

THE LITERARY DISCOURSE OF *BLADE RUNNER*: Film as a Literary Collage

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RESUMO: Este ensaio discute problemas teóricos envolvendo a relação entre filme e literatura a partir dos estágios iniciais dessa discussão. Também lida com o modo não só como a literatura toma de empréstimo o discurso do cinema, mas principalmente como o cinema se utiliza do discurso literário por meio da apropriação mútua de técnicas e através de um processo de tradução de diferentes meios. Cenas de *Blade Runner*, de Ridley Scott, serão usadas para ilustrar os argumentos desenvolvidos neste ensaio, ou seja, de que modo o filme traduz a tradição literária de Dante, Blake e Milton, assim como trechos bíblicos.

UNITERMOS: filme; literatura; tradução; cinema; *Blade Runner*.

ABSTRACT: This paper discusses theoretical issues involving the relationship between film and literature from the early stages of this discussion. It also deals with the way not only literature borrows the discourse of cinema but also how cinema makes use of the literary discourse by means of mutual appropriation of techniques and through a translation process of different media. Scenes from Ridley Scott's Blade Runner will be used to illustrate the argument developed in the paper, i.e., how this film translates the literary

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*tradition of Dante, Blake and Milton, as well as Biblical excerpts.*¹

KEYWORDS: film adaptation; literature/cinema; intersemiotic translation; Blade Runner.

1. Film and Literature: A Mutual Translation Process

The relationship between literature and film is found at the very beginning of cinema due to the visual characteristic of both media. D. W. Griffith wanted to film in the same way as Charles Dickens wrote novels. Similarly, Tolstoi wanted to write like a camera films (Paech, 1988: 122-123). George Bluestone, in establishing the limits of both the novel and the film, argues that novelist and film director meet in the attempt "to make you see," the former through the mind, the latter through the eye. For him, the root difference between the two media "lies between the percept of the visual image and the concept of the mental image" (1957: 137). He considers the end products of novel and film as representing different aesthetic genera, since each is autonomous and each is characterized by unique and specific properties (p. 139). Bluestone states that "a film is not thought; it is perceived" (p. 141). Therefore, film cannot have direct access to the power of discursive forms because it is a presentational medium (except for its use of dialogues). Whereas "the novel discourses, the film must picture" (p. 140).

Most of the arguments developed by Bluestone in 1957 have turned out to be inconsistent with the way contemporary works treat their media. There is a blurring of the borderlines of the medium allotted for each art form nowadays, as films be-

¹ This paper is part of a longer project (my doctoral dissertation presented to the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1997) in which I discuss the influence of literature on film (film as a literary collage of tradition and the postmodern) and the influence of film on literature. It was cut and adapted to fit the requirements of this publication. Part of this text was also presented at the 9th *Brazilian Translation Forum and 3rd. International Translation Forum* in Fortaleza, Brazil, in 2004.

come literary and novels become more and more cinematic. The development of the video cassette and DVD industry allowed us to have video libraries as book libraries at our disposal, which also accounted for one of the basic differences between the mode of perceiving the two media. Bluestone writes:

(...) because its mode of beholding allows stops and starts, thumbing back, skipping, flipping ahead, and so lets the reader set his own pace, a novel can afford diffuseness where the film must economize. Where the mode of beholding in the novel allows the reader to control his rate, the film viewer is bound by the relentless rate of a projector which he cannot control. (p. 142)

Bluestone could not predict at the time he wrote his book (1957) that one day, in the so-called “developed” and “developing societies,” movies would be as accessible in one’s homes as books (or maybe even more accessible than books). With the remote control, viewers now are able to rewind, fast forward, stop, get stills and slow motions as many times as they want, thus eliminating the difference he established between the modes of beholding.

Some critics prefer to associate film with the visual arts by stressing the role of the visual image over the narrative, as Morris Beja has noted (1979: 25-26). However, the relationship between literature and film in their mutual visual, dialogical, and narrative aspects is remarkable. Besides narrating, literature creates mental images in the readers’ minds, a fact which contradicts these arguments. Moreover, literature has frequently been associated with the visual arts in studies of the history of both art forms. There have been innumerable comparative studies between literature and film, which date as far back as the beginning of the 20th century. Morris Beja cites Tolstoy’s comments on the revolutionary influence cinema would have “in the life of writers” as early as 1908. He regards Vachael Lindsay’s book *The Art of the Moving Picture* (1915) as the “first important book of cinema criticism in the United States” written by a poet (Beja, 1979: 74). In 1926, before the advent of sound in movies, Virginia Woolf criticized the new medium as inaccessible to words in her essay “The Cinema.” She perceived the alliance of the two

media as “disastrous” and “unnatural,” and she described cinema as a “parasite” which had fallen “upon its prey [literature] with immense rapacity” (1988: 350). Woolf is one of the first critics to denounce the mesmerizing effect cinema produces. She condemns cinema for creating a reality “more real than reality,” an analogy similar to the motto used by the Tyrell Corporation in *Blade Runner*. She argues that the eye is unable to comprehend the new medium without the help of the brain, since the spectator is removed from his or her surrounding reality due to cinema’s ability to generate detachment from “the pettiness of actual existence”:

The eye is in difficulties. The eye says to the brain, ‘Something is happening which I do not in the least understand. You are needed.’ Together they look at the King, the boat, the horse, and the brain sees at once that they have taken on a quality which does not belong to the simple photograph of real life. They have become not more beautiful, in the sense in which pictures are beautiful, but shall we call it (our vocabulary is miserably insufficient) *more real, or real with a different reality from that which we perceive in daily life*. We behold them as they are when we are not there. We see life as it is when we have no part in it. As we gaze we seem to be removed from the pettiness of actual existence, its cares, its conventions (Woolf, 1988: 349, emphasis added).

