

Cinema Literary Adaptations as a Narrative Form

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Review Article

Abstract

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With an oral tradition spanning thousands of years, literary works have been intricately woven into the fabric of cinema since the inception of the cinematograph and cinema's recognition as a narrative tool. Throughout the entire history of cinema, from its very beginning to the present day, literature has consistently held a crucial role. Literary adaptations have provided a dependable source of material, especially within the domain of Hollywood's commercial cinema. Cinema has drawn inspiration from literature, theater, and original scripts alike for its adaptations. However the perception of literature as a more esteemed art form in contrast to cinema has often resulted in a critical examination of adaptations. These evaluations, often tinged with negativity, have led to a predisposed viewpoint towards adapted films. Nonetheless, it's important to acknowledge that both artistic realms contribute significantly to each other. For instance, the experience of watching a movie can often lead viewers to discover the corresponding novel, subsequently bolstering book sales. Additionally, literature presents content that can be easily adapted to cinema, streamlining the writing and production process. Converting a bestselling novel into a film ensures a built-in audience. The present study aims to delve into the complex relationship between cinema and literature, exploring the nuances of adaptation and its narrative implications through an extensive literature review. This investigation will primarily concentrate on core propositions and concepts that foster an approach to analyzing textual connections, particularly the intricate interplay between cinema and literature as epitomized in one of its most fundamental forms: adaptations.

Introduction

Cinema and literature share fundamental attributes as means of communication. It is widely acknowledged that individuals exist within societies characterized by perpetual interaction, inherently constituting a form of communication. This interaction among individuals and diverse societal layers highlights the integral connection between communication and various tiers of society. Within this intricate web of interaction, mass media assumes a central role. Simultaneously, literature has persisted as one of humanity's earliest forms of communication.

In an era preceding the prevalence of media technologies like radio, television, cinema, and the internet, these mediums fulfilled roles analogous to those currently associated with modern mass media. In the present day, literature continues to serve these roles through both oral and written mediums. Both cinema and literature, as conduits of communication, autonomously encompass functions such as

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disseminating news and information, facilitating social bonds, igniting motivation, cultivating cohesion, and contributing to the cultural advancement of society.

Literary adaptations serve as a conduit through which the themes and cultural significance of literature can reach a vast audience via cinema and television. Beyond this, adaptations play a pivotal role in rapidly introducing new literary trends to a broad populace. Cinema seamlessly intersects with various other disciplines and art forms, including painting, music, theater, and literature. This interconnectedness has enriched cinema by harnessing the abundant wealth of literary content.

Initially, this mutually beneficial relationship arose from economic motivations. Cinema not only leveraged the existing material of literary works for screenplay material but also tapped into the potential readership associated with these works and their authors. This pre-existing foundation liberated cinema from conforming solely to conventional script patterns and predictable themes. The concept that filmmakers could readily adapt literary works, especially novels and short stories, fostered a significant and dynamic engagement with literature.

However, despite the significant artistic communication possibilities that the enduring connection between cinema and literature offers, it often results in adverse outcomes, particularly in the context of literary adaptations. These negative consequences are not solely rooted in concerns related to oversimplification or catering to popular tastes during adaptations. They also stem from a prevailing mindset that rigidly adheres to the source text in a traditional interpretation of adaptation. Therefore, it becomes imperative to delve deep into the core of this matter and explore alternative approaches.

In light of this, cultivating a more harmonious and comprehensive perspective that goes beyond the assumptions and limitations of adaptation paradigms positioning cinema and literature in opposition becomes essential. This approach provides a way to overcome these constraints and foster a better understanding of the intricate relationship between the two mediums.

Relationship Between Cinema and Literature

The term "cinema" finds its origin in the truncation of "cinematography." The Lumiere brothers dubbed their invention the "cinematograph." Rooted in the Greek words "kinema" (movement) and "graphein" (to write), its defining attribute lies in its ability to faithfully depict life (Özön, 2008: 3). The advent of cinematography marked a monumental stride, responding to humanity's age-old yearning for animated imagery. The mesmerizing spectacle of images on the expansive screen stirred people's emotions. As cinema technology evolved, filmmakers increasingly turned to literature as a wellspring of inspiration for their narratives. However, the task of condensing a lengthy novel's narrative into the relatively brief duration of a movie proved challenging. The subsequent rise of larger budgets and the establishment of Hollywood movie studios further emboldened producers (Kemp, 2014: 18-19).

