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"I CAME A LONG WAY TO GET HERE": NARRATIVE POINT OF VIEW, THE TROPE OF THE JOURNEY AND RECONTEXTUALIZATION IN KAYE GIBBONS'S *ELLEN FOSTER* AND ITS CINEMATIC ADAPTATION

A b s t r a c t. The main theoretical aim of this article is to analyze the ways in which the narrative discourse and thematic concerns of Kaye Gibbons's best-selling novel *Ellen Foster* (1987), the literary original, are creatively re-worked in a different medium—its cinematic adaptation, the Hallmark Hall of Fame film. Therefore, I seek to show how the narrative point of view of the novel *Ellen Foster* is transcoded to the film of the same name, and to what degree the thematic concerns of the literary precursor find their way into a different medium. I will also analyze the final words uttered by the narrator within the rhetoric and narrative logic of both media to see whether they are consistent with the cultural discourse the texts are engaged in.

Key words: Kaye Gibbons; Ellen Foster; literature of the American South; the poor white/white trash; the Other; whiteness; racism; narrative voice; film adaptation; recontextualization.

Film semioticians have proved that attempts to evaluate filmic adaptations solely through the lens of fidelity to the literary precursor are inadequate (McFarlane 8, 9). If we avoid overestimating the importance of fidelity as a critical criterion in the analysis of an adaptation, we can analyze the ways in which the literary text is, to use McFarlane's phrase, creatively reworked into a filmic text (11). My primary aim in this article is to see how the narrative point of view of *Ellen Foster* is transcoded in the film of the same name. I want to see if the thematic concerns of the literary precursor find their way into the different medium and if they do—to what degree. I will also con-

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sider whether the final words uttered by the narrator are consistent within the rhetoric and narrative logic of both media.[1] In other words the form, content and impact of the two versions of one narrative are of focal interest in this article.

A brief preliminary discussion of the conceptual problems of novel-film adaptation may shed some light on the discussion about transferring or transposing the point of view,[2] narrative discourse and thematic concerns in *Ellen Foster*. Early adaptation studies tended to see the adapted text as "a conscious visual transliteration of the original" (McFarlane 7). Later research ceased to view and evaluate the relationship between the source text and its adaptation through the prism of fidelity to the original. Thus, in time the relationship between literary and filmic texts came to encompass more variations than the "fidelity/violation" dichotomy and included relationships between the two different narrative media that would fall somewhere on the spectrum from literal illustration, through creative interpretation, to a pretext for an altogether new artistic expression. Geoffrey Wagner classified those relationships as transposition, commentary and analogy (222); others as "fidelity of transformation", intersection and borrowing.[3] If we then see adaptation of literary texts as "a creative undertaking" which "requires a kind of selective interpretation, along with the ability to recreate and sustain an established mood",[4] then we should explore both what is transferred to screen—such as the plot, the character functions and mythic and/or psychological patterns (McFarlane 23–26)—and "the processes by which other novelistic elements must find quite different equivalences in the film medium" (McFarlane 13). In other words, we might analyse how the adapted text creatively re-works the narrative point of view and other discourse elements into a semiotic system of an altogether different medium (from verbal to visual and aural sign systems). The issue discussed in this article will not be the problem of the film's faithfulness to its literary precursor, but whether the transformations of the literary text make sense in the rhetoric of the film and the cultural discourse it is engaged in. In this sense, my critical assumption runs parallel with Christopher Orr's observation that "the issue is not whether the adapted film is faithful to its source, but rather how the choice

[1] On narrative logic, see Robert Stam et al., *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics* 75; and David Bordwell *Narration in the Fiction Film* 51.

[2] McFarlane sees adaptation as a process of transposition (195).

[3] Andrew, qtd. in McFarlane 11.

