

Summer 2012

## **Perspectives, Problems, and Processes in Contemporary Spanish Adaptations**

Vinodh Venkatesh  
*Virginia Tech*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/hipertexto>



Part of the [Latin American Literature Commons](#)

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Venkatesh, Vinodh. "Perspectives, Problems, and Processes in Contemporary Spanish Adaptations." *Hipertexto* 16 (2012): 41-53.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. It has been accepted for inclusion in Hipertexto by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. For more information, please contact [justin.white@utrgv.edu](mailto:justin.white@utrgv.edu), [william.flores01@utrgv.edu](mailto:william.flores01@utrgv.edu).



Hipertexto 16  
Verano 2012  
pp. 41-53

## Perspectives, Problems, and Processes in Contemporary Spanish Adaptations

Vinodh Venkatesh  
Virginia Tech

[Hipertexto](#)

When dealing with Spanish film from the last fifteen years, much has been done on the study of auteurs. The countless anthologies and critical books on Pedro Almodóvar are testament to this. Following another trajectory, which is more in tune with global cinema trends of identifying a national cinema, critics such as Marsha Kinder have worked on establishing a genealogy of Spanish film that is both national in its excavation yet global in its attempt to unearth, create, and establish linkages to other directors and movements. This interest in writing and researching Spanish cinema, however, has not paid particular attention to the concept and practice of adaptation. Boasting a literary canon and production that is global and iconic, Spanish literary tropes and novels have been at the root of many films in both Spain and elsewhere. A popular case is Cervantes's *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quixote de la Mancha* (1605) which has been adapted both in Spain (Rafael Gil, *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, 1947) and internationally (Terry Gilliam, *The Man who Killed Don Quixote*, 2011).

Though Cervantes's character is the most easily cited example of how successful adapting from Spanish texts can be, there are countless other examples both within and outside Spanish cinema. Directors such as Vicente Aranda, Montxo Armendáriz and Ventura Pons have focused the majority of their films on the practice of adapting popular texts, which include novels and plays. Phyllis Zaitlin has published several studies on Pons's adaptations while Thomas Deveny has analyzed a broad selection of Aranda's moving-image texts. Chema Pérez Manrique has paid attention to Montxo Armendáriz's work in her monographic *Le cinéma de Montxo Armendáriz: arrêt sur image* (1999) but focuses solely on his cinematic output without taking into account its relationships with the adapted source. Several critics have also focused on the filmic adaptations made popular during the literary Generación X of the 1990s. What I aim to do in the following pages is a broader examination of the "process (as creative reinterpretation and palimpsestic intertextuality)" and "product (as extensive, particular transcoding)" (Hutcheon 22) of adaptation in Spanish cinema of the last 15 years, taking into account Armendáriz's *Historias del Kronen* (1995) and *Obaba* (2005), and Pons's *Carícies* (1998). This article aims to engage the work of these two directors by

examining their films in dialogue with their source texts, analyzing the use of artifacts of representation such as the filmic apparatus, as is the case with the handheld diegetic video camera, and the implications of music and space in creating the adapted image.

As Robert Stam and George Bluestone, amongst others, have argued extensively, adaptation from the literary to the visual has been a popular strategy for filmmakers since the beginning of the moving image industry. Linda Hutcheon observes that adapting popular novels and plays to the screen has been an economic surety, especially during times of recession (5). Hutcheon's central thesis is that "adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication" (7). She divides the process and product of adaptation into three distinct perspectives. First, she accentuates that "seen as a formal entity or product, an adaptation is an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works" (7-8). This transcoding can involve a shift of medium, a change of context, and even a shift in ontology, i.e. from the real to the fictional. Second, she notes that it is a process of creation: adaptation involves recreation and reinterpretation. Her final perspective underlines the concept as a "process of reception" (8): we experience adaptations as intertexts, as visual and linguistic palimpsests that can and may be deciphered.

This image of connections, disjunctions, and allusions is evoked in Montxo Armendáriz's *Historias del Kronen*, a quickly-made adaptation of the very successful novel of the same name by José Ángel Mañas (1994). Written while Mañas was still a university student, the novel relates the (nocturnal) life of Carlos, a young, handsome, and carefree member of the burgeoning upper middle class in Madrid. He lives in the posh area of La Moraleja and has neither the need to work or to take care of himself, as his family employs a Philippine maid who cooks and cleans after him. Much of the novel takes place at night and in a music and drug filled culture of excess and loud music. The 'Kronen' from the title is a youth bar that serves as the epicenter of the protagonist's social group and of the trade in drugs that was pervasive in Spanish youth culture at the time.

