

Bull's-eye agency in audiovisual adaptations of *Oliver Twist* (1838), by Charles Dickens

O agenciamento de Bull's eye em adaptações audiovisuais de
Oliver Twist (1838), de Charles Dickens

Helena I. Lopes¹

0000-0002-1157-6107 

¹ BiFeGa, Universidade de Vigo, Espanha.

Autor correspondente: cityofglass1@gmail.com

Resumo. Argumentando um esbatimento de fronteiras culturais entre população vitoriana economicamente desfavorecida e animais inumanos operado pela retórica dickensiana em *Oliver Twist*, este estudo procura demonstrar como as adaptações audiovisuais do romance exponenciam cada vez mais o agenciamento, subjectividade e protagonismo da personagem Bull's-eye, o cão do vilão Bill Sikes, numa tentativa de satisfazerem a cultura cada vez menos especista dos seus públicos. Visto que os episódios introduzidos e suprimidos pelas adaptações têm base na forma como Dickens esboça o canídeo, consideram-se as soluções adaptativas bem-sucedidas, no sentido de uma domesticação tradutiva do texto de partida. Observa-se ainda como algumas soluções adaptativas acabam por fazer escola, criando um cânone audiovisual de representação do romance que passa a integrar o horizonte de expectativas dos públicos e é consequentemente assimilado pela narrativa dickensiana.

Palavras-chave: *Oliver Twist*. Cão. Agenciamento animal. Adaptação audiovisual. Tradução intersemiótica.

Abstract. Arguing for the hypothesis of a blurring of cultural boundaries between the economically disadvantaged Victorian population and non-human animals operated by Dickensian rhetoric in *Oliver Twist*, this study seeks to demonstrate how audiovisual adaptations of the novel increasingly exponentiate the agency, subjectivity and protagonism of the character Bull's-eye, the dog of the villain Bill Sikes, in an attempt to satisfy the ever less speciesism culture of their audiences. Since the episodes introduced and suppressed by the adaptations are based on the way Dickens sketches the canine, the adaptive solutions are considered successful, in the sense of a translative domestication of the source text. It is also observed how some adaptive solutions end up making a name for themselves, creating an audiovisual canon of representation of the novel that becomes part of the public's horizon of expectations and is consequently assimilated by the Dickensian narrative.

Keywords: *Oliver Twist*. Dog. Animal agency. Audiovisual adaptation. Intersemiotic translation.

1. Introduction

Stories also evolve by adaptation and are not immutable over time.
Linda Hutcheon

[Dickens] *could do brilliantly one or two of the things that few of us can do at all – like write prose that actually improves when read aloud. But he couldn't do at all most of the things that most of us do.*

Since 2001, Cannes has awarded a prize called the *Palm Dog* to real or animated dogs that have taken part in films (cf. Lawrence, 2015, p. 116). According to Michael Lawrence, canine actors have been gaining popularity since the beginning of the 19th century, in European and North American film and theatre productions, due to the growing favouritism for animals (cf. Lawrence, 2015, p. 116) on the part of an audience that, as we will try to argue, wants to see their canine characters acted, subjectivised and in the limelight.

Before analysing the case of the Bull's-eye dog in Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1838) and its audiovisual adaptations, it is necessary to place it in the broader context of animality in the Dickensian novel and its adaptive fortune. In “Bull's-eye, agency and the species divide in *Oliver Twist*: a cur's-eye view”, Jennifer McDonell emphasises the common condition of non-human animals and the disadvantaged like Oliver in *Oliver Twist*:

Stray children and women, like dogs, are shown in the novel to be equally vulnerable to violation by others: they are subjected to various forms of imprisonment, bodily harm, and death without recourse to social justice, and have a particular interest in food. (McDonell, 2017, p. 110)

The author draws on Giorgio Agamben's notion of *bare life*, a life of struggle for survival in a state of deprivation, civilisational exclusion and disposability, to characterise Oliver's gang, a part of the Victorian London population whose life constitutes an effect of the industrial revolution:

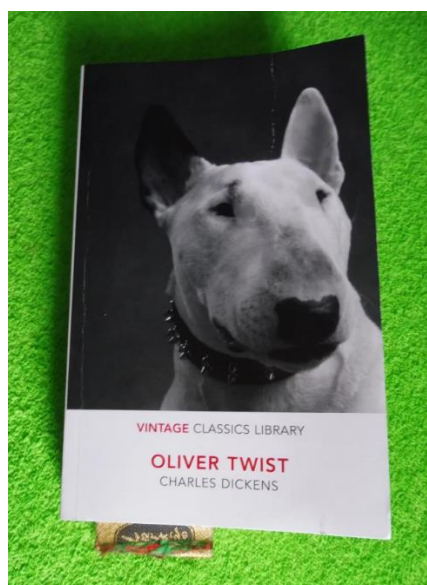
Not simply natural reproductive life, the *zoe* of the Greeks, nor *bios*, a qualified form of life. It is, rather, the bare life of *homo sacer* and the *wargus*, a zone of indistinction and continuous transition between man and beast, nature and culture. (Agamben, 1998, p. 109)

McDonell recalls that, for the Italian philosopher, this condition establishes a zone of indistinction between man and beast (cf. McDonell, 2017, p. 110). With this destabilisation of the cultural hierarchy between the thief Bill Sikes' companion animal and the protagonist, Bull's-eye takes centre stage in the *fable*, aka story or content plane (cf. Chatman, 1978, p. 146), to the extent that there are already two covers of the work on the market featuring the bull terrier, as we can see in Figure 1. McDonell also observes

that the revenge-hungry mob that pursues Sikes in the novel equals the villain in bestiality as described by Dickens: “the people jumping up, one behind another, and snarling with their teeth and making at him” (Dickens, 1994, p. 471). The author interprets human bestialisation in Dickens' rhetoric as a correlate of the humanisation of animals, tropes that highlight the disadvantaged condition of human people and animals (cf. McDonell, 2017, p. 117). Bearing in mind that the main characters in this novel, despite being British, are excluded from imperial power, this article will understand the notion of bestialisation in the light of Frantz Fanon:

The Negro is an animal. The Jew is damned. Fanaticism is a weapon of choice for both... In the colonial world, the colonized is seen as being bestial and subhuman. The colonizer reduces him to that status in order to justify his oppression. (Fanon, 2008, p. 114)

Figure 1. Cover of *Oliver Twist*, Vintage Classics Library, 2016.



2. Development

In terms of Dickensian *discourse* or expression plane (cf. Chatman, 1978, p. 146), it should be noted that *Oliver Twist* uses the animal metaphor to characterise villains that is so emblematic of the author's prose, if not of the Victorian novel as a genre. The Jew Fagin, for example, is likened to a reptile, dog and rat:

As he glided stealthily along, creeping beneath the shelter of the walls and doorways, the hideous old man seemed like some loathsome reptile, engendered in the slime and darkness through which he moved: crawling forth, by night. (Dickens, 1994, p. 168)

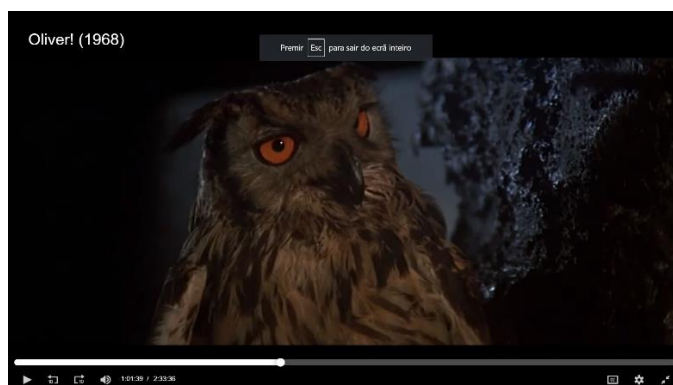
He disclosed among his toothless gums a few such fangs as should have been a dog's or rat's. (Dickens, 1994, p. 437)

