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Adaptation and Recycling in Convergent Cultural Polysystems: A Case Study

Abstract

This paper aims at presenting and discussing the findings of a research project that employs Polysystem Theory (Even-Zohar 1978; 2010) in mapping some of the contributions film industry has brought to the Brazilian literary and cultural systems. The focus of the project is on the editorial boom and recycling of J. R. R. Tolkien's trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* brought about by Peter Jackson's homonymous film versions and the several texts and cultural products synergically launched in the same period and afterwards. The research demonstrates that film adaptations of literary works in a convergent context (Jenkins 2006) may renew and enrich the original text, as well as rearrange its role and position within both source and target literary systems by introducing it to new audiences. By adapting the literary work into new texts and to new readers, this recycling process performs what Walter Benjamin conceived as translation's major role: to grant the original text "afterlife".

Keywords: Literary polysystems, adaptation, cinema, recycling, J.R.R. Tolkien.

The comparative strand of Literary Studies has always been particularly rich in Brazilian territory, partly because, as the critic Antonio Candido argued, "to study Brazilian literature is to study comparative literature" (Candido 1993: 23). As a result, the Brazilian Association of Comparative Literature and other such institutions have worked as reliable reference in pointing towards the newest trends and guidelines of academic research and critical thought aimed not only at the literary text itself, but also at the inter and transdisciplinary relationships that, if not introduced, were mul-

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tiplied and greatly deepened by postmodernity. In this sense, when we observe that some of the latest academic events in the field of comparativism have revolved around the dichotomy *center vs. periphery*, it seems reasonable to conclude that today there is a significant concern regarding the power relations that determine the formation of centers, which are obviously constituted in opposition to peripheral zones. Against this background, it is particularly interesting to investigate the role played by translation, adaptation and other forms of recycling which, at times, rearrange and challenge these positions.

Certainly, both in Brazil and internationally, the dichotomy *center vs. periphery* allows for a wide extent of probing possibilities that range from the already matured questioning as to national literatures within the scope of an alleged *Weltliteratur*, to more recent inquiries regarding the relations established between texts of different natures and that also determine hierarchies, cores and margins. Brazilian literary studies, however, arising from a so-called “country of transplanted culture”, have always shown special interest in comparativist discussions that aimed at granting the national literature recognition and visibility in its relationship with foreign literatures, especially European ones, for a long time regarded as the center around which the national production was destined to orbit, which can be inferred from Candido’s aforementioned statement. In this scenario, translating and translation studies, an area that has always been close to comparativist research, seemed to suffer from the curse of *la Malinche*¹ – the honor and the glory for fostering communication between peoples and cultures rest upon the translator, but s/he is also accused of defeatism and deemed responsible for the domination the center exerts over the periphery. Despite the anarchic humor of Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade in his anthropophagic propositions that back in 1928 stated “I only care for what is not mine” (Andrade 1991:36), only recently have Brazilians begun to break free from this view that is riddled with guilt, subservience, inferiority and debt. However, even this liberating perspective shift seems more closely related to extrinsic factors – especially the new conceptions of influence created under the overwhelming and revolutionary logic of intertextuality – than to some awareness that effectively celebrated being “mimics”. In other words, the moratorium of the cultural debt hanging over Brazilian literature was not decreed by Brazilians themselves, but by the theoretical and critical thinking generated in Europe and North America, their creditors.

More recently, however, whether due to effects of the postcolonialist logic that questions and subverts debts and filiations, or due to a postmodernist thought that is largely imported, even if prematurely – considering that Brazil has yet to fully accomplish its modernity –, the analysis and questioning of hierarchies, centers and peripheries within our own national literature has been gaining strength. This tendency is further enhanced by interdisciplinary and intersemiotic contributions that, without denying linguistic and textual borders and specificities, follow the text wherever it goes, be it as translation, adaptation, intertextuality or even influence, thereby extrapolating

the limits that surround what is literary to encompass the bigger – and therefore more complex – picture, that of what is cultural. In this context, the theoretical propositions made by Israeli researcher Itamar Even-Zohar regarding literary polysystems are of great significance, as they support investigations on relations of power and value assignment among the different texts that make up literary and cultural systems, which are characterized by their plurality and diversity of sets of elements in a dynamic yet hierarchically organized relation, resulting in what the researcher classifies as “system of systems”, hence “polysystem”.