Following a 'poetics of disaffection' (Amago 61), the novel interrogates the construct of identity along several paths that do not necessarily originate in a primal national model. The family as a unit is not actively deconstructed as was the case in Spanish novels and movies from the 1980s (namely the films of Pedro Almodóvar) but is instead presented post-deconstruction, as Carlos's grandfather notes: "La televisión es la muerte de la familia, Carlos. Antes, la hora de comer y la hora de cenar eran los momentos en los que la familia se reunía para hablar y para comentar lo que había pasado durante el día. Ahora las familias se sientan alrededor de la tele; no hay comunicación" (Mañas 95). The television set reflects the inclusion of mass media influences both within the diegesis and poesies of this narrative, which leads to a televisual style of writing that will be more developed in other Generación X writers such as Ray Loriga.

The novel is divided into 14 chapters and a tripartite epilogue composed of the protagonist Carlos reading a letter and throwing it away; his friend Roberto seemingly

confessing to a therapist his homosexual attraction to Carlos; and the lyrics to a song *Giant*, which served as an epigraph at the beginning of the novel. The final chapter narrates the party held at Fierro's house celebrating his birthday while his parents are away. The chapter begins in a first person narrative from the point of view of Carlos that is used in the rest of the novel. As Carlos and his friends get ready to go to Fierro's house, the narrative changes drastically (248). Though still told from Carlos's point of view, the text is composed solely of a monophonic dialogue that is separated by open and closed parenthesis.

Randolph Pope argues that the transition to the epilogue is 'emblematic of the inevitable failure of the solipsistic aspects of the Generation X project' (116). Aside from being the foundational text of the critical category of the Generación X in Spain, *Historias del Kronen* requires a national consciousness that does not intend to provide any answers or conclusions in reference to the problem of national identity. National identity is problematized and interrogated only in the half-hearted way allowed in a poetics of disaffection and slackerism. In a conversation among Carlos, Roberto and the married Miguel, Roberto expresses his desire to eat a tortilla sandwich. Miguel interjects, stating: "Bah, tú lo que pasa es que no eres español," and that "las tortillas y esas cosas son para los turistas. Yo las como en mi casa y prefiero no tomarlas fuera" (67). This gastronomic reflection of identity is not taken any further, nor linked to any intrinsic debates of personal identity. Instead, Carlos retorts that "el presente es una mierda" to which Miguel answers "pues el futuro, no te digo. Ya verás. Casado, con hijos, con canas. Viejo y podrido" (67). Any attempts at extrapolating Carlos's reflections and characteristics onto a national future are met with impotence, as he exclaims that "yo no me casaré. Ni tendre hijos" (67). This dystopian ideal is central to the novel's legacy in both its literary and societal reception.

Returning to the final chapter, Carlos completely takes control of the narrative. In earlier chapters, other characters are given subjectivity and agency as a natural result of being allowed to speak. Here, however, Carlos's voice is the only voice in the text as no extra-vocal modifiers in the form of punctuation are allowed. Mañas uses capital letters to emphasize a raised volume, which accentuates the monophonic nature of this narrative. While orchestrating the bounding of Fierro, Carlos comments: "venga, Fierro. Para que sea aún más excitante, te vamos a vendar los ojos. ( ) Parece una película, ¿verdad? Es como Nuevesemanasy media, ¿eh? ( )" (256). The reference to *9 ½ Weeks* (1986) as an erotic, sadomasochistic referent is not surprising as the characters in the novel show a deep knowledge of foreign film. What is important to note, however, is the direct reference to the filmic medium as Carlos comments that "parece una película." This, in turn, stresses a poetic reflection of a visual aesthetic that is played with in the filmic adaptation. Mañas and Loriga during the 1990s in Spain employ elements of the televisual in their narratives to create a disjointed text that only gains sense and form when seen. *Historias del Kronen* creates a visual element in its narrative by means of an inner point of spectatorship, which is affirmed by the morphosyntactic changes in the last chapter.