[4] Bodeen, qtd. in McFarlane 7.

of a specific source and how the approach to that source serve the film's ideology."[5]

Ellen Foster (1987), like Kaye Gibbons's other novels, is a first person monologue. This fictional memoir won the acclaim of fellow Southern writers, such as Walker Percy, who in a letter to Louis Rubin called it "the real thing. Which is to say: a lovely, breath-taking, sometimes heart-wrenching first novel."[6] Literary critics responded favourably to the novel as well. They appreciated Gibbons's skilful crafting, Ellen's sensitivity to racism, her humorous style and the interweaving of the past and present; others questioned Ellen's reliability as a narrator.[7] The novel was widely read, having been selected for the Oprah Winfrey book club in October 1997. Gibbons would return to her memorable character in *The Life All Around Me by Ellen Foster* in 2006. In order to see how *Ellen Foster*, the film, engages with its literary precursor, a short summary of Gibbons's novel might help systematize points of reference for further analysis. *Ellen Foster* tells of the growing up of an eleven-year-old girl, Ellen Hammond. She begins the story with her mother Charlotte's illness and her eventual suicide by overdosing on heart medicine, and ends with finding a new mother for herself over a year later. With the benefit of hindsight, Ellen narrates how she has found a new family to offer much needed security and peace. In a naïve and innocent way, Ellen reveals how she attempted to define herself by reconciling her past traumas (involving Bill Hammond, her abusive father), disappointments (in Nadine and Betsy, her indifferent maternal aunts, and Leonora Nelson, a vengeful maternal grandmother), and the social stigma attached to her poor white status, with hopes for a better future with her new mother. The idea of developing and preserving her sense of self-esteem—expressed through a search for a new family and home—runs throughout the novel and echoes in the movie adaptation. Even with this brief introduction, one can see that this *Bildungsroman* is structured around, to quote from Mary Jean DeMarr's *Kaye Gibbons: A Critical Companion*, "[s]everal central themes—family, search for identity and race" (39).

References to flower-children and the Vietnam war place the novel's story sometime in the early 1970s (DeMarr 39). The film is much more specific about narrative time. The date of Charlotte's death—1971—is engraved

[5] Christopher Orr 72, qtd. in McFarlane 10.
[6] Quoted by Dannye Romine Powell 115.
[7] For a more detailed discussion of the critical reception of the novel, see Snodgrass 116.

on her tombstone. Because the action of both the novel and the adaptation is shot through with "[a]ttitudes about race and class […] characteristic of the South" it is obvious that "the novel cannot be understood without reference to its Southern setting" (DeMarr 38). The semi-autobiographical character of the novel might suggest that it takes place in rural Nash County, North Carolina.[8] However, nothing in the narrative suggests any specific locality, making the story both universal (any intra-racial relations) as well as specific in character (inter-racial relations in the post-Civil Rights South).[9] The novel portrays a community with rigid class and racial divisions. As a product of her mother's *mésalliance*, Ellen is rejected by her maternal grandmother for the "redneckery" she represents. For this reason, the child cannot find support in her extended family when she wants to escape her dysfunctional white trash father's sexual advances and beatings. As the social Other, she can find a temporary shelter only in the loving and supporting families which are themselves on the margins of Southern society: in the home of her black friend Starletta, in the domestic flower-children bliss created by two Northerners, Julia (Ellen's art teacher) and her husband Roy, as well as in Mavis's shack (her grandmother's black field hand) down "the colored path" (DeMarr, 40) before she can finally enjoy the peace and quiet of her new mother's foster home.

Part of Ellen's growing in knowledge and developing a sense of self-worth involves negotiating her identity within the classist and racist society. She has to develop her own sense of identity against the stereotypes associated with poor white trash which have existed in the collective social consciousness since antebellum times. In order to legitimise their white racist supremacy, the logic of which might have been questioned because of the existence of less-than-perfect representatives of their own race, "white folks with class privilege"—claims African American feminist and social activist bell hooks—invented ethnic slurs "to separate themselves from what they called poor 'white trash'" (111). Having noticed the same mechanisms in the social process of "othering", Kelly Lynch Reames in *Women and Race in Contemporary U.S. Writing* explains:

[8] Gibbons's debut novel, along with Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1993), and Connie May Fowler's *Before Women Had Wings* (1997)—all fictional autobiographies—give voice to poor whites.