It should be noted how ideologically dangerous this 19th-century bestialisation of a Jewish character will become in the context of the Second World War. Analysing the stylistics of the entire Dickensian work, Pablo Ruano observes how *dicendi* verbs typical of animal sounds characterise the male villains, their inherent bestiality helping to exaggerate their evil in the context of a hyperbolic characterisation regime to which the author has become accustomed (cf. Ruano, 2018). Ruano uses the verb “growl” eight times to refer to Bill Sikes’ words (cf. Ruano, 2018, p. 485), so we can conclude that the Romanesque thief not only begins by finding his metonymy in Bull’s-eye, as I will try to demonstrate, but is also metaphorised as an irrational animal.

Since metaphor is a difficult trope to recreate in the code of narrative cinema, it is particularly clever that Carol Reed’s musical *Oliver!* (1968) and the 2007 BBC television adaptation chalk up animal metonyms to function as Fagin’s doppelgangers, in a gesture of searching for equivalences (cf. Hutcheon, 2006, p. 10) that can be considered an operation of intersemiotic translation (cf. Jakobson, 2000). After all, Dickens himself confesses to having drunk from pictorial art in order to get to know the Victorian *bas fond*, so it is only fair that the audiovisual adaptations use icons to translate the Dickensian style: “I had never met (except in Hogarth) with the miserable reality” (Dickens, 1841, n.p.).

The musical introduces an animal figure not present in the novel to allegorise a character: Fagin’s owl, an animal with much more positive characteristics than a reptile, which can be seen in Figure 2. The nocturnal bird signifies the secret that the recipient of the stolen goods is withholding, a trove of treasures that he doesn’t share with Sikes, and which he keeps hidden from the children, in order to support him during his retirement. In the 2007 television adaptation for the BBC, an animal absent from the novel was also introduced to act as Fagin’s interlocutor in his moments of solitude: a crow called Ezekiel. The name given to the creature is intended to signal Fagin’s Judaism, which in this miniseries is barely mentioned and not very well summed up in the characterisation of actor Timothy Spall. The role of prophet associated with the name and the symbolism of the raven foreshadow the tragic fate of the character. The introduction of an owl and a raven as interlocutors in these two adaptations is justified by the need for the film medium to directly depict the characters through their lines, since it is prevented from doing so indirectly through the latitude of Romanesque discourse enjoyed by the literary narrator.

Figure 2. Photogram of the film *Oliver!*, by Carol Reed (1968)



In the novel, Bull's-eye, which Jennifer McDonell considers to be the best known of the Dickensian animals (cf. McDonell, 2017, p. 112), is only referred to four times by name, a number that reveals the unsentimentalised register in which he is described: “Bull's Eye, unlike the impossibly pure Oliver, is a determinedly unsentimental figure” (McDonell, 2017, p. 112). This is not, however, evidence of the lack of singularity and dehumanisation to which the character of the villain Fagin is subjected, who is often referred to by Dickens simply as “the Jew”, with a capital letter, in a choice that betrays some antisemitism. In Jennifer McDonell's opinion, “Bull's-eye ...is sympathetically portrayed because he shares with the novel's orphaned children the depredations of *bare life*” (McDonell, 2017, p. 112). In fact, the canine's specifically animal movements are described in such a way as to elicit empathy, such as the rare moment when his owner summons him with an affectionate term: “Bull's-eye wagged his tail in acknowledgment of this unusually endearing form of speech” (Dickens, 1994, p. 136). It is these sparse but vivid passages that justify Beryl Gray's judgement of the existence of a “closely watched but economically described cycle of alert canine responsiveness” in the novel *Oliver Twist* (Gray, 2014, p. 107).