Returning to this chapter of the novel, Armendáriz seizes the line “parece una película” in his filmic adaptation released a year after the novel’s publication. The movie shows (using Hutcheon’s terminology) the events from the novel from the perspective of Carlos, though it is unable to provide any interiority to the narrative. Nancy Armstrong argues that the principal characteristic in the development of the modern novel is the creation of interiority to the subject. In filmic representations, however, interiority can only be achieved by means of a voice-over narrative or by employing point-of-view shots, which was experimented with in New Wave and Third Cinema films. Again, the economics of the project come to bear, as making a standard-structured adaptation is more viable to the viewing public. Armendáriz, as a result, discards any first-person point of view shots, till the very end of the movie, in what coincides with the final chapter in the novel. He takes the line, “parece una película” literally, and has Carlos manipulate a diegetic filmic apparatus. What in the novel seems to be a movie indeed becomes a movie in the adaptation, as Armendáriz uses the home video footage in his film. The inner spectatorship created by Mañas’s struggle with representing the altered state of the final chapter is reflected in the cinematic disjunction of the home video camera that effectively separates the events leading up to the climax of the filmic and textual narrative.

The home video apparatus provides the audience with an intentionally restrictive point of view that circumscribes some of the most poignant scenes in the narrative. During Fierro’s party, Pedro and his girlfriend escape into the garden area to have sexual relations. Carlos and Roberto follow them as voyeurs. They spy them having sex, and Carlos notes that he is getting an erection from watching them (254). He then comments: “( ) Seguro que tú también estás empalmado, ¿eh, Roberto? ( ) ¿Cómo? ¿Que no te gustan estas cosas? ( ) A ti, lo que te pasa es que te gustan los tíos, ¿no es verdad?” (254). The sexual politics of the novel are important as it is in the prologue where the reader learns of Roberto’s condition. In the text, homosexual desire is given no voice as it is the misogynistic Carlos who dictates and expression of sexuality.

Carlos’s diegetic voice provides active commentary of the sexual interchange between the two, as he comments: “( ) Así. Te gusta que te acaricie así. ¿eh? La tienes también dura, cabrón. [...] ( ) Así, así. Desabróchame tú también los pantalones y nos los hacemos mutuamente. ( ) Eso es, Roberto, eso es. Si te gusta. Si yo lo sé. Mira al Pedro enfrente cómo sigue metiendo como una bestia...” (254). We can visualize both characters stimulating each other manually though Carlos denies any labeling of homosexuality by directing the diegetic gaze towards the heterosexual encounter between Pedro and his girlfriend. Even after ejaculating, “( ) Eso es, Roberto. ( ) Más rápido, más rápido. ( ) ¡Así! ¡Voy a correrme!, ¡voy a correrme! ¡Córrete conmigo, Roberto!” (255), Carlos denies the act as being homosexual and dismisses it as something normal amongst friends. Though Carlos may deny his homosexual actions, Mañas’s prologue allows for a voicing of homosexual desire and a questioning of masculinity in the novel.

Turning to this scene in Armendáriz’s film, however, exposes the artifice of representation as a limiting factor in the movie. Though in an earlier scene, footage from

the handheld camera is juxtaposed with the director's apparatus to give us a sense of the interiority of the narrative, the voyeur scene in the garden is restricted to the home video footage. Armendáriz directs the viewer's gaze towards the heterosexual couple in coitus, even as Carlos and Roberto engage in homoerotic acts. The only indication the audience receives of a homosexual encounter is from off-camera voices and muffled grunts. The viewer's gaze remains trained on heterosexual sex, but is then off-centered as the apparatus is put on the ground as an effect of Carlos's orgasm. The camera captures a mid-shot of the two characters, focusing on their faces and not their actions – in stark contrast to the explicit commentary in the novel. Hutcheon (quoting Robert Stam) notes that in a medium like film, what is most important is "authorial control of intimacy and distance, the calibration of access to characters' knowledge and consciousness" (55), which can be achieved by the use of an intra-diegetic filmic apparatus.