[9] The universal impact of the narrative is underscored by the fact that the adaptation was filmed in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

> Those white people who lack sufficient economic means threaten the logic of racial superiority; they cannot be authentically "white" without undermining the logic of an essentialized racial superiority. Economically privileged white people must therefore make economically disadvantaged white people an "other" to protect their status and the faulty logic of white superiority. (94)

The non-landholding impoverished whites were treated as social waste or an abomination and they had to be stigmatised in order to secure the primacy of white hegemony.

Originally "used by Americans of all colors to humiliate and shame, to insult and dishonor, to demean and stigmatize" (Wray 1), the term "white trash" soon became a racist and classist insult (Newitz and Wray 170). It was "an expression of fundamental tensions and deep structural antinomies: between the sacred and the profane, purity and impurity, morality and immorality, cleanliness and dirt" (Wray 2). Leonora Nelson's comment to Charlotte, her daughter and Ellen's mother—"What did you expect? Marry trash and see what comes of you" (Gibbons 14)—foreshadows a piling up of resentment, hatred and loathing which she later expresses by burning the U.S. flag which Bill Hammond, her son-in-law, brought back from the Vietnam War.[10] Motivated by class superiority, Ellen's maternal grandmother demonises her low-life son-in-law. During Charlotte's funeral, she conflates her racist and classist feelings and "calls him a nigger and trash so long and loud she gets hoarse" (Gibbons 21). However, it is also true that Bill Hammond, with his bad diet, laziness, ignorance, lack of refinement, propensity for alcohol, and bouts of violence, represents a stereotypical "redneck."[11] His mother-in-law's provision of monthly financial assistance reminds him of his position as an underdog in the community. On realizing that Ellen takes a portion of that money to run the house, Hammond, in a drunken stupor, beats his daughter in order to boost his violated self-image and remind his only child that he is the one who pays the bills.

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[10] Undeniably, Bill Hammond's service to his country complicates his negative image. It is precisely this quality—patriotism, along with law abiding attempts to find employment and be respected in their community—that differentiates poor whites from poor white trash (hooks 112). In this context the rage with which Mrs. Nelson destroys the symbols of her son-in-law's patriotism (the U.S. flag and a medal) should not come as a surprise—she wants him to stay "white trash" and not just "poor white." In this way she can continue hating him for destroying Charlotte's life.

[11] In order to differentiate themselves from the "lower orders of Southern society", upper-class Southerners stigmatised poor whites as rednecks, and distinguished themselves through "manners" and lifestyles, or life choices (Reed 23).

As the cultural and social "white Other" (Newitz and Wray 168), poor white trash are often characterized by apathy and defeatism which in turn lead to self-perpetuating social exclusion propelled by both social determinism and "a set of myths and stereotypes that justify their continued marginalization" (Newitz and Wray 172). Unlike other non-landholding impoverished whites, poor white trash "flaunted their poverty, reveled in it, and were not ashamed. …. [W]hite trash saw themselves as above the law and as a consequence they were dangerous" (hooks 112). With the awareness of their status as the lowest social stratum, poor white trash would "naturally" demand respect from African Americans—the only ones beneath them on the social ladder. Thus, their own status as the white Other affected their proclivity to racism. Constance Penley in "Crackers and Whackers: The White Trashing of Porn" explains:

> A Southern white child is required to learn that white trash folks are the lowest of the low because socially and economically they have sunk so far that they might as well be black. As such, they are seen to have lost all self-respect. So it is particularly unseemly when they appear to shamefully flaunt their trashiness, which, after all, is nothing but an aggressively in-your-face reminder of stark class difference. (90)

Even though Bill Hammond may fraternize with black men over a bottle of liquor, which in itself "renders him morally suspect to his in-laws" (Reames 95), he corrects his daughter when she wants to engage in an activity which is coded "black." By slapping Ellen for her attempts to be like Starletta and eat dirt like her friend does, Bill, like many white racists, "consider[s] black people dirty, both morally and physically" (Reames 96).