In the essay “The ‘Movie’ Novel” (1918), Woolf criticizes Compton Mackenzie’s book *The Early Life and Adventures of Sylvia Scarlett* (1918) for the cinematic construction of his characters. She compares the non-stop depiction of events in the novel to cinema’s technique of showing one picture after another without stopping in order to conceal the boredom it would provoke when stopped (p. 290).

However, not all earlier criticisms are as pessimistic as Woolf’s. Eisenstein, in an essay on Dickens and Griffith in *Film Form*, written in 1944, defends the alliance of the two forms. He associates literature with the movies because each form is “an art of viewing” (p. 233). In the sixties and seventies when struc-

turalism was a major fad, several structural comparisons were established between the language of cinema and human language. A structuralist grammar of film was attempted in the French journal *Cahiers du 20e. siècle* (1978) dedicated to the relationship between film and literature. Roger Odin, in "Modèle grammatical, modèles linguistiques et étude du langage cinématographique," relates the cinematographic language to the grammar model of structural linguistics. He mentions a comparative study written in 1928 by Pierre F. Quesnoy in which Quesnoy develops the notion of a "littérature pré-cinématique" (Odin, 1978: 9). In *Film and Fiction* (1979), Keith Cohen treats words and images as systems of signs which bear resemblance to one another, the visual and the verbal element being component parts of one global system of meaning. For Cohen, a study of the relation between two separate sign systems like novel and film is possible because the same codes may reappear in more than one system (p. 3).

Although some of the earlier studies dealt with the relationship between the two media as separate art forms, more recent studies have been suggesting the overlapping of both media. In *Literatur und Film* (1988), Joachim Paech considers film a new literature, and he develops the idea that film can be read (p. 104-121). Similarly, both Beja and Richardson perceive film as a kind of literature. Robert Richardson finds an obvious reason for film to be literary in the fact that literature's intent as a narrative art is to create images and sounds in the reader's mind. Film and literature are analogous in their visual aspects and narrative forms (Richardson, 1969: 12). Cinema and literature share the technique of "careful selection and presentation of particular concrete images in order to create a single, overwhelming, and quite abstract proposition" (p. 51). Richardson even sees a closer analogy by applying the terminology used by one medium in the other, as did the French structuralist semioticians. For him, the simple photographed image is the vocabulary of film; the processes of editing, cutting, and montage are the grammar and syntax of film; single shots carry meaning as single words do, and a series of shots carefully arranged has as much meaning as a composed phrase does (p. 65-66). Richardson's

views were later contradicted by Christian Metz, for whom a shot conveys much more meaning than a word, being sometimes equivalent to a paragraph or a chapter (Metz, 1974: 118-119).

As some film critics have not been receptive to the comparisons between literature and film, an analogous feeling appeared among writers in their rejection of cinema. Besides Virginia Woolf's dissatisfaction with the new medium, other writers have had an ambivalent relationship with movies. Beja states that many writers "who became directly involved with the film industry as screenwriters often did so by going to Hollywood merely in order to take the money and run" (p. 74). He cites William Faulkner as an example, although Faulkner was also influenced by cinema's techniques in his own writing. Yet, other writers, such as John Steinbeck, Graham Greene, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller in the United States, and Jean Cocteau, Marguerite Duras, and Alain Robbe-Grillet in France kept their commitment to their literary art but also treated their work on film as seriously. Beja mentions another class of writers, such as Irving Wallace and Harold Robbins, who write from the beginning in the hope of having their work sold to the movies (p. 74).

In addition to these writers hired by the film industry to work as screenwriters, others with little or no direct contact with the industry have resorted to filmic approaches and techniques in their writings. The list is long and starts with James Joyce's use of montage. It includes Albert Camus, Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, Nathaniel West, etc. However, precursors of cinematic techniques may be found even before the appearance of the moving pictures in the works of Dickens, Flaubert, Walt Whitman, etc.

Certain critics consider literature a temporal art, whereas cinema is regarded as a spatial art. For Béla Balázs, "pictures have no tenses," a fact corroborated by Alain Robbe-Grillet for whom "the essential characteristic of the image is its presentness." However, as Joseph Frank has observed, literature has moved toward spatiality in a moment of time (Balázs; Robbe-Grillet; Frank *apud* Beja, 1979: 75). Also, movies have attempted to solve the barriers of temporality.

2. Film as a Postmodern Blurring of Media

Besides the arguments in favor of the association of the two forms, postmodern theory concerning the blurring of genres may be applied to the blurring of media. Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* (from now on referred to as *BR* to avoid confusion with the novels which bear almost the same title) illustrates this characteristic of the invasion of the frontiers in the arts, consolidating the break with media borderlines. In the same way that literature borrows discourses from other media, especially from the cinema, so does film borrow literary devices and techniques. *BR* is not simply a free film adaptation of Philip Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*² (from here on named *DADES*). It is a literary portrayal in film of different literary works through the use of metaphors translated into that medium. It may be considered not only literature in film, but literature in a different format other than a book. *BR*'s literary effects are achieved through its lyrical imagery allied to its effect of synaesthesia. The synaesthetic effect is accomplished through a borrowing of literary techniques and figures of speech (i.e., ambiguity, allegory, synaesthesia, metaphor, etc.) and through the different allusions, not only to literature in the form of narrative and poetry, but in its recourse to other media such as the visual arts (painting, photography, sculpture, and cinema itself).² The film reflects the scriptwriter's literary background, as well as the director's involvement with art.³

BR is not only a collage of literary texts. It is also composed of poetical shots in which the lyricism of its images blends

² *Blade Runner* is also a collage of different films. Its allusions to other films have already been established by Leonard G. Heldreth in *The Cutting Edges of Blade Runner* (1991: 40-52).

