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Pedagogická fakulta  
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DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

Functional equivalence in the film adaptation of Anni Proulx's *Brokeback  
Mountain*

Funkční ekvivalence ve filmové adaptaci povídky *Zkrocená hora Annie  
Proulx*

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Studijní program: Učitelství anglického jazyka pro 2. stupeň základní školy a střední  
školy

Odevzdáním této diplomové práce na téma Funkční ekvivalence ve filmové adaptaci povídky Zkrocená hora Annie Proulx potvrzuji, že jsem ji vypracoval pod vedením vedoucího práce samostatně za použití v práci uvedených pramenů a literatury. Prohlašuji, že jsem při její tvorbě nepoužil nástrojů umělé inteligence jiným způsobem, než je uvedeno ve vyjádření, které je součástí textu práce. Dále potvrzuji, že tato práce nebyla využita k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

V Praze 14. 4. 2025

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my supervisor, Mgr. Jakub Ženíšek, Ph.D., for his time, feedback, and guidance. I would also like to thank my family for their support and my future wife, Kristýna, for being the lighthouse in the storm.

## **ABSTRAKT**

Cílem této diplomové práce je analýza filmové adaptace povídky *Brokeback Mountain* od Annie Proulx, kterou v roce 2005 režíroval Ang Lee a jejíž scénář napsali Larry McMurtry a Diana Ossana.

Práce je rozdělena do dvou částí. Teoretická část představuje klíčové přístupy k filmovým adaptacím, včetně protichůdných názorů na věrnost a hodnotu adaptací jakožto samostatných uměleckých děl. Opírá se o teorie Lindy Hutcheon a Louise Giannettiho a rozvádí pojem funkční ekvivalence s odkazem na teorii překladu Eugena Nidy. Zvažuje také význam autorského záměru v kontextu adaptačních studií. Praktická část zkoumá adaptační strategie filmu prostřednictvím Giannettiho taxonomie doslovné, volné a věrné adaptace. Analyzuje momenty přímého přenosu textu, přidání a vypuštění scén či replik, časové posuny a zaměřuje se na to, jak jsou prostřednictvím funkčních ekvivalentů zachovány scény, charakterové rysy, emocionální stavy i tematické prvky.

## **KLÍČOVÁ**

## **SLOVA**

film, adaptace, funkční ekvivalence, věrnost, autorský záměr, povídka, scénář, motiv

## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this diploma thesis is the analysis of the film adaptation of Annie Proulx's short story *Brokeback Mountain*, directed by Ang Lee and written by Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana in 2005.

The thesis is divided into two parts. The theoretical part outlines key approaches to film adaptations, including contrasting views on fidelity and the value of adaptations as independent works of art. It draws on the theories of Linda Hutcheon and Louis Giannetti, and elaborates on the concept of functional equivalence with reference to Eugene Nida's translation theory. It also considers the relevance of authorial intention in the context of adaptation studies. The practical part examines the film's adaptation strategies through Giannetti's taxonomy of literal, loose, and faithful adaptations. It analyzes moments of direct textual transfer, additions and omissions, and shifts in chronology, and focuses on how scenes, character traits, emotional states, and themes are preserved through functional equivalents.

## **KEYWORDS**

film, adaptation, functional equivalence, fidelity, authorial intention, short story, screenplay, theme

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## **Introduction**

How does a piece of writing change as it is re-written—and more importantly, how does it transform when adapted into a completely different medium? The process of adaptation necessarily involves both subtraction and addition: scenes may be removed, new ones invented, and dialogue rewritten or redistributed. In some cases, the main storyline remains intact; in others, it is significantly altered to better suit the narrative conventions or limitations of the target medium. This inherent process of transformation becomes even more layered and complex when adapting literature into film—a shift that requires more than just transcription of content. It involves interpretation, creative decisions, and a reimagining of the original work's themes and emotional texture through the lens of cinematic storytelling.

A popular way of judging film adaptations is by evaluating their faithfulness to the source material. While fidelity criticism has been widely debated and critiqued—particularly by poststructuralist thinkers—this perspective remains useful for many audiences and scholars. As an avid cinephile, I have always approached films from a variety of analytical perspectives. Examining the degree to which a film honors its literary predecessor offers a compelling way of understanding the adaptation as both a new creation and a response to the original text.

The object of investigation in this thesis is Annie Proulx's short story *Brokeback Mountain*, which first appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1997 (*The New Yorker*, n.d.) and was later published in her short story collection *Close Range: Wyoming Stories* in 1999 (Goodreads, n.d.). While the story was met with critical acclaim in literary circles, it became a true global phenomenon through its 2005 film adaptation directed by Ang Lee. Many, myself included, encountered the story for the first time not in print, but on screen, unaware that it was an adaptation. The film, scripted by Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana, garnered extensive praise, winning three Academy Awards (IMDb, n.d.)—for Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Director, and Best Original Score—and significantly amplified the story's cultural impact.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the process of adaptation through the lens of functional equivalence, particularly as seen in Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain*. To this end, I employ Louis Giannetti's typology of adaptations, which classifies them as either literal, loose, or faithful. This framework not only provides structure to the practical analysis, but also allows

for a more nuanced understanding of the changes made during the adaptation process. While literal and loose adaptations often foreground either fidelity or transformation, it is the faithful adaptation that most clearly invites an investigation of functional equivalence—how the emotional, thematic, and narrative essence of the source text is preserved, even when surface-level changes are made.

The theoretical part of the thesis begins by offering a general overview of film adaptation as a creative process, with particular emphasis on the role of fidelity. In this section, the views of Linda Hutcheon are highlighted—specifically her assertion that adaptations must be appreciated as works in their own right, rather than judged solely by their relationship to the original. The chapter also outlines Giannetti’s taxonomy and introduces the concept of functional equivalence as a central analytical tool. The final chapter of the theoretical part engages with poststructuralist debates surrounding the “death of the author,” arguing that while these ideas offer important insights into reader and viewer reception, the voices of authors and screenwriters can enrich our understanding of the adaptation’s purpose and interpretation.

The practical part of the thesis opens with a brief comparative synopsis of the short story and the film adaptation. This is followed by a tripartite analysis aligned with Giannetti’s three categories of adaptation. Each section offers detailed comparisons between the original text and its film version. In the chapter on faithful adaptation, the emphasis is placed on instances of functional equivalence—examining how the film uses cinematography, dialogue, actor performance, and other cinematic tools to preserve the core psychological, emotional, and thematic elements of Proulx’s story.

Finally, the conclusion synthesizes the findings of the analysis and reflects on the complex nature of adaptation as both interpretation and creation. By applying the lens of functional equivalence to *Brokeback Mountain*, this thesis aims to contribute to a more refined understanding of what it means for an adaptation to be “faithful”—not just to the letter of the text, but to its spirit.

# **1 Theoretical part**

## **1.1 Book-to-film adaptations**

Literature and film, described by Montgomery et al. (1992, as cited in Bao, 2008) as two culturally dominant ways of experiencing fiction available to us, have captivated millions worldwide (Bao, 2008). Many literary masterpieces have been adapted into films, reaching broader audiences and offering new interpretations of established narratives. While novels allow for an intimate and immersive experience through the act of reading, films engage viewers with dynamic visual storytelling, music, and performances. This fundamental difference between the two mediums highlights the complexity of adaptation, as there is requirement for a transformation of a text-based narrative into an audiovisual experience.

The practice of adaptation is not recent, rather it has been an integral part of storytelling throughout history. Corrigan (2017) describes this phenomenon as having regularly shifted and acquired different connotations through many centuries. This suggests that adaptation is a fluid and evolving practice, influenced by cultural, technological, and artistic changes. While the concept has evolved, the core idea of transforming one work into another has persisted. Over time, it has become a means of preserving and reinterpreting stories, allowing them to resonate with new generations. Corrigan (2017) further explains that adaptation today is largely associated with film, media, and artistic practices, as scholars examine distinctions between writing and filmmaking to explore how adaptations create new meanings while retaining connections to their literary sources. This focus on film as a medium of adaptation is further emphasized by Corrigan's observation that during the early twentieth century, cinematic adaptation was often understood through the lens of intertextuality, wherein films incorporated elements from various artistic and social domains, reinforcing their role as interpretative works rather than simple reproductions.

The sheer prevalence of adaptations, particularly in film, underscores their significance in our culture. As Harold (2018) states in his entry in *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, adaptation is a dominant cultural phenomenon with most films being based on pre-existing sources—and one with a long and rich history. He illustrates the adaptability of narratives across different artistic media by mentioning how short stories are adapted into plays; plays into films; films into operas; songs into poems; and on and on, backwards and forwards. This

constant interplay between different art forms highlights the enduring appeal of revisiting and reinterpreting stories, while also demonstrating how stories are continuously reshaped to fit various cultural and artistic contexts. Films, in particular, have drawn upon sources ranging from classical literature to contemporary novels, reimagining these works in ways that appeal to modern audiences. The ability of adaptations to traverse multiple art forms suggests their importance in sustaining and revitalizing cultural heritage.

McFarlane (2009) supports this idea by noting how as soon as cinema established itself as a medium for narrative storytelling, filmmakers began extensively drawing from novels, a well-established source of narrative fiction, for inspiration, and how this practice quickly became a standard approach and has persisted for nearly a century without significant interruption. The longstanding relationship between literature and film has seen filmmakers continuously look to novels for compelling narratives and well-developed characters. Motivations behind adapting novels into films vary. McFarlane (2009) describes them as ranging from commercial considerations to a deep respect for literary works. Some filmmakers see adaptation as a way to capitalize on the popularity of a pre-sold title, ensuring a built-in audience and financial success (we can observe this phenomenon today as well with many new film releases being either sequels to or remakes of established works). Others view adaptation as an artistic endeavor, striving to translate the essence of a novel into a cinematic form. The tendency of focusing on making profit by exploiting commercially successful novels often results in the filmmakers ignoring whether what made the original triumphant was the verbal mode in which it was presented (McFarlane, 2009). This raises the question of staying true to the pre-text material. The transition from text to film is not always seamless, as filmmakers must navigate the challenge of retaining the novel's essence while making it accessible and engaging for a cinematic audience. Balancing fidelity to the source material with creative reinterpretations remains a central concern in adaptation discourse.

For many viewers, watching a film adaptation of their favorite novel can be both thrilling and nerve-wracking. Some may delight in seeing beloved characters and worlds come to life on screen, while others may feel disappointed if key elements of the story are altered or omitted. The way an adaptation aligns—or fails to align—with personal interpretations can

shape whether audiences view the film as a faithful homage or a misrepresentation of the original work. This emotional response often fuels debates about artistic liberties, narrative fidelity, and the inherent differences between literature and film. Stam (2000) describes how readers form personal interpretations of novels, fashioning their own emotions, desires, and idealized visions onto the narrative, mentally constructing unique interpretations of characters, settings, and events. This sense of personal ownership over the imagined world of a book can lead to disappointment when the film adaptation diverges from the reader's vision. The readers, who have formed their own perceptions of the story, are confronted with a filmmaker's singular interpretation, which may not align with their personal imaginings. If an adaptation is found as having lowered significant aspects of a novel, it often faces dissatisfaction and criticism from the readers (Hutcheon, 2006). McFarlane echoes Stam's sentiment by referencing Christian Metz's notion that readers will not always find their film, since what they have before them in the actual film is now somebody else's phantasy (as cited in McFarlane, 2009, p. 385). While concurring with Metz's statement, he simultaneously points out that audiences, despite any criticisms they may have about deviations from the original, audiences continue to be curious about how the books are visually represented, eager to compare their own mental images of the novel's world and characters with the filmmaker's portrayal. Ultimately, the viewer's experience of a film adaptation is shaped by their individual relationship with the source material and their willingness to reconcile their personal interpretation with the filmmaker's vision.

The process of adaptation thus involves a negotiation between being faithful to the source material and the filmmaker's creative vision. Success often depends on balancing these elements while resonating with both fans of the book and new viewers. Book-to-film adaptations have a long history and remain a significant aspect of cultural production. They bridge literary and cinematic traditions, offering audiences new ways to experience stories while simultaneously challenging their expectations. While viewers may have strong personal attachments to the literary world they have imagined, filmmakers are tasked with creating a version of the story that works within the constraints of a visual medium. This inherent tension raises critical questions regarding the very nature of fidelity in adaptation. Scholars in adaptation studies ask what constitutes a "faithful" rendering of a literary work in cinematic form or whether a strict adherence to the plot and characters is the only measure

of success, or whether there are other, more nuanced ways to capture the essence of a novel on screen.

## **1.2 Questioning the fidelity criterion**

When movies based on literary works are released, there's a prevailing tendency to evaluate them by comparing them to their source material, essentially determining the degree to which they remain faithful to the original book (Tecucianu, 2014). McFarlane concurs with this statement by citing Christopher Orr's "The concern with the fidelity of the adapted film in letter and spirit to its literary source has unquestionably dominated the discourse on adaptation" (1984, as cited in McFarlane, 2009, p. 387). He further points out that while fidelity is inherently a complex and layered concept, the prevalent critical discourse has nonetheless effectively simplified it into a benchmark—a kind of "gold standard"—that filmmakers are encouraged to strive for (McFarlane, 2009). As a result, adaptations have frequently been judged in terms of their perceived "success" or "failure" in preserving the integrity of the original text.

### **1.2.1 Defining fidelity**

The notion of fidelity has been defined by many scholars from the field of adaptation studies with little to no differences in the general understanding of the term. Harold's (2018, p. 90) definition for example goes as follows: "*By 'fidelity' is meant the critical issue of the degree to which the film captures the significant aspects of the original work.*" His mention of the "significant aspects" is an important one. Similarly, Stam (2000) is suggesting that when critics demand fidelity in adaptations, they operate under the assumption that a novel contains a distinct, underlying core—a fundamental "essence" or "heart" that exists beneath its stylistic details and can be neatly extracted and preserved. In other words, fidelity presumes that there's a definitive, extractable truth at the center of the original text that adaptations should aim to capture. When we label an adaptation as "unfaithful," he adds, we are really voicing our disappointment that the film has failed to capture what we consider to be the core narrative, thematic, and aesthetic elements of the original literary work (i.e. its aforementioned "heart") (Stam, 2000). Although for much of the history of adaptation

studies, adaptations have been predominantly evaluated based on their fidelity to the source text, the perception of this criterion has evolved over time.