The stigma of being thought poor white trash prevents Ellen from finding a home with her extended family which would offer her a feeling of security and nourishment. Both her aunts are disinclined to take care of Ellen even when they can deduce the reason for the bruises on her body. The aunts' rejection is symptomatic of what Ellen goes through: "[t]he episodes of the novel, a nearly unbroken series of deaths and rejections" (DeMarr, 28). Nevertheless, as DeMarr aptly notes, these episodes "are punctuated by episodes in which Ellen finds some love and support" (28). Each of the stops on Ellen's journey to selfhood is a point of reference for Ellen's real home and the ideal home she dreams of. The homes which could offer sustenance are stigmatised as being Other—Starletta's family is black and Roy and Julia are Yankee flower-children. On the other hand, the homes which should, by na-

ture of blood kinship, provide support and security for Ellen treat her as "the social Other."

In the novel Ellen reveals her internal experiences and gives an inside account of the events of her life from her mother's death to her eleventh birthday, which she celebrates under her new mother's roof. The novel's first-person voice is sincere, naïve, and rather uneducated. Readers are confronted with Ellen's traumatic past in the very first sentence she utters. A child confessing, "When I was little I would think of ways to kill my daddy" (Gibbons 1), is clearly characterized by unabashed honesty. Much like Huck Finn,[12] Ellen is the product of her poor-white background, visible in both the form and content of what she utters. Ellen uses plain and ungrammatical language full of Southern vernacular. Her comments about Starletta and her family reflect the racism she has unconsciously internalised from her dysfunctional white-trash father and Southern society in general. However, with her level-headed insights about her grandfather and maternal grandmother Ellen proves to be cleverer than her age. Such statements as "I figure I made out pretty good considering the rest of my family is either dead or crazy" (Gibbons 2) are emblematic of her wit, sharp tongue and keen perception. These are features she shares with her mother, which make their kin uncomfortable when in their presence. This, however, does not preclude Ellen from misnaming and wrongly identifying simple things. As DeMarr notes, "Ellen is bright, sometimes understanding people and events with a perception lacking in people much older than herself, but she is also naïve, sometimes misunderstanding simple facts of her society and culture" (29-30). With naïvety and childishness, Ellen blames her mother's health problems on a "romantic fever" (her misguided decision to marry Bill), not on rheumatic fever (Gibbons 3). Nor does she understand the semantic ambiguity of the word foster in the phrase "a foster family." For this reason, Ellen decides to replace Hammond, her "old" family name, with Foster, thinking that this is the actual surname of the family to which she wants to belong.

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[12] There is no need to belabour here the similarities between Huck Finn and Ellen Foster, as they are extensively covered in Kristina Groover's "Re-visioning the Wilderness: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Ellen Foster*." *Southern Quarterly* 37.3/4 (Spring/Summer 1999): 187–97. On the other hand, Mary Jean DeMarr reveals interesting differences between Twain's and Gibbons's novels in terms of the trope of the journey (39).

In adapting a literary text to screen, any director has to choose how to replace textual devices with visual and aural ones, how to find a new expression for the narrative discourse of the literary precursor. A film director has to be aware of each medium's narrative abilities so that s/he can overcome the limitations they impose. Generally speaking, narration in film "can be defined as the act of communicating a story to a viewer through images, editing, verbal commentary and point-of-view, as distinct from the narrative world itself in which the characters perform" (Stam 86). A film director can use various visual, aural and verbal signifiers in order to transfer or modify the narrator's voice and point of view (McFarlane 26) so that s/he can manipulate viewers' reception of the film narrative.