What later came to be called the Polysystem Theory was arranged from several texts published by Even-Zohar throughout the 1970s and which have been systematically reviewed, deepened and expanded. Resulting from studies of strong formalist influence carried out at the University of Tel Aviv, Even-Zohar’s theories were born aligned with the Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) proposed by Gideon Toury. Those first papers focused on translation issues that defined the development conditions and scenario of the then incipient Hebrew literature, particularly the relations of power established between this literature and those produced in other languages that coexist and circulate in the still young Israeli literary polysystem. Despite the systemic and contextualized view of translational, literary, linguistic, cultural and even economic phenomena that have influenced the development of the literature in focus, losing sight, at times, of source and target texts, Even-Zohar’s analysis maintains the descriptive neutrality and objectivity postulated by his colleague Toury and that evoke a scientific formalist bent. According to this orientation, then, there should be no judgment of value nor clear ideological stands raised and/or defended in the analysis, but the attempt to map the existing tensions between the elements that make up the literary polysystem. However, being still in full swing, Itamar Even-Zohar has considerably extended the scope of his theory, no longer limiting his investigation to literary polysystems in their diachronic and synchronic relations, but embracing the power relations that are established within culture as a whole, which gives rise to the characterization of actual cultural polysystems, as evidenced by his recent publication *Papers in Culture Research* (2010).

The dynamics of creation of centers and peripheries within literary polysystems mirrors power relations of colonialist and/or imperialist nature, since texts written in prestigious languages or from literary systems of renowned cultural value tend to settle comfortably next to the top of the hierarchy of works that make up a literary system still in the process of consolidation. The issue, however, is more complex, since, as pointed out by the researcher, there are other cases in which translated literature enjoys central position over the local production in the literary system.

It seems to me that three major cases can be discerned: (a) when a polysystem has not yet been crystallized, that is to say, when a literature is “young,” in the process of being established; (b) when a literature is either “peripheral” or “weak,” or both; and (c) when there are turning points, crises, or literary vacuums in a literature. (Even-Zohar 1978: 21).

Therefore, translation as a cultural practice gains in importance, for it is through this practice that the center of the system is fed with works that will either act as models and oppose the ones orbiting in peripheral areas or make up for possible weaknesses and gaps in the system. Hence, the systemic approach proposed by Polysystem Theory offers great contribution to studies of formation and organization of literary systems, forged in the shadows of European literatures, consequently dependent on translation and imports. Of course, the current situation of the Brazilian literary system no longer corresponds to the scenario of those early days; one should thoroughly inquire and investigate to what extent translated literature still holds a central role in the national polysystem, given the undeniable progress and maturity of Brazilian literature. In any case, even an uncommitted walk among the shelves of major bookstores around the country seems to indicate that this situation of unbalanced trade relations is still far from being reversed, and that translated literature will hold a privileged status in Brazilian culture for years to come.

Even-Zohar's theoretical studies, however, did more than subsidize research focused on this phenomenon of international exchange. They have also contributed to the realization that national productions are equally distributed in central and peripheral zones within their literary systems, indicating the same hierarchical dynamics that guide the positioning of foreign texts imported through translation, which is often noticed in the status given to children's literature or to written expressions of popular culture. It follows that the judgments of value, attribution of prestige and formation of canons that govern the internal dynamics of literary polysystems arise from power games that go well beyond the simplistic notions of cultural and economic domination between nations.

In times of exacerbated interdisciplinarity, however, no theories or concepts based on and applied to literature seem to be restricted to this form of art and field of studies. Likewise, when new conceptions of text put into question literary assumptions, translation, being one of the many forms of textual dialogues, is also broadened so as to accommodate, or at least approach, relationships between texts of different natures, extending its ancient tradition and relatively new theoretical framework to even newer fields of studies based on concepts of similar orientation, such as adaptation, appropriation, recycling, transculturation, remix, among so many others.

Added to this is the fact that cultural markets, driven by the logic of globalization and massification, seem to bet on convergence and transdisciplinary synergies and similarities so as to maximize their marketing campaigns and sales potential. Therefore, it seems absolutely natural and coherent that Even-Zohar's findings regarding literary polysystems migrate and become also relevant to larger and more complex scenarios that encompass all other semiotic systems of communication and cultural production.