### **1.2.2 Insistence on fidelity**

Tecucianu (2014) suggests that our entrenched cultural beliefs, which often privilege the written word over visual media, have fostered a widespread devaluation of film adaptations of literary masterpieces. Such negative attitude is, she argues, partly due to the persistent focus on fidelity—that is, the expectation that adaptations should transfer specific elements from the original text to the screen in a particular way (Tecucianu, 2014). As Linda Hutcheon (2006) reports, this persistent view is apparent in both academic criticism and journalistic reviewing, where there is a tendency to dismiss contemporary adaptations by labeling them as inferior to the original texts, noting that these adaptations are often criticized as being secondary or derivative. Terms such as *infidelity*, *betrayal*, *deformation*, *violation*, *vulgarization*, and *deseccration* could often be seen in the language of the film adaptation criticism (Stam, 2000). Like Hutcheon, Stam too contends that discussions about film adaptations often reinforce the notion that literary art is inherently superior to film. He sustains this standpoint by providing several deep-seated prejudices: the belief in the inherent superiority of older art forms (seniority); a bias that devalues visual arts compared to verbal arts (iconophobia); and a strong preference for the written word, reminiscent of the veneration found in the "religion of the book" (logophilia) (Stam, 2000). When considering the critical stance toward adaptations, Hutcheon (2006) highlights that a significant factor in the devaluation of both adapters and their adaptations is the lingering (post-)Romantic emphasis on the originality and creative genius of the source work. Within this context, adaptation studies have long been haunted by the idea that film destroys the authenticity and uniqueness of a work of art, leading to the assumption that the literary work—as the valued original—is inherently superior to the film adaptation, which is dismissed as nothing more than a mere copy or "impure cinema" and is judged solely by its closeness to the source or, even more vaguely, "the spirit" of the book (Tecucianu, 2014). This prevailing perspective reverses the original act of creation, often at the expense of appreciating the transformative work involved in adaptation.

Tecucianu (2014) names George Bluestone as one of the adaptation studies scholars convinced about the aforementioned superiority of written texts. She explains that Bluestone argues the inevitable changes resulting from shifting from the linguistic medium of novels to the visual realm of film arise from the inherent autonomy of these media, and he maintains that literature is intrinsically superior because novels are more complex, self-conscious, and self-reflexive, thereby better equipped to render thought (Tecucianu, 2014). Newman (1985, as cited in Hutcheon, 2006) shares this sentiment by characterizing the shift from literary media to film or television as a transition to a deliberately inferior mode of cognition. Bluestone (1957, as cited in Tecucianu, 2014) even contends that novels and films are essentially incompatible, describing them as inherently antagonistic media between which true adaptation is impossible. This opinion was not shared only among the scholars of in the field of adaptation but by literary writers alike, as is apparent in Virginia Woolf's critique of early cinema for its tendency to oversimplify literary works during adaptation, describing film as a "parasite" and literature as its "prey" and "victim" (1926, as cited in Hutcheon, 2006). Although, in the past, there was a consensus on upholding the fidelity criterion, in today's adaptation literature, the tendency is very much different as the prevailing view is that the concept should be discarded (Harold, 2018). Nevertheless, this change of perspective was in no way sudden.

### **1.2.3 Contemporary views on fidelity**

Francois Truffaut, a French director (he himself an adapter of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*), was one of the first individuals who voiced their disagreement with the superiority of written texts. Truffaut (1954, as cited in Tecucianu, 2014) critiqued the "tradition of quality" in French cinema in his influential essay "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema," arguing that films overly reliant on literary qualities and directed by mere metteurs-en-scène fall short of true cinematic art, while he praised auteurs like Robert Bresson and Jean Cocteau for transforming their films into genuine expressions of personal vision, even when drawing on literary material. Tecucianu (2014) names Maurice Beja as another voice of this opinion change, focusing on his dismissal of the term "betrayal" as overly moralistic and criticizes the use of the fidelity criterion for undermining the assessment of adaptations as independent artistic works, yet he still advocates that adaptations should remain faithful to the "spirit of

the original work". Harold (2018) concurs with Beja's assertion. He maintains that while strict adherence to the narrative does little to enhance a film's artistic merit, preserving the underlying themes of the source material is essential. For Harold, this thematic fidelity is not a given—it requires considerable skill on the part of the adapter to effectively translate the core ideas and messages of the original work into a new medium (Harold, 2018). McFarlane (2009) is likewise concerned with the notion of thematic fidelity and argues that fidelity criticism is based on the flawed assumption that a text possesses a singular, fixed meaning that an intelligent reader can extract and against which a filmmaker's interpretation can be measured. He differentiates between fidelity to the "letter" of a work, which some scholars dismiss as insufficient for a successful adaptation, and fidelity to its "spirit" or "essence," which is far more elusive. Since every adaptation reflects the filmmaker's personal reading of the source material, it is impossible to ensure alignment with the diverse interpretations of other readers or viewers. As a result, McFarlane (2009) sees the fidelity approach as inherently futile, suggesting that critics who judge adaptations by their faithfulness are merely asserting that a film's interpretation does not match their own.

The ongoing debate regarding how closely an adaptation should align with its source has led to the development of various classification systems for adaptation processes according to how faithful they are to the original. Geoffrey Wagner, for instance, distinguishes three categories of adaptation: transposition, in which the novel is directly rendered on screen with minimal alteration; commentary, where the original work is either intentionally or unintentionally modified; and analogy, which involves a significant departure from the source material to create an entirely new work of art (1975, as cited in McFarlane, 2009). Dudley Andrew (1984), in a roughly corresponding way, explores the concepts of "fidelity of transformation," "borrowing," and "intersection" in relation to adaptation. Michael Klein and Gillian Parker (1981, as cited in Hutcheon, 2006) propose a similar classification system of their own that also outlines three approaches: (a) maintaining fidelity to the main narrative thrust; (b) preserving the core structure of the narrative while significantly reinterpreting or even deconstructing the source text; and (c) treating the source merely as raw material, serving as the impetus for an entirely original work. Tecucianu (2014) argues that such efforts to analyze adaptations are designed to undermine the idea that strict fidelity to the original text should be the main criterion for evaluating them. Instead, these approaches

assert that films adapted from literary works should be appreciated as independent works of art with their own unique artistic qualities and inherent value, regardless of how closely they adhere to the source material (Tecucianu, 2014).

#### **1.2.4 Linda Hutcheon and fidelity**

Contrary to the aforementioned scholars, Linda Hutcheon deliberately sidesteps the endless and often unproductive arguments about how close or faithful an adaptation is to its predecessor. Hutcheon (2006) critiques the idea of fidelity in adaptation, arguing that it wrongly assumes adapters merely seek to replicate the source text. As she puts it, adaptation is “repetition”, but it is “repetition without replication”, or, as Tecucianu (2014) adds, a paraphrase. According to Hutcheon (2006), there is a wide range of possible motivations behind the act of adapting a text. Sometimes, the adapter might want to “consume and erase” the original, essentially using the source material as a springboard for their own vision and overshadowing or even replacing the memory of the original. Other times, the adaptation might be a critical engagement, “calling into question” aspects of the source text (Hutcheon, 2006). Hutcheon further contrasts these motivations with the more traditional view of adaptation as an act of homage, where the adapter seeks to “pay tribute” to the original by closely copying it. Instead of focusing on how faithful an adaptation is to its source, she suggests we look at the core meaning of “to adapt”—to adjust, alter, or make suitable. This act of adjusting can be done in countless ways, and Hutcheon emphasizes this flexibility. She then points out the linguistic nuance that “adaptation” refers to both the process of adapting and the product of that process, meaning it encompasses not only the act of transformation but also the resulting work itself (Hutcheon, 2006). This dual meaning is crucial to her theory, as it allows her to explore adaptation from multiple angles.

Hutcheon's (2006) first perspective defines adaptation as *a formal entity or product*—a deliberate and significant reworking of a specific work or works. This process, which she refers to as “transcoding,” can take various forms, such as changing the medium (e.g., adapting a poem into a film) or altering the genre (e.g., reworking an epic into a novel). Adaptation, she notes, may also involve reframing a story to offer a new interpretation, such as presenting events from a different character’s perspective. Furthermore, transposition can

involve transitioning between reality and fiction, such as transforming historical accounts or biographies into fictional narratives or dramas (Hutcheon, 2006).

Her second perspective considers adaptation as *a process of creation*, involving both the reinterpretation and recreation of a source text (Hutcheon, 2006). According to Hutcheon, such process can be described as either "appropriation" or "salvaging," depending on one's viewpoint, meaning that while some may see adaptation as an act of forceful appropriation, others view it as a careful act of preservation.

Lastly, Hutcheon (2006) focuses on how adaptations are received by audiences (*a process of reception*). From this perspective, adaptation functions as a form of intertextuality, where our experience of an adaptation is shaped by our recollection of the original work, creating a layered effect of repetition with variation. She illustrates this point by saying that viewers of Paul W. S. Anderson's 2002 film *Resident Evil* will perceive it differently depending on whether they have played the video game it was adapted from, as their prior familiarity influences their interpretation (Hutcheon, 2006).

By concentrating on adaptations as processes rather than just as products, Hutcheon therefore allows herself to move past the notion of fidelity and broadens the scope of adaptation studies beyond merely comparing different media or individual cases. Specifically, she enables a deeper exploration of how adaptations function across various modes of engagement—whether through storytelling (narrative), visual representation (showing), or interactive experiences (such as video games or immersive theater) (Hutcheon, 2006). Hutcheon argues that all three storytelling modes—telling, showing, and participating—immerse audiences, though each does so in a different way. In narrative literature, she notes, readers engage through imagination, guided by the author's words without visual or auditory constraints. They control their experience, pausing, rereading, or skipping ahead. In contrast, film and stage adaptations immerse audiences in a continuous, forward-moving narrative experienced through direct perception. Performance media combine language with visuals, gestures, sound, and music, yet they cannot fully capture the complexity of verbal expression in poetry or the layered narration of prose. Hutcheon further explains that interactivity, as seen in virtual reality or video games, offers a deeper level of immersion. Like films and plays, interactive media present a world visually and aurally rather than relying solely on language.

However, unlike performance, they allow participants to actively engage with and navigate the story rather than merely observing it (Hutcheon, 2006).

To summarize, Hutcheon (2006) is suggesting that we should view narrative adaptation not just as a process of transposing a story from one form to another, but also as a form of cultural evolution. She uses the analogy of biological adaptation to explain her point. Just as organisms adapt to their environment to survive, stories adapt to their cultural environment. This process can involve changes, mutations, or adjustments to the story to make it resonate with a new audience or a new medium. She emphasizes that stories are not static; they evolve over time, and adaptation is one of the key mechanisms of this evolution. Like biological organisms migrating to favorable conditions, stories travel to different cultures and mediums, adapting along the way (Hutcheon, 2006). *“Therefore, an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing”* (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 9).

### **1.3 Literal adaptation, faithful adaptation, loose adaptation**

The task of adaptation poses a unique challenge: instead of striving for an unattainable exact reproduction of the original text, filmmakers must decide how closely to adhere to the core elements—or "raw data"—of the source material. As Giannetti (2014) explains, the central issue for any adapter is determining the appropriate degree of fidelity, a decision that underpins the typology of adaptations he outlines as literal, faithful, and loose. This chapter clarifies the contrast between the three different adaptation styles.

#### **1.3.1 Literal adaptation**

Giannetti (2014) posits that literal adaptations, attempts to closely mirror the source material, are primarily confined to the realm of plays. This inclination stems from the inherent structural similarities between drama and film, with both relying on action and dialogue as fundamental modes of expression. However, the perceived simplicity of literal translation discredits the complexities inherent in adapting stage to screen. A seemingly straightforward approach, such as maintaining long shots and restricting editing to scene shifts, might approximate the theatrical experience, but it would ultimately fail to harness the unique

capabilities of cinema. Giannetti argues that few filmmakers would willingly settle for a mere recording of a play as such a passive approach would not only diminish the intrinsic excitement of the original work but also squander the inherent advantages of the cinematic medium, particularly its unparalleled freedom in manipulating space and time. He further adds that "movies can add many dimensions to a play, especially through the use of close-ups and edited juxtapositions" (Giannetti, 2014, p. 403). These techniques, foreign to the theatrical stage, inevitably transform the original work, even in so-called "literal" adaptations.

The notion of a strictly literal adaptation therefore proves to be an illusion. While stage dialogue may be preserved in film, its impact on the audience is fundamentally altered as while in live theater, the simultaneous presence of characters and real-time delivery of dialogue shapes its impact, but film's fragmentation of time and space through individual shots inevitably alters this dynamic (Giannetti, 2014). Furthermore, as Giannetti (2014) emphasizes, "because even a literary film is primarily visual and only secondarily verbal, nearly all the dialogue is modified by the images." (p. 403). Thus, even in adaptations that strive for literal fidelity, the visual language of cinema inevitably reshapes and reinterprets the source material, while retaining the essential elements of the original.

### **1.3.2 Faithful adaptation**

While literal adaptations focus on directly translating a source text's dialogue and action to film (primarily contending with the challenges of adapting space and time) faithful adaptations strive to capture the underlying spirit of a literary work by preserving its essential characters, scenes, and tone by re-creating it in filmic terms (Giannetti, 2014). With this approach there is a need for a careful balance between maintaining the integrity of the source material and adapting it to the distinct language of film. In this context, Giannetti (2014) mentions André Bazin's analogy as particularly illuminating as he compared the faithful adapter to a translator who seeks to find equivalents for the original text in another language while also highlighting the inherent challenges of adapting literature into cinema, where the visual medium demands creative solutions that go beyond a mere verbal translation.

An exemplary case of a faithful adaptation mentioned in Giannetti's *Understanding Films* (2014) is John Osborne's screenplay of the 1963 film *Tom Jones* which he praises for

preserving much of the novel's plot structure, major events, and the most important characters—even retaining the witty omniscient narrator—while simultaneously adapting the dense narrative of Fielding's work.

### **1.3.3 Loose adaptation**

Loose adaptations take only a few general ideas, situations, or characters from a literary source and then build a completely new narrative around them (Giannetti, 2014). Instead of striving to recreate every detail of the original, this approach gives filmmakers the freedom to reinvent the story in ways that better suit the visual language of cinema. Giannetti (2014) suggests that by treating the source material as a loose framework rather than a strict blueprint, filmmakers can explore fresh themes and perspectives that might not have been as prominent in the original work. While this creative latitude often leads to innovative storytelling and can bring unexpected richness to the film, it also means that some of the original's subtleties might be lost along the way.

## **1.4 Functional equivalence**

Originally formulated by translation theorist Eugene A. Nida, functional equivalence emphasizes preserving a text's meaning and impact rather than its literal form. While Nida applied this concept to Bible translation, it also extends to novel-to-film adaptations. This chapter explores its role in both fields, showing how filmmakers, like translators, prioritize meaning over direct replication. Drawing on adaptation theory, it examines how films can remain "faithful" to their source material beyond mere textual accuracy.

### **1.4.1 Translation studies**

After four decades of work, American linguist and translation theorist Eugene A. Nida devised his distinctive and highly influential approach to Bible translation that we today refer to as "functional equivalence" (Statham, 2005). According to Nida, functional equivalence is "a quality of a translation in which the message of the original text has been so transported into the receptor language that the response of the receptor is essentially like that of the original receptors" (Nida and Taber, 1982, p. 200). He uses the term "function" as a contrast to "form", where the latter is the literal, observable element – the actual words used, with

the former referring to the underlying meaning and significance of the item used (Statham, 2005).