³ In an interview with Paul Sammon, Hampton Fancher states that before being asked to write *BR*'s script, he was interested in poetry and fine literature. Ridley Scott has a degree from the Royal College of Art, and he worked as a designer before becoming a filmmaker (Sammon, 1996: 25; 43-45).

with text.⁴ Roy Batty (played by Rutger Hauer), the leader of the revolting androids, is presented as a poet in several takes. When he meets Chew (James Hong), the maker of his eyes, he quotes adapted verses of the poem *America, a Prophecy*, plate 11, by William Blake. When told that Chew had made his eyes, he resorts to a cynical lyrical answer (“Chew, if only you could see what I’ve seen with your eyes”), which acquires a tone both poetical and philosophical. Before dying, the language he uses in his final remark to Deckard reveals the lyricism of the scene: “I’ve seen things you people wouldn’t believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glittering in the dark near the Tannhauser gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in the rain. Time to die” (*BR*).⁵

Poetry, however, is not only present in the movie’s verbal language. Besides the poetic language used by Roy, the lyricism of this scene is enhanced by the actor’s performance, Scott’s camera depicting the rain falling on the character, his transformation from an animate being into a statue, and the context, the fact that Roy is dying after having saved the man who wanted to kill him. The camera’s focus on the eternal rain falling on Roy as he recites his final epitaph “All those moments will be lost in time like tears in the rain” is a lyrical moment which approximates the android to its hunter.

Poetry also appears in the close-ups of Rachael’s (Sean Young) despair when she finds out she is not human; it is repeated in the takes of her face arranging her hair to look like the women in the photographs in Rick Deckard’s (Harrison Ford) apartment in a poignant attempt to be human, and in the close-up of her hands playing the piano. The lyrical effect created by

⁴ A note should be made about the fact that the film *Blade Runner*, and not the novel that served as its source, generated a textual continuity in two books written by K. W. Jeter, a friend of Dick’s. These sequels, however, have not been adapted to the screen so far, which is a rupture with the normal tradition.

⁵ This poetical sentence was written by Rutger Hauer, the actor who plays Roy Batty. Hauer improvised it during the shooting, and Scott decided to keep it. The dove’s idea was also his (Sammon, 1996: 385).

the camera reappears in Deckard's dream of the unicorn (in the director's cut), and in the scene following Roy's death, when he releases the white dove that takes flight into the sky. In addition, the enigmatic close-up of the eye reflecting fireballs in the opening scene may be interpreted as a poem without words about fiery tears going up, which may be contrasted with Roy's allusion to "tears in the rain" in his final recitation.

Ridley Scott's close-ups confirm Béla Balázs's definition of this technique as "the pictures expressing the poetic sensibility of the director." The expressions on the faces "are significant because they are reflected expressions of our own subconscious feeling." (1992: 186) As Balázs states,

(...) good close-ups radiate a tender human attitude in the contemplation of hidden things, a delicate solicitude, a gentle bending over the intimacies of life-in-the-miniature, a warm sensibility. Good close-ups are lyrical; it is the heart, not the eye, that has perceived them. Close-ups are often dramatic revelations of what is really happening under the surface of appearances (1992: 186).

Scott conveys this sensibility to the audience through his use of the camera and through the performers' expressions.

The film's atmosphere of dark and light evokes not only a technique in painting (*chiaroscuro*), very much explored in film noir, but also alludes to the symbols of dark and light in the Biblical tradition in the struggle between good and evil. Jordan Cronenweth's cinematography created a feeling of ubiquitous claustrophobia and chaos mixed with film noir's romanticism. Rebecca Warner argues that it is the black background in the film that makes the bright lights possible, creating the feeling of a city at once vast and claustrophobically enclosed. According to her, "[t]he city becomes a metaphor for a man's mind, or perhaps for his soul, for the soul of Rick Deckard." By bombarding the viewer "with details until they can no longer be assimilated," the film is also about entropy, about the decadence of a city falling down, of replicants as "bright lights burning swiftly" which cannot hold for very long, and of human characters who are "disintegrating in one way or another" (Warner, 1991: 178).

The chaotic, decentered city space in *BR* is more similar to New York than to Los Angeles. It resembles a wasteland where the interference of culture via industry and technology has eliminated any trace of a natural environment. The high-tech cyberpunk cityscape is atrociously urban, with a preponderance of mass media and different forms of technology and information. It functions as a critique of our times by creating a mesmerizing unreality, a universe of the spectacle whose function is to mirror itself endlessly. The city becomes a metaphor of the postmodern condition in its fusion of old and new styles – the Mayan pyramidal shape of Tyrell Corporation contrasts with state-of-the-art technologies – through the process of retrofitting,⁶ and through the disappearance of the boundaries between public and private spaces. The constant presence of search lights and huge billboards functions as the invasion of private space. They persistently monitor people's lives and exert a kind of ubiquitous control without an origin or center, like a gigantic eye that watches everything, similar to the one depicted in George Orwell's *1984*.

