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FLEABAG AND BLANCHE: HOW MEDIA DEVICES INTERFERE IN THE CHARACTER-VIEWER RELATIONSHIP

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ABSTRACT: This work aims to investigate the relationship between two characters from stories presented in different media: the unnamed woman from the limited series *Fleabag* (Waller-Bridge, 2016-2019) and Blanche, the main character from the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Williams, 1947). Both works introduce as main characters women who experience difficulties navigating their lives through social expectations and norms, trauma, and sexuality, with their respective sisters and brothers-in-law playing important roles in their storylines. The similarities between the play and the TV show suggest that they might be read as adaptations of one another, even though the creator of Fleabag has not made such a claim. Having established the connection between these two texts, this article attempts to understand how the different devices of each medium (Rajewski, 2010) might influence the public's perception of these characters. The claim is that the main character of *Fleabag*, due to the serialization of a TV show narrative (Mittel, 2015), can establish a deeper relationship with her viewer, despite the similarities between her story and that of Blanche.

Keywords: Adaptation; Blanche Dubois; Fleabag; intermediality; media devices.

FLEABAG AND BLANCHE: COMO DISPOSITIVOS DE MÍDIA INTERFEREM NA RELAÇÃO ENTRE PERSONAGEM E AUDIÊNCIA

RESUMO: Este trabalho tem como objetivo investigar a relação entre duas personagens de histórias apresentadas em diferentes mídias: a mulher inominada da minissérie *Fleabag* (Waller-Bridge, 2016-2019) e Blanche, a personagem principal da peça *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Williams, 1947). Ambas as obras apresentam como personagens principais mulheres que vivenciam dificuldades em navegar suas vidas em meio a expectativas e normas sociais, traumas e sexualidade, tendo suas respectivas irmãs e cunhados como elementos importantes em suas narrativas. As semelhanças entre a peça e a série de TV apontam para a possibilidade de que elas possam ser lidas como adaptações uma da outra, embora a criadora de Fleabag não tenha afirmado tal relação. Tendo estabelecido a conexão entre esses dois textos, este artigo busca compreender como diferentes dispositivos de mídia (Rajewski, 2010) podem influenciar a percepção do público sobre essas personagens. A hipótese é que a personagem principal de *Fleabag*, devido à serialização da narrativa televisiva (Mittel, 2015), pode estabelecer uma relação mais profunda com seu espectador, apesar de sua história se assemelhar à de Blanche.

Palavras-chave: Adaptação; Blanche Dubois; dispositivos de mídia; Fleabag; intermidialidade.

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Introduction

It would be no exaggeration to describe the appearance of *Fleabag*, a 2016 British television show, as a phenomenon. Its two seasons were critically acclaimed[2] and praised by the public, and its accurate depiction of the difficulties of navigating a woman's life through societal expectations, patriarchy, and trauma has already been defined as a masterpiece and a future classic (Friendly Space Ninja, 2021). Concerning its genesis, the show has often been referred to as an adaptation of a theater monologue of the same name, written by the same author, Phoebe Waller-Bridge. This one-woman play premiered in the 2013 Edinburgh Festival Fringe, and, as its successor, enjoyed a great critical response. However, whereas the theater monologue is the obvious work to which the show can be related, there is another work, also from the drama field, that seems to be deeply connected to the show's characters and story development, if we consider the relationship established between Fleabag[3], her sister Claire, and her brother-in-law Martin. *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), a play by Tennessee Williams, also portrays a triangular relationship involving Blanche DuBois, a Southern Belle in decay, her sister Stella, and her brother-in-law Stanley.

In both works, the women at the center, Fleabag and Blanche, find themselves on the verge of collapsing when their lives and themselves seem to be falling apart, and their acts may condemn them as simply bad people. They lie, pretend, hurt, and are critical of others, leading their close ones to disbelieve, dismiss, and even reject them. However, while Fleabag is a character that is loved and celebrated, and to whom the audience feels closely attached despite her actions and personality, Blanche's reading seems much more ambiguous. Her position appears to evoke more pity than understanding when dealing with the same issues as Fleabag. This distinction seems to highlight the necessity of analyzing how these two stories are being told, which inevitably must include an intermedial analysis. The hypothesis raised by this paper is that the different responses to Fleabag and Blanche can be attributed to how they are presented to and interact with their readers/audiences in each medium, specifically the theater and television.