Nida therefore argues that the translator's foremost responsibility is to convey the underlying message of the source text rather than mechanically reproducing its form (Nida and Taber, 1982). In order to do so effectively, one must often modify the grammatical structure and vocabulary rather than adhering rigidly to the original wording. Strict adherence to the original wording is secondary to ensuring that the core message reaches the reader.

He further contends that the translator should strive for functional equivalence rather than exact identity between the source and target texts (Nida and Taber, 1982). This means that the translation should evoke the same understanding and emotional response in the reader as the original did, even if that again requires departing from the literal form of the original utterance.

This emphasis on meaning particularly crucial in contexts like Bible translation. Nida argues that, when translating sacred texts, conveying the true content is of utmost importance (Nida and Taber, 1982). He maintains that in order to capture the depth and nuance of the original message, translators may need to implement considerable changes to the formal structure of the text, saying that such departures are not mistakes but deliberate choices aimed at ensuring that the message is as clear and impactful as possible.

Nevertheless, Nida acknowledges that while meaning is paramount, the style of the original text should not be entirely disregarded (Nida and Taber, 1982). Each genre carries its own stylistic demands, and a translator must be sensitive to these differences. Even though style comes after meaning, a good translation also respects and reflects these stylistic nuances of the original work to maintain its full communicative power.

#### **1.4.2 Functional equivalence in film adaptations**

Nida's notion of functional equivalence emphasizes that a translation should aim to evoke in the target audience the same understanding, emotion, and response as the original text did for its initial readers. This idea can be readily applied to novel-to-film adaptations.

When stating his views on fidelity, Harold (2018) makes a point about what makes a film adaptation of a book good. As a consequence, he implicitly mirrors Nida's functional

equivalence. While Nida notes that a translation should prioritize conveying the “function” (meaning, impact) of the original text, even if it means changing the “form” (words, structure), Harold argues that being faithful to the story is not the most important factor in adapting as what matters more is capturing the underlying themes (meaning, message) of the book, even if it means changing the story (plot, events).

Stam (2000) explicitly suggests that we reconceptualize adaptation as a kind of translation as well since it involves transferring the source material’s content from its original written form into a cinematic format. Hutcheon (2006) notes that when a work is adapted from one medium to another, the process is indeed similar to translation, but it goes beyond just converting words from one language to another. Instead, it is an "inter-semiotic transposition," meaning that the adaptation must convert meaning from one system of signs (language) to another.

When adapting a novel to film, we move from the telling mode of engagement to the showing mode (Hutcheon, 2006). As Stam (2000) points out, the process is not just about translating words into images. It is about taking a story that was originally told through a single channel (language) and re-expressing it through a complex, multi-layered medium with a wide range of expressive possibilities. In film adaptations, functional equivalence means that filmmakers work to retain the core meaning or message of the story, while also taking advantage of visual and auditory techniques that the original authors of the written text did not have access to.

Adapters have a wide array of tools to transform written words into a cinematic experience, far surpassing direct, word-for-word translation. For instance, photography—with its careful use of composition, lighting, and camera angles—sets the mood and conveys meaning, while *mise en scène* creates visual context and character through the arrangement of actors, sets, and costumes. Movement, whether coming from the actors or through dynamic camera work, guides the audience’s attention and enhances the narrative. Editing shapes the film's rhythm, and sound—through dialogue, music, and effects—adds depth to the atmosphere and emotional impact. Finally, actors breathe life into the characters, making the story both immediate and compelling. In this sense, Stam (2000) concludes, cinema offers not fewer

but rather a broader range of expressive tools than the novel, regardless of how filmmakers choose to utilize these capabilities.

## **1.5 Resurrecting authorial intention**

As previously stated, contemporary adaptation studies have largely discarded the notion of fidelity, recognizing it as an inadequate measure of an adaptation's success. One key reason for this shift is the inherent variability in interpretation—each reader engages with the original text differently, forming a unique understanding shaped by personal experiences, cultural background, and individual perspective. Given this subjectivity, it is impossible for a film adaptation to satisfy all interpretations, as it ultimately reflects the filmmaker's own reading of the source material, which will inevitably diverge from others. With this in mind, a crucial question arises: should the original authors have the authority to judge whether an adaptation is thematically faithful, capturing the essence of their work? Or does the text, once published, cease to belong to its creator, allowing its meaning to be shaped entirely by readers, viewers, and filmmakers, as theorists like Roland Barthes have suggested?

### **1.5.1 The Death of the Author**

Roland Barthes' 1967 essay *The Death of the Author* included in *Image-Music-Text* (Barthes, 1977) challenges the traditional notion that a text's meaning is determined by the author's intentions, biography, or personal experiences. Instead, Barthes argues that writing inherently removes the author's authority, transferring the power of interpretation to the reader.

Barthes traces the concept of the "Author" as a modern construct emerging from humanism, individualism, and capitalist ideology. Traditional criticism has reinforced the idea that literature is deeply tied to the author's life, personality, and experiences, often seeking to explain a work through biographical analysis. However, some writers (Barthes names the likes of Mallarmé, Valéry, and Proust) have challenged this notion, distancing the personal "self" from their works. Surrealists further undermined the dominance of the author by promoting automatic writing, proving that texts could be created independently of conscious intent.

Drawing from structuralist linguistics, Barthes emphasizes that language itself generates meaning, not the author. The "I" in a text does not represent a real person but is merely a linguistic function. The author, therefore, becomes a "scriptor" who assembles words rather than an original creator. This leads to the idea that a text is not a fixed entity with a single, authoritative meaning but rather a "multi-dimensional space" of intertextuality, where various cultural influences and prior writings intersect. Meaning, according to Barthes, is constructed by the reader, whose interpretation gives the text its significance. He advocates for an open-ended view of literature, where multiple interpretations coexist. By rejecting the authority of the author, Barthes liberates the text, making reading a dynamic and creative process. His essay ultimately calls for a transformation in literary theory—moving away from the writer's intent and placing interpretive power in the hands of the reader. As he famously concludes, "*The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author.*"

Applied to adaptation studies, Barthes' argument implies that since no single "correct" interpretation of a literary text exists, the original author's opinion on an adaptation should not be privileged over anyone else's. Just as a novel's meaning is shaped by its readers, a film adaptation generates its own meanings, independent of the author's original intent. The filmmaker, like any other reader, engages with the source material through their own interpretive lens, inevitably producing a version that reflects their perspective. If adaptation is inherently an act of interpretation, then an author's critique of how faithfully a film represents their work holds no more inherent validity than that of any other viewer.

### **1.5.2 Author's say in the adaptation's interpretation**

While Barthes argues that the birth of the reader must come at the cost of the author's death, this dichotomy is not necessarily absolute. It is true that we can analyze a text purely through its language, uncovering meaning without any knowledge of its author. However, understanding the author's background, historical context, and intentions can reveal additional layers of meaning that enrich our interpretation. In adaptation studies, this perspective is particularly relevant—while a filmmaker's vision is crucial, knowing about the author's perspective or even involving them in the adaptation process can, in many ways, be valuable. Rather than limiting interpretation, the author's presence can serve as a guide, offering a deeper understanding of the text while still allowing for creative reinterpretation.

Authors have a unique understanding of their own work, including its themes and characters. While filmmakers will naturally interpret the source material through their own lens, consulting with the author can help maintain the emotional and thematic integrity of the original work, preventing unintentional distortions. An author's input can also be invaluable in identifying which story elements are crucial and which can be modified for the cinematic medium. Since not everything translates perfectly from page to screen, the author can offer guidance on which changes are necessary and which would compromise the work's core meaning. Incorporating the author's viewpoint doesn't stifle the filmmaker's creativity. Instead, it provides a valuable reference point for balancing artistic interpretation with faithfulness to the original. Adaptation is inherently transformative, not replicative, but respecting the author's vision offers crucial context for creative decisions that stay true to the work's essence. Rather than seeing the author's influence as a constraint, adaptation studies could benefit from recognizing that their perspective can complement new interpretations, adding depth and ensuring continuity as the story moves from text to screen.

### **1.5.3 Authorial insights into the *Brokeback Mountain* adaptation**

To highlight the importance of having the original author involved in the adaptation process in order to maintain a level of faithfulness to the source, this section will provide a brief summary of three essays from *Brokeback Mountain: Story to Screenplay* (2005). Aside from Annie Proulx's short story, this book also contains the screenplay for the motion picture written by Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana, as well as the aforementioned essays in which the three authors provide their thoughts on the process of adapting.

When Diana Ossana and Larry McMurtry approached Annie Proulx with the idea of adapting *Brokeback Mountain* into a film, she agreed to sell the rights, trusting their skill as writers and McMurtry's incomparable knowledge of the West's mores and language. When she read their screenplay, she was struck by how powerful it was, recognizing that they had augmented and enriched the sparse narrative of her short story. She acknowledged that her writing style was tight, compressed, and required air and loosening to unfold into art. Unlike novel adaptations, which often require heavy cuts, *Brokeback Mountain* was a short story with a sturdy framework but, as Proulx thought, with not enough there for a feature-length film. The screenwriters needed to expand, develop, and add new elements to the story—a

process that, instead of distorting Proulx's work, evolved into a form of creative collaboration.

However, despite initially being impressed with the screenplay, Proulx began to have concerns about the viability of the project. She questioned whether any producers, actors, or directors would be willing to take on such a controversial story about homophobic gay Wyoming ranch hands. One of the questions she asked herself was, "How severely would the screenplay be clawed to pieces?" (Proulx, 2005, p. 134). Her concerns deepened when she learned that the director would be Ang Lee, a Taiwanese filmmaker, whom she initially doubted could understand the setting and subterranean forces of Wyoming.

As the adaptation moved forward, Proulx realized she had lost control over the process. She recalled writing a letter pleading for a specific scene—the motel scene—to be fleshed out in the film, only to have her request go for naught. This moment made her acutely aware that the adaptation was no longer hers: "It was out of my hands, no longer my story, but Ang Lee's film" (Proulx, 2005, p. 136). This experience of hers aligns with Barthes' theory, which argues that once a text is produced, its meaning is no longer dictated by the author but shaped by its readers—or in this case, its adapters and audiences.

Despite these reservations and the loss of control, Proulx was profoundly affected when she finally saw the completed film. She described the experience as an "emotional hammering" that left her unprepared, simultaneously admitting that "in our time, film can be more powerful than the written word". This paradox—that an adaptation could (during production) be out of her control yet still feel deeply faithful to her vision—complicates Barthes' argument. While she admitted that the film was no longer hers, she also felt that the filmmakers had "gotten into my mind and pulled out images". Rather than being an entirely separate creation, the film remained deeply tied to her story, suggesting that adaptation can be an act of interpretation that still honors the original author's intent. Although the film was seemingly out of Proulx's hands, her voice remained embedded in the adaptation through the work of Ossana and McMurtry, who carried her vision onto the screen.

As experienced screenwriters, Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana approached the adaptation of *Brokeback Mountain* with a clear understanding of the challenges involved in translating literature to film. From the outset, they recognized the strength of Proulx's writing—her

"spare, wire-fence prose that is congruent with the landscape itself, and with the struggling, bruised speech still to be heard across the north plains" (McMurtry, 2005, p. 140). However, they also understood that the short story's compressed nature required expansion. Ossana, in particular, was captivated by Proulx's simple lyricism and rawness and power, describing the short story as an excellent blueprint for a screenplay. The original story, though covering two decades, was quite short, only thirty pages. This brevity gave the filmmakers creative freedom to expand the narrative, developing the characters more fully, adding new scenes, and enriching the existing ones. Such approach, rather than altering the essence of the story, was seen as a way to bring greater depth to Ennis and Jack's relationship while maintaining the original's emotional weight.

Despite embracing the creative liberties necessary for adaptation, McMurtry and Ossana sought to stay true to Proulx's vision. They engaged in extensive conversations with her, in which Proulx had points she wanted to clarify as well as some corrections, but overall gave the impression of being pleased with the result. Additionally, they spoke about Ennis's character and the landscape, and the lives of people of Wyoming. All of which Ossana mentally filed away and referred to throughout the adaptation process. The screenwriters' reliance on Proulx's contributions indicates that they were instrumental in ensuring the adaptation's faithfulness to the source material.

Ossana recognized that filmmaking is a collaborative process, much like cooking. A successful film, like a delicious dish, depends on a balanced combination of elements. If those elements are not in the right proportions, the result can be a failure. This analogy highlights the balance between adaptation as a transformation and adaptation as a faithful representation. She admitted her fear that the film might be "botched beyond recognition" (Ossana, 2005, p. 148), emphasizing the risk that adaptations carry when they diverge too far from the source. However, when she saw the final product, she described it as an "out-of-body experience," feeling as though she were "being introduced to the characters for the first time" (Ossana, 2005, p. 150).

McMurtry and Ossana ultimately believed that their adaptation remained true to Proulx's work, not in the sense of strict fidelity, but in preserving its emotional depth and themes. Ossana concluded her essay by saying that that "Brokeback Mountain the film stands

faithfully beside 'Brokeback Mountain' the short story" (Ossana, 2005, p. 151), suggesting that while the two versions are distinct, they exist in a complementary relationship. Their perspective supports a more nuanced view of adaptation—one that does not require absolute fidelity to the author's vision but also does not dismiss the author's voice entirely. While they reshaped and expanded Proulx's story, they remained deeply connected to its core, demonstrating that adaptation can be both an act of transformation and an act of preservation.

## **2 Practical part**

### **2.1 Comparative synopsis of the plot line of the short story and the film**

Set in Wyoming between 1963 and 1982, the story follows Ennis del Mar and Jack Twist, two young men hired as sheep herders on Brokeback Mountain, where their initial friendship soon deepens into a passionate but secret love affair. Unwilling to acknowledge the full extent of their feelings, they assure each other that what they share is only temporary, with Ennis declaring, “I’m not no queer,” and Jack responding in agreement. When their summer together ends, they go their separate ways, and four years pass before they see each other again. In that time, Ennis marries Alma and has two daughters, while Jack also settles into marriage and fatherhood. Yet, when Jack and Ennis reunite, it is clear their connection remains as strong as ever. For nearly twenty years, they continue their relationship in secret, meeting sporadically under the guise of fishing and hunting trips, escaping to the wilderness where they can be themselves, away from a society that would not accept them. Jack, the more hopeful of the two, dreams of a life together, but Ennis, shaped by fear and the violent reality of their world, refuses to take the risk. Their love remains confined to stolen moments until one day Ennis’s postcard to Jack is returned with the word “deceased.” When Ennis contacts Jack’s wife, she tells him that Jack died in an accident while fixing a flat tire, supposedly suffocating on his own blood, but Ennis harbors deep doubts, suspecting foul play. Seeking closure, he visits Jack’s parents, where he discovers a personal relic tucked away in Jack’s closet—his own long-lost shirt from their first summer together, carefully folded inside one of Jack’s.