Scott Bukatman (1997) also interprets the implant of false memories in the replicants' minds as the dissolution of personal space when the private territories of the mind become vulnerable to attack (p. 29). Traditional subjectivity is thus replaced by a computerized form of subject, which dissolves notions of subjecthood and individuality. This new form of identity, which Bukatman labeled *terminal identity* (p. 45), is the epitome of the postmodern being. The implant of false memories constructs the androids' personal history. History becomes a fiction totally dependent on a form of representation: the photography. The film leads the viewer into questioning whether memory remains "the residue of something now absent" or whether it is "only a simulation, a false presence" (Bukatman, 1997: 57). As Charney remarks, "if the present disappears, and thereby hollows out presence, this shift also hollows out the subject who constructs

⁶ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "retrofit" means "modify so as to incorporate changes made in later products of the same type or model" (p. 797).

that presence" (apud Bukatnam, p. 57). Although Scott, for budgetary reasons, was not initially concerned with the morality issues implied in his film, as he reveals in the interview with Sammon (1996: 380), his resulting work tackles on ethical problems irrespective of his conscious intention. In its presentation of unresolved questions, which leave much room for doubt and uncertainty, *BR* claims an ethics for the postmodern, one that questions the benefits of a dystopic society, where individuals are dissolved into spectacular forms guided by technology and mass media.

The film starts with a sound which reminds us of both an explosion and a gate being opened while the title and the cast names are shown, followed by five consecutive similar sounds, the first being stronger than the others. These sounds are accompanied by the music score, which adds an atmosphere of horror, reminiscent of wailings emitted by suffering souls doomed to damnation: poignant, somber sounds of spirits in eternal pain. The poignancy of these laments becomes accentuated in the end when Roy sees Pris's (Daryl Hannah) corpse. After using her blood to besmear his face, like a warrior preparing for a battle, he utters excruciating lupine sounds, similar to those emitted by a pierced animal. His howls of anguish upon Pris's death become not only his eulogy for her, but also his battle song.

The sounds, recurrent throughout the film, evoke sounds of Asian languages as well. Since much of the setting depicts Asian characters and people, even in the gigantic electronic billboards showing a geisha, one may see in the predominance of Asian types and language Scott's reading of the future of the world as dominated by Eastern culture through overpopulation, which suggests the downfall of the Western world.

Andrew Stiller sees the swooping glissandos and hollow booms as evocative of incoming artillery fire precipitating something ominous about to happen behind "the impenetrable black background across which the credits roll" (Stiller, 1991: 197). He describes some of these sounds as "eerie" and "plangent melody." For Stiller, the heavy reverb creates a mood of mystery and paranoia through an aural oppressiveness. He classifies the predominant emotional tone of *BR* as almost oppressive nostal-

gia, the film being “one long lament for lost innocence” (p. 199). He claims that some snippets of that age’s popular music are Japanese in style and they may be actual excerpts of Japanese music (p. 198), which is confirmed by *Blade Runner’s* FAQ.

The presence of the written word as part of the narrative appears from the very beginning of the film. By borrowing a convention inherited from silent movies, the film sets the scene of the story about to unfold with a prologue in the form of a crawl immediately after the title and cast names appear.⁷ This prologue is a summary of how replicants, “a being virtually identical to a human,” were created and how they became illegal on Earth “early in the 21st century”:

Early in the 21st Century, THE TYRELL CORPORATION advanced Robot evolution into the NEXUS phase – a being virtually identical to a human – known as a Replicant. The NEXUS 6 Replicants were superior in strength and agility, and at least equal in intelligence, to the genetic engineers who created them. Replicants were used Off-world as slave labor, in the hazardous exploration and colonization of other planets. After a bloody mutiny by a NEXUS 6 combat team in an Off-world colony, Replicants were declared illegal on earth - under penalty of death. Special police squads – BLADE RUNNER UNITS – had orders to shoot to kill, upon detection, any trespassing Replicant.

This was not called execution.
It was called retirement (BR).

⁷ This is, however, different from those movies of the silent era, when novels were adapted into movies. D.W. Griffith, for example, cited particular passages from Dickens to illustrate the major innovations in technique he added to film: the dissolve, the superimposed shot, the close-up, the pan (Cf. Bluestone’s article “The Limits of the Novel and the Limits of the Film” in Harrington’s *Film And/As Literature*, p. 137-138).

Following the crawl, another explosion is heard, mixed with a metallic, clanking sound, as if to confirm the opening of a huge gate. Another “card” situates the film’s place and time: LOS ANGELES, NOVEMBER, 2019. Next, we are presented with the first image: an aerial shot of the city, depicting building tops, which resemble contorted chimneys, enveloped by dark mists. They create the illusion of a gaseous, volcanic bog from whose insides fireballs explode into the air, and they suggest the cliché image of the future as a return to a primitive state. This image is later negated by the presence of high technology.⁸ A flying vehicle reminiscent of a car speeds by, lightning crisscrosses the space, and an explosion is followed by a huge fireball. Another flying object zips by, the screen is filled with a close-up of a blue eye (the iris of which reflects the fireballs), and a flying vehicle lands on top of a slanted building. Another close-up of the eye (again occupying the whole screen) displays clouds of smoke and fire moving upward. This fireball outlines the left corner of the iris, like a tear going up instead of going down, in an artistic shot that evokes the painting *Le faux miroir* (The False Mirror) by René Magritte. A spacecraft approaches the top of a building. A cut to an external view of a building is immediately followed by another cut to the inside, where we can see a fan rotating over a figure in semi-darkness and smoke. A vertical shot shows a man smoking and looking out an upper opening that serves as a window, the same as in the previous scene, only a little more detailed. All these sequences take place without words, which are only heard for the first time through a loudspeaker announcing the entrance of the next subject to be tested.