... the polysystemic approach is expected to serve as the theoretical environment for the study of culture allowing it to develop versatile tools which will enable dealing with heterogeneity and dynamics along the same principles that have led to the furtherance of the cultural framework. (Even Zohar 2010: 39)

Consequently, based on these theoretical assumptions, I have dedicated myself studying the contributions made by the international film industry to the Brazilian cultural polysystem through adaptations of English-speaking literary works. Studies related to the dialogue between literature and film are quite recurrent in the contemporary Brazilian academic environment, partly due to the acknowledgement owed to the investigative merits of interdisciplinary approaches, a consequence of the comparative bent aforementioned, partly due to the unavoidable cultural influence and penetration cinema exerts as an artistic expression, despite the fact that the national film industry is still rather unstable. However, I seek to go beyond the still quite recurrent perception that this interdisciplinary dialogue indicates a parasitic relationship in which cinema – a recently formed art and industry – benefits from the literary legacy – older and more prestigious – when borrowing stories, plots, characters and narrative resources. To avoid the trap of treating recyclers as traitors, my research draws on the systemic approach to describe the intricate net of relationships existing between literature and cinema within the Brazilian cultural system. As a result, despite the prejudice still found in some instances of both academic and cultural environments, the research findings indicate that the massified “seventh art” has been aiding the publishing industry in minimizing the impact that the exacerbation of visual culture, as well as new technologies and entertainment media, has had over reading and hence over the local literary system.

The relationship between literature and film is as old as cinema itself, as thoroughly pointed out by Gerald Mast:

Since moving pictures and, after 1927, moving pictures synchronized with recorded sounds could be used to tell stories, describe events, imitate human actions, expose problems, and urge reforms, it is not surprising that such uses of motion pictures would provoke speculative comparisons with that other major human system for telling, describing, imitating, exposing, and urging—verbal language. The history of these comparisons between film and literature has been a history of splitters and lumpers, of those who argue for the distinctness of the two media – the effects, purposes, pleasures, and possibilities of two separate arts that are, ought to be, or must be distinct – as opposed to those who argue that the aims, effects, and means of the two media are similar, parallel, or analogous. (Mast 278)

Even though this dialogue derives from the textual structures and communicative possibilities inherent to the two arts involved, giving rise to a wide range of relationships, parallels and influences that have contributed greatly to their respective productions, a huge percentage of the theoretical and critical approaches to these relationships limits the term “literature” to novels and drama, whereas “film” is reduced to the category of fictional narrative films, particularly feature films, a noticeable impoverishment which happens for reasons unknown even to Mast. Comparatively speaking, there is little discussion on the possible dialogues between documentaries and non-fiction literary texts, or poetry and, say, animation, to name two out of many other investigative

possibilities. What is more, even a cursory analysis on the numerous production devoted to such studies seems to be enough to prove the tendency to give priority to cases of literary adaptation (of novels and plays) to film language, practically disregarding the wide range of possible dialogues – from obvious intertexts to subtle influences –, which ultimately contributes to this insidious notion that the myriad of relationships between two huge fields of artistic creation can be narrowed down to the practice of intersemiotic translation aimed at merely retelling on the big screen what literature has previously consecrated in its pages. In a world still strongly attached to the notion of an overvalued and idealized originality that is mistaken for primacy, there is no need for a great deal of reflection to realize that this is a comfortable spot to a notion of cultural debt along the lines of that which still undercuts many non-European literary systems. In other words, this biased and narrow-minded view of the richness of the interdisciplinary dialogue reinforces the perception that cinema owes to literature a great part of its wealth and complexity simply because, mind you, it did not come first.

Of course, the market for film adaptations of literary works, as well as the obviousness of such dialogues, often expressed in the choice of title itself, partly justifies this notion, but there are also historical reasons that seem to contribute to such a marked tendency. The first, as noted by Mast, is the fact that cinema, being a recent art, is not only valued and judged according to criteria that are applicable to the oldest and more prestigious arts, but is also studied by professionals who had their education and taste developed to conform to the particularities of the already established art forms and disciplines dedicated to them, especially literature. Differences in the composition of audiences are also noteworthy, since the aesthetic, philosophical and epistemological concerns are displayed by the most select and affluent publics of the prestigious arts, while the often illiterate cinema audiences of the early days were not concerned with this sort of questioning, little caring about the socio-cultural status of their newly acquired hobby. In addition to that, in the specific case of adaptation, appropriation and other explicit intertextual dialogues and recycling practices, there is the discredited view of translation – in this case, intersemiotic translation – which has not yet been overcome due to the resistant notion that places the original literary text as something sacred whose integrity must not be tainted; it is the old maxim of fidelity, which, however fallacious translation studies have proven it to be, is still desired and defended by many, at times in an overt way.