As a character in the story she tells, Ellen is a homodiegetic narrator, to use Gérard Genette's classification of narrative voices (245). In *Ellen Foster* the restricted point of view belongs to the eponymous heroine: all the events and memories of events are filtered through Ellen's consciousness. The way a character is introduced is of some significance, as it affects the viewer's reception. In the film we meet Ellen for the first time in her house sitting on the floor of the living room next to her sleeping father; the heat is sweltering. John Erman, the film director, and screenwriters Maria Nation and William Hanley, immediately expose the point of view of film narrative. A telling close-up reveals Ellen's look of disapproval, if not disgust, at her father, which resonates well with the remark she makes in the voiceover: "Sometimes I think that the day he made my daddy, God wasn't thinking straight." Such a comment carries a similar emotional load, even if somewhat toned-down, to the already quoted opening sentence in the novel. The initial point-of-view shot establishes Ellen as the narrative centre of the scene, and the whole film by extension. In the film adaptation she is still a homodiegetic narrator, as Ellen "relates … her own experiences or perceptions, and functions in … her own story as an actor" (Stam 99). However, instead of making a first-person film, in which the intradiegetic narrator would completely restrict our knowledge of the fictional world, the interplay of Ellen's near omnipresence and the function of the voiceover is supplemented by scenes in which Ellen is not present.

Such scenes are entirely an invention of the film. The director seems to include them to increase the complexity of the portrayal of Ellen's social and familial situation. In order to transcend the narrative possibilities offered by the first person narrator, the director and screenwriters add scenes in which Ellen either is told what has happened or, as a clever child, can deduce

knowledge about them. For instance, Ellen can infer from her aunts' comments that her grandmother has renewed an invitation in a hospital room to take Charlotte home and she can confront her mother about it, which she does. Even though Ellen does not witness aunt Nadine and aunt Betsy expressing their displeasure at the thought of taking in their half-orphaned niece, we learn later on that Ellen sensed their unwillingness to take care of her. In the headmaster's office, when asked about an alternative place to live, Ellen without remorse and with disarming honesty responds, "I wore out my welcome." Such scenes, which either have no literal equivalent in the novel or are modified versions of events from the literary original, allow the director to ensure that viewers share Ellen's perceptions of her family and life-situation.

The novel's plot moves through two temporal layers: the present is interwoven with flashbacks shedding light on Ellen's physical and psychological journey. The use of grammatical tenses differentiates the "present" perspective of the novel's narrative (11-year-old Ellen) from the past events which have shaped who she is "now." Thus, the passages referring to the beginning of Ellen's journey are narrated by an older, more mature narrator. By using this strategy of "having the narrative move back and forth between the past and the present, Gibbons skillfully and repeatedly reminds readers of the contrast between Ellen's two lives and the fact that she will ultimately prevail" (DeMarr 29). To relate to the structure of the novel—in other words, to draw comparisons between the younger Ellen and her more mature narrating self—the director may have recourse to voiceover, which is the "traditional cinematic equivalent of the novel's first-person narrative" (McFarlane 122). With the voiceover technique, Erman filters our knowledge of Ellen's life. Because the voiceover commentary expands the protagonist's psychological portrayal, the viewers are affirmed in their assessment of Ellen's character, personality and situation. In a voiceover comment about Mrs. Nelson calling her son-in-law a "rotten piece of trash", Ellen reveals her sensibility and perceptiveness of human nature: "It seemed to me that she might have got hold of her natural meanness. For her own daughter's funeral at least. I guess she hated my daddy more than she loved my mama. It didn't seem proper to me. I think that at funeral everybody should love everybody else."