During the discussion, although I am aware of and recognize the relationship between the monologue *Fleabag* (2013) and the series, the understanding of intermediality raised by Rajewski's "Border talks" (2010) seems to provide fair support to the analysis being developed here. The category of "intermediality in the narrower sense of medial transposition", as the author has called it, seems broad enough to compress both the relationship of adaptation in its more conventional sense, as we have between the monologue and the TV series, and the relationship between the TV series and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In both cases, we can consider a transformation from one media configuration to another, and, in my analysis, I aim to demonstrate why it is suitable in this particular case. I am also aware that both works could be analyzed in terms of their own configurations as being plurimedial works. Still, this

[2] Fleabag – Awards & Nominations: https://www.emmys.com/shows/fleabag.
[3] The main character of Fleabag is never named or alluded to by her name in the series, but for a matter of convention this character will also be regarded as Fleabag in this text.

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discussion feels collateral to the movement of looking simultaneously at the TV series and the play. I will discuss the possibilities of each medium to deal with the issues that approximate the stories of Fleabag and Blanche.

1. Theoretical background

At the core of this paper, however diverting the idea of claiming a different source text for a known adaptation of something else may be, there is a question of how media influences our interaction with a story. It is known that on many occasions an adaptation, either a resumed version of a book or a reinvention of a text through film, is used not simply to create a new work, which is given, but also to achieve a different public or to bring back past readers and audience. The format is, therefore, as crucial as the story being told.

In "Border talks" (2010), Irina Rajewsky, while addressing the debate of media borders, reintroduces her categorization of three different types of intermediality: media transposition, media combination, and intermedial references. The first one refers to the, maybe, most popular phenomenon of intermediality, that of media transformation, which encompasses, for example, a book adapted into a movie; the second one refers to media that are multimedia, mixed-media, or intermedia themselves, such as theater and film; the third one relates to the phenomena of one medium referring to another. The first category is especially relevant to the analysis of the relationship established between *Fleabag* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Yet, we might also discuss a possible construction of media reference, the third category, within the TV series.

In his book *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (2015), Jason Mittel focuses on a change in television storytelling that he identifies from the 1990s onward. According to the author, the book "is about this shift, exploring how television storytelling has changed and what cultural practices within television technology, industry, and viewership have enabled and encouraged these transformations" (2015, p. 2). A whole chapter of the book is dedicated to *character,* within which the matter of viewership gains considerable relevance. Investing in compelling characters appears to be a must for successful shows, especially in serialized narratives, where one must spend a significant amount of time with these characters. Interestingly, many of Fleabag's reviews from its first season center on its unnamed main protagonist, going so far as to disregard the show's plot and still recommend it. For Mittel, although sometimes overlooked, characters are a crucial narrative element for this model of TV, especially that:

> Television's character consistency is more than just an industrial convenience, as one of the primary ways that viewers engage with programming is to develop long-term relationships with characters. The term for such engagement dates back to early mass communications research in the 1950s: parasocial relationships. (...) they can instead be viewed as an active, participatory facet of media consumption, with fans choosing to engage with a media text and extend its reach into their own lives (Mittel, 2015, p. 127).

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The matter of a character's personality, whether it is a hero or an anti-hero, will not especially harm this bond if the character is done correctly and can still engage its viewership. A matter of how to access this relationship in a theater play is flagrantly more difficult, especially considering that the claim in this article is that of an adaptation of the play text. More specialized works on character theater, such as the chapter about it in *A personagem* (2009), by Décio de Almeida Prado, usually consider that the human in theater is crossed by "humanity itself, the living presence and actor's flesh" (Prado, 2009, p. 47)[4]. The character is, more often than not, discussed only in terms of performance, since it is the arriving point of these productions. Understanding, thus, the relationship Blanche establishes with her readers/audience will be supported partially through the character's reception within the execution of the play — however broad this approach might be —, and partially through the discussions of Peter Huhn and Roy Sommer (2011) on the narrativity of theater.