Mast adds as a derogatory factor for cinema in face of literature the modernist assumption, still much in vogue, that a work of art has to be a radical creation, both in form and content, one that does not result from generic conventions and, therefore, cannot be identified with the masses, which tend to feel comfortable in the presence of what is generic and conventional (281). Even though the American scholar does not go too deep into this issue, emphasizing only that formal experimentalism is not exactly the hallmark of most of the film industry production, one can notice here that he touches an aspect of great importance to this research: the characterization of cinema as

mass cultural expression. In previous texts I have analyzed some of the consequences, particularly for cinema, of overtly biased views on mass culture products, such as Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno's articulate reasoning which concluded that art and entertainment are not only two distinct cultural phenomena, but incompatible ones.

Despite so many entrenched principles and prejudices that for many years denied cinema the status of art, one can say, with relief and genuine satisfaction, that this discussion is today surpassed in most cultural systems. Though the term "film industry" stills haunts and distresses a few purists on duty, the seventh art now seems to live up to its own muse. However, prejudice does not die easily, and often its propagators make small concessions in order to maintain their innermost values untouched; the old strategy of "losing the saddle to keep the horse". This seems to have been the case of the perception of cultural value attributed to cinema; instead of abolishing aprioristic evaluations that prejudge and label film productions based on their popularity among the least affluent and sophisticated publics, art criticism gradually split film productions into two segments of easy identification, the so-called "art films" and "commercial films" – an offshoot of the overwhelming growth and diversification of worldwide film production that unfortunately reinforces the notion that art and entertainment are self-excluding. Although specialized literature does not fully define what kinds of films are to be aligned in each of these segments, even because generic classifications in film studies are a work in progress, any reader of cultural supplements knows that the second category must be filled up with Hollywood movies and blockbusters; whereas the definition of the first group would be a little more complicated, since it involves the very notion of film art. However, this task can be significantly simplified without much risk of error if one aligns European (particularly French), Asian (except for the world-famous Bollywood films), independent, experimental and auteurial productions, that is, almost all movies that have not been created by North American studios and/or have not achieved much success or financial return. Excesses and inaccuracies aside, one can say that the contemporary film industry, as well as its specialized criticism, is guided by this classificatory logic.

It is worth stressing, though, that cinema is both art *and* industry. Therefore, both the experimentalism and aesthetic refinement peculiar to art films, and heavy investments in new audiovisual production and reproduction technologies – only possible in films bankrolled by major producers – contribute equally to the development of film language. Nonetheless, the same conception of tainted entertainment devoid of artistic qualities that once fell on cinema as a whole is now often employed in a priori characterization of commercial movies, especially blockbusters. Of course, it is not my aim to advocate the complete reversal of this assumption, defending that all movies are works of art and objects deserving of the most insightful analyses and theoretical considerations. Just like all other arts, cinema produces a great deal of works of poor or highly questionable quality and merit, regardless of having or not any commercial appeal. What is in question here is the (not always) veiled practice of assessing artistic value

and quality based on financial data in a relation of inverse proportionality: the higher the figures involved in the production of a film, the lower its merit as a work of art.

Although this is an internal matter of film industry and market, literature has always been affected by this relation, and the growing complexity of today's transdisciplinary and transmedial cultural polysystems has only enhanced these "sympathy pains". The numerous adaptations and appropriations of literary works, for instance, are also subject to the same rules applicable to original screenplays, but with an aggravating factor: few readers seem to be pleased by the sudden transformation of one of their favorite readings into a blockbuster. Imagine, just for the sake of recreational pondering, the passionate reactions one would get from an announcement of yet another film production of *Hamlet*, only this time with experienced actor Sylvester Stallone in the leading role. Not even Alfred Hitchcock's many lessons demonstrating that, in film, acting skills are not a *sine qua non* condition for the production of a great movie would save this work. Even before any take was shot, the film and its director would already be hopelessly and irrevocably doomed by the critics' and the public's massacre. Certainly such a far-fetched example may be laughable, but it is enough for us to realize the existence of this premise according to which film adaptations – and other forms of recycling – of great literary works must be guided by an artistic approach, not a commercial one, whatever that entails in terms of screenwriting, intersemiotic translation and film production.

