoke affective adherence.

One critic distinguished, in the use of this feature in *The turn of the screw*, narrated in the first person by the unnamed *au pair*, the trait of modern experimentation:

Perception itself, as we are led to understand thanks to the exclusive emphasis on the housekeeper's point of view, has a persuasive power that ultimately determines the action; and, in demonstrating the truth that one way of seeing can eventually become infectious, *The Turn of the Screw* evokes other disturbing narratives, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" (1835) and "The Construction" (1924), an allegory of Kafka. It is a characteristically modern experiment that shows how much the narrative depends on the point of view. (Bromwich, 2011, p. 165).

If the expansion of the plot and the pluripersonal aspect do not constitute unquestionable values, the resources hinder, on what refers to complex audiovisual series, the critical argument of condensation and simplification. The artifice, being an industrial and formulaic form, heir to the 19th century serialization and television narratives of the 20th century, lies in expanding the fictional population without sacrificing the thread of intrigue. I am interested in exploring here the poetics of this expanded and complex form and how it is articulated to a contemporary sensibility and condition of reception.

This article is divided into three parts, in addition to this introduction and the final considerations. In the first segment, I address, in the theory of adaptation, the debate about the pragmatic need to reduce the literary to the filmic transposition and how the narrative prolongation in serial form opens possibilities for extension and complexification of fictional universes. I begin the second part with a paraphrase of *The turn of the screw*, a work that served

¹ See about this the "theory of the iceberg" cited by Ricardo Piglia (2004) in "Theses on the tale". The theory is elaborated from the technique of omission, by Ernest Hemingway, which suppressed the end of the tale leaving the form even more condensed to point to what was not said in story.

the theorization of the fantastic genre. Next, I comment on some of the film adaptations that kept the focus and ambiguity of Henry James' text. In the third part, I analyze narratively the expansion of fiction in the series *The haunting of Bly manor*, with emphasis on two aspects: the democratization of the fictional population, a term that I draw from Jacques Rancière's (2017) analysis of the modern novel; and the relationship between this complex form (Mittell, 2012, 2015) and the current context of reception.

FROM DIGESTED TO EXPANDED FICTION

The reduction of literary works is one of the most recurrent criticisms of the process of audiovisual adaptation, and results of an economically and culturally established condition of production and exhibition. In opposition to the rhetoric of fidelity, Robert Stam (2000) states that even loyalty to the plot, one of the elements considered common between romance and cinema, would be impossible at a detailed level, since, for this, a film version of a work such as *War and peace* would last 30 hours. "Virtually all filmmakers condense the events of the novels being adapted, if only to conform to the norms of conventional theatrical release". (Stam, 2000, p. 57).

The pragmatic need to reduce a literary work in the process of film adaptation, especially in the case of works rich in subplots and characters cores, does not inevitably lead, according to Bazin, to a lack. The condensed form is, rather, according to him, tuned with coeval time. Like radio, which provided culture for everyone in the comfort of home, adaptation "represents a gain of time and a reduction of effort, which is the very mark of our era [...]". (Bazin, 2000, p. 22). For Bazin, the notion that only the work of art that demands intellectual effort and spiritual concentration is culturally valid emanates from a bourgeois and elitist perspective.

Bazin also rejects the dichotomous thinking that reveres literature at the expense of the cinema that adapts it. The exalted defense of the novel in those cases prevents, according to him, a fruitful relationship between the arts. Film adaptation, according to Bazin, can promote literature, disseminate it, and even contribute to introducing a complex novel to an audience unfamiliar with literature and who can then move on to reading the work. For James Naremore (2000), this essay by Bazin brings arguments that support the French critic's well-known claim for an impure cinema and allows us to see the author from another angle, from an anti-elitist thought that could well have contributed to cultural studies in the second half of the 20th century.

Two other points of Bazin's essay deserve attention. The first concerns the relationship between narrative and style. For Bazin, the narrative is not

the style, as it is at the service of it. The style is the body, not the soul, “[...] and it is not impossible for the artistic soul to manifest itself through another incarnation.” (Bazin, 1948, p. 23). Characters developed by the force of the literary — a myth-creating art, according to Bazin — rise from novels to circulate in culture. “Don Quixote and Gargantua dwell in the consciousness of millions of people who have never had any direct or complete contact with the works of Cervantes and Rabelais”. (Bazin, 1948, p. 23).