2. Comparative analysis

As established in the introduction, several elements point to the relationship between *Fleabag* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. On the surface, we have the triangular relationship, the assault and its aftermath, and the main protagonists' characteristics. In both stories, we are presented with a pair of sisters who navigate their lives in contrasting ways, as seen through the lens of achieving life success in their social contexts. The stories of Blanche and Fleabag depict both characters as hitting rock bottom and having to reach out for their respective sisters, materially and emotionally, as they find themselves in deeply vulnerable positions. Stanley and Martin, although with diametrically different representations, appear as opposing forces that influence the relationship between the protagonists and their respective sisters and are responsible for the assaults.

The points mentioned should be an accurate summary of *Fleabag*'s first season; it is not, however, of its second season, which arrives six years later. For this reason, I will be focusing my analysis primarily on Fleabag's first season, which follows the character of Fleabag from her introduction until the moment when, like Blanche at the end of the play, she feels left without options and support. The second season may eventually be mentioned, considering that part of it contains the delayed development of motifs that appear in both works, such as the sister's pregnancy; however, its story follows a Fleabag that Blanche could never be.

Moreover, in *Fleabag*'s first episode of its first season, we could argue that there is a distinct reference to *A Streetcar Named Desire*, which also sets the tone for the comparison. This refers to an event that is previous to the action of the play, and we only learn of it in Scene Six. Blanche has been fired from her position as a school teacher for having an affair with one of her students. In Fleabag's first episode, in one of her first scenes, she is on a bus reading a paper. We see her in an open shot, but the camera eventually moves to an angle where we can

[4] "do próprio homem, da presença viva e carnal do ator" — my translation.

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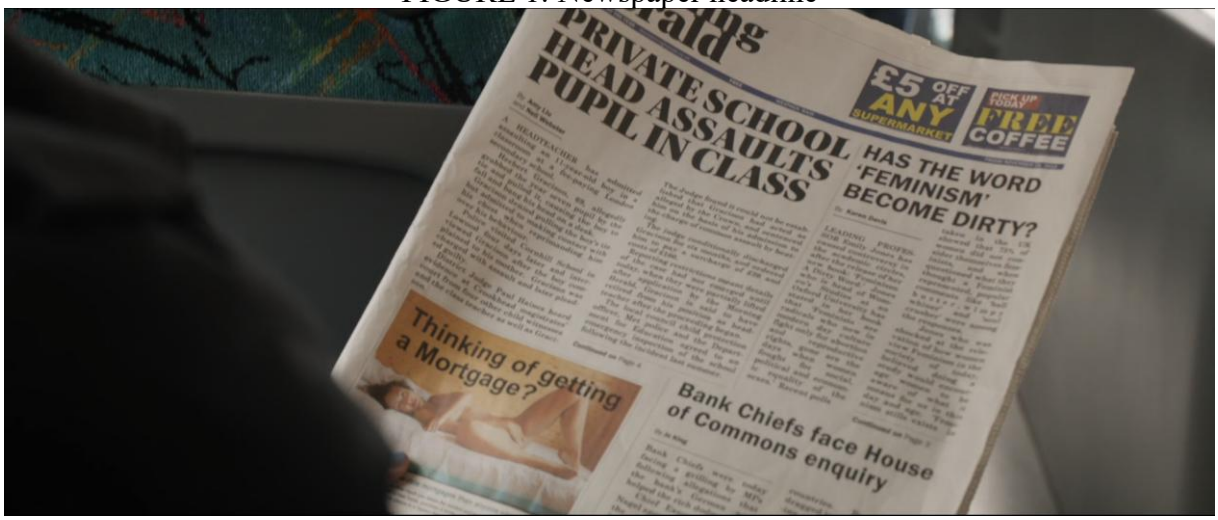
distinctly see the headline she was reading. This headline is surprisingly similar to what has just been retold about Blanche's past:

FIGURE 1: Newspaper headline



Source: Amazon Prime Video. Season 1. Episode 1.