The contradictions in this scene have been commented by Santiago Fouz-Hernández, as he notes the disconnect between Armendáriz and Mañas in the adaptation of *Historias del Kronen* as the former belongs to an older generation that is more moderated in its views towards sexuality and its necessity to embody a consciousness that is lacking in the poetics of the Generación Kronen (87). The change in the ending of the movie exemplifies this disconnect, as Armendáriz entirely skips the epilogue in favor of a scene between Carlos and Roberto where they tussle for the footage of what happened to Fierro. The two watch the movie almost as a snuff movie, with Roberto wanting to destroy it and Carlos wanting to turn it in to the authorities. As they struggle for the tape, the camera remains immobilized and the action occurs outside the frame, though this time, the point of view is not directed by a home video camera. The protagonist's renewed sense of morality is the final oeuvre as Armendáriz leaves the film with an open ending quite unlike Mañas's closed, sociopathic conclusion.

Armendáriz has been accused of being too moralizing in his adaptation of the novel due in part to this changed ending and the unwillingness on the part of the director to explore the homoerotics of a homosocial youth society (Fouz-Hernández 87). The film includes a scene after the party where Carlos and his friends rush the young victim to the hospital. They wave a white handkerchief outside the car window to indicate an emergency, connecting this scene with an earlier car ride where they pretended to have an emergency to get through a traffic jam. In the second version of this scene, Armendáriz employs extra-diegetic music as a sobering mood-setter to indicate a renewed consciousness and morality in the main character. Importantly, the director uses a public space and movement within this space to reflect a change within the character. The film uses extensive shots of Madrid to ambient the narrative. By means of slow panning shots of residential and urban areas, or static overhead shots of roads and interchanges, the camera creates a visual body and network of arteries and veins that constitute the city. In contrast to New Spanish cinema that utilized Italian neorealist tactics of establishing the physical environment as something vast and open, Armendáriz constricts his narrative to a very specific Madrid in 1994 (though the novel is temporally located in 1992). There is a focus on movement within this space in the shots of the characters in their cars driving through traffic and in the sustained shots of

an anonymous, repetitive flow of cars. These representations of the urban space are contrasted with earlier Spanish film of the post-Franco days such as Pedro Almodóvar's *¿Qué he hecho para merecer esto?* (1984) or Carlos Saura's *Cría cuervos* (1976) where the city is depicted in slow-panning long shots or by means of static portraits of particular buildings that are central to the narrative of the visual image.

The use of the city and its arterial networks of roads and metros create a diegetic coherence that resonates with Hutcheon's focus on the process of adaptation, as consistency is important in adaptation especially when the source medium is visually scanty. While novels and narrative texts can boast a plethora of physical descriptions and details for a director to use in his "repetition but not replication," the process of adapting theatrical works can be more challenging, more so when these works provide very little indications of setting.

The importance of space in adaptation is central to Ventura Pons's 1998 *Carícies*, an adaptation of Sergi Belbel's play of the same name (1992). The play is set in an unnamed city, with unnamed characters and with a bare definition of props that suggest spatiality but are not specific enough in doing so. Pons is no stranger to adaptation, as Zaitlin notes, "he has treated the stage plays as respectfully as possible, retaining not only the chronological arrangement of scenes but much of the sources' dialogue" (434). In discussing this specific adaptation, David George (quoted in Zaitlin), observes that Pons' *Carícies* shows several departures from Belbel's play, including an "introduction of visual images of the city" and a "greater use of sound" (436). Similarly, Zaitlin notes that these "changes are predictable transformations required by the translation of the text from one medium to another," and that "film will show what drama tends to tell" (436-7). This final observation is of interest, as it seems that Pons does not only show what is told, but goes further and imagines a setting for the play that is beyond anything seen in the text.

To be more specific, the movie is rooted in Barcelona and its historic monuments, people, and central business district. Pons like Armendáriz creates an organic, arterial network of roads to give the viewer a sense of belonging in a greater body of work, reflecting perhaps the palimpsestic nature of adaptation. The possibilities are endless, differing, yet all connected in this organic city space. It is also poignant to note that the movie is literally rooted in Barcelona, as Pons uses subterranean shots of the city's metro system to give the viewer a sense that there is more to the city (and the story) than the surface and what initially meets the eye.

The city in *Carícies* is less the connection between text and image, or city-text that Edward W. Soja and other geophilosophers conjure (10), and more the organic, repetitive, and non-centered space that Deleuze and Guattari conceive (Bonta 40). This methodology to representing space is convenient from a filmic standpoint when the source-text is scanty in its details. Through the repetition of images and the allusion of a space that is beyond the visible, the film engenders a universalism to the narrative that lies at the core of Belbel's play.