Although this is the major plot outline for both Annie Proulx’s short story and Ang Lee’s film, the story of the cinematic adaptation expands upon the original narrative by adding scenes, developing background characters, and making structural adjustments. The film fleshes out the lives of Jack and Ennis beyond their relationship, particularly by adding scenes that show how the two men live their lives when they are apart, such as Ennis’s strained relationship with Alma and their children or Jack’s increasing frustration with his wife Lureen and his father-in-law. The adaptation also giving more depth to their several background characters, but most noticeably the protagonists’ wives. Alma, for instance, is portrayed not only as a passive observer of Ennis’s deception but also as a woman struggling

with her own heartbreak. Similarly, Jack's wife Lureen evolves from a mere mention in the text into a complex character, transitioning from a lively rodeo girl to a detached and emotionally distant woman. Structurally, the film removes the framed narrative of the short story, which begins with Ennis waking from a dream about Jack, setting the story as his recollection of their relationship. Instead, the film unfolds chronologically, immersing the audience in the events as they happen rather than presenting them as Ennis's memories.

## **2.2 Brokeback Mountain as a literal adaptation**

A literal adaptation strives to preserve the original text with minimal alterations, maintaining both its dialogue and visual details as closely as possible. In *Brokeback Mountain*, this approach is evident in scenes that replicate Annie Proulx's short story with high fidelity, either through direct verbal correspondence or meticulous visual and auditory recreation.

This section examines two key techniques used in the film to achieve literal adaptation: full verbal equivalents, where characters deliver lines that closely match the original dialogue, and full mimetic equivalents, where the film visually or aurally reproduces elements described in the text. These minimal alterations allow the film to maintain a strong connection to the source material, effectively carrying over its tone, meaning, and emotional depth.

### **2.2.1 Full verbal equivalents**

Full verbal equivalents refer to moments in the film when the dialogue spoken by characters reproduces the exact wording of Annie Proulx's short story. As McMurtry (Abhinandan Bera, November 19) himself noted in the "From Script to Screen" DVD extra, "Virtually every sentence is used somewhere in the screenplay," indicating that he and Ossana aimed for maximum inclusion in the film. These moments are significant because they demonstrate the filmmakers' decision to retain not only the semantic content but also the rhythm, tone, and stylistic nuance of the original prose. Such fidelity to the original text can serve various narrative and emotional functions—from preserving the author's voice to emphasizing key thematic moments with maximum authenticity.

The following analyses of selected scenes employs a comparative textual methodology. Scenes were selected on the basis of their dialogue's near-complete or complete match with

the source text. Each instance is examined in terms of its narrative placement, degree of verbal fidelity, and thematic and emotional effect. In doing so, the analyses aim to assess the extent to which literal dialogue contributes to the functional equivalence of the adaptation—i.e., the preservation of meaning, tone, and impact between the two media.

### **2.2.1.1 Aguirre's trailer**

The sequence set in Aguirre's trailer occurs early in the narrative, serving to establish the initial employment arrangement for Ennis and Jack. In Ang Lee's film adaptation, Aguirre's instructions to the protagonists are preserved almost entirely verbatim, closely replicating the original text of Annie Proulx's short story. Aguirre's distinctive phrasing, including detailed commands such as "pitch a pup tent on the Q.T. with the sheep," "sleep with the sheep, hundred percent, no fire, don't leave no sign" (Proulx, 2005, p. 2) and his explicit concern about "predator loss," remain intact (Proulx, 2005, p. 2). Although minor textual differences exist—such as the substitution of "couple a miles" (Proulx, 2005, p. 2) with the more colloquial-sounding "3 or 4 miles" (Lee, 2005, 4:52) and Aguirre's brief phone interruption unique to the film—these slight variations do not significantly affect the semantic meaning or narrative function. Instead, they enhance the realism and conversational pacing appropriate to film dialogue.

Preserving Aguirre's dialogue in such exact detail allows the adaptation to emphasize the austerity and harshness of the working environment on Brokeback Mountain, setting a tone of isolation and surveillance that resonates throughout the narrative. The foreman's insistence on secrecy subtly prefigures the central thematic concern with concealment that defines Jack and Ennis's relationship. Additionally, the verbatim retention of Aguirre's lines reinforces his dismissive, authoritative stance, highlighting the socio-economic vulnerability of the protagonists and immediately positioning them within a rigid hierarchical structure.

The deliberate fidelity in this scene exemplifies a clear strategic commitment to the authenticity of Proulx's prose, reflecting a broader adaptation strategy of literal fidelity aimed at capturing the narrative's essence. Aguirre's verbatim instructions function as a literal adaptation technique where textual fidelity serves not only to maintain the original's thematic resonance and narrative clarity but also to firmly anchor the audience within the austere, uncompromising atmosphere that characterizes the source material.

### 2.2.1.2 Saying goodbye

After the first snowstorm of the season, the two cowboys are told to bring the sheep back down from the pastures into the valley. Their farewell scene by Jack's truck marks a narrative turning point, concluding Jack and Ennis's summer experience on Brokeback Mountain and signifying their return to lives governed by societal expectations. Again, the dialogue in this scene is transferred into the film adaptation with close adherence to the source text, reproducing central exchanges nearly word for word, such as Jack's uncertain question, "You goin a do this next summer?" and Ennis's ambiguous reply, "Maybe not" (Proulx, 2005, p. 8), along with his reference to marrying Alma and finding ranch work. However, slight modifications appear—for instance, Ennis mentioning that the wedding is in November instead of December, Jack saying "If the Army don't get me" (Lee, 2005, 41:58) rather than "If the draft don't get me" (Proulx, 2005, p. 8), and Ennis's additional remark about leaving his shirt behind—but these minor changes overall do not significantly alter the core meaning or emotional resonance of the exchange.

By maintaining key dialogue intact, the adaptation preserves the restrained emotional intensity and poignant uncertainty of their parting. The verbal brevity and casual tone mask a deeper emotional undercurrent, reflecting both men's reluctance to openly acknowledge their emotional bond or the personal significance of their time on Brokeback Mountain. The understated nature of their final words, retained faithfully in the adaptation, reinforces the themes of repression, silence, and hidden longing that permeate the narrative. Although the adaptation omits some explicit visual elements from the prose and subtly differs in others, the preserved verbal exchange effectively compensates for such alterations, maintaining thematic coherence and emotional depth.

This adherence to the original dialogue accentuates a strategic choice in adaptation, aligning with screenwriters' stated goal of maximal textual inclusion. The filmmakers' commitment to preserving the original's minimalist yet emotionally charged conversation serves the adaptation's broader fidelity, highlighting the narrative's central tension between spoken restraint and unspoken emotional intensity. Thus, such literal transfer of dialogue effectively contributes to the functional equivalence of the adaptation, maintaining the original story's tone, characterization, and thematic weight within the cinematic medium.

### **2.2.1.3 Ennis talking to Jack's parents**

The scene set at Lightning Flat near the conclusion of the narrative carries significant emotional weight, as Ennis visits Jack's parents after learning of Jack's death. Once again, in transferring the dialogue to the film adaptation, the filmmakers retained a majority of the source text nearly word-for-word, notably preserving critical emotional and thematic exchanges. Jack's mother's gentle offer—"Want some coffee, don't you? Piece of cherry cake?" (Proulx, 2005, p. 24)—and Ennis's respectful but withdrawn response are retained almost exactly, highlighting the quiet, restrained sorrow permeating the interaction. The father's harsh, embittered commentary about Jack thinking he was "too goddamn special to be buried in the family plot" (Proulx, 2005, p. 24) and his recollection of Jack's "half-baked" (Proulx, 2005, p. 25) plans to build a cabin with Ennis are also closely preserved in the adaptation, maintaining the father's bitterness and resentment that deepens the emotional tension of the scene.

Nevertheless, a noticeable difference is the film's direct combination of two originally separate statements by Jack's father, merging his remarks about Brokeback Mountain and Jack's unfulfilled plans with Ennis into one extended monologue. This compression heightens the impact of the revelation about Jack's planned life with another man, making Ennis's reaction more immediately intense and personal in cinematic terms.

The preservation of Jack's mother's dialogue inviting Ennis to visit Jack's unchanged room functions emotionally and symbolically in both versions, emphasizing her quiet understanding and compassion, and implicitly offering Ennis a moment of private mourning. Retaining these verbatim lines serves the adaptation strategy by ensuring emotional resonance and thematic coherence: the film remains deeply faithful not only to the original dialogue but also to its narrative implications—loss, unfulfilled dreams, and the complexity of hidden lives. The filmmakers' fidelity in this instance demonstrates their commitment to Annie Proulx's vision, achieving a functional equivalence where meaning, thematic depth, and emotional intensity remain intact across media.

### **2.2.2 Full mimetic equivalents**

Full mimetic equivalence refers to instances in which the film reproduces descriptive passages from the source text in a literal, visual, or auditory manner. Rather than translating

words into dialogue, these moments adapt physical environments, bodily actions, and atmospheric details exactly as they appear in the narrative prose. In *Brokeback Mountain*, Ang Lee's adaptation demonstrates a high degree of fidelity not only through preserved dialogue but also by visually mirroring Annie Proulx's textual descriptions with meticulous attention. These literal translations contribute significantly to the adaptation's functional equivalence by preserving tone, symbolism, and thematic atmosphere. The following selected examples divided into two categories illustrate how the film maintains fidelity to the source material through direct visual or aural representation.

### **2.2.2.1 Environment and atmosphere**

In *Brokeback Mountain*, scenes displaying full mimetic equivalence significantly contribute to the film's emotional resonance and thematic depth by faithfully translating Annie Proulx's detailed descriptions into audiovisual imagery. By preserving environmental details exactly as described in the source text, the filmmakers create an immersive atmosphere consistent with Proulx's prose, reinforcing narrative tone and emotional subtext.

The opening scene in Aguirre's trailer exemplifies this approach vividly. Proulx describes Aguirre's office as having "a table littered with scribbled papers, a Bakelite ashtray brimming with stubs" (Proulx, 2005, p. 2), an image meticulously replicated in the film through precise set design. Although there are minor variations—such as the absence of venetian blinds explicitly described by Proulx (2005, p. 2)—the adaptation carefully preserves the essential visual impression of the office, complete with sunlight illuminating Aguirre's interlocked hands on the cluttered table. Such close visual fidelity effectively conveys the rigid authority and austere environment dominating Ennis and Jack's initial employment, thus establishing the emotional atmosphere of isolation and control that underpins their narrative.

Similarly, the depiction of Ennis and Jack climbing up *Brokeback Mountain* closely mirrors the vivid imagery from the source text. The description, "flowed up the trail like dirty water through the timber and out above the tree line into the great flowery meadows" (Proulx, 2005, p. 4), is rendered through expansive establishing shots of the mountain's meadows and ridges, accompanied by views of grasses and tree branches visibly swaying in the "coursing, endless wind" (Proulx, 2005, p. 4). This careful visual recreation emphasizes the

characters' entry into a landscape both liberating and isolating, symbolically highlighting their emotional vulnerability through the physical environment itself.

The hailstorm scene further demonstrates the filmmakers' strategic use of mimetic equivalence to accentuate narrative tension and emotional intensity. Proulx writes, "In August Ennis spent the whole night with Jack in the main camp, and in a blowy hailstorm the sheep took off west" (Proulx, 2005, p. 7), which the film captures through clear audiovisual elements—sounds of thunder, howling wind, and visible hail pelting the camp. Such precise audiovisual reproduction vividly underscores nature's unpredictability, mirroring the emotional turbulence within the characters as external pressures and internal struggles intensify. By visually and aurally translating the hostility of the environment, the filmmakers reinforce emotional conflict and narrative complexity.

In the farewell scene, atmospheric details are again precisely used to mirror emotional subtext. Proulx notes, "The wind was gusting hard and cold," and describes a "dust plume" (Proulx, 2005, p. 8) causing Ennis to squint. The filmmakers meticulously reproduce these details, employing audible gusts of wind and visible clouds of dust to intensify the emotional discomfort and underlying sadness of Jack and Ennis's parting. By carefully matching these descriptive elements in the film, the adaptation effectively translates textual nuance into audiovisual form, highlighting the characters' inability to openly express their feelings.

Finally, Ennis's visit to Jack's childhood room at Lightning Flat provides a powerful conclusion to these environmental mimetic equivalences. Proulx describes the "afternoon sun pounding through the west window" and "the window looked down on the gravel road" (Proulx, 2005, p. 25), both of which are directly replicated in the film, with bright sunlight illuminating the room and the gravel road clearly visible from the window. This careful translation of imagery provides symbolic closure, emphasizing themes of loss, solitude, and unfulfilled longing. The faithfully recreated details anchor viewers emotionally in Ennis's introspective moment, visually reinforcing his private mourning.

Across these selected scenes, the filmmakers' consistent fidelity to environmental details from Proulx's text underscores their dedication to emotional and thematic authenticity. By reproducing detailed descriptions visually and aurally, these mimetic equivalences function not merely as faithful reproductions but as strategic narrative devices. They communicate

complex emotions, symbolic meanings, and thematic nuances through carefully matched audiovisual elements. Consequently, the adaptation achieves functional equivalence by preserving and intensifying the emotional resonance and thematic richness of Proulx's prose through meticulous visual representation.

#### **2.2.2.2 Characters and physical Actions**

In Ang Lee's adaptation of *Brokeback Mountain*, the literal depiction of characters' physical actions significantly enhances the emotional resonance and thematic depth, demonstrating clear functional equivalence with Annie Proulx's short story. By meticulously reproducing specific actions described in the source text, the filmmakers preserve character dynamics and emotional nuances, effectively translating the essence of the narrative into visual form.

The bar scene early in the narrative is exemplary of this approach. Proulx succinctly notes, "They found a bar and drank beer through the afternoon" (Proulx, 2005, p. 3), a simple action faithfully visualized in the adaptation. The film shows Ennis and Jack walking side by side toward a building explicitly marked "BAR," followed by a clear shot of Jack drinking from a beer bottle, and finally, both men seated together at the bar. The literal adaptation of these specific actions emphasizes their developing bond and mutual comfort, mirroring the subdued intimacy of the original prose through carefully orchestrated body language. The shared action of drinking beer silently underscores their camaraderie, hinting at the emotional closeness that evolves throughout the story.

Similarly, the setting up the camp scene translates straightforward textual descriptions of routine tasks into visual details. The source mentions explicitly, "They got the big tent up on the Forest Service's platform, the kitchen and grub boxes secured" (Proulx, 2005, p. 4), directly visualized in shots of Ennis constructing a campfire ring and Jack hoisting boxes into the trees. By presenting these seemingly mundane actions visually, the film firmly grounds the narrative in realistic detail, reinforcing the daily practicalities and physical labor that characterize their lives on Brokeback Mountain. This visual specificity not only preserves the realism of Proulx's text but also enhances viewers' engagement by clearly depicting the characters' lived experiences.