Even if there are divergences between the text and Blanche's story, the context of strong similarities and paradoxical constructions between the two works reinforces that this is probably not an accident. The matter of sexuality and women's sexualization, which is thematized in this newspaper's page, is transversal for both works. They are stressed, of course, in diverse ways, considering the historical period of each production and the material possibilities each woman had access to in them. Both Blanche and Fleabag have a liberated sexual life that is looked down on by their prospective male partners, respectively, Mitch and Harry. These "nice guys" judge both woman for their unconventional exploration of sexuality, even though it might in part derive from emotional damage, as Blanche eventually states that "Yes, I had many intimacies with strangers. After the death of Allan — intimacies with strangers was all I seemed able to fill my empty heart with" (Williams, 1947, p. 118). Interestingly enough, both works refer to Lowood, the repressive school attended by the main protagonist of *Jane Eyre* (2013).

Now that the lens of the analysis has been presented, a basic understanding of the works should be established.

A Streetcar Named Desire begins with Blanche's arrival at Stella's apartment, where she intends to stay for an indefinite time: she is single, homeless, bankrupt, and unemployed. Still, because of her background and education, she looks down on her sister's life for marrying down in society, even though we could argue that Stella is still in a better position in their society, for she is a married woman who has a husband to provide for her. In the same sense, in the pilot episode of Fleabag, the protagonist is presented to us as a bankrupt woman who has an unstable relationship with her boyfriend Harry, and who is often put in comparison, even within her own family, to her sister Claire, who is rich, successful in her career, and supposedly

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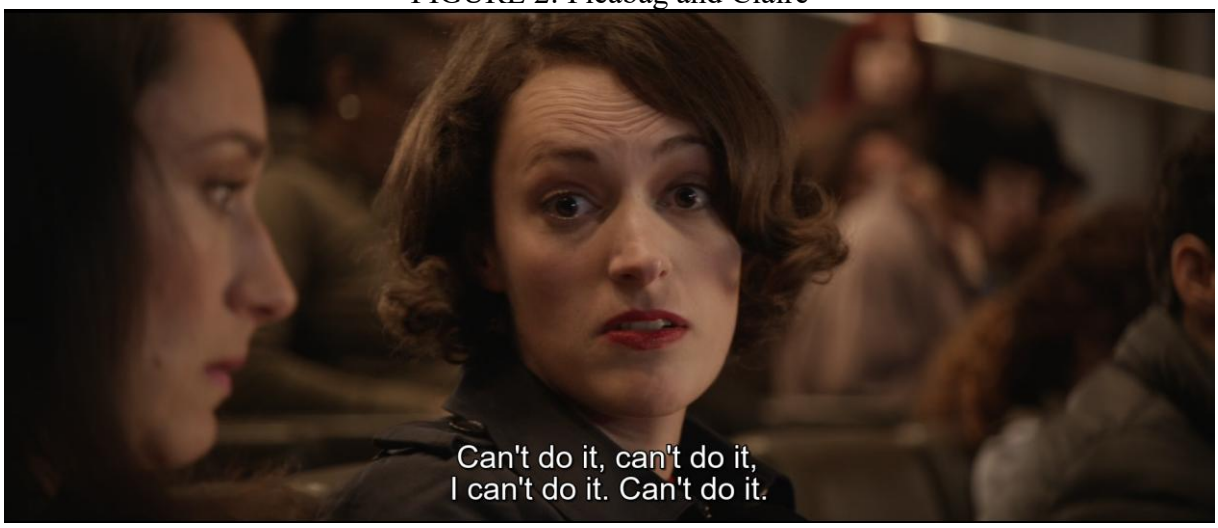
happy in her marriage. However, despite their situations, Blanche and Fleabag refuse to put themselves in the position of someone who needs help. While Blanche does it by never addressing this fact, even though she depends on her sister Stella for the entire play, Fleabag is incapable of asking Claire for financial assistance, as she confides to us, while reflecting upon her incapacity to do that:

FIGURE 2: Fleabag and Claire



Source: Amazon Prime Video. Season 1, Episode 1.