Despite Ellen's mishandling of semantic ambiguities, she is a very mature girl. This again is revealed in the voiceover, for instance when she refuses to accept people lying to themselves about the situation they are in. The voiceover insight when, on her way to Charlotte's funeral, she expresses remorse

and guilt over not taking better care of her mother, and not protecting her from her abusive, drunkard husband, reveals what the child felt intensely but was unable to express with words or gestures. All the voiceover comments refer to those events in the novel which are narrated in the past tense and they imply the knowledge of a more mature narrating self. The voiceover refers us back to the peculiar property of the novel's narrative—the double time structuring. It is visible for instance in Ellen's honest comment about her grandmother being granted legal custody over her half-orphaned granddaughter. When Ellen is uprooted from the flower-children's haven at Julia and Roy's she says: "If I had known about her all I know now I would have jumped off that big car", that is, the car that was taking her to her maternal grandmother's emotionally abusive environment in her "humongous, empty" mansion.

The filmic representation of the journey Ellen makes from her dysfunctional family home to her new mother's house can be treated as the equivalent of the literary trope of the journey. If we accept James Monaco's definition of the literary trope as "a logical twist that gives the elements of a sign—the signifier and the signified—a new relationship to each other" (140),[13] then clearly Ellen's search for identity—from Hammond to Foster—symbolizes her need to find a place where she can belong. The story seems simple but Gibbons complicates it by deviating from straight chronology. DeMarr sees Gibbons's deviation from a chronological time sequence as "separating her [Ellen's] life into two major periods: A terrible past in which she was repeatedly victimized but refused to consider herself a victim and a wonderful present in which she has everything she needs to make her happy" (28). Gibbons manages to creatively defamiliarize her readers with Ellen's situation (the story) by complicating the sequence of events (the plot) with flashbacks.[14] Films in general have "no built-in tense system" (Stam 121) and "[l]inearization obviates the need for explanation" (McFarlane 44). Hence, directors have to signal alterations in straight chronology, for instance through voiceover (Stam 121). That is also why Erman resorted to having a voiceover in his film: in order to supplement the linear treatment of basic plot events.

[13] James Monaco also claims that the literary trope is "the connecting element between denotation and connotation" (140).

[14] For a theoretical explanation of the construction of plot, see Bordwell 52, and for a discussion of the difference between plot and story, see Bordwell 49–50.

The story of Gibbons's novel is retained in Erman's film, but the latter begins with a series of photographs with credits before the actual "plot" begins. Instead of beginning the narrative in *medias res* with Ellen's confession of the dysfunctionality of her family and her eventual recovery from that situation, as the novel does, the film's opening credits are seen against a background of photos representing Ellen's happy family life as well as photographs of those families she will meet on her journey to new selfhood. The sentimental and nostalgic tones of the musical score (John Morris's music) heard in the background underscore the emotionality of the narrative. This change in the exposition of the narrative carries implications. In so doing, the director, aided by his crew,[15] reconceptualizes the confessional mode of sharing trauma and secrets to a happily ever-after mode accentuated by a picture of a happy family after trials. This scene places the film squarely in the tradition of the *Hallmark Hall of Fame* films. *Ellen Foster* aired on CBS as a *Hallmark Hall of Fame* film in 1997, which made it close to the second hundredth episode in this American television anthology series. The series' "contribution to the television medium" was acknowledged with 81 Emmys, dozens of Golden Globes, and Peabody awards.[16] Since its inception in 1951, the *Hallmark Hall of Fame* collection has aimed to inspire, entertain and inform with their family-friendly presentations. Even though the series approaches socially-sensitive topics, such as mentally challenged people, schizophrenic individuals, ethnic minorities, and aged citizens in its productions, the controversial issue of racism is muted in the adaptation of *Ellen Foster*.