Returning to this source, *Carícies*'s episodic nature is inspired by Arthur Schnitzler's *La Ronde* (1903). Belbel expands on the themes seen in Schnitzler's play (Zaitlin 440) and includes homoerotic and violent elements in his play. There is a rooting of *Carícies* within a theatrical tradition as even in the introduction to the printed script, the work is placed amongst names such as Beckett, Bernhard, Koltès, Mamet, Müller, and Shepard (6). The introductory notes to the play have the setting as "diferents espais d'una ciutat" and the time being "anys noranta" (13). The characters are equally vague and anonymous, being named "home jove, dona jove, dona gran, dona vella, home vell, nen, home, noia, home gran, noi, dona" (13). To a viewing audience in a theatre or to a reader at home with the script in hand, the lack of names and definition of setting is relatively unproblematic as Belbel's play is read within a theatrical tradition. A problem, however, surfaces when the stylistics of the stage are adapted to the moving visual images of the screen. How can one adapt a tradition-steeped work to a medium in which the referents of this tradition are non-existent?

Pons creates a diegetic coherence in the film by using the city of Barcelona as his stage. Showing similarities to Armendáriz's *Historias del Kronen*, the ample, fast-paced shots of a city in motion and of traffic in constant flow and flux orients the viewer to a particular and framed context. As Huthcheon has noted, part of the process of adapting includes the reception and receptors of the adaptation (80). Therefore by locating Belbel's episodes in Barcelona, Pons successfully translates the "diferents espais d'una ciutat" onto a tangible matrix of places, peoples, and experiences.

The shots of the city in *Carícies*, however, differ from Armendáriz's slow and static shots of Madrid. The viewer is treated to changing point of view shots from moving apparatuses within the arterial networks of the urban space, thereby creating a sense of urgency and agency in the receptor. We are no longer observing a narrative, but are deeply enmeshed in the moving to and from places and episodes within the story. Pons uses slow motion, normal and fast forward shots of roads, pedestrian areas, and the metro to give a holistic sense of the (possible) movement between episodes in the play. The apparatus is also not static within what can be assumed to be a car or train. This detachment of the moving image suggests the existence of an intra-diegetic apparatus, as was the case in *Historias del Kronen*. Prior to the script's first episode, the apparatus orients the viewer to a bustling Barcelona. The camera fast forwards, and then slows down as we see buildings and shops. The camera then moves above the moving entity and focuses on a clock, suggesting that both time and space are equally important.

Following this observation, spaces in Pons' *Carícies* fill in some of the gaps held open in Belbel's script. While the latter describes the first scene as occurring in a "saló d'un pis cèntric. Butaques" (15), the movie begins with an outdoor shot of an apartment building as the camera follows a man into it. Two characters are seen in the stairwell and lobby of the apartment as one goes upstairs. Belbel's play is structured around a repetition of characters across the episodes as we are treated to different takes in each of their lives. As an example, the "home jove" going up to meet his wife in the first episode is also the visitor in the epilogue who asks the older lady to "omplir aquest



vaset d'oli d'oliva" (71). Belbel's script has both the benefit of (anonymous) names for the characters, which the movie necessarily lacks if it is to remain true to the script and not create its own names (as was the case in Pons's *Amic/Amat* [1999], an adaptation of Josep Maria Benet i Jornet's *Testament* [1996]). The use of common spaces such as the stairwell permit an identification of these common characters that goes beyond their simple visual adaptation (in the form of actors) which creates another level of coherence to the moving visual images.