The fear of demonstrating that their lives have failed to meet social and family expectations leads Blanche and Fleabag to share a tendency for lying and denial behavior. When confronted with their respective sisters, these characteristics are often used against the protagonists, especially in the conflict involving their brothers-in-law. Although both sisters give indications that they know that Fleabag and Blanche do not lie about the cases of assault, both use their personalities as excuses to align with their husbands. In Stella's case, we could argue that the choice was as emotional as materially necessary; she is economically dependent on Stanley and is pregnant. In contrast, in Claire's situation, she is mostly emotionally dependent on Martin, since she is the house's breadwinner.

Due to the pressure Fleabag and Blanche suffer from others and themselves, these two characters are bound by a need for escapism, which is also linked to their loneliness and melancholia, their lack of love and self-love, the fear of aging and losing beauty, and their traumatic and unresting past. They both see the ruin of their family with the loss of their parents, and later have to cope with the guilt of being responsible for the death of people they loved: Blanche of her husband Allan and Fleabag of her best friend Boo.

These tragedies happen before the events of each story, but they are evident influences on how these two characters behave. The deep sorrow of their psyche feeds itself in guilt and mourning. In *Fleabag*, as will be discussed soon, it is easier for audiences to distinguish the impact of grieving, since this event has gained centrality in the show; in the play, however, especially considering that I am dealing mainly with the play text, it is necessary to remember

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it is expected to be performed and that its realization is often, and in this case in particular, a combination of media. In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, readers know that Blanche is mourning her loss and feeling guilty because her husband killed himself after she found out about his homosexuality and told him she despised him. And we know it not only because the characters allude to it but also for the recurrent stage directions for the use of the same music that played on the night of the suicide, the Varsouviana polka, and light choices. When reading the text, readers may not have the whole experience of a stage production, but given that this production will always be an interpretation of the text, I consider it a fair approach. In this case in particular, audiences have sometimes been misled, for instance, on the profound impact Allan's death had on Blanche (Phillips, 2015[5]). Still, the same polka is referred to in the stage directions in seven key moments, including when Mitch rejects Blanche and a blind Mexican woman appears selling flowers for the dead.

What may be misleading about Allan's importance is his offstage condition and the fact that both audience and readers must be deeply attentive to realize that the play score is a reference to him and his death. Boo, on the other hand, never seizes to be present in the TV show, in part due to the possibilities at the disposal of television construction, such as editing, mixing, quick transposition of image, and so on; and in part, as established, because concerning the story being told and how it is told, Boo's death is at the center. In the first season of *Fleabag*, the fact that our protagonist was the cause of the death of her best friend is the season's major plot twist. The fact that Fleabag was the woman Boo's boyfriend slept with is key information that is kept from the audience by the show and by Fleabag herself. When we think of Blanche's rape, this is the climax of the play, the main event that shapes everything and leads to Blanche's deeper detachment from reality. However, in *Fleabag*, the assault is not the event that shapes everything, but the revelation that the audience receives because of it. There is a change in perspective over the whole time spent with the character, since audiences were not only seeing her suffering the loss but also carrying this blame with her. She betrayed the only person who saw her for what she was and liked her anyway. In the first season, it feels as if the only moments Fleabag is truly happy are the flashbacks of her life with Boo, especially in the cafe that she now has to manage on her own.

[5] I accompany his reading of Allan as an unseen character, but Blanche's assessment as a former plantation owner who is anti-brutality could have been more problematized.

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FIGURE 3: Fleabag and Boo at the cafe

Source: Amazon Prime Video. Season 1, Episode 1.

Fleabag parades all her intimate moments — being in a toilet, having sex, masturbating — but keeps out the one mistake that she probably sees as defining the person she really is. In episode four, in a silent retreat, she has an "unintentional" flashback when asked to close her eyes and think of a past moment she cannot let go of. A flashback of a person opening a man's jeans starts; however, it is cut almost immediately, and she looks at the audience to say "Not for now" (Fleabag…, 2016, ep. 4).