The hypothetical example above also reinforces that which Christian Metz (1972) indicates as one of the features that help us distinguish between film and cinema language. The cinematographic text goes far beyond the film text, for it also involves elements that produce meaning before, during and after the screening of the film itself, such as projection conditions or even assumptions and intertexts created by the mere casting for the different roles, as described in our comical example or in the recent (and slightly surreal) negative reactions of Batman fans to the choice of Ben Affleck to take up the role as Bruce Wayne in Zack Snyder's coming production. Therefore, one can see that criticizing commercial cinema for using elements extrinsic to the film itself in order to maximize the cultural experience tied to it makes no sense at all, for these extrinsic elements are a mechanism intrinsic to the production of meaning in the art of cinema.

Given this scenario, the position of the director who intends to adapt into film canonical or extremely popular literary works is unrewarding. If s/he has aspirations of someday being praised as an *auteur*, s/he will almost wish that the work be a flop, so that only critics and a few enthusiasts will find in it the "noncommercial" bent that will consecrate the artist. However, if that is a rule in today's film industry, there has to be at least one exception to confirm it. Well, it seems one of such exceptions may be found in New Zealand, and it goes by the name of Peter Jackson.

A virtually unknown B movie director (hence, an "artist") without any title of greater impact in his curriculum, Peter Jackson found himself, in the mid-90s, trusted with

a multimillionaire budget and one of the greatest film projects ever carried out – the simultaneous production of three feature-length films that would bring to the screen the saga *The Lord of the Rings*, by J. R. R. Tolkien. Since the first rumors about this long-awaited adaptation, yet until then unseen due to the challenges of intersemiotic translation the novel presented, strong suspicions as to the reasons behind the choice of Jackson and to his attributes to undertake such a huge responsibility hovered. Although Tolkien's work has always been subject to fierce disputes regarding its literary worth and has never rejoiced in a position that was unquestionably central – even in its original literary system –, its passionate legion of British fans raised it to the singular position of “book of the century”². With such a literary heritage in hands, the risks of significant financial loss and of the adaptation becoming “a chronicle of a flop foretold” were astronomical. Therefore, choosing a director was not something that could be done carelessly, it followed a thorough process of selection that took into account both characteristics needed to ensure acceptance by the literary public and what would guarantee the financial return necessary and desired by producers and investors, as pointed out by I. Q. Hunter:

Jackson and his co-adaptors were constrained not only to satisfy Tolkien readers by capturing “the essence” of the novel, but also to produce a blockbuster action movie accessible to viewers with no emotional investment in the novel. But the novel's wide fan base, while not sufficient, as Kristin Thompson remarks, to make the film a hit, was certainly large enough to cause damage if the film was felt to be inauthentic, “Hollywoodized” and out of alignment with readers' expectations ... To keep the fans onside, it was crucial not only that the films (or at least the first one) stuck closely to the novel, but that Jackson and his team display credentials as fans themselves. The Tolkien estate, luckily, had no control over the films, but convenient links were emphasized between Tolkien and the filmmakers - for example, the fact that Christopher Lee, who plays Saruman, had actually met Tolkien. Jackson himself was opportunistically spun in publicity material as a genial, tubby, bare-footed hobbit. Even so, while mollifying the fans ensured some sort of audience for the film, pandering exclusively to them was aesthetically constricting and commercially perilous ... Furthermore, for a minority of film fans (like me), *The Lord of the Rings* was not simply an adaptation of Tolkien: it was the latest film by the *auteur* Peter Jackson, an accomplished director of fantasy movies from the splatter-comedy *Bad Taste* (1987) to the psychological drama *Heavenly Creatures* (1994). How would *Lord of the Rings* adapt to and extend his distinctive vision? Was the quirkily subversive New Zealander at last selling out to Hollywood? (156-157)

However, contrary to the most pessimistic predictions, choosing Jackson proved to be more than just accurate and, by the end of 2003 – when the final film of the trilogy was released – the film version of *The Lord of the Rings* was celebrated as one of the most successful adaptations of literary works, a great work of fiction, a prodigy of au-

diovisual creation of fantastic worlds and beings and, paradoxically, a blockbuster of great artistic qualities. But, of course, Jackson was not alone during the several years demanded to accomplish the production of the trilogy, and part of its success is owed to the efficient marketing campaign that orchestrated all the moves of the several cultural products created in association with the film. Aware of the sales potential that this massive cultural movement presented, the publishing industry rushed to launch its products as well: several different editions of the original trilogy, new editions of other works by Tolkien, as well as a number of other publications somehow related to *The Lord of the Rings*.