The shots of the city and its spaces also serve an interpretive function of the thematics of the play, as Barcelona is portrayed as a dehumanized, pedestrian and industrial place of anonymity. The episodes in the script echo these motifs in their exploration of identity and sexuality in an urban space. The changing speeds and directions of the inter-episodic shots of the city also reflect on the importance of time that the opening sequence with its focus on the clock suggests. Between the ninth and tenth episode, the shots of the city appear as though being rewound within the apparatus. It is not merely a spatial moving backwards but is instead a spatial and temporal shift. The clock seen earlier is also rewound which indicates an explicit stepping-back in the narrative of the episodes. We now see the young man in the first scene as he enters the apartment going upstairs to be beaten by his wife. At the same time, we see another man (who was noted in the first shot) enter his mother's apartment. By rewinding the filmic apparatus, Pons transports us back to the temporal referent of the first scene. The epilogue to *Carícies* flows smoothly into the final episode, as Pons does not revert to the use of the city as he did in the previous gaps between episodes. The young man who has just been beaten by his wife rings the doorbell and asks the lady for some olive oil – seamlessly connecting the first and last episodes into a cyclical process that reflects the cyclical nature of time and space as a theme in the play.

On a further note, music functions as another cognitive layer in Pons's movie as many of the city shots are punctuated by the use of loud techno/dance and rock music. Extra-diegetic music is also used in the third episode when two elderly women dance at a geriatric residence. They both begin dancing a tango and as they physically separate, the shots of one of the women involve the playing of rock and roll music that reflects a flashback scene of a mother wanting to dance to rock and roll. The other woman continues dancing a tango, and the shots of her maintain the diegetic music playing in the residence. This shift in audio is permitted in film as when the apparatus frames one woman, it is capable of including extra-diegetic music that can and does create an interiority to the subject. This authorial control of intimacy is permitted by the use of the camera as a point of reference that also frames the images seen. It chooses what to show, if we return to Hutcheon's modes of engagement, and permits a transposition of the literal to the visual by means of extratextual registers and images.

Keeping with this trend, controlling and framing the visual image in the process and product of adaptation is evidenced in Armendáriz's latest film *Obaba*, from Bernardo Atxaga's 1994 novel *Obabakoak*. The two works have been studied by Lulú Gabikagojeaskoa, who argues that though there are a myriad of semantic and symbolic

differences between film and text, that there are important points of juncture that reflect the foundational core of Atxaga's work. Recalling the importance placed on framing vis-à-vis the audience, we note in *Obabakoak* the use of a prologue that contextualizes the novel and its stories. Written in the style of a poem with 10-line stanzas, the author speaks of his language, Euskera, and its literary tradition. An immediate focus is placed on the process of writing, as the pages of the novel must necessarily be included in the (limited) canon of Basque letters.

A focus on writing is seen when the protagonist and his friend reflect on the art of storytelling (162-165). As they get in their car, they recall "what Balzac said: that life does not provide us with nice, rounded stories, that it was only in books that you found good, strong endings" (163). The narrator then includes an old Sufi tale, included as a separate chapter, which serves to illustrate Boris Karloff's idea on what makes a good story. Afterwards, the two characters further interrogate this process of writing, when they ask "but why is it good? What makes a story good?" (165).

A discourse centered on the art and product of writing appears in the opening chapter, where Esteban Werfell sits at his table to write his memoirs. He "picked up his pen – the one with the wooden shaft that he used only when writing his diary – and dipped it in the inkwell" (4). The process and product of writing are stressed, as after writing a paragraph, "he sat back in his chair to wait for the ink to dry" (5). Writing within the text is a paradox as it is rife with "mistakes" (6) but is also immaculate in its perfection. It is never a work-in-progress medium but is instead a completed image. Similarly, the text engages a visual processing of its descriptions towards a filmic medium shot of Werfell sitting at his table, pen in hand and watching (with us) the ink dry. The need to not only visualize the written, but to actually visualize the signifiers suggests the need to show more than to tell in *Obabakoak*. This deference towards telling can also be seen structurally in the novel as there is no narrative coherence to the events, actions, and places in the text, suggesting an episodic structure that can only be put together by the visual imagining of the printed text and not merely what it signifies.

Following this fixation on representation, Armendáriz renegotiates the visual point of reference as he introduces a filmic apparatus into the diegesis. The visual image takes cues from the written text and vice versa as it did in the novel/film of *Historias del Kronen*. In the earlier adaptation, Mañas used parenthesis in the text to indicate a change in visual register whereas Armendáriz included a handheld home video camera to reflect this change (which was arguably caused by an influence of cinema in the text in the first place – creating a cyclical aesthetics and poetics of representation). In *Obaba*, Armendáriz restructures Atxaga's novel around a diegetic filmic apparatus, as the town of Obaba now becomes the subject of a documentary done by a young, female university student who randomly decides to make a film on the history of the town and its people.