These introductory images and sounds are filled with literary allusions in Scott’s postmodern rereading of the past and the Biblical literary tradition of Blake, Milton, and Dante, of man’s fall and his descent into hell. The references to Blake appear throughout the film, not only in these initial images, but also through the quotations of adapted verses of one of his poems,

⁸ There have been attempts to imitate the opening scenes and content of *BR* in sound, visual effects, and plot in other films of the genre, such as *Cyborg* and *Cyborg 2*.

and in its theme. Blake was influenced by Milton and Dante, whose books he also illustrated, so the presence of tradition through allusion and intertextuality is already felt in these appropriated works.

Ridley Scott borrowed the title of his film from William S. Burroughs's novel *Blade Runner: a Movie*. In his turn, Burroughs based his story on Alan E. Nourse's novel *The Blade Runner*. However, the film is based upon Philip K. Dick's novel *DADES* in which the term is not used. Due to the length of this paper, I will only be referring to some of the traditional literary influences and will not be approaching the relationship between the film and these postmodern works.⁹

3. *BR's* Literary Translation: Film as a Literary Collage

Although *BR* is based on a postmodern novel of the cyberpunk genre, its protagonist shares some similarities with the medieval epic hero, and its motif may be compared with the epic plot as well. Allusions to this tradition are implicit not only in the dialogues but also in the film's imagery. Rick Deckard, however, although fighting for a race (the human species), becomes an anti-hero. The "evil" he fights turns out to be the hero, also fighting for his android species. As in medieval romances, love becomes the major force of a heroic cause, and he ends up protecting that which he had to destroy. According to this tradition, the beloved was always out of the lover's reach, and conflicts

⁹ Before optioning Dick's novel, Fancher was planning to obtain the rights to Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*. The initial title of Fancher's script draft was the same title as Dick's novel. In its second draft, it was shortened to *Android*, later changed to *Mechanismo*. Because they could not get the rights from the art book with the same name, *Mechanismo* became *Dangerous Days* (Sammon, 1996: 25-41). *Blade Runner* appeared by accident from Burroughs's novel, when Fancher was searching for a convincing future name substitute for the word "detective." Only later did they discover Nourse's title. For Sammon, the title "describes Deckard's character, which runs on the knife's edge between humanity and inhumanity (p. 379).

always obstructed their marriage, making their relationship impossible. By the same token, Deckard and Rachael's love in *BR* is conflicting. It is both impossible and undesirable, since they are situated at opposite sides: she is a replicant with a limited life span, and he is a hunter of replicants whose job is to terminate her species. He is supposedly a human, whereas she is an android, a mechanical being.

Allusions to Dante's *Inferno* (c1307-21) are recurrent in the film. Like Ridley Scott, Dante exploits the effects of synaesthesia to the extreme, which may account for the allusions to his "visual" work in *BR*. Moreover, the architecture of the *Inferno*, shaped like a funnel pit with its center beneath Jerusalem, may be contrasted with *BR*'s city architecture. The pyramidal shape of Tyrell Corp. building resembles an inverted funnel. The different plans of the city are comparable to the different "circles" of Hell and its series of circular stairways.

Dante creates a three-dimensional art by combining sight, sound, hearing, touch and smell with pity, dread, horror, anger, passion, and other emotions. The effects he achieves are similar to those encountered in narrative film. His readers are involved by his descriptions to such an extent that they seem actually to experience his situations and not merely to read about them. Dante's synaesthetic (and cinematic) effect was captured by the artists who have illustrated the *Divine Comedy*. His images are as vivid as Ridley Scott's, since Scott creates a comparable effect in his film.

In Canto III of Dante's *Inferno*, cries of anguish are heard at the Gate of Hell in a fashion similar to the opening sounds (both of a gate being opened and the rueful sounds like those of souls in eternal pain) and images of the movie. At the entrance gate, Dante sees a sign, written in dark-colored words, which warn him to "abandon every hope." It is through that gate that he is going to find "eternal grief" "among the lost" as he enters "the woeful city" (Alighieri, 1982: III.1-9). These words are the inaugural warnings for what Dante is going to face: sighs, laments, and wailings, which make him weep. The initial dread, agony, and grief produced by the soundtrack as *BR* starts evoke Dante's description of Hell. Vangelis's synthesizer creates an

atmosphere of horror and pain, which recurs throughout the film. The laments mentioned by Dante are heard in several languages, which may be associated with the international multicultural hodgepodge of the city jargon in *BR* (Alighieri, 1980: 25). Other images and sounds also find their counterpart in Dante's work, but we must move on to Blake's influence now.