A TV series combines, just as a play, choices of music and light that will impact how we perceive the story being told, but one resource that is unique to television is how different scenes can be easily sewn together. In *Fleabag*, this is essential to our attachment both to our protagonist and to her pain, since every time she remembers her friend, we also remember her and see this memory in front of us from Fleabag's perspective. After spending some time with the audience, with a look, a smile, a nod, or other resources that Mittel (2015) calls exterior markers, it is already possible for us to infer Fleabags states of mind. We must not be naive to think that Boo could be a perfect person all the time, but the fact that we access everything from Fleabag's perspective impacts our emotional response and places us side by side with her. If we think of a scene Fleabag shares with her father in the last episode of the first season, this becomes quite clear. Fleabag does not like her stepmother and resents her father's quick engagement with this woman after her mother's death, as if he did not care about her mother at all. However, in this problematic yet moving scene, Fleabag's father makes her realize that he thinks of her mother with the frequency she thinks of Boo: all the time. After this description, it may seem obvious that he would miss his late wife and think about her, but as Fleabag had to ask for this information, we were also unsure until that moment. Or, at least, we had already established a grudge against that character.

In the same way, upon flashbacks, we access, through Fleabag's lens, Boo's elevated memory as the lovely and kind best friend Fleabag misses so much, and we feel for her loss. In visually representing grief, the series does an excellent job because, again, it has the possibility

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of showing us what it means to Fleabag wearing old jeans, seeing a pencil, or thinking of a subject or a quality. By the revelation of Fleabag's past mistake, we watch the character's despair and disorientation through an extrapolation of the flashback resource we had already been accustomed to during the whole season. Claire's confrontation starts a quick intercalation of Fleabag's desperate looks, images of heartbroken Boo, and their interactions with Boo's boyfriend. Narratively, the dark lights and close grilles of the underground room depict how the character feels trapped by the revelation and our gaze. She looks at the camera and she is speechless, because the viewers have access to something she had been hiding.

FIGURE 4: Flashback intercalation – Fleabag looks at the viewer

Source: Amazon Prime Video. Season 1, Episode 6.

FIGURE 5: Flashback intercalation – Fleabag and Boo

Source: Amazon Prime Video. Season 1, Episode 6.

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FIGURE 4: Flashback intercalation – Fleabag and Boo's boyfriend

Source: Amazon Prime Video. Season 1, Episode 6.

This moment also highlights, by the contrast of silence, the most remarkable resource that the series appropriates: the breaking of the fourth wall. This narrative device allows characters to break the agreement of fiction and interact with the audience, establishing a privileged relationship (Woods, 2019). This is a key element in how we respond to Fleabag's character, and that is absent in Blanche — we are Fleabag's confidants, maybe her only friends, and that implicates us in how she feels and what she experiences. According to Faye Woods, the precarious-girls shows, in which she includes Fleabag, "entangle audiences (whether willing or not) with their floundering female protagonists" (2019, p. 5) by welcoming us into the intimate parts of their lives. The serialization of TV narrative already implies that there is more time to sympathize with Fleabag, and to deepen the bond we have built with her. As Jason Mittel points out,

> Attachment is particularly important for serials, as spending time with characters encourages parasocial connections — the more time we spend with particular characters, the more we extend that time through hypothetical and paratextual engagement outside the moments of watching (Mittel, 2015, p. 130)

There are, throughout Fleabag's story, *interceding gaps* — the time we spent outside an episode — that allow the audience to keep engaging with the character even when they are not watching them. For Blanche, however, the relationship is less stretched in time, which gives the audience, upon the play's performance, only the time of development as the time to process the character and her actions, which might explain in part her mixed reception. The serialization of Fleabag's story guarantees that we will see her flaws and her sorrows in a continuous movement. This continuous movement, which crosses family dinners and one-night stands as well as ugly fights, makes us engage more with her since in serialized narratives, "we are particularly interested in what happens to the characters — how they develop relationships, how

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they cope with various obstacles week after week, season after season. (...) We may even come to know these characters better than our own coworker" (Porter et al., 2002, p. 1).