The supper scene at the camp further illustrates the strategic use of mimetic fidelity. Proulx describes in detail their actions: eating beans, sharing a quart of whiskey, Jack warming his

feet by the fire, and occasionally moving away from the fire to urinate (Proulx, 2005, p. 5). The filmmakers translate these actions directly onto the screen, first showing Jack from behind as he urinates, then cutting to Ennis casually eating beans straight from the can. The intimacy deepens visually when Jack sits down, takes out a whiskey bottle, warms his feet at the fire, and pours whiskey into Ennis's cup. This visual sequence captures the ease, familiarity, and quiet affection between the two characters. By faithfully replicating their subtle physical interactions, the film highlights their emotional intimacy in ways words alone cannot fully convey, making the scene resonate emotionally and thematically with the original narrative.

A pivotal narrative turning point occurs when Ennis receives Jack's postcard. The textual description, "Friend this letter is a long time overdue... I'm coming thru on the 24th, thought I'd stop and buy you a beer" (Proulx, 2005, p. 10), is directly visualized as the film cuts from Ennis looking at the postcard to the content itself, clearly showing Jack's handwriting. The filmmakers also visibly reproduce the return address from "Childress, Texas" (Proulx, 2005, p. 10), maintaining precise mimetic equivalence. This explicit visual representation intensifies Ennis's emotional response, underscoring his anticipation and excitement through concrete visual evidence. The literal depiction ensures viewers fully appreciate the emotional weight of this seemingly mundane object, aligning closely with the impact described by Proulx.

Finally, the argument scene between Jack and Ennis powerfully employs mimetic equivalence to communicate deep emotional turmoil. Proulx describes Ennis as standing "as if heart-shot, face gray and deep-lined, grimacing" (Proulx, 2005, p. 21), a physical expression exactly replicated by actor Heath Ledger's performance. The film shows Ennis standing motionless, eyes filled with tears, his face contorted in profound emotional pain, with lines around his eyes clearly visible. This precise physical translation powerfully conveys Ennis's inner emotional devastation, making explicit the narrative's underlying themes of frustration, regret, and unexpressed longing. By visually mimicking the detailed description, the adaptation effectively bridges internal emotional states with external, observable actions, enhancing viewers' emotional engagement.

On the whole, the filmmakers' consistent use of literal physical actions from Proulx's text significantly strengthens the emotional fidelity and thematic resonance of the adaptation. These careful visual reproductions of character behaviors do more than just preserve textual accuracy; they communicate subtle emotional nuances and complex interpersonal dynamics, achieving true functional equivalence. Through meticulously matched visual actions, the adaptation successfully conveys the profound emotional depths of the original narrative, ensuring viewers experience the subtlety, intimacy, and unspoken emotion central to Proulx's powerful short story.

### **2.3 Brokeback Mountain as a loose adaptation**

Although the previous chapter has demonstrated how *Brokeback Mountain* at times adheres literally to the source material—preserving Annie Proulx's dialogue and descriptions with striking accuracy—it simultaneously takes liberties in expanding, compressing, and reordering narrative elements to suit the medium of film. These moments of deviation, where the adaptation moves beyond literal or mimetic equivalence, fall under the category of loose adaptation. According to Louis Giannetti's aforementioned typology, a loose adaptation is characterized by significant creative latitude, often altering or supplementing character development, structure, or plot to align with cinematic storytelling needs or thematic elaboration.

In *Brokeback Mountain*, this form of adaptation manifests not through radical reinvention but through subtle yet consequential techniques that reshape the emotional and narrative experience of the story. Specifically, the film introduces newly invented scenes and dialogue, omits certain details or passages from the original, and reorders events for dramatic or thematic effect—three methods broadly identifiable as additions, ellipses, and chronological adjustments.

The chapter proceeds in three sections, corresponding to the categories above. Each section explores how these techniques reshape the story's structure, deepen its characters, and guide the viewer's emotional experience.

### **2.3.1 Additions**

The section on additions is divided into three categories: whole scenes that are entirely absent from the source text, scene elements that expand existing scenes with new actions or visuals, and added lines of dialogue that enhance character development or thematic depth.

#### **2.3.1.1 Whole scenes**

The scene in which Ennis returns late to the camp after encountering a bear exemplifies how additional material can serve both narrative and psychological functions. In the short story, the movement of supplies and interactions between Jack and Ennis are minimal and compressed. By introducing an entire mini-narrative involving a bear attack, the film not only injects dramatic tension but also provides an external event that intensifies the characters' dependency on one another. Ennis's injury becomes a visual cue for vulnerability, while Jack's response—including his attempt to care for him—reveals tenderness and concern. Their subsequent dialogue about eating the sheep and Ennis's adherence to rules offers insight into their differing worldviews, subtly foreshadowing later conflict. The adapters thus use this added scene to establish dynamics that will continue to define their relationship.

In contrast, the compilation of scenes depicting Jack's courtship of Lureen adds dimension to a secondary character whose role in the original story is peripheral. The film takes care to construct a brief but effective arc, beginning with Lureen's commanding presence in the rodeo ring and culminating in their sexual encounter in her car. Each scene reveals something about Lureen's personality—her flirtatious confidence, her social standing, and the gender dynamics she inhabits. For Jack, this courtship is less about romance and more about survival and societal conformity. His easy charm is on display, but so too is his willingness to step into a prescribed heterosexual role. These added scenes are not mere exposition—they contextualize Jack's life in Texas and highlight the performative aspects of his public identity. In doing so, they underscore the contrast between his emotionally significant bond with Ennis and his socially sanctioned relationship with Lureen.

A similarly poignant function is served by the added scene in which Ennis hastily packs for his first trip with Jack following their reunion. Although the short story does refer to their occasional meetings, it offers little detail about Ennis's domestic life beyond its

disintegration. The film chooses to visualize the emotional consequences of Ennis's choices, particularly from Alma's point of view. As Ennis moves mechanically through the kitchen, barely acknowledging his wife or daughters, the camera lingers on Alma's face, capturing the quiet devastation of a woman who has come to understand the nature of her husband's absence. This scene foregrounds a key theme of the adaptation: the emotional collateral of secrecy. By showing what is left behind, the film articulates the cost of Ennis's internal conflict in ways that the short story only implies.

The Thanksgiving dinner scene at Jack's home offers another original moment that powerfully illustrates the tension between appearances and repression. Jack's outburst at his father-in-law, L.D., marks one of the few instances in the film where he asserts control over his domestic life. In a narrative defined by silence and submission, Jack's furious insistence on respect within his own household signals a boiling point—not just in terms of his relationship with Lureen and her family, but in relation to the frustration he feels about his double life. This added confrontation offers catharsis while exposing the fragility of Jack's constructed identity. It allows the viewer a rare moment of satisfaction as Jack momentarily asserts himself, but it also highlights the futility of his rebellion in a world that continually denies him personal fulfillment.

Finally, the tender exchange between Ennis and Alma Jr., in which she announces her engagement and asks him to attend her wedding, functions as a redemptive moment of character development. In the short story, Ennis remains emotionally stunted to the end, but the film grants him the possibility of growth. His initial hesitation—voiced through a half-hearted excuse about work—is consistent with his history of avoidance. But his reversal, prompted by his daughter's visible disappointment, marks a decisive shift. For the first time, Ennis chooses emotional presence over self-protection. The scene is subtle yet profound, suggesting that although he could not fully commit to Jack in life, he is now capable of showing up for someone he loves. It is a powerful addition that broadens the emotional palette of the narrative and offers the viewer a quiet form of closure.

These five added scenes showcase how the film adaptation utilizes loose adaptation techniques not as a betrayal of the source material, but as a means of enriching it. By expanding on characters' backstories, deepening emotional stakes, and externalizing internal

conflicts, the filmmakers craft a more layered and emotionally resonant narrative. These additions do not dilute the original text—they serve to translate its silences into visual and dramatic form, creating a powerful synergy between literature and film.

### **2.3.1.2 Scene elements**

In Aguirre's trailer scene, there is a brief moment when Aguirre answers a ringing phone mid-sentence. It might appear inconsequential, but it reinforces his curt, distracted demeanor. This simple act breaks the flow of the hiring instructions, emphasizing how little personal investment Aguirre has in the lives of the two young men he is sending into isolation. It also subtly communicates the socio-economic hierarchy that dominates the world of the film, rendering Jack and Ennis as expendable labor. In the medium of film, such moments of interruption humanize minor characters and paint a more complete social setting with minimal exposition.

In the morning after the tent scene, the addition of Ennis discovering a dead sheep—its stomach torn open by coyotes—is a visual metaphor for guilt and consequence. This inserted moment functions symbolically: Ennis has just crossed a personal boundary the night before, and the dead animal signals, in his mind, a loss of control or a divine punishment. The gaze he fixes on the sheep is not just about the failure to protect the herd but is loaded with self-reproach. The novella describes predator loss as a concern of Aguirre's, but the film transforms it into a thematic device that visualizes Ennis's psychological unrest.

Similarly, the added moment of Ennis and Jack repairing Jack's truck before parting in the farewell scene enriches the emotional landscape without altering the dialogue. By giving the men a shared task—however mundane—the scene allows for a physical closeness and wordless cooperation that contrasts with the emotional distance that follows. The domesticity of the act momentarily simulates a kind of partnership that their world will never permit. These few seconds of silent, purposeful movement communicate longing, restraint, and familiarity more powerfully than words might.

In the emotionally pivotal reunion scene, several new details are added to magnify the stakes. Ennis looks around nervously before and after kissing Jack, signaling a lingering fear that shapes his entire life. Jack, in contrast, is carefree, bold, and ready to embrace his feelings. The addition of Alma witnessing the kiss and walking away in stunned silence is especially

significant: it transforms her into an active participant in the narrative, giving her interiority and reaction where the story previously left her on the margins. Her quiet devastation becomes a turning point that will ripple throughout her marriage. These visual insertions do not change the plot but rather sharpen the emotional trajectories of multiple characters.

Other additions accentuate gestures of care and resistance to intimacy. In the kitchen scene after Thanksgiving, Alma's delivery of her lines with visible tears and Ennis's elevated tone shift what was once subtext into performed tension. The physical presence of their daughters, who come out onto the porch to say goodbye to Ennis as he leaves in anger, introduces a layer of familial strain, reminding the viewer of the collateral damage caused by silence and secrets. Likewise, in the final parking lot argument between Ennis and Jack, Ennis physically pushes Jack, and Jack responds by trying to hold him as he collapses. These actions were not scripted in the source text, but their inclusion provides emotional catharsis and physicalizes the push-pull dynamic of their relationship.

The final visit to Jack's parents also contains a crucial addition: Jack's mother silently aiding Ennis by placing the shirts in a bag. Her quiet act of understanding, compassion, and perhaps tacit approval is never stated aloud, but the gesture holds immense emotional weight. It offers a glimmer of human connection in a world largely characterized by silence, prejudice, and disconnection. This is further underscored in the film's closing moments, where Ennis folds his daughter's sweater and places it beside the now-reversed shirts. The visual inversion—Ennis's shirt now on the outside—provides a poetic closure that the short story leaves unspoken. It signals a posthumous emotional opening: Ennis, who once resisted vulnerability, is now embracing Jack in death in a way he never could in life.

Together, these added elements are small yet purposeful. They do not disrupt the structure or pacing of the narrative but enrich its emotional and symbolic complexity. They exemplify the film's loose adaptation strategy, in which fidelity is not just about preserving words but about honoring emotional truth through cinematic means. These scene elements demonstrate how careful augmentation can deepen audience understanding, evoke empathy, and give voice to what is left unsaid in prose.

### 2.3.1.3 Lines of dialogue

One of the earliest examples of this technique is found in the bar scene where Jack and Ennis begin to get to know each other. While Ennis remains largely silent in the source text, the screenplay introduces a key line of exposition when Jack asks him whether he ever rodeos: “You know . . . I mean, once in a while, when I got the entry fee in my pocket” (Lee, 2005, 7:36). This offhand remark reveals Ennis’s financial instability, a theme that recurs throughout the film. It subtly lays the groundwork for understanding his working-class hardship, which later constrains his choices and shapes his relationship with Jack. The line also establishes a tone of modesty and resignation that permeates Ennis’s character.

In the following scene at the trailhead when the Basque packer warns Ennis against ordering soup he delivers a response added in the adaptation. Ennis’s dry reply, “Well, I don’t eat soup” (Lee, 2005, 8:49), is stoic in tone but functions as setup for a later scene in which he is seen ordering soup from the man who warned him against it. The shift occurs because Jack had complained about being sick of beans—therefore, the soup purchase is not only a practical response but also a small act of care, reflecting Ennis putting aside his preferences because of Jack and therefore the evolving bond between the two men.

When the hailstorm comes, Ennis suggests returning to the sheep, but Jack warns him of the dangers of riding out during the storm: “You’ll get pitched off your mount in a storm like this” (Lee, 2005, 35:54). This brief exchange conveys Jack’s concern for Ennis’s safety, reinforcing the emotional care that underpins their relationship. It also serves a narrative function, foreshadowing the following scene in which the sheep are found tangled within a Chilean herd.

After the first snowfall Jack informs Ennis that Aguirre has ordered the sheep to be brought down early, Ennis’s angry response, “The sonofabitch, he’s cutting us out of a whole month’s pay” (Lee, 2005, 38:03), again signals his financial precarity. His rejection of Jack’s offer to lend him money—“I don’t need your money, huh?” (Lee, 2005, 38:17)—serves not only as a character note of pride and stubbornness but also reiterates the psychological walls Ennis erects around himself. He is unwilling to accept support, even when offered freely, a trait that becomes emblematic of his struggle to accept love and vulnerability.

The scene where Ennis and Alma discuss the possibility of moving into town introduces another layer of subtextual meaning. Alma's line, "You don't want it to be so lonely, do you?" (Lee, 2005, 49:24) is especially poignant in retrospect. While on the surface it appeals to Ennis's memory of a solitary childhood and seems to express her hope for a fuller family life, it also functions ironically. Alma believes Ennis is content with their domestic arrangement, unaware of the emotional and romantic connection he still harbors for Jack. Her line, therefore, becomes a tragic moment of dramatic irony, revealing Alma's innocence and Ennis's emotional isolation.

In the motel scene that follows the pair's reunion, Jack says how eager he was to meet Ennis again revealing his longing and eagerness to rekindle their relationship. When he asks him via an added line about his feelings of to the reunion, Ennis's response, "Me? I don't know" (Lee, 2005, 1:06:32) stands in sharp contrast, laying bare the emotional imbalance between them. This brief exchange encapsulates the central tragedy of the film: Jack is all in, while Ennis remains conflicted and guarded, still bound by internalized fear and societal expectations.

A particularly intense moment of added dialogue comes in the parking lot argument near the end of the film, following Jack's now-iconic line, "I wish I knew how to quit you." What follows in the adaptation is a cascade of emotionally raw lines from Ennis: "Then why don't you? Why don't you let me be, huh? It's because of you, Jack, that I'm like this. I'm nothin'. I'm nowhere" (Lee, 2005, 1:47:44). These lines express the full burden of Ennis's inner turmoil. He blames Jack for awakening feelings that he cannot reconcile with the world he inhabits. His confession of feeling like "nothin'" and being "nowhere" reveals a deep sense of self-loathing and existential confusion, culminating in the line, "I just can't stand this anymore, Jack." Through these additions the emotional weight of the scene amplified, portraying Ennis's collapse not as a dramatic outburst, but as an inevitable breaking point.