While both texts, literary and filmic, begin their story in the past, it is the literary original which encapsulates both the trauma and the progress Ellen has made to who she is "now." DeMarr posits that "[f]rom the very beginning of the book, then, readers know that everything will turn out well and that the story will reveal how Ellen got from her painful beginnings to her happy ending" (29). The film chooses a different structure, one that tones down Ellen's traumatic experiences while retaining the emphasis on the search for home, symbolizing the internal journey to defining her selfhood. *Mise-en-scène*, editing procedures and the soundtrack accompanying the opening and closing scenes capture the essence of Ellen's journey. In the opening shot of the film the camera, slowly wandering around the house, re-

[15] The director was aided by Bill Blunden's editing and Fred Harpman's production design.

[16] "Awards, Honors, and Praise." http://www.hallmark.com/online/hall-of-fame/awards.aspx.

cords stagnant water barely resembling a stream. The presence of the sewage-like reservoir of water underscores the marginal status of Ellen's poor white trash family as social detritus. The peeling paint on the house and the untended, flowerless lawn, recorded in bland colours intensify feelings of inertia, apathy and defeatism. The *mise-en-scène* at the end of the film is diametrically different, however. The camera movement—a sequence of short shots focusing on different members of the foster family—parallels a flurry of activity in a full house. The colourful flowerbeds and verdant lawns point to the nourishment and sustenance, both emotional and physical, the foster family offers its members. In contradistinction to the final shot of the film, where the rhythms of film editing reflect the rhythms of Ellen's present life as opposed to the lethargy of her family home in the past, the novel gives an altogether different impression: "the happy present is in general shown as an undifferentiated, almost static life in which nothing changes … . The present is a goal that she has reached, but the past was a series of experiences she lived through" (DeMarr 29). Through such aural and visual signifiers as the film's opening and closing shots the director is able to portray synecdochically Ellen's achievement of self-confidence, security and selfhood.

John Erman exercises his artistic prerogative by introducing linear representation and the voiceover. He also reformulates the thematic concerns of the film in order to better fit the frame of the *Hallmark Hall of Fame*. Therefore, in a specific way, Erman's film reflects what Casetti theorized about, that "adaptation is primarily a phenomenon of recontextualization of the text, or, even better, of reformulation of its communicative situation" (83). The film prioritises classist "othering" over racist "othering." The treatment of racism is the major point in which the novel and the film diverge.

Examples of Ellen's feelings of racial superiority in general and towards Starletta and her family in particular abound in the novel. The eponymous heroine likes Starletta's parents because "they do not try to be white" (29). She wouldn't drink after Starletta (29). A sweater for Christmas from them "does not look colored at all" (38). Dreaming about her ideal new family Ellen automatically assumes it will be white (67). According to DeMarr, the theme of race in the novel "is closely bound to her [Ellen's] sense of identity, and it reveals her growth in maturity throughout her experience. Tracing her comments on race … shows how she grows in understanding of both herself and others" (40). The film downplays racism. By whitewashing Ellen's internalised racism, which functions in the novel "as a way of prop-

ping up her belief in her own value" (DeMarr, 30) and the overcoming thereof, the film de-emphasizes the fact that Ellen "must confront the racist stereotypes and blindness of both her culture and her own imagination ... to create a viable subject position to herself" (Reames 91). In so doing, the director fails to acknowledge the complexity of Ellen's quest for selfhood and self-esteem, which involves the discarding of the racist feelings she exhibited at the beginning of her voyage. Because the film refers to the cultural and social framework of the American South, the exclusion of Ellen's unconscious racism goes against the novel's ideology. In the film, whose narrative structure is so embedded in the issues of race and class, to deny Ellen's growing racial sensitivity impoverishes the complexity and magnitude of her journey.

Erman also chose to mute some other thematic concerns of the novel. For example, the film sanitizes the extent of Mrs. Nelson's emotional and physical abuse of her granddaughter. There is also no mention of Ellen being forced to work in the cotton fields side by side with black farm hands as a punishment for reminding her mother's mother that she is her father's daughter. Mrs. Nelson wants to humiliate Ellen by conflating classism with racism. As Reames claims, "By giving her this job, Ellen's grandmother has forced her to cross racial lines and perform labor that has been coded black" (101). The film also glosses over Charlotte's suicide, both the reasons behind it, and her husband's part in it. Bill's drunken attempt to rape Ellen is never mentioned. This is nevertheless understandable in the light of the film's PG-13 rating.