Umberto Eco (2013) constructs an argument similar to the assumption that some characters acquire a floating condition, because they detach themselves from the scores that originated them and become part of the collective imagination, sometimes migrating from text to text, which includes adaptation to other media. From the perspective of Linda Hutcheon (2013), the adaptation process, as in the case of species, perpetuates the narratives, transforming them and, at the same time, carrying a certain cultural memory.

The second aspect is the dissolution of the notions of author and unity of the work of art. According to Bazin, cultural production was moving towards a reign of adaptation at the end of the first half of the 20th century, in which a narrative would be told at the same time in theater, cinema and literature. Those arts would be the faces of a pyramid and the work, an imaginary spot at the top of this figure, without precedence of one text over the other. Bazin also speculates on the erasure of the boundaries of criticism because the critic of the future should be interdisciplinary, interarts or, to use more recent expression, intermediatic.

We can apprehend, however, from the review made by Hutcheon (2013), that the criticism based on condensation about the adaptations of literary texts for the audiovisual still prevails. The question even opens Hutcheon’s study through one of the epigraphs of the first chapter – excerpt from Louis Begley’s novel *Shipwreck*. In this text, the character of an award-winning novelist considers that the writing of a screenplay based on a great novel is essentially a work of simplification, not only narrative simplification, but also intellectual. The reductions are therefore in the order of the plot and the characters and their psychology. They also imply the sacrifice of words and their connotations, forged in the style of an author and which are replaced by images – signs that embody and determine (people, scenarios, and things) what in literature is left to the imaginative *mise-en-scène* of the reader.

Hutcheon points out that the condensation of a literary plot can, in some cases, make the narrative more potent. She cites Stanley Kubrick’s *Barry Lyndon*, which tied up the fuzzy structure of Thackeray’s picaresque novel by giving it blunt linearity, and the distillations that some *noir* novels have gone through,

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with the elimination of redundancies, which resulted in sharper plots. However, Hutcheon acknowledges that the predominant discussion about simplifying adaptations is in terms of loss in various senses.

As it is usually said about media of a performative nature, cinema, in the privilege of corporeality, would not reach the complexity of the literarily constructed inner life, with loss of the motivations of the characters. “The visible body is our only evidence for the invisible mind” wrote Leo Braudy (2002, p. 184). According to Tom Wolfe (2005), the treatment of the psychology of a character is an unavoidable problem for cinema when it is considered as a reference the way literature develops the point of view, either through the intervention of the narrator or through the inner monologue. “No filmmaker has ever been able to bring the audience into a character’s mind or central nervous system—something that even bad novelists are able to obtain routinely” (Wolfe, 2005, p. 80).²

The prolongation of serial fiction, in general, remediates the need for simplification of the plot and the complex way in which series narrate today can contribute to the construction of thicker characters. The foundation of the complexity of contemporary series lies, according to Jason Mittell (2012, 2015), in the way episodic forms are redefined under the teleologic of serial narrative. The episodic – the plot that closes at the end of each part and returns to balance – is balanced by a cumulative form, by an ongoing narrative, in which each event contributes to the development of the story.

Even if Mittell looks at longer series, with more than one season, it is possible to recognize reflections of this narrative mode in works such as *The haunting of Bly manor*, of only nine episodes – unless we see *Bly* as what it also is: the second season of an anthology, *The haunting*, by Mike Flanagan. For Mittell, this balance between the episodic and serial forms allows, among other resources, to develop, through extended analepses, pasts of the characters that will contribute to the understanding of their psychologies manifested in the present tense of diegesis.

It is well known the analogy that Julio Cortázar (2004, p. 151) makes between the short story and photography, the novel, and the film, “to the extent that a film is in principle ‘an open’, Romanesque work, while a well-made photograph presupposes a just prior limitation [...]”. But the reading time of a novel or even a novel like *The turn of the screw*, with its duration, interruption, and penetration into the life of the reader, does not equate to the screen time of a film, which, in commercial exhibition, usually leads the viewer narratively for about two hours.