William Blake (1757-1827) also inherited the epic Biblical tradition via Dante, (whose works he illustrated), and Milton. Although not specifically an epic poet, some epic motifs are found in his works, especially those dealing with the myth of the fall of man, which he used in order to explain man's misery, fragmentation, bewilderment, and emptiness. He aimed to restore "what the Ancients called the Golden Age" (Blake *apud* Johnson, 1979: xxiv) by trying to identify the causes of evil and "build Jerusalem upon England's green and pleasant land." In his poem "Milton" (p. 234-306), the poet acquires heroic features as an immortal bard.

William Blake is considered a poet of "vision." Like Dante, he also made use of synaesthesia. His paintings are as descriptive and literary as his poems are pictorial. In "A Memorable Fancy," Blake describes the poetic subject "walking among the fires of hell, delighted with the enjoyments of Genius, which to Angels look like torment and insanity." The poet collects some proverbs of "Infernal wisdom" (Blake, 1979: 88). Then he proceeds into the inspection of Hell where he meets prophets and poets, as Dante does in his *Comedy*. After visiting a printing house and its chambers, an Angel comes to him and shows him a cavern, until they reach the void, where they stop to contemplate the infinite Abyss, pictured as "fiery as the smoke of a burning city." The description of the burning city is similar to the opening scene of *BR* in its imagery. The sun, "black but shining," reminds us of the feeble sunlight and the dark atmosphere in *BR*. The movie's flying objects are evocative of the flying devils in the shape of spiders chasing their preys. The flames and smoke in the film's sky resemble the "cloud and fire bursting and rolling through the deep," and also the "cataract of blood mixed with fire." The continuous rain in *BR* evoke Blake's "black tempest." The explosions in the film's soundtrack are suggestive of Blake's "terrible noise" (*Designs* 96).

BR's motif of rebellion¹⁰ against slavery and against the father – the androids' defying the law not to come to Earth – is also a theme in Blake's poems, in both "The Book of Los," which completes the cycle of poems on the continents, and in "The Book of Ahania."

The androids' disobedience alludes to both Satan's and Adam's Fall. It is illustrated visually when Roy Batty descends in the glassy elevator at Tyrell Corp. after having killed his "father." He looks at the sky and for the first time in the film the viewer can see the stars. This shot establishes a connection between Roy's descent in a starry elevator coming down "from the sky" and his condition of a fallen angel. Reference to the Fall also occurs when Roy enters the eye lab and quotes adapted verses of William Blake from the poem "America: A Prophecy," Plate 11. Blake assumes the function of the epic bard as a prophet, a seer who is able to understand contemporary events and perceive their social implications. Blake's poem reads:

Fiery the angels rose, & as they rose deep thunder roll'd
Around their shores, indignant burning with the fires of
Orc (116).

Roy changes the verbs in his quotation, making it clear that the androids' condition is one of fallen angels who came in fire to declare war on Earth, and not of angels rising into Heaven:

Fiery the angels fell. Deep thunder roll'd around their
shores, burning with the fires of Orc (*BR*).

¹⁰ Their revolt is also a Faustian rebellion towards the achievement of knowledge in their desire to meet their maker and to find out what constitutes the essence of their lives, so that they may be granted the wisdom of more life. One can perceive in the androids' struggle to achieve knowledge another classical literary reference which is in itself intertextual (from Marlowe, through Goethe, to Thomas Mann). Another possibility of interpretation is to consider Dr. Eldon Tyrell as Dr. Faust himself, in his attempt to have the knowledge to become the god of biomechanics to be able to generate life.

Blake's poem starts with a "Preludium," which constitutes a mythological view of an outbreak of repressed energy. After Orc breaks his chains, he has violent intercourse with a "nameless female." The image of fire in the quotation above, besides connoting destruction, revolt, and war, also suggests desire and lust. It indicates the replicants' lustful desire for more life, and implies a sexual interpretation, which finds its expression in the intercourse between Deckard and Rachael. The poem refers to the rise of the American democratic Revolution when the colonies rebelled against England. In a similar way, the replicants rebel against their rulers by leaving their Off-world colonies to come down to Earth and fight for their freedom. Blake's treatment of the theme of the Fall is a movement towards experience, a theme which is presented in cosmogonical terms but resolved historically with the rise of the French Revolution, as Schorer notes (1959: 230).

Rick Instrell, quoting R. Wood, sees the inversion of "rose" to "fell" as suggesting the ultimate demise of the American Revolution (1992: 167). This is also another possibility of interpreting this scene, for Tyrell stands for the powerful force of capitalist society. Since the United States is the major representative of this system, Tyrell assumes the allegorical form of Uncle Sam. His downfall is emblematic of the collapse of the utopian dream created by the American Revolution because its praxis resulted in a polluted inferno of business schemes whose ultimate goal was monetary value and man's exploitation.

The relationship between *BR* and William Blake is found not only in the recited verses, but also in the fiery images of the abyss, in the wailing sounds of the Daughters of Albion, and in the androids' plight, which is comparable to that of rebel fallen angels embodied by Fuzon in "The Book of Ahanian," and by Orc in "America: A Prophecy." But the film's association with the Fall is also found in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) follows the tradition of epic poems. Milton links the epic to the religious myth of creation and to the war of gods, and transforms Adam into a new hero. Like Dante, Milton resorts both to the Biblical tradition and to the Greco-Latin heritage of Homer and Virgil.