By rewriting and diminishing the role of Ellen's overcoming her racist feelings in the process of growing to maturity, the movie denies the paradigm shift at the novel's conclusion. Ellen's growth is visible not only in her inviting Starletta over for a weekend to her new mother's house to apologize and compensate for her patronizing and racist feelings in the past. Ellen believes that it is brave of her to think about a black person spending the night in a white person's house. Her awareness of inter-racial relations can be sensed in her comment "I am not sure if it has ever been done before" (85). More importantly, the depiction of Ellen's maturity depends on her withholding certain information about Starletta. One cannot deny the significance of Ellen concealing, until the last possible moment, that Starletta stutters. The withholding of sensitive information about her friend's disability proves that Ellen can transcend colour divisions and see Starletta as a sovereign individual: "her old sense of being superior to at least Starletta because

she was herself white [has] been destroyed by recognition of Starletta's personhood" (DeMarr 146).

The final voiceover comment is consistent with the rhetoric of the film: "Everyday I try to feel a little better about all that went on when I was little. I will eventually get straightened up. … I came a long way to get here. That will always amaze me." Such a conclusion clearly "serves the film's ideology"—these final words encapsulate Ellen's quest for a new home and a new identity. The film manages to successfully "recreate and sustain an established mood" (McFarlane 7). Yet such a conclusion underplays the role the developing of racial sensitivity played in the enhancement of Ellen's feeling of self-worth. The film ending deprives the viewers of Ellen's redefinition of her intra- and inter-racial boundaries through her friendship with Starletta. A "projection of the self into other and thus some reshaping of the narrator's identity" (Abel 421), which Elizabeth Abel identified while analysing a female friendship depicted in Christa Wolf's *The Quest for Christa T*, defines Ellen's cross-racial relationship with Starletta. As such, Ellen's female friend becomes what Abel calls, "an alter ego that refines and clarifies the narrator's self-image" (423). Ellen's final words in the novel reveal the intricacy of her achievement: "I came a long way to get here but when you think about it real hard you will see that old Starletta came even farther. … And all this time I thought I had the hardest row to hoe. That will always amaze me" (126). Recognition of her initial racial prejudice and superiority reveals the true scope of Ellen's emotional transformation.

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„PRZESZŁAM DŁUGĄ DROGĘ, ABY TUTAJ DOTRZEĆ": NARRACYJNY PUNKT WIDZENIA, TROP PODRÓŻY I REKONTEKSTUALIZACJA W KAYE GIBBONS *ELLEN FOSTER* I JEJ FILMOWEJ ADAPTACJI

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Przesłanką teoretyczną artykułu jest analiza procesu adaptacji dyskursu narracyjnego i rozległego spektrum tematycznego, przeprowadzona w oparciu o ekranizację powieści Kaye Gibbons *Ellen Foster* z 1987 r. Głównym celem artykułu jest ukazanie sposobu prezentacji narracyjnego punktu widzenia oraz zagadnień tematycznych przeniesionych z literackiego pierwowzoru do filmu o takim samym tytule z serii the Hallmark Hall of Fame. Dokładnej analizie zostały poddane słowa występujące w zakończeniu dzieł, posługujących się odmiennymi środkami przekazu, rozpatrywane w kontekście retorycznym i logicznym. Oddzielne miejsce zostało poświęcone kwestii spójności obydwu mediów z dyskursem kulturowym, w który się wpisują.

Słowa kluczowe: Kaye Gibbons; *Ellen Foster*; literatura amerykańskiego Południa; biała biedota; „Inny"; białość; rasizm; narracja; filmowa adaptacja; rekontekstualizacja.