So far, nothing new; publishing booms fueled by film adaptations are a fairly common phenomenon and, though they reinforce my underlying statement here concerning cinema's great and perhaps increasing influence on literary polysystems, they sometimes do not go beyond a fleeting fever of the publishing market. But the specific case of Jackson's adaptations of Tolkien's works and their penetration into the Brazilian cultural market had unique consequences that allowed further investigation of the complex relationships texts of different natures and languages establish between themselves within the scope of what may be called "cultural polysystems". The peculiar aspect behind the position taken up by Tolkien's work within the Brazilian literary polysystem arises from the fact that *The Lord of the Rings*, despite its aforementioned popularity in its original system and in those of other English-speaking nations, had remained virtually unknown to Brazilian readers until the late 90s, the eve of the release of Jackson's trilogy.

Looking back, it is really interesting and rather surprising that Tolkien's work had such an unimpressive performance in Brazil during the 20th century while establishing itself as one of the most popular and admired works of fiction in the English language, especially if we take into account that the first translation of the trilogy to Portuguese was carried out by Antônio Ferreira da Rocha and Luiz Alberto Monjardim for the Brazilian publishing house Artenova. About twenty years after the publication of the original work in the UK, Artenova published its translation; oddly enough, the Brazilian edition had six volumes, three of which created and titled by the editors, since the original text, conceived as a single novel, had been divided into three books, despite the author's resistance, in order to make it more marketable. Translational and editorial licenses aside, Artenova was responsible for introducing *The Lord of the Rings* into the Portuguese-speaking world. However, despite this major accomplishment, the company closed down soon after the publication of the last of the six books. After this period (70s and early 80s), the only translations of *The Lord of the Rings* to Portuguese would be published by Europa-América, a Lisbon-based publishing house.

For those unfamiliar with Brazilian culture, Artenova's failure in publishing those translations might seem to have been due to prejudice or national grudges against English literary works. However, as previously discussed, most of the works that hold central position in the Brazilian literary polysystem are European, many of which

English-speaking, and have been brought here through translation. One could also hypothesize that this poor publishing performance might have resulted from a difficulty the translated work faced in positioning itself, since young adult fiction in Brazil until quite recently was not dissociated from children's literature, hence the recurrent classification of works as different as, for example, Roald Dahl's and Tolkien's under one generic and imprecise label called *infanto-juvenil*³ literature. Still, other English-speaking writers have been successful in ensuring their niches in this apparent "mixed bag", such as Lewis Carroll or even Jonathan Swift, whose works have been somewhat oversimplified and adapted to young readers. Therefore, the reasons for Artenova's poor performance in introducing Tolkien to the Brazilian literary system remain unknown, and the fact is that the masterpiece of the famous British philologist had to wait more than a decade until the cultural agitation sparked by the making of Jackson's film adaptations ensured the investment of the publishing market in producing new translations. Still in the 90s, probably tuned to the first steps of Jackson's long and painstaking pre-production, the publishing house Martins Fontes resumes the project of introducing *The Lord of the Rings* to the Brazilian literary market, publishing the saga in its original format, in three volumes. Already in 2000, aided by the international marketing campaign run in preparation for the release of the first feature film (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, 2001), the Brazilian publishing house could already tell that the process of reintroducing and recycling Tolkien in the Brazilian polysystem was not only complete, but had been a success. Following this first "recycled" edition of the first novel of the trilogy, the other two novels came right behind, but soon the marketplace would be flooded with revised editions and publications in new formats, including, of course, the one that would confirm the "synergy" of the different cultural products of the Tolkien franchise: a three-volume edition with covers alluding to Jackson's films.

With the release of the last film of the trilogy (*The Return of the King*), in 2003, Brazilian readers could count not only with a British writer and a highly popular work of young adult literature thoroughly renewed within their literary polysystem, but also with a number of new cultural products and a genuine "tolkienmania" spreading through several segments and media, such as comics, digital games and fanfiction. But more than that, to the likely chagrin of the precursors from Artenova, one can observe that the recycling of *The Lord of the Rings* within the Brazilian literary system was not limited to fueling the commerce of the trilogy and other products directly associated with it, but pushed all of Tolkien's work, if not to the center of the literary system, certainly to the center of the publishing market. With that, fictional and nonfictional works of the British writer thus far unknown to the Brazilian public (aside from occasional buyers of imported books), such as *The Hobbit*, *The Silmarillion*, *The Children of Hurin* and *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, were finally translated and published by national publishing houses. Similarly, the cultural effervescence brought about by the *The Lord of the Rings* franchise would be later reenacted and further explored by the launch of Jackson's adaptation of *The Hobbit* (2012-2014); this time, however, it came

as no surprise, since Brazilian readers and film viewers were already enlisted among Tolkien lovers worldwide.