Finally, in the film's penultimate scene, Ennis phones Lureen after receiving Jack's returned postcard. The added line, "About the ashes, I mean" (Lee, 2005, 1:55:04), comes at the end of Lureen's comment that Jack's parents would appreciate if his wishes were carried out. This seemingly minor addition infuses the moment with subtextual weight. It implies that Lureen knows more than she admits—that she may have sensed Jack's emotional distance

and understood that his true desire was to have his ashes scattered on Brokeback Mountain, not because of the location, but because of what it symbolized. The line subtly acknowledges the gap between Jack's public life and private longing.

In each of these moments, the screenplay's added lines are far more than filler. They enrich character, sharpen themes, and illuminate the emotional landscapes that the visual medium of film can suggest but not always articulate.

### **2.3.2 Ellipses**

The section on ellipses is likewise divided into three categories: whole scenes that have been omitted, scene elements that the filmmakers chose to omit, and missing lines of dialogue.

#### **2.3.2.1 Whole scenes**

The short story opens with an extended and highly detailed account of Ennis waking alone in his trailer. The description captures his bodily routine—scratching his stomach, reheating coffee, urinating in the sink—as well as the desolate landscape outside, where the wind rattles the thin walls and the gravel scratches beneath the trailer. This morning sequence powerfully establishes Ennis's isolation, his impoverished existence, and the emotional stasis he inhabits following Jack's death. It also frames the narrative retrospectively: Ennis recalls a dream about Jack, and in doing so, signals the enduring hold Jack has on his inner life. In contrast, the film omits this passage entirely, beginning instead with scenes that immediately establish the present action. The likely rationale behind this choice lies in pacing and tone. While the prose scene provides valuable psychological depth, its static nature and raw physicality—particularly the detail of urinating in the sink—may have felt at odds with the film's more lyrical and visually restrained tone. Rather than literalize this moment, the filmmakers chose to express Ennis's loneliness and poverty through subtle visual cues: the barrenness of his trailer, his quiet gestures, and the muted color palette of his surroundings.

A similar motivation likely lies behind the exclusion of several scenes from the beginning of Ennis and Jack's final trip. In the short story, this section is rendered in lush, almost romantic detail: the men ride through snowmelt trails, breathe in the scent of juniper, and surprise a black bear that lumbers away into the forest. The river sparkles with spring runoff,

and the two men quietly set up camp in a secluded spot. This passage evokes the natural intimacy they share and underscores the emotional continuity with their past summers on Brokeback Mountain. However, in the film, the narrative cuts straight to the emotional climax of the trip—the confrontation that reveals the limits of their relationship. Omitting the earlier scenic moments allows the film to maintain narrative momentum and direct the viewer’s attention to the impending rupture between the characters. Furthermore, staging a bear encounter would have introduced logistical and budgetary complications. But more importantly, the filmmakers likely sensed that the emotional significance of the trip was better conveyed through silence, performance, and the sparseness of dialogue than through evocations of landscape. The omission thus sharpens the dramatic focus while preserving the film’s aesthetic economy.

The source text also contains a touching scene in which Ennis purchases a postcard of Brokeback Mountain from a local gift shop. After searching through the display rack, he finds what he’s looking for—or rather, commissions it—and, when it arrives, pins it up in his trailer above the two shirts. This gesture serves as a deeply symbolic act of mourning and memorialization: unable to scatter Jack’s ashes as he wished, Ennis recreates a visual shrine to their love. The film, however, elides the process and presents the final tableau already in place. This decision may have been guided by the desire for visual impact. Instead of showing Ennis engaging in a mundane act of shopping and pinning, the film allows the viewer to discover the shirts and postcard simultaneously, through a single quiet reveal. This allows for a poignant moment of visual storytelling, consistent with the film’s preference for showing over telling. The emotional power of Ennis’s grief is conveyed not through dialogue or action, but through the haunting stillness of the shirts hanging in the closet—silent witnesses to a life unlived.

Perhaps the most significant omission occurs in the very last paragraph of the short story, which describes Jack’s recurring appearances in Ennis’s dreams. In these dreams, Jack is as he was in life—curly-haired, smiling, and full of life—but the imagery becomes surreal and even grotesque: a can of beans appears with a spoon shaped like a tire iron, evoking both humor and violence. Ennis wakes from these dreams sometimes in grief, sometimes with physical longing. This passage captures the psychological depth of Ennis’s mourning and

the ongoing presence of Jack in his subconscious. Its absence from the film can be understood as a stylistic choice: to include a dream sequence, especially one with such surreal imagery, would have interfered with the film's realist aesthetic. The emotional resonance of the dream is instead transposed into the film's final moments, where Ennis folds Alma Jr.'s sweater, opens the closet, and looks silently at the shirts and postcard. The decision to conclude with an image rather than a narrated interiority reinforces the film's visual grammar and preserves its tone of understated sorrow.

Taken together, these ellipses underscore the interpretive nature of adaptation. Given that *Brokeback Mountain* is only a near thirty-page short story, one might assume that there would be little need for omissions and that the filmmakers would instead seek to extend or elaborate upon the source material. Yet Lee, McMurtry, and Ossana demonstrated a remarkable ability to recognize which scenes, though evocative on the page, were thematically peripheral or stylistically unsuited to the medium of film. Their restraint in this regard is not a shortcoming but a strength—one that reveals their skill in adapting not just the content of the story, but its emotional architecture.

#### **2.3.2.2 Scene elements**

In contrast to the relatively substantial number of additions, the list of omitted scene elements in *Brokeback Mountain* is notably limited, highlighting the filmmakers' commitment to preserving much of the short story's structural and thematic integrity. Still, a few small yet telling details were excluded. One such moment occurs in the trailhead scene, where the short story describes a Basque shepherd showing Ennis how to pack the mules. The adaptation removes this instructional moment, likely for pacing reasons, as the film seeks to move swiftly into the central relationship between Ennis and Jack without lingering on procedural detail that does not bear directly on character development or the central narrative arc. A more consequential change involves Lureen's father, who is alive and present in the film but mentioned as having died in the source text. This change enables the inclusion of the added Thanksgiving dinner scene, during which Jack's frustration and alienation are directed at a tangible source of patriarchal authority. By keeping Lureen's father alive, the film gives Jack a foil who embodies the conservative values that repress his desires and contribute to his internal conflict, deepening the emotional texture of the scene. Another

change concerns the argument between Ennis and Alma after the Thanksgiving dinner. While the short story describes Ennis twisting Alma's wrist so that "a dish clattered," the film omits the detail of the dish falling. This may be because Ennis grabbing Alma's wrist and threatening her already establishes the necessary emotional and physical intensity of the moment. Including the clattering dish might have pushed the scene toward excessive dramatization, whereas its absence keeps the tone measured while still communicating Ennis's volatility.

### **2.3.2.3 Lines of dialogue**

In some cases, dialogue was seemingly removed to avoid redundancy or exposition better suited to prose; in others, the omissions may have been guided by a desire to preserve ambiguity, intensify subtext, or concentrate the focus on the central emotional trajectory. While not as structurally significant as omitted scenes or added sequences, these missing lines offer insight into how the film reshapes character psychology, thematic nuance, and social context.

Some of the earliest examples of missing dialogue occur in the bar scene where Jack and Ennis get to know one another. In the short story, Jack casually mentions having shot an eagle the year before. While seemingly incidental, this line builds on Jack's boastful nature and rural background. Its exclusion in the adaptation might have been deemed narratively expendable—it neither develops the central relationship nor significantly informs Jack's character in a way that other retained lines do.

Another example appears after the two decide to switch roles—Jack will tend the camp, and Ennis will watch the sheep. In the short story, Ennis takes supplies with him and remarks that he'll "save a trip, stay out until supper" (Proulx, 2005, p. 5). This detail reinforces Ennis's practicality and work ethic. However, in film, visual storytelling can imply such traits more economically; the actual line was likely omitted for the sake of pacing and to keep focus on the emotional undercurrent of their changing dynamic.

One of the most substantial omissions comes during the extended supper scene at the campfire. In the short story, Ennis and Jack engage in a wide-ranging conversation covering horses, rodeo injuries, the military, lost submarines, and family histories. These topics serve as a window into their attempts to bond and build intimacy through traditional masculine

channels. However, the film distills this moment into a more focused and emotionally resonant exchange. The decision to streamline their conversation reflects the cinematic principle of showing rather than telling; the warmth of firelight, shared whiskey, and relaxed posture communicates camaraderie without needing exhaustive dialogue.

Another emotional nuance is lost when, during their reunion, Ennis murmurs “little darlin” (Proulx, 2005, p. 10) to Jack. The short story emphasizes that Ennis rarely uses endearments, making the line a touching expression of his affection. Its absence in the film arguably lessens the tenderness of the moment. Yet, it could also be attributed to the filmmakers’ decision to avoid sentimentality or to preserve Ennis’s emotionally guarded persona.

Further omissions arise during the motel scene. Many of Jack’s extended monologues about rodeo life, physical injuries, his experiences with Lureen and her father, and Ennis’s questions about their sexual identities are absent. These lines contribute to the complexity of Jack’s character and clarify the personal sacrifices he has made. Their exclusion reflects an effort to avoid overloading the scene with exposition. The filmmakers opt instead for subtext and visual performance—Ennis’s hesitancy, Jack’s urgency, and the confined space of the motel room carry much of the emotional weight without requiring every line to be spoken.

Similar streamlining is evident in the campfire scene during their last trip. In the short story, Ennis reflects on his daughters, and Jack opens up about his son’s dyslexia and Lureen’s controlling nature. These lines provide valuable insight into their roles as fathers and further explore the contrast in their domestic lives. However, these elements shift attention away from their relationship and the emotional arc of their final trip together. Omitting these lines allows the scene to stay tightly focused on their shared longing and the emotional impasse between them.

The argument scene, perhaps the most emotionally charged moment in both text and film, also features missing lines that enhance its thematic depth. Jack’s reminder that they had originally planned to meet in August and Ennis’s mention of his demanding job under Stoutamire add layers to their conflict—detailing broken promises and unequal sacrifices. Their removal from the screenplay simplifies the scene but may also intensify its emotional focus by honing in on Jack’s pain and Ennis’s fear.

Across these examples, a consistent adaptation strategy becomes clear: dialogue from the source material is omitted when it reiterates character traits already evident through performance, diverts attention from the central relationship, or risks disrupting the film's emotional tone and narrative economy. By trimming such lines, the adapters craft a more distilled, visual, and emotionally resonant experience that foregrounds the tragedy of Jack and Ennis's relationship while preserving the spirit of Annie Proulx's prose.

### **2.3.3 Chronological adjustments**

In addition to added scenes, and omissions, *Brokeback Mountain* as a film adaptation demonstrates a subtler but significant technique of loose adaptation: chronological adjustments. Three types of chronological reordering can be observed in the adaptation. First, there are minor changes in the order of scene elements, in which events within a single scene are reshuffled for pacing or clarity. Second, the film engages in relocating lines of dialogue, taking lines delivered in one moment of the short story and assigning them to a different scene in the film. Lastly, the adaptation reconfigures certain retrospectively recounted events from the source text, opting instead to portray them chronologically in real time, thereby giving them greater immediacy and emotional weight.

#### **2.3.3.1 Scene elements**

The category of minor chronological adjustments in *Brokeback Mountain* involves subtle shifts in the order of narrative elements within individual scenes. These changes, while present, do not appear to significantly alter the narrative or character development and can be seen as neutral modifications made to accommodate the visual and temporal logic of film. For instance, in the source text, Ennis and Jack shake hands while still inside Aguirre's trailer, whereas in the film this gesture occurs after they have exited the trailer. Similarly, Jack's first night with the sheep is slightly repositioned: the short story has him spend the night in camp before heading out in the morning, while the film shows him riding out in the evening to stay with the herd. Other examples include the repositioning of Jack's lunchtime complaint about commuting—shifted earlier in the film—and the sequencing of Ennis's comment about shooting a coyote, which he delivers after shaving rather than during the act itself. These changes, though technically chronological alterations, seem to have been made for reasons of pacing, visual clarity, or directorial rhythm rather than narrative necessity.

### **2.3.3.2 Lines of dialogue**

A particularly striking example of the adaptation's chronological reconfiguration of dialogue is the relocation of several emotionally charged lines from the short story's motel scene to an added scene in the film: an evening spent by the campfire during Jack and Ennis's first post-reunion trip. In the original narrative, these lines are delivered in the emotionally intimate but physically confined and gritty space of a motel room, immediately following their sexual reconnection. In the film, however, the same dialogue unfolds in the open air, under the stars, framed by the soft glow of the fire and the quiet of the Wyoming wilderness.

This shift in setting and timeline is far from arbitrary. By embedding the conversation in a picturesque and serene natural environment, the filmmakers create a poignant juxtaposition between setting and subject matter. Jack's hopeful vision of the two of them sharing a life on a small ranch, Ennis's fear of discovery and violence, and his traumatic recollection of witnessing a hate crime in his youth—these lines strike a deeper chord when delivered against the backdrop of peaceful mountain solitude. The beauty and stillness of the setting seem to momentarily hold the fantasy that Jack yearns for, making it feel not just imaginable but tantalizingly within reach.

At the same time, this serenity emphasizes the emotional chasm between Jack's idealism and Ennis's dread. The natural world, which once served as a space of freedom for them on Brokeback Mountain, here becomes a quiet stage for emotional exposure. By relocating these lines, the filmmakers underscore the tragedy of their relationship: even in the most beautiful, undisturbed moments, their connection is laced with tension, compromise, and unfulfilled longing. In this way, the chronological shift enriches the narrative without disrupting its emotional arc, using visual contrast to amplify the emotional content of the dialogue.

### **2.3.3.3 Retrospective scenes made chronological**

The short story uses memory and retrospection to layer meaning and allow characters to process trauma or longing internally, whereas the film relies on the immediacy of visual storytelling, which invites viewers to experience moments in real time rather than through reflection. Several important events in the source text are presented retrospectively, only mentioned after the fact through dialogue or narrative commentary. However, in the film,

these are relocated to the actual points in the story where they occurred, shifting them from recollected incidents to directly dramatized scenes.

One notable example of this technique is the fight scene on the mountain between Jack and Ennis. In Proulx's text, this moment is never presented in real time. It is referenced only in passing when Ennis avoids looking at Jack's bruised jaw during their farewell and later when Ennis finds the bloodstained shirts in Jack's childhood bedroom, prompting a memory of the injury. The moment is infused with emotional weight through its delayed recollection, drawing on the significance of the shirts as tokens of love, memory, and remorse. In contrast, the film presents the altercation in full during the last day on Brokeback Mountain. What begins as playful wrestling escalates into violence when Jack accidentally knees Ennis in the face. Ennis, humiliated and bleeding, reacts by punching Jack and walking away. This visual dramatization allows the audience to witness the tension between physical intimacy and masculine aggression that underpins their relationship. Rather than preserving the moment as a shadowy memory, the film brings it into the present, reinforcing its impact and foreshadowing the emotional significance of the shirts without relying on narrative exposition.