The practices of watching a series vary greatly according to the viewer, and are sometimes conditioned by different forms of broadcasting, from the Netflix

² Wolfe cites some features that filmmakers use to achieve something similar to the literary effect from a standpoint: *voice-over*, subjective camera, and *flashes* of memory. According to him, none of them are successful. “For me, what comes closest is the use of Michael Cane’s camera aside in the film *Alfie*; at first they are jokes, as in the film *Tom Jones*, but they end up being quite moving moments, strangely more efficient than the asides of a play” (Wolfe, 2005, p. 80). Still on the issue, see the subchapter on characters, in the work *Stars*, by Richard Dyer (1998). The author, who also considers the aspect the most difficult for the filmic construction of a novelistic character, comments on cinematic devices to express interiority, among them, the *close-up* and the performance of actors/actresses who can signal to the inner life.

paradigm (in which all episodes are delivered at once) (Buonanno, 2019)³ to the experience of the interval between episodes, which in fact characterizes serialization since the literature by slices in the 19th century. The relationship of the spectator with the fictional universe of the series is a more lasting temporal experience than with cinema and in this it can approach the immersion in more extensive literary narrative, which, as in the continuation of Cortázar's metaphor, wins the reader by points. However, the series also has its specificities, such as the seduction of the pilot and the *cliffhangers* has become a communal phenomenon of social conversation.

³ Buonanno refers to the phenomenon of *binge-watching*. While acknowledging that this practice was not inaugurated with Netflix (there are cases of Victorian novels published in a single volume and then sliced) nor is it exclusive to the platform, Buonanno so names it because she considers that this mode of delivery is mainly related to this *streaming* service.

THE HESITATION OF THE FANTASTIC

The turn of the screw was originally published in twelve parts in the American magazine *Collier's Weekly*. Its structure is that of a frame-narrative whose beginning follows the literary convention of the meeting around the fireplace in which ghost stories are told by guests, who seek to surpass, in astonishment, the previous narrative. One of them, Douglas, mentions that he possesses a manuscript unbeatable in monstrosity, entrusted to him by a former housekeeper of his sister.

He claims that a ghost story involving a child, such as the one told in the previous round, has "a special touch," and then announces, "if the child gives the effect another turn of the screw, what do you say to *two* children" (James, 2022, n. p.). The guest has the text of the city brought to a reading session. The narrator of the manuscript is a young teacher who accepts a job offer to take care of two orphans, Miles and Flora (whose parents died in India), in a house in Bly, a fictional English country. The person who hires her is the children's uncle, who lives in London and does not want to be bothered by news of his nephews. We don't know the name of the housekeeper, only that she is the youngest daughter of a parish priest and that she had come to London attracted by the announcement. In Bly, she will live with Mrs. Grose, who until then managed the house, and with "a cook, a housemaid, a dairywoman, an old pony, an old groom, and an old gardener" (James, 2022, n. p.), characters not developed in the account.

The housekeeper begins to have premonitions on the property and, especially after the early arrival of Miles, expelled from the school for unknown reasons, visions of people who, according to descriptions, are identified by Mrs. Grose as Peter Quint, a former servant whose violently death is obscure, and the previous housekeeper, Miss Jessel, also dead for unknown reasons. Convinced that the children act strangely under the influence of ghosts, the increasingly distraught housekeeper sends Flora, along with Mrs. Grose out of Bly and is left alone with

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Miles, intent on forcing the boy to admit that he also sees the ghost of Peter Quint and thus exorcize the evil entity from him. Pressed to confess – here the narrator also uses the expression “another turn of the screw” – Miles has a shock and dies in the arms of the housekeeper. This is the final paragraph of the novel:

But he had already jerked straight round, stared, glared again, and seen but the quiet day. With the stroke of the loss I was so proud of he uttered the cry of a creature hurled over an abyss, and the grasp with which I recovered him might have been that of catching him in his fall. I caught him, yes, I held him — it may be imagined with what a passion; but at the end of a minute I began to feel what it truly was that I held. We were alone with the quiet day, and his little heart, dispossessed, had stopped. (James, 2022, s. p.).