But the revival of *The Lord of the Rings* within the Brazilian cultural system had consequences that went way beyond establishing or enlarging Tolkien's and Jackson's fanbases. The intensity of this boom helped consolidate young adult fantasy literature as a high-profit niche dissociated from children's books, a niche which, of course, would need more than one author to sustain itself. As a result, the editorial market made heavy investments in recycling previous works by different authors or in publishing new ones that could be associated with Tolkien's fantastic universe, such as narratives exploring Norse or Celtic mythology, medieval scenery and fantastic sagas of Messianic heroes, themes and images that do not easily match South-American tropical environments. Moreover, having taken place in these times of unprecedented "cultural convergence", as Henry Jenkins puts it, the adherence of Brazilian youth to Tolkienmania fed the recent but growing practice of fanfiction writing and sharing, a cultural phenomenon which in Brazil is still restricted to the upper classes due to the costs involved in the acquisition of technology, but which has already proven to be highly influential in the dynamics of the literary system both by boosting readership and by forming more, better and younger literary writers by the year.

Therefore, from the facts presented in this "literary case study" it is clear that the effects of film adaptations and of the ensuing revival of literary works adapted are diverse, complex and too broad to be encompassed by approaches exclusively aimed at analyzing source and target texts. The systemic approach proposed by Even-Zohar allows us to map, both synchronically and diachronically, without any intention of exhausting the issue, the complex and dynamic web of relationships between texts of different media that feed the cultural polysystem, particularly re-culture practices that interfere in the circulation of such texts.

Although much more could be researched regarding the corpus and connections presented here, it seems reasonable to conclude that the data exposed put to rest any notion that one could still have as to film industry's debt to literature. Even if the film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* might not have had major implications in cultural systems in which the literary work had already enjoyed solid popularity – which I doubt –, I believe that the cultural phenomenon brought about by the release of Peter Jackson's trilogy in Brazil is not only worthy of note and study, but must be greeted warmly, for a nation where about 40% of students report having less than ten books at home⁴ is in no position to feed prejudice against any cultural product or practice that may boost the publishing market and stimulate an interest in reading. The launch of Jackson's adaptations in Brazil, backed up by commercial practices usually frowned upon for their overt financial motivations, had the merit of single-handedly supporting the reintroduction and recycling of a great work of young adult fantasy in a literary system where this genre was marginal and fuzzy, of introducing a rich fantastic universe that has influenced many other works and of stimulating the formation and

qualification of both new readers and writers, greatly surpassing any timid governmental campaigns to promote reading.

If it is true that Brazil has been going through a serious “book crisis”, as has been argued, then perhaps it is time scholars and critics free themselves of unfounded prejudices and regard cinema not as wealthy literature’s poor and indebted cousin, but as a possible and effective aid in reviving and recycling the literary legacy which is increasingly in disuse. In this sense, the long-detracted practice of adaptation may claim its share of acknowledgment for cultural services rendered, since, just like the hailed poetry translation, it can carry out the primary task of translation appointed by German philosopher Walter Benjamin: to ensure the survival of the literary text. Although Benjamin’s romantic spirit did not have in mind mundane topics such as the publishing market or re-culture practices, it will seem logical to any more pragmatic mind that, without readers, no text survives.

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- 1 *La Malinche*, also known as Malintzin, was the Mexican woman who, due to her talent for language learning, became Hernan Cortez’s interpreter, contributing to the devastating Spanish domination over Mexico. The term La Malinche has since meant both the translator and the traitor.
 - 2 In a survey carried out in 1997 by Britain’s Channel 4 in partnership with Waterstone bookstore chain that aimed at pointing out “the greatest book of the 20th century” according to the readers.
 - 3 A category that encompasses both children’s and young adult literature.
 - 4 According to PISA 2010, 39.5% of Brazilian students have less than ten books at home, and other 30.4% reported that their books do not exceed 25, textbooks included.

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