To summarise the intervention of the canine in the Dickensian novel, Bull's-eye appears for the first time *in media res* of Oliver's story, in chapter 13, at the feet of his owner, the alcoholic and violent Bill Sikes: “a white shaggy dog, with his face scratched and torn in twenty different places, skulked into the room” (Dickens, 1994, p. 77). The definition of the bull terrier breed, a cross between a pit-bull and a terrier to combine ferocity with obedience, does not appear in the Dickensian text, but was fixed by George Cruikshank's illustrations, and subsequently adopted by the majority of film and television adaptations, within contemporary possibilities: “the influences we may find on all filmic adaptations of the Victorian novel must necessarily take into account other visual and verbal representations of the novel, be it the theatrical adaptations, be it the illustrations” (Pereira, 2009, p. 4). As Jennifer McDonell observes, the Victorian breed no longer exists, so audiovisual productions use its equivalent, an American Bull Terrier (cf. McDonell, 2017, p. 116). The novel immediately establishes that the canine is obedient, trained, threatened, insulted and mistreated: “this command was accompanied with a kick, which sent the animal to the other end of the room. He appeared well used to it” (Dickens, 1994, p. 77). His loyalty is boasted by the Artful Dodger: “he wouldn't so much as bark in a witness-box... not if you tied him up in one, and left him there without wittles for a fortnight” (Dickens, 1994, p. 162). Bull's-eye follows his owner everywhere with great loyalty, which becomes a problem when Sikes is wanted by the police. Fearing being identified by his canine companion, Sikes tries to drown Bull's-eye in a lake before fleeing London by tying a boulder around his neck, as can be seen in figure 3. Sensing that his life is at risk, Bull's-eye refuses for the first time to obey and runs away: “the dog, however, resists and escapes, largely on the strength of his canine instinct and ability to accurately read human expression and affect” (McDonell, 2017, p. 119). The canine returns only to witness his owner's death by falling from a building in an attempt to escape police pursuit. Unable to live without his owner, in a co-dependency very characteristic of abusive relationships (cf. McDonell, 2017, p. 119), Bull's Eye also jumps from the building to his death, through a vivid description of his destruction: “jumped for the dead

man's shoulders. Missing his aim, he fell into the ditch, turning completely over as he went; and striking his head against a stone, dashed out his brains” (Dickens, 1994, p. 347). According to Beryl Gray, author of *The dog in dickensian imagination*, the details of Bull's-eye's death recall those of the murder of Nancy Sikes, which is why some adaptations replace the attempted murder of Bull's-eye with the crime against Bill Sikes' companion.

Figure 3. An illustration of *Oliver Twist* by George Cruikshank.



Sikes attempting to destroy his dog.

Since it is impossible to go into all the film and television rewrites of the orphan's story, I will focus on those that have had the greatest critical fortune, ordered more or less chronologically, in order to emphasise the originality of the adaptation solutions in relation to the canine figure, an originality that has often made a name for itself in the history of audiovisual adaptations.

In the 1922 silent adaptation, a feature film starring the excellent child actor Jackie Coogan, Sikes' dog rebels against Nancy's murder, barking and clawing at the door to try to stop the violence, as can be seen in Figure 4, whereas in the novel he just shrinks back. The same will happen in the film directed by David Lean in 1948, as can be seen in Figure 5, and in the 1982 television film. It seems that the adapters, unlike Dickens, felt it impossible for the canine not to express his empathy with his master's companion by rebelling against the lethal violence to which she is subjected. However, the two adapters remain faithful to the spirit of the novel by expressing the affection that the pet harbours for Nancy: “Bull's-eye is metonymically linked to the battered prostitute” (McDonell, 2017, p. 112). Like Linda Hutcheon, in the exercise of “creative reinterpretation and

palimpsestic intertextuality” (Hutcheon, 2011, p. 47) that constitutes adaptation, I value “fidelity to the imagination – rather than obvious fidelity to reality” (Hutcheon, 2011, p. 55). The adapters' strategy is simply to exponentiate the animal's level of agency. The agency of Bull's-eye was not, however, absent from the novel. In the words of Jennifer McDonell:

Bull's-eye is invested with a form of social agency-albeit in uneven and unstable alliance with humans-which, significantly, is denied to the putative hero of the novel, Oliver, to whom things simply seem to happen without his ever having to make them happen. (McDonell, 2017, p. 113)

If the novel adopts a bourgeois ideology and bonhomie by justifying Oliver's inexorable goodness and good manners through his haute bourgeois origins (cf. Pereira, 2009, p. 7), these adaptations continue this worldview by dramatising the pet's revolt against the murder of a character dear to him. This addition helps to consolidate the moralising tone that Dickens himself wanted to imprint on his fable: “when I wrote this book, why... should [it] not serve the purpose of a moral” (Dickens, 1985, p. 33).

Figures 4 and 5. Photograms of the film *Oliver Twist* by Lon Chaney (1922) and the one by David Lean (1948).



However, in the silent film, Bull's-eye remains loyal to the villain by committing suicide when Bill Sykes mistakenly hangs himself using ropes to escape the police from the rooftops of London, in a similar way to the novel, as can be seen in Figure 6. The film

directed by Frank Lloyd is the only adaptation to include and dramatise the canine's suicide, although it is limited to Bull's-eye's leap from the roof from which Sykes hangs himself immediately after his master's fall, whereas in the novel the dog's suicide is more violent and visceral, with the pet finally immolating himself against a rock. Jennifer McDonell roots the Dickensian scene in the melodramatic Victorian theatre genre of *dog drama*, “in which trained dogs frequently played a crucial part in the play's action by diving into tanks of water to rescue drowning children or by attacking murderers and villains” (McDonell, 2017, pp. 113–114). The obsolescence of Bull's-eye's suicide in terms of adaptations can thus be explained by the outmoded nature of its intersemiotic inspiration. If Dickens sought to captivate Victorian readers by cross-pollinating popular media and genres, it is only fair that 20th and 21st century adaptors take creative liberties to meet their audiences' vision of animals: “it is as if Bull's-eye's highly stylised death had been conceived for the stage, as a parody of moralistic Victorian stories about dogs remaining loyal to their masters even after death” (McDonell, 2017, p. 120). It is also clear from the history of adaptations that audiences are increasingly less inclined to watch animal cruelty. In the words of Donna J. Haraway, 21st century audiences champion “the relief of suffering as the core human obligation to animals” (Haraway, 2003, p. 54).

Figure 6. Photogram of Lon Chaney's *Oliver Twist* (1922)



David Lean's 1948 adaptation is the first to capitalise on the scene in the novel in which the villain Sikes, being sought out as a figure accompanied by a dog, tries to drown the canine for fear that his companion will identify him, as can be seen in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Photogram of David Lean's *Oliver Twist* (1948).



In Lean's film, as in Walt Disney's 1997 TV adaptation and Alan Bleasdale's 1999 ITV dramatisation, it is Bull's-eye who leads the police and the crowd of vigilantes to the hideout of Sikes, Fagin and the child criminals, as can be seen in Figure 8. However, in Lean's film, the reason for Bull's-eye turning on his owner is that he realised that the latter was trying to kill him, whereas in the Walt Disney film, it's that he witnessed Nancy's murder, a solution that this film inherits from the musical *Oliver!* directed by Carol Reed in 1968.

Figure 8. Photogram of the film *Oliver Twist*, by Alan Bleasdale for Walt Disney (1999).



Oliver! is not a direct adaptation of the novel but of the Broadway musical, therefore an adaptation of an adaptation or, in the words of Linda Hutcheon, part of the “inherently ‘palimpsestuous’ works” (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 6), which involves a geneological change (cf. Hutcheon, 2006, p. 29). The dog has been extensively made up to look neglected and mistreated, just like in the 2007 BBC adaptation. Functioning, as in the novel, as an extension of Bill Sikes, the canine does not display the truculence and aggression of his

owner in this film, in order to arouse in the viewer of the 1960s the same feelings that Dickens sought to arouse in Victorian readers, a sameness that implies a difference in resources: “Dickens refrains from presenting him as in any way lovable, yet he engages the reader's sympathies” (Gray, 2014, p. 101).