The text does not reveal whether Miles actually saw the ghost of Peter Quint and whether this final scene was that of an exorcism that culminated in his death or whether the boy died of fear in the face of the governess's aggression and terror. The account remains in the tension between a rational explanation (the ghosts would be projections of the troubled mind of the housekeeper) and the supernatural (which considers real, in diegesis, the malignancy of events). In his theory of the fantastic, Tzvetan Todorov (2007) proposes this ambiguity as a defining element of the genre: “The fantastic is the hesitation experienced by a being who only knows the natural laws, in the face of an apparently supernatural event” (Todorov, 2007, p. 31). Todorov considers *The turn of the screw* a remarkable example of his theory for the fact that the novel maintains ambiguity until the end.

Among the adaptations of the work for the cinema, at least two of them, *The innocents*, directed by Jack Clayton, in 1961, and *Through the shadow*, directed by Walter Lima Jr., in 2015, maintain the dialogue with the hesitation of the novel. Both works suppress, however, the framed narrative of *The turn of the screw* and begin with images of the housekeeper, played by Deborah Kerr, in the American film (the viewer will later know that, chronologically, it is a scene from the end of the narrative), and Virginia Cavendish, in the Brazilian version, as if they marked, in the opening, the perspective of the story to be displayed. The final scene of the two adaptations is also similar.

The phrase “I caught him, yes, I held him — it may be imagined with what a passion” is adapted by a strong hug from the housekeeper followed by a kiss on the mouth of the dead boy. One possible meaning for this outcome is that the hallucination or premonition of the character is crossed by a forbidden desire. Lima Jr.'s film probably pays homage to Clayton's in those images. Scenes earlier,

also in both films, the character of Miles (with the name Antonio, in Lima Jr film) had given a kiss on the mouth of the housekeeper, an inappropriate act for a child, which apparently generates revulsion in the housekeeper and contributes to her suspicion that the boy is possessed.

Lima Jr.'s film is more markedly a process of *indigenization*, an expression that Hutcheon (2013) draws from anthropology to refer to the migratory movement of ideas, theories and, in adaptation, stories. In those cases, the narrative is not only transplanted into another media, but into another sociocultural context with which it dialogues. In the distance crossed, the narratives undergo changes to better adapt to new audiences. In the script by Adriana Falcão, Bly's property becomes a coffee farm in Brazil in the 1930s, with predominant black people labor, a remnant of slavery.

The constant burning of coffee, ordered by Getulio Vargas government, after the crisis of 1929, causes the morning mist to be replaced by smoke in the afternoon and evening, making the farm's scenery constantly ghostly. In it, the preceptor, a young woman fresh out of a convent, believes she sees the foreman Benedict, killed in a fall on horseback, and Isabel, the teacher who preceded her. As said, the line of hesitation ends up predominating in *Through the shadow*, but there are, in the film, scenes that can indicate the presence of ghosts, such as when the girl Elisa also seems to see Bento on the roof or the game of the glass (a kind of Ouija or talking board), in which a spirit speaks through the object that points letters placed in a circle on the table.

DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE FICTIONAL POPULATION

The haunting of Bly manor breaks with hesitation to take it up again in another circumstance. For this, the plot spread over nine episodes, of 45 to 60 minutes approximately, is fundamental. The backbone of the narrative is the same: housekeeper Danielle Clayton — named after the director of *The innocents* — is hired to educate orphans Miles and Flora Wingrave. In Bly, she is haunted by the ghosts of Quint and Jessel. In the series, which is set in 1980s England, the Wingrave family's surname refers to those who win the grave, in an indication of the curse that hangs over the property: just as in Flanagan's previous series, *The haunting of Hill house*, an adaptation of Shirley Jackson's novel, everyone who dies in the house is imprisoned in it.

Between real phantasmagoria and hallucinated consciousness, the series sticks with both phenomena. The ghosts integrate the objective reality of the narratives: the children and other characters see them, and also the audience. In a recurring feature in Flanagan's thriller, all the characters withdraw,

and the camera continues to frame the environment, when something ghostly moves in it, just for us viewers.

But at the same time, both in the personal story of housekeeper Danielle Clayton and in that of the children's uncle, Henry, ghosts embody trauma, regrets, and guilt. Clayton feels responsible for the death of his childhood friend, Edmund, who in his youth becomes her fiancé. Upon acknowledging herself as homosexual, Clayton breaks up with the groom who abruptly pulls out of the car where they were talking and is run over. Since then, the image of Edmund has appeared to the housekeeper as a reflection in the mirrors. This plot is developed in episode 4, "The way it came", in *flashback* that builds layers of the housekeeper's character, explaining her departure from the United States and entering the interior of England, the disturbed mind and affective difficulties. Only after crossing the ghost of Edmund will Clayton be able to relate to the house's gardener, Jamie Taylor, who also has her story told in the series.