The film's introductory scenes have their counterpart in Milton's Book I of *Paradise Lost*. A similar pattern of images is repeated with the presence of flames, darkness, fire burning, and the wailing of tormented souls. There is a reference to the Serpent, a motif which appears later in the movie, both in the form of a dragon, and in its artistic use by Zhora, a replicant disguised as a snake charmer. On the streets, a place called "The Snake" shows its name in neon lights. Roy represents Satan (who transformed himself into a Serpent to tempt Eve) as the leader of the rebel androids. As the leading rebel, he stands for what Milton calls "the infernal serpent" in "his pride," "guile," and envy of man. Satan and his legion had been "cast out from Heaven," whereas the androids had been cast out from Earth. Yet, unlike Satan, Roy suffers when he witnesses the death of his comrades in fate, the androids he led down to Earth. Milton's depiction of Satan's search for "glory above his peers" (I.34-39), however, does not correspond to Roy's position in the movie, since he had the same life time as his comrades.

Milton depicts Hell as one great furnace whose flames do not prevent the darkness. In *BR*, flames like those of a furnace appear in the aerial shots of the city. Yet, their presence does not stop the pervasive claustrophobic darkness. The dark world below is not illuminated by the flaming building tops. The partial light only serves "to discover sights of woe, regions of sorrow, doleful shades" and to show a constant rain. The building chimneys belch a "fiery deluge fed with ever-burning sulphur unconsumed." As in Milton's description, the world of *BR* presents no possibility of hope. Life in that world has become an endless "torture" to which all inhabitants are doomed:

As one great furnace flamed, yet from those flames
 No light, but rather darkness visible
 Served only to discover sights of woe,
 Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
 And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
 That comes to all; but torture without end
 Still urges, and a fiery deluge, fed
 With ever-burning sulphur unconsumed (I.62-69).

The rebellion of the androids in the film has its correlation in Milton's work as it does in Blake's. Both the androids and the fallen angels encounter their doom in their descent as they fall into Hell. The Earth, or what was left of it after a nuclear war (named *War Terminus* in *DADES*), is transformed into a hellish place with constant rain and "tempestuous fire." Milton describes the fate of the rebel angels as prisoners of the dark, deprived of light and God's benevolence, and removed from the center, which is the same condition not only of the androids but also of postmodern beings. *BR* constitutes a metaphor of the postmodern person's entrapment in this decentered universe:

For those rebellious, here their prison ordained
 In utter darkness, and their portion set
 As far removed from God and light of heav'n
 As from the center thrice to th' utmost pole.
 O how unlike the place from whence they fell!
 There the companions of his fall, o'erwhelmed
 With floods and whirlwinds of tempestuous fire
 (l.71-77).

Another pattern may be established. The replicants come down to Earth like fallen angels, descending from the Off-world colonies where they are doomed to live for a limited period of time. They come in search of their creator to give them a longer (eternal) life, living in constant fear of the blade runners. The replicants defy the law established for them, as the Devil defied God's law. One of them, Zhora, disguises herself as Miss Salome, a snake charmer dancer. Both Salome and the snake allude to the Bible. Salome refers to the daughter of Herodias and Herod Philip who danced for the head of the prophet John, the Baptist (Matt. 14: 6-11). The latter is a reference to Genesis and man's fall through Eve and the serpent. This allusion becomes evident in the film, since the announcer introduces her with these words: "Miss Salome and the snake. Watch her take the pleasures from the serpent that once corrupted man" (*BR*). Since their creator, Tyrell, cannot do what they want, their leader, Roy, kills him.

However, in the end, before Roy dies, he has his hand pierced with a nail, in a scene reminiscent of Jesus's suffering

and death nailed to the cross. Moments before dying, Roy saves Deckard from falling off the top of the building, rescuing the man who was going to kill him. Through that act, he reaches his redemption for both his sin and the sins of mankind. When the white dove that he is holding is released, it takes flight into the skies to suggest his soul's rising into heaven, like a free soaring soul in search of redemption.

The pattern above is similar to the one presented by Milton. "Man's first disobedience" and the loss of Paradise constitute the subject of *Paradise Lost*. This subject is presented in Book I, where Satan provokes man's fall. After God announces to the legion of angels that his son will be their leader, Satan induces some fellow angels to war against God, and tries to convince the angels faithful to God that they were just weak slaves, while he and his legions were free. After a long fight between the angels faithful to God and those faithful to Satan, God sends his son to overcome the evil angels, and shows his wrath with darkness, flames, and smoke. Expelled from Heaven, Satan and his followers fall into the bottomless pit of Hell. Since they cannot fight against God, Satan convinces the other rebel angels to fight against man, God's new creation. Satan finds a way of penetrating Eden, and disguised as a serpent, convinces Eve to taste the fruit of knowledge. She persuades Adam to follow her deed, and God sends his son to judge them.

In *BR*, six replicants come down to Earth in order to take revenge on their creator, disobeying the law which bars their presence outside the colonies. These replicants are similar to the revolting angels. One of them (Zhora) is associated with a snake. Tired of their condition of eternal slavery, they rebel against the law and come down in search of a longer life. The replicants' search for freedom from their enslavement finds a parallel in Satan's claim that the obedient angels were God's slaves. Moreover, the replicants' descent to Earth is comparable to Satan's descent to Eden. The replicants' creator, however, is a man, and although he is referred to as "the maker," a surrogate "god of biomechanics," he is not God, and he does not have the power to prolong their lives, as the conversation between Roy and Tyrell shows:

Tyrell: I'm surprised you didn't come here sooner.

Roy: It's not an easy thing to meet your maker.