A second scene that undergoes this shift is Jack's visit to Aguirre the summer after their time on Brokeback. In the short story, Jack relates the event retrospectively during the motel scene, explaining that he returned to Wyoming hoping to reconnect with Ennis, only to be dismissed by Aguirre, who hints at having witnessed their relationship. The anecdote serves to highlight Jack's unfulfilled hopes and the external threat their love faces. The film, however, presents the scene in real time earlier in the narrative, showing Jack pulling into the ranch and having a cold, dismissive conversation with Aguirre, who refuses to rehire him. By rendering the encounter chronologically, the film emphasizes Jack's yearning and disappointment more directly. Viewers are not merely told of his rejection—they see it unfold. Aguirre's binoculars, a key symbol in both versions, become visually tied to his role as both observer and judge, heightening the sense of surveillance and the stakes of their intimacy.

A final example of this strategy is Jack's drive to visit Ennis after learning about his divorce. In the short story, this visit is only briefly mentioned in passing when Ennis makes a phone

call following Jack's death. The narrative notes that Ennis had called Jack only once before, which Jack misinterpreted as an invitation, resulting in a long and ultimately fruitless journey. The moment functions in the text as a symbol of missed connection and miscommunication. The film, however, turns it into a fully realized scene. Jack arrives hopeful, expecting perhaps a change in their situation, only to be met with Ennis's ambivalence. The decision to dramatize this moment allows the film to convey Jack's vulnerability and longing in a more visceral way. It becomes a pivotal moment in their dynamic—Jack's reach toward a shared future and Ennis's continued emotional retreat.

Through reordering these events into their actual place within the timeline, the film enables a more immersive and emotionally immediate viewing experience. These chronological adjustments heighten the realism of the narrative and make the characters' struggles and disappointments more tangible. Whereas Proulx's retrospective narration invites introspection and delayed realization, the film's linearity allows audiences to experience moments of connection and rupture alongside the characters themselves.

## **2.4 Brokeback Mountain as a faithful adaptation**

Faithful adaptations seek to preserve the essential elements—such as themes, structure, and overall narrative style—of the literary source material, while thoughtfully transforming it to fit the cinematic medium. Unlike literal adaptations, faithful adaptations do not rely strictly on verbatim transposition, nor do they significantly alter or diverge from the source like loose adaptations. Rather, they aim for what this thesis refers to as functional equivalence, attempting to recreate in film the emotional, thematic, and narrative resonance of the original text.

In this chapter, three primary adaptation strategies that filmmakers employ to achieve this equivalence in the film *Brokeback Mountain* will be explored: firstly, the adaptation of narrative notes from the source text into characters' direct speech; secondly, the manner in which the actors' performances translate literary description and implied emotional states into visual, performative expression; and thirdly, the role cinematic techniques—such as

cinematography, editing, and direction—play in recreating the short story’s narrative effect within the cinematic medium.

### **2.4.1 From narrative notes to direct speech**

One prominent technique of faithful adaptations is the conversion of narrative exposition into direct character speech. Rather than relying on voice-over narration or text captions—which might disrupt narrative flow or seem stylistically intrusive—the adapters transform essential narrative notes from the source material into natural dialogue delivered by the characters themselves. In this subchapter, I will analyze how such conversions are employed in *Brokeback Mountain*, focusing on three primary areas: character background, and exposition; clarification of scenes and plot details; and the emotional dynamics of relationships.

#### **2.4.1.1 Character background and exposition**

The filmmakers of *Brokeback Mountain* skillfully employ the adaptation technique of transforming narrative exposition from Annie Proulx's short story into direct character dialogue. This method achieves functional equivalence by preserving key elements of characterization and motivation, seamlessly integrating them into the film's dramatic structure without relying on external narration or overt exposition.

An illustrative example of this approach occurs during the breakfast scene after Jack and Ennis's first night on Brokeback Mountain. While the original narrative succinctly states that both characters "claimed to be saving money for a small spread" (Proulx, 2005, p. 2) and notes Ennis's engagement to Alma, the film translates these narrative details into dialogue. Jack expresses his impatience: "Can't wait till I got my own spread, and I won't have to put up with Joe Aguirre's crap no more" (Lee, 2005, 11:52), prompting Ennis to reply, "I'm savin' for a place myself. Alma and me, we'll be gettin' married when I come down off this mountain" (Lee, 2005, 11:57). By verbalizing their aspirations and relational status, the characters naturally reveal their desires, ambitions, and socio-economic context, providing viewers with essential exposition while maintaining dramatic immediacy.

Similarly, during the supper scene at their camp, the filmmakers adeptly transform extensive narrative exposition about Ennis's difficult family history into dialogue. In the short story,

Ennis's upbringing—marked by poverty and hardship following his parents' untimely death—is delivered solely through narrative commentary. However, the film has Ennis disclose this background directly to Jack: "They [my brother and sister] did the best they could after my folks was gone, considerin' they didn't leave us nothin' but 24 dollars in a coffee can" (Lee, 2005, 21:07). This dialogue offers a compact yet emotionally rich summary of Ennis's youth, subtly emphasizing how his impoverished past informs his reserved and pragmatic nature. It underscores his emotional guardedness and the limitations he places upon his aspirations and relationships.

In the bar scene early in the film, narrative notes describing Jack's motivation for joining the rodeo circuit and escaping his oppressive home environment are similarly translated into spoken dialogue. Rather than narrating Jack's desperation to leave his father's ranch in Lightning Flat, the film allows Jack to vocalize his dissatisfaction directly: "But beats workin' for my old man. Can't please my old man, no way. That's why I took to rodeoin'" (Lee, 2005, 7:24). This dialogue succinctly and effectively communicates Jack's psychological drive, revealing his deeper motivations: a desire for independence, validation, and escape from familial conflict. By articulating Jack's internal struggles through direct speech, the adaptation foregrounds his restlessness and ambition, offering insight into his later life decisions.

Furthermore, Jack's Pentecostal background, initially described briefly in Proulx's narrative as a mere character detail, is also directly articulated through dialogue in the film. Around the evening campfire, Jack remarks, "My mama, she believes in the Pentecost" (Lee, 2005, 24:25). This seemingly minor line enriches Jack's character by adding an additional layer of complexity, suggesting both his familial influences and potential internal conflicts regarding religion and personal identity. Directly expressing this element through dialogue rather than relying on narrative exposition reinforces character depth and psychological realism.

Overall, by converting key narrative descriptions into organic, believable dialogue, the filmmakers achieve a high degree of fidelity in adaptation, successfully capturing Annie Proulx's richly detailed characterizations. This strategy not only maintains narrative coherence but also deepens viewers' emotional engagement with the characters by providing

meaningful psychological and motivational context naturally embedded within their conversations.

#### **2.4.1.2 Scene clarification**

Transforming narrative exposition into direct character dialogue proves especially valuable in clarifying scenes and developing the plot in *Brokeback Mountain*, ensuring that key events and details remain both accessible and clear to the viewer.

A clear instance of this strategy occurs in Aguirre's trailer scene, where the short story briefly summarizes the situation with the narrative line, "Pair of deuces going nowhere" (Proulx, 2005, p. 3). The adaptation instead transforms this into a line directly spoken by Aguirre, addressing Jack and Ennis: "If you two pair of deuces are lookin' for work, I suggest you get your scrawny asses in here pronto" (Lee, 2005, 4:26). By making Aguirre vocalize this remark, the film immediately establishes his harsh authority, clarifies the power dynamics between the characters, and sets the tone of urgency for their job arrangement.

In the trailhead scene, the narrative detail regarding Jack's mare—described in the original text as having "a low startle point" (Proulx, 2005, p. 4)—is effectively conveyed through dialogue when Ennis warns Jack explicitly: "You wanna watch it there. That horse has a low startle point" (Lee, 2005, 8:56). This spoken warning clarifies an otherwise subtle detail, preparing the audience for the mare's skittish behavior later, and contributes to a sense of narrative cohesion and foreshadowing.

Similarly, during the scene in which Jack plays his harmonica, the filmmakers translate another narrative note—that the harmonica had been "flattened a little from a fall" (Proulx, 2005, p. 6)—into direct dialogue. Ennis explicitly remarks, "That harmonica don't sound quite right either" (Lee, 2005, 23:50), prompting Jack to respond, "That's 'cause it got kinda flattened when that mare threw me" (Lee, 2005, 23:52). This exchange, presented naturally within their dialogue, clearly explains the harmonica's damaged condition to the audience and further emphasizes the mare's volatile behavior, linking seamlessly back to the prior warning.

Another instance where narrative clarification is successfully achieved through dialogue is the untangling of sheep following the hailstorm. The original narrative notes that the sheep

had scattered and "got among a herd in another allotment" (Proulx, 2005, p. 7), with worn and faded paint brands making their retrieval difficult. The film's adaptation succinctly clarifies this situation through direct speech: "Well, what're we supposed to do now?" (Lee, 2005, 36:12) Ennis asks, and Jack replies clearly, "Get on in there and untangle them Chilean sheep out from ours" (Lee, 2005, 36:14). Through this dialogue, viewers gain immediate comprehension of the problem's practical stakes and urgency, ensuring the visual sequence of untangling sheep remains clear and purposeful.

The filmmakers further enhance clarity by verbalizing the narrative description of the snowstorm as a brief event. In the short story, the early snow is summarized narratively as having "piled up a foot, but was followed by a quick melt" (Proulx, 2005, p. 8). The adaptation instead has Ennis explicitly remark, "That snow barely stuck an hour" (Lee, 2005, 37:58), emphasizing clearly through dialogue how briefly this event impacted their environment, thereby efficiently progressing the narrative.

Finally, the narrative description of Aguirre's disappointment in the final sheep count—"The count was not what he'd hoped for, either. Ranch stiffs never did much of a job" (Proulx, 2005, p. 8)—is effectively rendered through Aguirre's direct criticism: "The count ain't what I'd hoped for, neither. You ranch stiffs, you ain't never no good" (Lee, 2005, 40:51). Spoken aloud, this dialogue clearly communicates Aguirre's dissatisfaction, emphasizing the protagonists' failures and reinforcing the sense of tension and vulnerability central to their precarious employment situation.

Overall, by converting explanatory narrative details into purposeful, natural dialogue, the filmmakers maintain clarity and narrative momentum, successfully guiding the audience through critical plot developments and subtle nuances within the story.

#### **2.4.1.3 Emotional dynamics**

Converting narrative exposition into direct speech further intensifies emotional dynamics and clarifies the relationships between characters, providing audiences with explicit insights into their underlying tensions, desires, and conflicts.

A poignant example occurs during the scene when Ennis is preparing for another trip with Jack, and Alma suggests a potential job opportunity at the power company. Originally a

narrative comment highlighting Ennis's reluctance to seek stable employment, this detail becomes a revealing exchange in the film adaptation, with Alma directly suggesting, "Ennis, they got a openin' over at the power company. Might be good pay" (Lee, 2005, 1:16:17), to which Ennis curtly responds, "Well, as clumsy as I am, I'd probably get electrocuted" (Lee, 2005, 1:16:21). The directness of this interaction underscores Ennis's stubborn resistance to change, simultaneously reflecting Alma's growing frustration over financial instability and Ennis's own sense of inadequacy and self-deprecation. Consequently, their diverging priorities and the growing emotional distance between them become explicitly articulated through this exchange.

Similarly, the filmmakers transform a narrative detail about Alma's apprehension regarding another pregnancy into direct speech during an intimate scene between the married couple. In the source text, Alma's dread of pregnancy is briefly mentioned; however, in the adaptation, her anxieties become immediate and explicit when she pleads with Ennis: "Ennis, as far behind as we are on the bills, it makes me nervous not to take no precaution" (Lee, 2005, 1:18:34). By vocalizing Alma's worry, the filmmakers explicitly foreground the practical burdens and anxieties that overshadow their marriage, vividly portraying the strain caused by economic instability and the emotional gap that has formed between the couple. This dialogue intensifies the emotional stakes of their relationship, emphasizing the growing tension and disconnect.

The emotional intensity between Jack and Ennis is similarly amplified during their pivotal argument scene. In the original text, a narrative description summarizes the pair's chronic dissatisfaction and longing: "One thing never changed: the brilliant charge of their infrequent couplings was darkened by the sense of time flying, never enough time, never enough" (Proulx, 2005, p .20). The filmmakers chose to transform this into Jack's direct, bitter lament: "There's never enough time, never enough" (Lee, 2005, 1:44:33), delivered explicitly during their confrontation. By vocalizing Jack's despair, the adaptation forcefully conveys his profound frustration with the brevity and infrequency of their meetings, clearly exposing the emotional turmoil underlying their strained relationship. This direct expression not only heightens the emotional intensity of the scene but also emphasizes the heartbreaking consequences of their constrained reality.

Finally, the filmmakers use direct dialogue to explicitly portray Ennis's emotional vulnerability and deep-seated attachment to Jack through a flashback scene involving a childhood memory. In the source text, the narrative briefly mentions a phrase Ennis remembers from his mother, yet in the adaptation, this memory is explicitly verbalized: "My mama used to say that to me when I was little" (Lee, 2005, 1:48:43). By having Ennis vocalize this intimate detail, the filmmakers vividly convey his emotional openness and vulnerability in Jack's presence, establishing a rare moment of tenderness that underscores the depth of his affection. This direct dialogue not only enriches viewers' understanding of Ennis's emotional complexity but also reinforces the profound bond the two men share.

Ultimately, such dialogue transformations allow filmmakers to vividly portray complex emotional realities inherent in the characters' lives, thereby heightening the viewer's emotional engagement.

#### **2.4.2 Actor performance**

While literary texts often articulate characters' emotional states, inner thoughts, and psychological motivations explicitly through narration, film, lacking a similar degree of direct narrative introspection, relies heavily on actors to embody these nuances. In Ang Lee's adaptation of *Brokeback Mountain*, the carefully orchestrated performances by the actors successfully translate Annie Proulx's descriptive passages into non-verbal expressions, body language, and subtle emotional cues. These actor-driven moments ensure that the complexities of the source text are not lost in translation, but rather are vividly conveyed.