Henry Wingrave's phantasmagoria is himself, his evil double, who visits him every night. The *topos* of the double, developed in episode 6, are taken from another Henry James short story, "*The jolly corner*". In the series, the double is projected on the character's guilt for getting involved with sister-in-law Charlotte, wife of his brother Dominic. Henry feels mainly guilty for the death of the couple, parents of Bly's children, who, after the revelation of the betrayal (it is discovered that the girl Flora is Henry's daughter), travels to India in order to resume the marriage and dies in a plane crash. All the titles of the episodes of the series make references to other works of Henry James and the narrative inserts events and characters from the author's universe weaving them in the narrative thread of *The turn of the screw*. In the balance between episodic and seriality, the teleological conception is placed at the forefront. In the structure, episodes gain autonomy to also develop characters that, in James' novel, are only mentioned or do not exist.

But it is episode 8, "*The romance of certain old clothes*," an adaptation of James' eponymous short story, that more forcefully affirms the part's autonomy. Episode 7, "*The two faces, part 2*," ends with a *cliffhanger*, in which the ghost of the Lady of the Lake attacks housekeeper Clayton and drags her by the neck. Episode 8 begins with the end of the previous part, but does not continue it, opening a parenthesis set back in time to narrate, in black and white, the story of the sisters Viola and Perdita – named so by their father, according to the narrator of James' tale, in honor of Shakespeare's characters (James, 1999).

The viewer will have to wait for episode 9, "*The beast in the jungle*," for the resumption of what was suspended. The adaptation alters various events of the tale, the family composition and reverses the name of the sister characters, but the supernatural horror is preserved: Viola is the sister who marries, has

a daughter, and falls seriously ill. On a deathbed that seems to have no end, she asks her husband, Arthur, to keep her clothes and jewelry in a chest to be opened, as an inheritance, when their daughter is older. Perdita takes care of Viola but is constantly humiliated by her.

When he can no longer bear his sister's suffering, he chokes her with a pillow to death. She marries Arthur soon after and, years later, in a time of financial difficulties, decides to open the chest to sell the dead sister's belongings. Viola is trapped like a ghost to her things and feeling betrayed, kills her sister and wanders around Bly, sometimes murdering those she recognizes as a threat. As said, everyone who dies in that house has their spirit attached to property and, over time, loses their traits, face, and sense of identity.

The account coming from the autonomous tale explains the curse of the house and acts as what Marie-Laure Ryan (2013) calls *folklore*, a component of the narrative world that, through founding stories and legends, points to its origin. The account consolidates the tone of the Gothic novel, in which horror lies as much in a supernatural agony as in the trauma and guilt that cannot be circumvented and determine the ruin of the characters. That is Miss Clayton's fate. Between the ghostly of the Lady of the Lake and the life led in the overlapping of traumas, she succumbs, haunted by the reflection of the mirror and the water (herself?), without knowing whether, in the visions, the supernatural or the psychological operates. The haunted mansion is a gothic *topos* and the recurring reading that is made of it as a metaphor is that of the mind, with its traumas and beliefs.

In *The turn of the screw*, Bromwich (2011) identifies the radical reverberation of the pragmatism of William James, Henry James' brother. For the philosopher, belief can determine in part our experience in the empirical world, a thesis discussed, for example, in *Hill house*, through the character of the writer Steven Crain. "Thus, a ghost can hardly appear in the absence of a faith in ghosts already existing in the mind of the person who sees it" (Bromwich, 2011, p. 180). The haunted house, in the literal and metaphorical sense, is the narrative convention that groups the narratives of the anthology created by Mike Flanagan whose project also includes the adaptation of the short story "*The fall of the house of Usher*", by Edgar Allan Poe.