Tyrell: And, what can he do for you?

Roy: Can a maker repair what he makes?

Tyrell: Would you like to be modified?

Roy: Stay here [pause]. I had in mind something more radical.

Tyrell: What – what seems to be the problem?

Roy: Death.

Tyrell: Death. Well, I'm afraid that's a little out of my jurisdiction, you –

Roy: I want more life, fucker!

Tyrell: The facts of life. To make an alteration in the evolvement of an organic life system is fatal. A coding sequence cannot be revised once it's been established.

Roy: Why not?

Tyrell: Because by the second day of incubation any cells that have undergone reversion mutations give rise to revertant colonies like rats leaving a sinking ship. Then the ship sinks.

Roy: What about EMS recombination?

Tyrell: We've already tried it. Ethyl methane sulfonate as an alkylating agent and potent mutagen. It created a virus so lethal the subject was dead before he left the table.

Roy: Then a repressive protein that blocks the operating cells.

Tyrell: Wouldn't obstruct replication, but it does give rise to an error in replication so that the newly formed DNA strand carries the mutation and you've got a virus again. But, uh, this – all of this is academic. You were made as well as we could make you.

Roy: But not to last.

Tyrell: The light that burns twice as bright burns half as long. And you have burnt so very, very brightly, Roy. Look at you! You're the prodigal son. You are quite a prize! [He caresses Roy]

Roy: I've done questionable things . . .

[close-up of Roy's face looking down, as if asking for father's forgiveness]

Tyrell: Also extraordinary things. Revel in your time [Roy smiles].

Roy: Nothing the god of biomechanics wouldn't let you in heaven for (*BR*).

After this conversation, Roy grabs Tyrell's face, kisses him on the mouth. Then he smashes his face and gouges his eyes out. There is a close-up of the owl's eyes, one black, one pink, and the camera moves back to Roy's face. Sebastian feels bad, and runs out of the place. Roy follows him. There is another close-up of the owl's eyes, blinking. The owl turns its head, and there is a cut to the elevator take.

Roy's visit to Tyrell is one of the most poignant scenes in the movie. The dialogue they have, as a son talking to a father, is both metaphysical and philosophic. Tyrell embodies both the figure of God and of a father to whom Roy, who personifies the Biblical figure of the prodigal son, begs for more life. Roy, however, is not the prodigal son who came back to repent and be accepted, since he is not welcome in that place. He had been expelled to the Off-World colonies never to return under the penalty of death. He comes back not to beg, but to demand more life at the price of death. Nevertheless, Tyrell is unable to fulfill his desire, and as a result he is killed, in an act of total rebellion against the father. This act reminds us of the archetypal figure of the primal father in Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. However, in this case there is a lack of subsequent guilty feeling, as described by Freud, which would generate the law against incest, since there is no mother to complete the other corner of the triangle.

The Enlightenment mind created the idea of progress as a possibility of man's recovery from his eternal Fall. Progress meant a return to a utopian Paradise. However, entropy shows this is impossible, and that the only certainty with which mankind can live is a return to chaos and ruin. One of the themes *Blade Runner* approaches in this promenade through the past is the end of the products of civilization through decay. Instead of progress, there is a return to a past through the allusions to the Biblical myth of the origin of man and civilization, man's loss of beatitude, and man's self-inflicted infernal Fall. It is not contradictory that a postmodern film such as Scott's resorts to an old symbolism of the Fall. After all, the progress we have been offered has proven to be our way to damnation instead of salvation.

Furthermore, the film performs a postmodern twist concerning Roy, who becomes an ambivalent figure. As the leader of the revolting androids, he embodies the figure of Satan leading

the fallen angels (fallen from outer space). When he puts a nail through his palm, he embodies Christ and his crucifixion. Man's fall is occasioned by Satan as Deckard's literal fall is provoked by Roy. However, Roy, with his "crucified" hand, rescues Deckard from falling, and elevates him to the top of the building. When Roy dies, like Christ, he redeems mankind (personified by Deckard) from the fall. He dies for man's sake. This is the way the postmodern reworks the past, by putting opposites together and emphasizing ambiguity, where good and evil live side by side.

Besides the epic elements in *BR*, the film also alludes to tragedy. Roy's blinding of Tyrell before killing him reminds us of *Oedipus Rex*, another classical literary reference. Hoffmann's story "The Sandman" and its Freudian reading of "The Uncanny" also find references in the film. However, those references will be left for a later paper due to the limitations of length.

4. Concluding Remarks

Blake's, Milton's, and Dante's system privileged human reason as the way into salvation. *BR* refers to this tradition in order to deconstruct its system. The film shows the products of what should lead into salvation through Enlightenment (science, progress, technology) as the source of man's downfall into this very system. The technological society resulting from the search of progress through reason and science turns out to be the same infernal polluted society of Hell. Man's attempt at perfection led to the creation of beings who are "more human than the humans" (*BR*) when it comes to sensibility and ethics. As for knowledge, both replicants and humans still roam about in a universe whose certainty is the uncertainty of the human condition. The resort to tradition does not aim at repeating its pattern, but at showing how the promised progress of our present and future society still points to a past which professed certain answers that have proven unsatisfactory. Reason, the basis of this system, has disclosed its inability to furnish adequate answers to our philosophical queries.

Therefore, by resorting to traditional literature, cinema is influenced by literature in the same way that modern literature has become influenced by cinema from its origin until now. But that is another story to be told in another paper.

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