Figure 9. Photogram of *Oliver!* (1968)



In the musical *Oliver!*, it is also after Sikes murders Nancy that Bull's-eye stops identifying with his owner and refuses for the first time to obey his orders, an invention in the film that would become a school of adaptations, eliminating the dog's attempted murder by his owner: “when animals resist, their very resistance seems to operate as a vector of agency” (Despret, 2013, p. 41). In Reed's film, as in the 1999 ITV television production, the canine appears guilty and disapproving after witnessing Nancy's murder, as can be seen in Figure 9, giving it an agency that is philosophically controversial as to whether, and to what extent, non-human animals possess it.

In this regard, the brilliant study by Vinciane Despret will be operative. She begins by noting that the concept of agency, classically understood as intentional, rational and premeditated, suffers from humanist and Christian worldviews that promote human exceptionalism by erasing the perspective of non-human animals (cf. Despret, 2013, p. 30). In her review of the *Animal studies* literature, Despret concludes that, correlatively, it is enough to adopt the point of view of a particular species in order to consider it to have agency (cf. Despret, 2013, p. 30). Safeguarding that taking a subject position does not necessarily mean functioning as an agent (cf. Despret, 2013, p. 33), not least because you can be an agent without being a subject (cf. Despret, 2013, p. 39), Despret uses Deleuze and Guattari to create a notion of agency that includes animals (and even some plants): “an *agencement* is a rapport of forces that makes some beings capable of making other beings capable” (Despret, 2013, p. 38). By a Deleuzian relation of force, she means what happens to each living being that is perceived, and thus makes others capable of affecting and being affected. Therefore, “inciting, provoking, producing, inducing, arousing, sparking, evoking, instigating, engaging, inspiring, and [reacting] are examples of active affects inside an *agencement*” (Despret, 2013, p. 38). According to Despret, all agency is relational: “there is no agency that is not interagency” (Despret, 2013, p. 44).

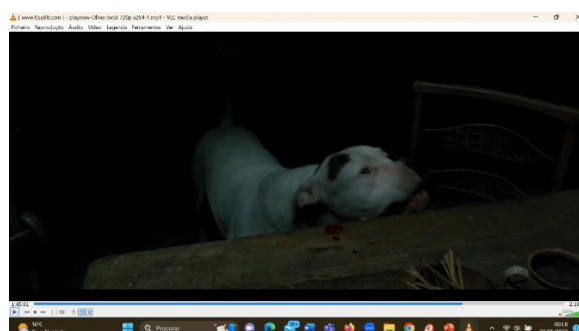
Following this theory, Bull's-eye's behaviour towards Sikes, as described in such detail in the novel, endows the creature with more-than-human agency: “any attempt to take seriously a ‘more-than-human’ agency must begin with the recognition that nature and animals are not passive in relation to humans” (McDonell, 2017, p. 121).

In *Oliver Twist*, the adaptation directed by Roman Polanski in 2005, we see the corollary of the concept of agency for non-human animals, since it is Bull's-eye, after being very visibly mistreated by his owner during the film, who takes revenge on his owner by precipitating his death. If, in the novel, the villain Bill Sikes still spends more than a page tormented by his homicidal act, stumbling to his death by accidental hanging because he is distracted by a vision of Nancy's bulging eyes during the strangulation, in Polanski's film, Sikes is a flatter villain with no remorse, who, in a scene completely absent from the novel, meets his death by being distracted by the barking of the dog that returns after having run away because it realised that its owner was trying to kill it: “agency... clearly appears as the capacity not only to make others do things, but to incite, inspire, or ask them to do things” (Despret, 2013, p. 40). By dramatising the episode in which Sikes tries to kill his pet, Polanski's film is once again faithful to the novel, after several adaptations that place the motive for the dog's revolt in the witnessing of Nancy's murder. There is a small basis in the novel for Polanski's reinvention of this episode:

dogs are not generally apt to revenge injuries inflicted upon them by their masters; but Mr Sikes's dog, having faults of temper in common with his owner, and labouring, perhaps, at this moment, under a powerful sense of injury: made no more ado but at once fixed his teeth in one of the half-boots. (Dickens, 1994, p. 128)

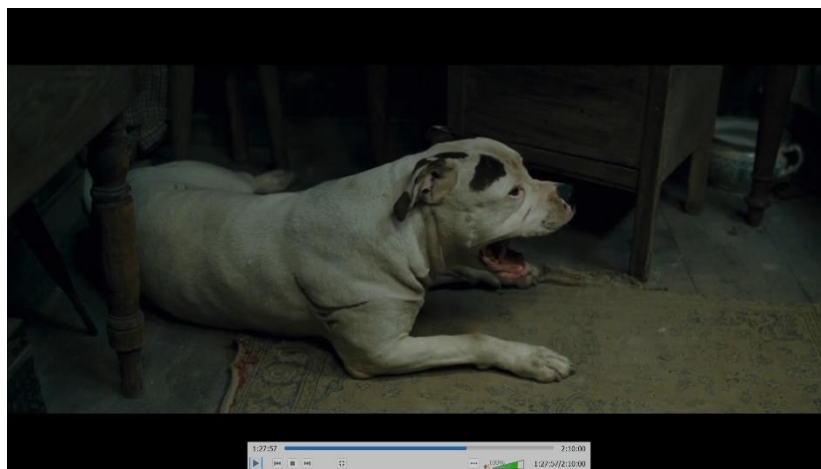
As Jennifer McDonell historicises, this episode comes from the Victorian worldview according to which dogs were by nature stoic, but could be provoked to violence by certain circumstances (cf. McDonell, 2017, p. 118). By taking poetic license, Polanski's adaptation fills out the verbal gap articulated by Donna J. Haraway: “we need other nouns and pronouns for the kin genres of companion species, just as we did (and still do) for the spectrum of genders” (Haraway, 2003, p. 96). The new language created by Polanski to revenge Bull's Eye has therefore a foundation in the novel itself, as can be seen on Figure 10.

Figure 10. Photogram of Polanski's *Oliver Twist* (2005) at the moment of Nancy's murder.



As Jennifer McDonell observes, as a criminal's companion animal, Bull's-eye is excluded from the symbolic order of the Victorian economy, functioning as the symbol of a kind of what I would call the Marxist *lumpen*: “Bull's-eye is better understood as a working dog in a novel in which almost no one has a meaningful relation to social production” (McDonell, 2017, p. 118). I suggest that Polanski saw in this *lumpen* dog a revolutionary potential to take justice into his own hands through direct action in the face of his exclusion from institutions, and even their inoperability, from a Dickensian perspective. Polanski uses a novelistic basis to transform Bull's-eye into a vigilante, since Dickens portrays him as a creature whose propensity for violence is merely a reaction to his owner's abusive treatment (cf. McDonell, 2017, p. 118): “as an animal victim, the character of Bull's-eye draws attention to the precarious existence of animals in the city, and brings into focus not only the suffering experienced by creatures caught deep within scenes of exploitation” (McDonell, 2017, p. 122). On the other hand, Polanski's poetic licence can be seen as an emancipation of the canine from domestication, the civilisational contract having ended when Sikes attempts on the animal's life, as can be seen on Figure 11: “the differences in aesthetic structure make the search for equivalents an even more delicate matter, and thus they require all the more power of invention and imagination from the film-maker who is truly attempting a resemblance” (Bazin, 2005, p. 67).