A potent illustration of actor performance effectively translating literary emotional depth can be found in the farewell scene, after Ennis and Jack complete their summer on *Brokeback Mountain*. In the short story, Ennis's emotional state at the departure is succinctly yet powerfully described: "He felt about as bad as he ever had" (Proulx, 2005, p. 9). While concise, this literary line encapsulates a profound sense of loss, isolation, and internal anguish. Heath Ledger conveys these abstract emotional dimensions through raw physicality: after walking away, he collapses in a secluded alley, violently punches the wall, screams in agony, and then breaks down into uncontrollable sobs. The intensity of Ledger's performance is crucial: his initial scream is primal, full of pent-up despair and frustration accumulated over the summer. The subsequent punching of the wall symbolizes his futile

attempt to physically purge the pain caused by parting with Jack, with whom he experienced genuine companionship and intimacy for the first time in his life. Ledger's sobbing is equally significant: he lowers himself to the ground, physically diminished, whimpering and shaking as he attempts to regain control of his emotions. This progression from rage to despair and then helpless resignation effectively embodies Ennis's internal conflict, thus providing the audience with direct and powerful visual insight into his emotional turmoil. Ledger's performance, devoid of any verbal articulation, serves as a cinematic equivalent to Proulx's narrative introspection, ensuring that viewers fully experience Ennis's profound suffering.

Another significant moment where the actors effectively communicate inner emotional states occurs during the sex scene between Ennis and Alma. The short story provides insight into Alma's apprehension by mentioning that Ennis "did quickly what she hated" (Proulx, 2005, p. 9), implicitly referring to unwanted intimacy. Rather than explicitly narrating Alma's inner turmoil or discomfort, Michelle Williams translates Alma's inner state into subtle yet expressive physical gestures. She tightly grips the frame of the bed, keeps her eyes shut tightly, quivers her lips, and inhales sharply in visible discomfort. Williams's restrained performance vividly communicates the unspoken dread and discomfort articulated indirectly by Proulx's narrative, ensuring the film captures the emotional nuance of the source text authentically and sensitively.

Similarly nuanced actor performances are evident in the scene of Ennis and Alma washing dishes after Thanksgiving dinner. The original text describes Ennis as "feeling too big for the room" (Proulx, 2005, p. 16), indicating his awkward discomfort and a strong desire to escape the tense situation. Heath Ledger communicates this through subtle yet evocative gestures: he keeps glancing down, shifting uncomfortably, and avoiding direct eye contact with Alma. Ledger's posture conveys a sense of confinement—he leans uneasily against the kitchen counter, and repeatedly shifting his weight, actions that suggest nervousness and mounting anxiety. As the scene progresses and Alma begins to confront him, Ledger's eyes dart around the room, reflecting his growing unease and fear of impending conflict. Michelle Williams, as Alma, matches Ledger's intensity with her own carefully modulated performance. Her lines are delivered quietly but forcefully, her voice trembling slightly to signal suppressed anger and emotional exhaustion. Alma's restrained yet visible distress

gradually builds; her eyes fill with tears she refuses to shed openly, and her face tightens with anguish as she reveals her painful awareness of Ennis's relationship with Jack. Both actors expertly capture the underlying tension described by Proulx's narrative, conveying through subtle yet powerful visual cues a relationship further disintegrating beneath a facade of normalcy. Their performances create an emotionally charged scene that provides viewers with profound insight into the depth of hurt and misunderstanding between them, serving as an effective cinematic equivalent to the literary portrayal.

The climactic argument between Ennis and Jack provides yet another exemplary case of actors conveying inner turmoil through performance. The short story describes Jack's accumulated frustration, conveyed partly through dialogue and partly through narrative description. In the film adaptation, Jake Gyllenhaal embodies Jack's resentment and exasperation by slamming the truck door and delivering his lines with escalating vocal intensity. Heath Ledger, conversely, translates Ennis's reluctant admission and emotional withdrawal by nervously biting his nails, rubbing the car door handle, and maintaining minimal eye contact. When Ennis moves aggressively towards Jack, physical proximity becomes a powerful visual metaphor of emotional intrusion, encapsulating Proulx's narrative line: "He was cutting fence now, trespassing in the shoot-em zone" (Proulx, 2005, p. 21). The actors thus visually externalize the psychological tension and emotional volatility carefully crafted in the source text.

Through these carefully executed performances, the actors successfully carry the emotional weight and internal complexities expressed in Proulx's short story, creating functional equivalence by visually and viscerally embodying narrative subtleties. Thus, performance emerges as an indispensable strategy of faithful adaptation, as the actors bridge the inherent gap between literary introspection and cinematic immediacy.

### **2.4.3 Cinematic techniques**

In adapting literary works, filmmakers have at their disposal an array of uniquely cinematic techniques that enable them to translate textual meaning, character psychology, and emotional resonance into visual and auditory forms. These tools—comprising camera movement, framing, editing, and visual symbolism—allow filmmakers not merely to illustrate narrative content but also to vividly convey emotional depth and thematic

subtleties. Although Ang Lee's adaptation of *Brokeback Mountain* utilizes numerous cinematic techniques throughout, this analysis will closely examine two pivotal scenes—the climactic argument between Ennis and Jack and the poignant hug flashback scene—which demonstrate with particular clarity how visual storytelling can establish functional equivalence with the literary source.

The argument scene during Ennis and Jack's final trip serves as a narrative and emotional climax, crystallizing the tensions that have long simmered beneath their relationship. Here, the filmmakers employ a panning shot that gradually reveals Jack's expression, underscoring a significant psychological shift. This movement, combined with Jack's full-frontal positioning in the frame, creates an intimacy between the viewer and Jack, visually communicating his internal decision to confront Ennis about their future. The shot also positions Ennis in the distant background, Jack's back turned to him, symbolizing his obliviousness to Jack's emotional state and his reluctance to engage openly with the realities of their relationship.

As the scene progresses, the filmmakers deploy a wide-angle shot, situating Jack against an expansive backdrop of lake and mountains. This compositional choice emphasizes Jack's isolation, visually communicating his emotional state—alone, distant, and pushed aside. Such symbolism highlights the unspoken tensions between the two men, effectively translating the emotional nuances described subtly in the short story into powerful visual form.

A sudden switch to handheld camera movement further enhances the emotional immediacy of the confrontation. The source text describes Jack's tone as "bitter and accusatory" (Proulx, 2005, p. 21), and through a shaking, unstable handheld shot, the film mirrors this emotional intensity, effectively placing the audience into the heated, anxiety-ridden interaction between the two men. Viewers are no longer mere observers but participants, fully immersed in the emotional turbulence on display.

Framing choices within this sequence underscore power dynamics and emotional shifts. In a pivotal moment when Jack confronts Ennis directly, Jack is placed centrally within the frame on a slightly elevated position, visually suggesting dominance, while Ennis occupies an out-of-focus, marginalized space at the left edge of the frame, effectively suggesting

vulnerability and helplessness. Coupled with the wide-angle lens, these framing choices physically manifest their emotional and psychological distance, visually emphasizing Jack's feelings of rejection and Ennis's internal struggle with vulnerability and fear. The filmmakers further heighten this emotional intensity by employing a tightly framed handheld close-up shot of Ennis's hunched-over back. The confinement of Ennis within the borders of the frame visually symbolizes his emotional constriction—he is trapped, emotionally overwhelmed, unable to navigate the relationship or his personal anguish clearly. These cinematic decisions thus effectively translate literary expressions of internal conflict and emotional distress into poignant, immediate visual forms, enhancing the adaptation's emotional resonance.

The hug flashback scene that directly follows the argument scene employs similarly effective but contrasting cinematic techniques, offering viewers a glimpse into the emotional warmth and freedom of their past relationship. The scene opens with a shot of glowing hot coals and a flickering fire, visually symbolizing warmth and comfort. Accompanied by gentle, tender music, this shot evokes nostalgia and creates an immediate emotional contrast with the preceding argument's turmoil.

The filmmakers transition from an intimate close-up of Jack and Ennis's faces to a wide long shot of the two men embracing amid vast natural scenery, with only their horses in the background. This deliberate visual composition symbolizes the freedom and happiness the characters once experienced. This openness, expansiveness, and sense of freedom dramatically contrast with the emotional confinement and turmoil of the preceding argument. Through these visual contrasts, the adapters powerfully evoke the emotional core of the narrative—an acute sense of loss and longing for what was once shared.

Editing further amplifies this emotional resonance. A swift cut takes viewers from the smiling face of Jack in the past to his bitter, frustrated expression in the present. This technique emphasizes the painful realization Jack experiences, as he recognizes the profound loss of intimacy and freedom once felt. This editing decision directly mirrors the emotional poignancy of the literary narrative, specifically the internal thought Jack has in the source text, in which he bitterly acknowledges that their relationship had peaked long ago, never again achieving the same closeness.

The flashback concludes with a deliberate fade to black as Ennis's car leaves the parking lot. This cinematic choice symbolically communicates the narrative finality of the moment—it is the viewer's farewell not just to their time together but to Jack himself, indicating that this chapter of the story is permanently closed. By doing so, the filmmakers provide visual and narrative closure, effectively underscoring the thematic weight of loss and finality inherent in Annie Proulx's original short story.

In both scenes, Ang Lee and his filmmaking team demonstrate how cinematic techniques, including careful shot composition, nuanced camera movements, symbolic editing, and meaningful framing choices, can serve as powerful tools for translating literary themes, emotional subtext, and psychological states onto the screen. These cinematic choices are therefore instrumental in achieving functional equivalence between the original literary work and its film adaptation, ensuring that the film remains emotionally faithful to its narrative source.

## Conclusion

This thesis has examined the film *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) through the lens of Louis Giannetti's taxonomy of film adaptations, focusing primarily on the concept of functional equivalence. The study has aimed to demonstrate that functional equivalence is not only a useful tool in the field of literary translation but also a powerful and necessary strategy in the domain of film adaptation. By closely analyzing numerous scenes in the film and their counterparts in Annie Proulx's short story, the thesis has identified various strategies the filmmakers employed to successfully translate the written narrative into a cinematic experience, all while preserving the thematic and emotional core of the original work.

The theoretical portion of this study provides a foundation for understanding different critical perspectives on adaptation. Central to this discussion is the contrast between traditional fidelity-based criticism and more recent theories, such as those advanced by Linda Hutcheon, who argues that adaptations should be judged as independent creative works. Hutcheon's view allows for a more nuanced appreciation of adaptations as transformations that are shaped by the characteristics and limitations of their respective media. Nevertheless, the thesis also acknowledges opposing perspectives that consider adaptations as inherently secondary or derivative, whose worth is measured by their closeness to the source text.

In terms of categorization, Louis Giannetti's distinction between literal, loose, and faithful adaptations is used as a structural framework for the practical analysis. These categories allow for a more systematic understanding of the degrees and types of changes that take place during the adaptation process. Additionally, the thesis explores the concept of functional equivalence, first proposed by Eugene Nida in the context of translation theory. By drawing a parallel between the translator's task of rendering meaning and cultural resonance and the filmmaker's challenge of conveying literary subtext visually, the study reframes adaptation as a process not of simple reproduction but of creative equivalence. The use of functional equivalents in film, therefore, becomes a necessary and valid strategy, enabling filmmakers to remain faithful to the essence of a literary work while also making it accessible and engaging to a new audience.

This argument is further supported in the final theoretical chapter, which challenges the poststructuralist view—most notably represented by Roland Barthes's seminal essay *The*

*Death of the Author*—that authorial intent is irrelevant to textual interpretation. While acknowledging the critical importance of this stance in literary theory, the thesis argues that in the realm of adaptation, particularly when navigating questions of fidelity, the insights of the original author as well as the screenwriters can offer valuable context for understanding the adaptation's purpose and direction.

The practical portion of the thesis applies these theoretical insights to a detailed analysis of *Brokeback Mountain*, systematically exploring how different adaptation strategies are deployed throughout the film. In the section devoted to literal adaptation, the thesis identifies instances where the film closely mirrors the source text, often reproducing scenes or dialogue verbatim. While these moments are relatively infrequent—due to the need to expand the short story into a feature-length film—they are strategically selected to retain the emotional intensity of Proulx's prose, particularly in scenes that are central to the development of the protagonists' relationship.

The next chapter considers *Brokeback Mountain* as a loose adaptation. Here, the study analyzes the filmmakers' choice to omit, add, or re-sequence scenes to enhance character depth and narrative coherence. Examples include scenes that were added to enrich the personalities of secondary characters like Alma and Lureen, as well as omissions of internal monologue and literary description that would be redundant or overly abstract in visual form. The analysis of these loose adaptations reveals that the filmmakers were not arbitrarily deviating from the text but were instead using their creative license to achieve narrative clarity, emotional resonance, and thematic consistency. These changes highlight how adaptation is as much about interpretation as it is about translation.

In the final chapter on faithful adaptation, the focus turns to those moments where the film adheres closely to the emotional and thematic core of the source material, not necessarily by using the exact words or events, but by achieving functional equivalence. The analysis identifies three key strategies: transforming narrative exposition into dialogue, employing actor performance to convey psychological states, and using cinematic techniques—such as camera movement, framing, and editing—to replicate the emotional tone and atmosphere of the original. For instance, the actors' body language and facial expressions are shown to carry the emotional burden of scenes where the short story uses internal narration. Similarly,

cinematographic choices such as handheld camera work or wide-angle shots are used to externalize characters' inner turmoil and relational distance.

The cumulative findings of this thesis underscore the complexity of adapting literature to film. While a shift in medium necessitates a range of transformations—from structural changes to tonal adjustments—the filmmakers behind *Brokeback Mountain* have succeeded in crafting an adaptation that remains powerfully resonant with the source text. This is especially impressive given the brevity of Proulx's short story; the necessity to extend the narrative for cinematic purposes could have easily led to dilution of its original impact. Instead, screenwriters Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana, along with director Ang Lee, expanded and adapted the story with great care, maintaining the emotional gravity and thematic depth of the original. Notably, both the screenwriters and Annie Proulx herself have expressed their conviction that the film represents a faithful rendition of the original work. This endorsement by the original author further supports the argument that the adaptation preserves the essential spirit and message of the short story. The filmmakers did not remain slavishly faithful to the text, nor did they attempt to reinvent it entirely. Rather, through the judicious use of functional equivalence, they created a film that enables viewers to experience the story in a way that is emotionally and psychologically consistent with how it is experienced by readers.

Overall, the study of *Brokeback Mountain* as a case of literary adaptation reveals the multifaceted nature of fidelity. It demonstrates that being faithful to a source does not necessarily mean duplicating it word for word or scene by scene. Rather, it means preserving its essence—its emotional truths, character arcs, and thematic concerns—through the creative and interpretative powers of cinema.

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## **Vyjádření k využití nástrojů umělé inteligence / AI usage statement**

CZ: Tímto prohlašuji, že jsem při psaní své diplomové práce využil nástroje umělé inteligence jako podporu svého akademického úsilí. Tyto nástroje mi pomohly porozumět složitým teoretickým konceptům, jako je například Barthesova *Smrt autora*, a napomohly mi k logickému a přehlednému uspořádání jednotlivých kapitol. Také jsem je využil ke gramatickým korekcím a stylistickým úpravám za účelem zlepšení celkové srozumitelnosti a čtivosti textu.

ENG: I hereby declare that, in the process of writing my thesis, I made use of AI tools to support my academic work. These tools helped me understand complex theoretical concepts, such as Barthes' *The Death of the Author*, and assisted in organizing individual chapters in a clear and logical way. I also used them for grammar correction and stylistic refinement to improve the overall coherence and readability of the text.