The character of Fleabag feels representative of people's own flaws, rather than representing the flaws of others, which are often so easily condemned. It is through Fleabag's perspective that we navigate the lives she interferes with, whereas in Blanche's case, her triangle with Stella and Stanley is less attached to one single perspective. In *A Streetcar Named Desire,* there are no voice-over throughout the play, so the actions are developed through the characters and their dialogue. When the virtual play is realized upon performance, all the secondary text that accompanies it becomes part of it, intradiagetically. It can be argued that the play text, as intended to be understood before being performed, has to tell its story to a reader who precedes the stage production. In this sense, in the play, the narrative could be seen as if from the point of view of an extradiegetic narrator[6]. Depending on the text, the influence of stage directions can restrict more or less the story to be told according to the choices made by the time it realizes itself, but to the reading of the text, they are part of the story. In the case of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, this stage orientations are written in a way that denotes a mediation voice, as seen in this description of the play's first scene: "The section is poor but, unlike corresponding sections in other American cities, it has a raffish charm" (Williams, 1947, p. 1).

This poetic description can be associated with William's concept of *plastic theater*, by which he was distancing himself from realism and investing more in symbolism and a construction of meaning that burst from the combination of all the tools available to a play. According to Richard E. Kramer, "his scenic descriptions draw on metaphors from the world of art and painting, and his use of sound and light is symbolic and evocative, not just realistic in its effects" (2002). Given his vision for theater and for how a play should be constructed, William ends up writing more literary stage directions.

The issue of the existence or non-existence of an extradiegetic narrator cannot be further deepened in this work. Still, regarding the proximity between a character and its readers/audience, in both cases, we are less implicated with Blanche's feelings. The breaking of the fourth wall or the monologue are narrative options available in theater, which are nevertheless absent in the play. This, I assume, is due to the emphasis of the play on the triangular relationship at its center, even though Blanche is easily distinguished as the play's protagonist: her appearance initiates all actions, her presence interferes in all dynamics, and the play's closure is her ending. It is not to say, of course, that there is no emotional response required by a character such as Blanche or a play such as *A Streetcar Named Desire*; it is only an unavoidable difference. In the play, we have stage directions that indicate the translation of Blanche's emotional state into the combination of different media that are part of theater, such as music, lighting (and shadow), scenery, etc. In this regard, Will Norman (2021) comments on how these choices are even incorporated by the characters, especially Blanche, in their own

[6] This is a point that has been greatly disputed in the discussion surrounding drama texts, to which in the *Handbook of Narratology* Peter Hühn and Roy Sommer (2011) briefly present both side arguments.

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choices during the play. As she fears appearing old by regular lights, Blanche acts to change her environment to this purpose, unveiling her fragilities: "I bought this adorable little colored paper lantern at a Chinese shop on Bourbon. Put it over the light bulb!" (Williams, 1947, p. 54).

These features, however, do not seem to be enough to raise a relationship beyond understanding and to reach the level of attachment we feel with Fleabag. In a letter to director Elia Kazan, Tennessee Williams states that what an audience should feel for Blanche is certainly pity (Williams *apud* Spector, 1989). However, as Kazan himself later discovered, not even that, upon performance, is guaranteed[7]. Without the narrative being shaped according to her perspective, as it is for Fleabag, it is not impossible for us to escape aligning ourselves with Blanche and to maintain a certain distance between her problematic self and our own. But Fleabag, as a show that is much "about the complexity of being human" (Friendly Space Ninja, 2021), implicates us with its protagonist's struggles and awkward moments. Following Faye Woods' (2009) reflection on the target demographic of Fleabag, I understand that I fit the profile of a white woman between 16 and 34 years of age, which can influence how I relate to this protagonist. However, I do not share many of Fleabag's worldviews and cultural references, being, for once, a Brazilian woman. I am nevertheless carried by the show to commune with the character precisely through the media devices used by the show to engage its audience. Separating our perspective from Fleabag's is not intuitive, but rather an effort against what the narrative expects of us.