Figure 11. Photogram of Polanski's film (2005).



3. Conclusion

To conclude, the history of film and television adaptations of *Oliver Twist* introduces scenes and actions that are absent from the Victorian novel in the sense of a progressive increase in the dog's protagonism and a progressive endowment of Bull's-eye with agency. The companion animal even shows feelings such as disapproval, obstinacy, justice and revenge. This range is not present in the novel, but the authorial intention is well transposed to times when the vision of the non-human animal is more complex: “it is perhaps true that the dog is not too well drawn, but it is nevertheless marvelously expressive of cringingly defiant intuition” (Gray, 2014, p. 112). The reason for this evolution is the difference in the ideological circumstances of the production of the

orphan story from the Victorian era to the 21st century. In Victorian legislation, as far as we can read in the novel, “the government... lets a man kill his dog as he likes” (Dickens, 1994, p. 129). From the Victorian novel to Polanski's 2005 film, there has been a growing sensitivity to the qualities and capabilities of companion species, as well as a recognition that they are capable of experiencing emotions almost as complex as those of humans: “the attempt to take into account the point of view of animals has coincided with a political agenda: to credit animals with interests, will, preferences, and intentions that should be taken into account” (Despret, 2013, p. 30). Such is the contemporary affection for companion animals that the 2007 television adaptation has Oliver sleeping attached to the dog with whom he shares the leftovers in the house of the undertaker who buys the child as an apprentice, this being the only element in the house that offers any comfort to the protagonist. This BBC invention is a sign of the growing appreciation of domestic animals by audiences through history.

In conclusion, the history of audiovisual adaptations of *Oliver Twist* is an example of a progression from the novel's iconophobic and hyper-reverent preoccupation with fidelity towards a preoccupation with authorial intention reconfigured for the ideology of the coeval audience, passing through interesting moments of importing cinematographic and television solutions that create their own historical audiovisual tradition. Although Dickens is a classic author, preconceptions of iconophobia and logophilia (cf. Stam, 2005, pp. 5-6) become less and less prevalent throughout the adaptations as time creates an adaptive canon and accustoms the viewer to the audiovisual transcoding of Dickens. These adaptations find ingenious visual solutions to transpose a source text that was itself a mixed medium of illustration and text based on paintings and theatrical genres:

...the image/text problem is not just something constructed “between” the arts, the media, or different forms of representation, but an unavoidable issue *within* the individual arts and media. In short, all arts are “composite” arts (both text and image); all media are mixed media, combining different codes, discursive conventions, channels, sensory and cognitive modes. (Mitchell, 1994, pp. 94–95)

What the story of adaptations does is shrewdly and economically use the figure of Bull's-eye to externalise and dramatise what was being *told* (cf. Chatman, 1978, p. 32) in the novel. In this respect, Fagin's owl and raven in the adaptations are nothing more than metonymies of the owner, while even Bulls-eye in the novel, although he begins by functioning as an avatar of the owner in his truculence, breaks this metonymic pact by running away from Sikes when the latter tries to drown him, returning to him for his final suicide. The more-than-human agency, subjectivity and protagonism that the bull terrier gains in the audiovisual adaptations further emancipates him from this metonymic order. The Dickensian intention to moralise and the Victorian function of eliciting empathy are thus transposed to the ideology of 20th and 21st century audiences: “like biological adaptation, cultural adaptation involves migration to favourable conditions” (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 31). This ideology proves to be increasingly less speciesist: “speciesism [is] a form of favouritism for our own that is as unjustifiable as racism” (Singer, 2007, p. 15). Thus, the progressive emancipation from domestication of Bull's-eye in audiovisual adaptations results in a domestication of the source text, in that it makes it more familiar

to the sensitivity of the audience. The audiovisual history of *Oliver Twist* is therefore an example of cinema about cinema, that is, of self-reflexive adaptations that gloss over the history of cinema and the ideology of its audiences more than the letter and ideology of the source literature.

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