The film mixes elements of the novel such as the number of bends in the road to Obaba to construct a cohesive narrative from what is really a collection of shorter

stories united across spaces and temporalities by a unique heritage in the novel (as framed by Atxaga's prologue). Armendáriz also modifies certain storylines in the text to better fit the documentary project of his film. The story about the man who suffers from schizophrenia after causing the drowning of his sister in their youth is in the novel a German man, Klaus Hanhn, who drowned his brother.

Unlike the two other films studied here, *Obaba* is not rooted in a specific physical space or within a traditionalized practice of filming this space, as is the case of Madrid and Barcelona. Armendáriz's movie instead must engage a process of finding this mythopoetic place that Atxaga's novel defines but never fully locates. Based on structural and narrative coherence alone, one could argue that *Obaba* works more as a foundational text in the Basque-language canon than does *Obabakoak*, though this line of investigation falls outside the scope of these pages.

Returning to the idea of the filmic apparatus as an integral diegetic referent to the process and product of adaptation, the young and attractive female protagonist, Lourdes, comes to *Obaba* to make a documentary of the town. She encounters the mysterious and lizardphilic Ismael who runs the local hotel. The film uses flashbacks to show the story of the school teach who came to the town years before, just as the novel can be read as a series of flashbacks interwoven into a greater narrative. One of Lourdes's projects is to recreate a school photo shot on the steps of the local hostel with everybody in the same place they were years ago. The photographic camera becomes a referent of representation, as it provides a static image that can only be articulated by Lourdes's moving-image camera. It is in this process of orchestrating the school photo that she reveals a mystery that might explain the mental sickness of another town member. Ismael, in the photo, is shown holding a lizard near another boy's ear. It is local folklore that a particular type of lizard can enter one's head through the years and consume the brains in the skull –leaving one mentally handicapped. The photo becomes the thread that weaves the narrative together as the flashback scenes of the schoolteacher, Ismael's role in the narrative, and Lourdes's obsession with getting to the bottom of the mystery tie the plot together.

Her obsession is artfully examined in a scene that recounts Armendáriz's dexterity at including the filmic apparatus within the diegesis in *Historias del Kronen*. In the text, Ismael locks the protagonist into the lizard hut, with both the narrator and the reader aware of the myth of the brain-eating lizards. The narrator goes into a moment of panic as he realizes that he is stuck in the hut and will be there overnight. He exclaims that: "No, I couldn't stay awake, I would sleep and once I was asleep a lizard would come along and crawl into my ear and then... but how could I think such nonsense?" (316). The protagonist then falls asleep and is awakened the next morning by Albino María, Ismael's supposed childhood victim. The final chapter reveals textual clues that suggest a change in the narrative voice. While the text was written in a concise and clear style, reminiscent of Esteban Werfell's need for a perfect page, the narrator now digresses and corrects himself. He notes how he "wanted to find a word to finish the book with" (317) and that he feels "tired and disillusioned, old before [his] time, and when [he] sat down in front of a blank sheet of paper, [he] would weep" (317). The

narrative devolves into an inner monologue that gives away a need to revise the written text: “Yes, that man was Joubert and, as I have just said, I wanted to be another Joubert [...] which is why, as I said before, I kept dreaming about Joubert” (317). The text becomes both a process and product of an amnesiac who is coping with a psychosomatic loss of grey matter, or who actually had his brains devoured by one of Ismael’s lizards.