All the characters in *Bly Manor*, closest to the narrative core, have part of their stories told: assistant Peter Quint, *au pair* Rebecca Jessel and Danielle Clayton, housekeeper Groesen, gardener Jamie, cook Owen, children Flora and Miles and their parents, uncle Henry Wingrave. Through those stories, the viewer understands the psychology and motivation of the fictional population. The narrative resources for this are mainly two: the episodes or part of the *flashback* episodes, cleverly plotted in the central thread, and the dialogues

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turned monologues, an aspect of a possible Mike Flanagan style. Not infrequently, in the conversation between characters, one of them becomes a narrator and the text, then, becomes preponderant. This *self* that, in the foreground, takes over the screen, like a theatrical actor who goes to the front of a stage for an aside, narrates the life already subjectively qualified.

In Virginia Woolf's well-known essay "The brown stocking" on *To the lighthouse*, Erich Auerbach (2011) describes how this novel implodes objective reality and moves solely through fragments of character perceptions. "What is essential to the process and to the style of Virginia Woolf is that it is not just a matter of *a* subject, whose conscious impressions are produced, but of many subjects, often changing [...]" (Auerbach, 2011, p. 483, emphasis added). Faced with this profusion of perceptions, the reader does not always have in his hands "any determined common thread" (idem, ibidem, p. 491). Jacques Rancière (2017) understands this movement that began with the modern realist novel as the democratization of the fictional population, which establishes the regime he calls "aesthetic". This new narrative, by placing large numbers of characters on an equal footing, erases the elements of distinction of the hero that characterized fiction since the Aristotelian conception. "This population hinders the report. It leaves no room for the selection of significant characters and for the harmonious development of an intrigue" (Rancière, 2017, p.22-23).

We are also facing, in this expanded serial fiction, a democratization of the fictional population, with some differences. In some series, we can say that a democratization of protagonism in fact occurs. Actress Jamie Chung, of Korean descent, said in an interview that it took 10 years for her to take a central role in the audiovisual industry, which occurred in the episode "*Meet in me Daegu*" of the series *Lovecraft country*, an adaptation of Matt Ruff's novel. Chung plays nurse Ji-Ah during the Korean War, when he meets the protagonist of the central narrative, Atticus Freeman (Jonathan Majors), a soldier serving in the U.S. Army. The episode is about the origin of the curse of Ji-Ah, who embodies the fox of nine syrups, being from Eastern mythology. The chapter moves the character from a supporting role to protagonist, breaking with the stereotype of roles intended for Asian actresses (Andrews-Dyer, 2020).

In this sense, the democratization of protagonism is a form of displacement of the types of hero and of broadening the spectrum of representation and representativeness. The form nods to the recognition of subalternized groups in audiovisual fiction, a sociocultural demand, today, placed on entertainment. The question remains whether political and social democracy accompanies the fictional democracy of the series or whether, at least, it will contribute to changing it and on what terms.

But it must be emphasized, even once, that this is an industrial form that values the narrative thread. Unlike the realistic novel and what occurs more sharply in Woolf's works, the contemporary series, committed to entertainment, does not tear apart the external action, but rather maintains and multiplies it, and the way it opens up in life stories to collect them in intrigue is an object of pleasure for the viewer, increasingly attentive to enunciation.

In this diagram, *Bly manor* retrieves what the adaptations of *The turn of the screw* mentioned above left aside: the frame-narrative. The first episode takes place in the United States in 2007, when a group reunites to prepare for a wedding. A woman tells attendees the story about the housekeeper hired for Bly. Voice-over narration is intermittent, returning at key points in the series to introduce and concatenate subplots. The narrative framing also awakens the analytical sense of the viewer, because, at the end of the intrigue of contemporary series, it is expected that the story from outside, at some point, intersects with those inside in a hitherto unforeseen way. In the final episode, it is revealed that gardener Jamie is the narrator, Flora the bride, and other members of Bly also attend the wedding.

If the form studied here democratizes the fictional population without giving up intrigue, which preserves entertainment and dialogues with politics of representation and representation of our time, it also updates, in its own way, the dialectic of writing and reading (Martín-Barbero, 1997). Fan-produced fiction has long developed, on its own, stories for characters from classics, sequels to protagonists, or biographies for secondary individuals. Carlos Alberto Scolari (2009) even considers this creation of fans as a strategy for expanding narrative universes.