Of course, much of the reception of the 1940s play is linked to Kazan's staging, and Philip Kolin (2000) points out that other directors have changed the imbalance between Stanley and Blanche in later productions. They have made her less cartoonish and, therefore, more relatable to audiences. According to Kolin:

> In revivals, Blanche and Stanley have evolved. In the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, Blanche has a repertoire of character traits far different from those available to Tandy, Hagen, or Leigh. Blanches have become funnier, less hysterical, and more resilient. In some revivals, too, Blanche and Stanley have exchanged roles as victims of power and agents of disempowerment. Stanley does not always triumph in revival (Kolin, 2000, p. 83).[8]

In the text play, we can pity Blanche until a certain point, and modern audiences, in general, will not overlook her assault, unlike some in the 1940s. However, we have fewer of her good qualities presented to us, which makes it harder to create a connection. We mostly see her struggle to find happiness in her relationship with Mitch and her instability when she arrives in Elysian Fields. She seems disconnected from everyone around her, and she is mean to her sister. She does not seem to see others aside from their negative traits, which she readily remarks

[7] In *Alternative Visions of Blanche DuBois: Uta Hagen and Jessica Tandy in A Streetcar Named Desire*, Susan Spector (1989) presents the imbalance of public sympathy between the characters of Stanley and Blanche when the play first premiered in 1947.

[8] The actress cited are responsible for the first stage and movie productions of the play, respectively for the first montage of the play, the national tour and the first movie adaptation.

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on. This does not diminish her suffering, but leaves her audience/readership without redeeming qualities to hold on to.

Fleabag, on the other hand, exhibits more of these redeeming qualities. Despite having a complicated relationship with her family, she is an attentive listener to everyone around her. Throughout the first season of the TV show, in many comic scenes, we see how Fleabag can predict the actions and words of her family members. In episode 4, she even places herself as the listener of a man, a bank manager, who has disregarded her in the first episode of the series and who has assaulted a co-worker. She understands the wish to fix past mistakes and how hard it can be to move on. In the last episode of season one, this man will return to Fleabag in her lowest moment, when she seems to be having suicidal thoughts. The event appears to be mirroring Blanche's ending, where she proffers the famous sentence "I have always depended on the kindness of strangers" (Williams, 1947, p. 142), except for a change in tone. Blanche is as haughty as she has been the whole play when she meets the doctor, but the destiny she envisions is being held in a psychiatric house. This is the common destiny for many women who challenge the social norms of the time, and it represents the loss of agency. Fleabag, however, has the interview for the loan she desperately needs to save her cafe, which could represent a turning point in her life (and will, as we learn in season 2).

Final considerations

One typical result of discussing adaptation is highlighting the different resources appropriated by each medium, especially in those that are media combinations themselves. In the cases discussed in this paper, *Fleabag* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the media devices appropriated by each story are essential to the distinct reception of Fleabag and Blanche. Even if *A Streetcar Named Desire*'s devices are restricted to the 1948 text, much of what was envisioned by Tennessee Williams is essential to understanding Blanche's core issues. Some of the specific restrictions of each medium, especially TV serialization, prove to play the most distinctive role in differentiating how audiences might interact with each character. After comparing the points in which their stories connect and analysing how each medium is organized, Fleabag stands out as a character that stimulates more engagement from its audience. Especially in terms of narrative perspective and the breaking of the fourth wall, many viewers might experience a stronger connection to her than to Blanche.

As discussed throughout the text, there are some limitations to what this paper might achieve, especially considering the delicate issue of debating the play text, given the numerous stage productions that adapt and change Tennessee's text. This paper has focused mainly on the reception of the first productions of the text, for they have been the first experiences that an audience had with *A Streetcar Named Desire,* and they have shadowed later productions ever since. However, an interesting approach could also be to place *Fleabag* within the movement recognized by Kolin (2000) of play productions from the 80s onward, which have colonized, in Thomas Leitch's terms (2007), the play. This analysis could highly how much Britishness,

the later feminism, and the 21st century mentality have transformed and built up a Blanche, that, without name and noble birth, has enabled us to feel closer to ourselves.

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