This narrative turn of events requires an intimacy and interiority, and is brought to the field of the visual in the film by means of a diegetic filmic apparatus. Lourdes is trapped in the lizard hut with only her camera with her. She leaves it on a table to document the night. She speaks to it, as part of her documentary project involves self-reflections into the apparatus. The film’s point of view defers to Lourdes’s camera, just as it did to Carlos’s in the penultimate scene/final chapter of *Historias del Kronen*. As she dozes off, the action fast-forwards, suggesting a temporal shift as perhaps the video is now being reviewed by Lourdes to discover what happened that night. A Lizard approaches her head but she dozes off and her head falls off camera (outside the frame of the diegetic filmic apparatus) and the lizard follows her. As in the text, we are unable to discern if the lizard did or did not eat her brains, though the final scene suggests that Lourdes, like the narrator in Atxaga’s novel, has been deeply traumatized by the lizard hut. In the final scene, Armendáriz uses a voice-over by Lourdes to frame her descent into madness. The novel, however, uses the text as signifier of the narrator’s descent effectively as the final paragraph of the last chapter is incoherent with the beginning. When told by his uncle that his head was like a flaming torch, but that it is now a “torch that is burning lower by the minute” (322), the narrator retorts: “I didn’t say anything at the time but I really think my uncle is going mad. My head has always been round, it’s never been anything like a torch. And anyway I can’t remember a thing about this Joubert person and I don’t know what to write” (322). This slip into madness – a slice of the inner self of the narrative voice – is carried out in the movie by a voice-over. The filmic apparatus within the diegesis as a point of representation, however, makes this possible, as we no longer know the truth about what happened. If Atxaga’s novel is successful in problematizing the process and product of writing a story, Armendáriz’s movie is just as or more successful in problematizing the moving visual image and its related questions of representation vis-à-vis the creation of individual and/or regional subjectivities.

To say that filmic adaptations are an important component of Spanish cinema in the last 15 years does not detract from the original films made by directors in that same time span. The work of Ventura Pons has been punctuated by a persistent practice of adapting the written and performed to the filmic, with an emphasis placed on rooting these stories within Barcelona. Similarly, Armendáriz has engaged in a politico-aesthetic project as he has chosen to represent works that take as intrinsic their own regionalisms. Working with texts that are difficult in the sense that they expose the artifice of writing, Armendáriz and Pons structure their adaptations around the fallacy of representation. The process of adapting, then, is not simply a transposition of the narrative characters and events of the source texts, but instead engages the nuances and implicit poetic struggles of the written word. By straying from a discourse of fidelity

towards an articulation of the language of cinema and its own struggles with representation, Armendáriz and Pons place their work in a critical practice that stresses the paradoxical autonomy of the filmic adaptation.

### Works Cited

- Amago, Samuel. "Can Anyone Rock Like We Do? Or, How the Gen X Aesthetic Transcends the Age of the Writer." *Generation X Rocks: Contemporary Peninsular Fiction, Film, and Rock Culture*. Ed. Christine Henseler & Radolph Pope. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2007: 59-77. Print.
- Armendáriz, Montxo. *Historias del Kronen*, 1995. Film.
- . *Obaba*, 2005. Film.
- Atxaga, Bernardo. *Obabakoak*. New York: Vintage International, 1994. Print.
- Belbel, Sergi. *Carícies*. Barcelona: Ediciones 62, 1992. Print.
- Bonta, Mark and John Protevi. *Deleuze and Geophilosophy: A Guide and Glossary*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2004. Print.
- Bluestone, George. *Novels into Film*. Berkeley: U California P, 1971. Print.
- Deveny, Thomas. "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall ...: Reflections in/on the Films of Vicente Aranda." *Anuario de Cine y Literatura en Español: An International Journal on Film and Literature* 3 (1997): 43-51. Print.
- Fouz-Hernández, Santiago. "¿Generación X? Spanish Urban Youth Culture at the End of the Century in Mañas's/Armendáriz's *Historias del Kronen*." *Romance Studies* 18 (2000): 83-98. Print.
- Gabikagojeaskoa, Lulú. "Obabakoak vs. Obaba." *Letras Hispanas* 6.2 (2009): 90-100. Print.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.
- Mañas, José Ángel. *Historias del Kronen*. Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, 1994. Print.
- Pérez Manrique, Chema. *Le cinéma de Montxo Armendáriz: arrêt sur image*. Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 1999. Print.
- Pons, Ventura. *Carícies*, 1998. Print.

Pope, Randolph D. "Between Rock and the Rocking Chair: The Epilogue's Resistance in *Historias del Kronen*." *Generation X Rocks: Contemporary Peninsular Fiction, Film, and Rock Culture*. Ed. Christine Henseler & Randolph Pope. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2007: 115-25. Print.

Soja, Edward W. *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000. Print.

Zaitlin, Phyllis, 2007. "From stage to screen: The adaptation of Ventura Pons." *Contemporary Theatre Review* 17 (2007): 434-45. Print.

---. "From Stage to Screen: Amic/Amat." *Anales de la Literatura Española Contemporánea* 26 (2001): 239. Print.