Apparently, the industry has incorporated the practice to expand its own products. There has also been a strong change in the way series are watched, either by the emergence of digital communities that scrutinize the works; the aspects of distribution that allow the viewer to see and review the narratives; by a development of TV criticism, which has contributed to trace intertextualities, unravel interwoven temporalities, and organize fictional universes that are presented in scattered histories. In this regard, Mittell assures that:

If most television storytelling for its first few decades was designed to be viewed in any order by a presumably distracted and indiscriminating viewer — a strategy that many programs and viewers challenged but was certainly encouraged by the industry — today's complex narratives are designed for a discerning viewer not only to pay close attention to once but to rewatch in order to notice the depth of references, to marvel at displays of craft and continuities, and to appreciate details that require the liberal use of pause and rewind. (Mittell, 2015, p. 38).

In a text widely cited in the studies of serial fiction, Eco (1989) speculates about the emergence of a viewer in the 20th century who, already aware of the redundancy of the medium, becomes a second-level reader, not naive, interested less in the unfolding of history than in the scheme of repetition and its minimal variations. The viewer of the contemporary series has also become, for Mittell (2015), a second-level reader, but in another condition, as challenged by the “operational aesthetics” of the narratives. According to Mittell, the series, through irony, reflexivity, multiple temporality and spatiality, dense characters, twists, among other resources, demand from the viewer engagement with the form, challenging him to think about the way the gear works and to enjoy intricate narratives.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The contemporary series, characterized by confluences between the episodic and the serial (Mittell, 2012, 2015), enables the expansion of literary universes through the dilated and intricate audiovisual narrative structure, which develops and intertwines events and characters often only mentioned in the novel or novella that served as the source for the adaptation. In this, the series might execute turns in protagonism, deepen the psychology of the characters, create and develop founding stories of the fictional world, temporal games, among other narrative devices. Therefore, the adaptation in the contemporary series confronts the perception, still current, that audiovisual transpositions necessarily reduce novels and novellas, with regard to the plot or the complexity of the characters.

In the case of the series analyzed in this study, *The haunting of Bly manor*, the main strategy adopted for the expansion of the fictional universe was the insertion of other fictions of Henry James in the intrigue of *The turn of the screw*, which remained as the main narrative axis. This allowed the articulated meeting, in the series, of gothic elements and themes dispersed in James’ work and the coherent construction of the expanded universe, which democratizes the fictional population and updates the agenda of the novel. In addition to the protagonists of the book, a set of characters close to the narrative core has its story told in *Bly*, which allows the viewer to understand the psychology and motivation of those fictional beings, including that of the antagonists.

This is a contribution of the articulations between the episodic and the serial to the literary adaptation in the contemporary series. The autonomy of some episodes, placed in teleological structure, provides more extensive biographical narratives that, in addition to brief and punctual flashbacks, give layers to the characters and expand the fictional population. This democratization has, however, as I have shown, differences in relation to the phenomenon in the modern novel, because the

expansion of characters and perspectives in the series does not break the narrative thread. It should be noted that it is an industrial form that, indebted to the serial fictions of previous centuries, values intrigue, and entertainment, even making use of strategies such as the *cliffhanger*. The series does not, therefore, erode the action, but branches it into dispersal and collecting movements that result in narrative effects.

For Mittell (2015), the contemporary viewer of those series engages with the story narrated while being very attentive to storytelling strategies. It was believed that this last mode was a skill and a pleasure reserved for criticism or a so-called cultivated spectator/reader – the *happy few*, in the irony of Umberto Eco (2003). I would not venture, however, to say that this is an inaugural scenario. Spectators, even in the face of the flow of broadcast television, have always been able to fluctuate between levels, although the material conditions today are undoubtedly more conducive to the examination and discussion of the series.

What is most clearly underway is a change of communicative assumption. When television was taken over in the 20th century as a means of mass communication, the pejorative charge that this term (mass) coming from sociology possesses was applied to the public, considered intellectually demeaned, vulgar and in bad taste. As Williams (2016) criticizes, much of television production has followed this logic. The contemporary series, in turn, has consolidated itself in the pulverization of the channels, with smaller but engaged audiences, with a cult form of accompaniment, which was extended to *streaming* (Mittell, 2015). The complexity and inventiveness of expanded fiction are therefore both stimulated by this reception and projecting it, which constitutes another way for industries to interpret audiences. ■

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