Among the earliest films, adaptations of literary works hold a significant place (Cartmell, 2012: 2). Once cinema embraced itself as a medium for narrative entertainment, it embraced the novel as a reservoir of narratives, a practice that has endured over time (McFarlane, 1996: 6). Tracing the annals of cinema's history, it becomes evident that its inception drew subjects from literature while assimilating theatrical modes of expression. Consequently, it's fair to assert that the novel exerted a formative influence on the evolution of cinema's language. Hence, cinema dwelled in the shadow of the written word for an extended period. The cinematic language, rooted in the narrative essence of literature, retains its relevance even in contemporary times.

Film amalgamates various senses, encompassing sight and hearing, to culminate in a cohesive structure that assimilates the contributions of preceding art forms. Consequently, adaptations give rise to an interrelated framework wherein these disparate realms intertwine. The filmic narrative may incorporate

elements from painting, poetry, or music, or it might metaphorically allude to the methodologies of these arts. Thus, adaptations harness the diverse array of cinematic signifiers, thereby expanding artistic allusions (Stam, 2005: 23-24).

In essence, literature serves as a wellspring for cinematic scripts. Throughout its history, cinema has consistently demanded narratives to convey, spanning from the past to the present. Cinema functions as a conduit for the audience's consumption of stories, providing entertainment, and literature readily furnishes these narratives for cinema's utilization. Indeed, a substantial portion of written works offers pre-existing content well-suited for cinematic adaptation. In truth, adaptations have constituted a fundamental cornerstone of cinema since its inception.

Nearly every film presents a sequence of events unfolding with a discernible beginning and a conclusion. An exemplar of this adaptation process is found in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, where the cinematic adaptation yielded a figure more widely recognized than the literary progenitor. Perception, in this context, emerges as an elective determination, predicated on an initial visual intake followed by subsequent content, governed by the consciousness's compass. Consequently, the phenomenon of transcending individual boundaries underscores the bedrock of visual representation (Ergüven, 2002: 88). Consequently, the mere mention of *Frankenstein* invariably conjures the image of the monster, relegating the doctor to the background. Contrary to this, in the original literary work, *Frankenstein* designates the doctor rather than the creature. Herein lies the premise that the narrative within cinema, as a visual art form, often predates its literary counterpart, grounded in written text.

Upon close examination, the interplay between cinema and literature reveals itself within the context of cinema's distinctive attributes. Analogous to other artistic forms, cinema invariably imbues the content or structure of its source material with transformative qualities while capitalizing on literature. Hence, the relationship between adaptation films and their literary origins frequently manifests unique nuances. When scrutinizing how cinema navigates literary works, it becomes evident that cinema draws on literature as an exemplar. This practice can be attributed to technical limitations such as the constraints posed by the length of film strips, underdeveloped techniques in montage and shooting settings, as well as the deficiency in comprehensive scenarios (Kayaoğlu, 2016: 28).

Literature and literary works have constituted my primary source, asserted Sokurov. He further expounds on his affinity for immersing himself in the classical creations of literary luminaries such as Dostoyevsky, Chekhov, and Tolstoy (Bazin, 2011: 130). These works, metamorphosed into Russian theater and radio theater adaptations, serve as an auditory backdrop for Sokurov. He elucidates that when an individual engages with a literary work, the act of reading transcends into an exercise of personal liberation. The reader's psyche visually conjures the narrative, rendering it an intimately subjective experience. Conversely, in the realm of radio theater, listeners find themselves unshackled to explore and manifest the stories within their dreamscapes.

Nonetheless, Sokurov approaches cinema as a medium fraught with limitations, warranting his critique of it as a prepackaged entity that precludes the viewer's participatory contribution. In his view, cinema's visual essence can inadvertently relinquish its audiences to the director's vantage point, constraining the unfettered exploration of the viewer's inner realm, and coercing them along undesired trajectories (Sokurov, 2009: 243-245).

Cinema, juxtaposed with literature, engenders a temporary captivity, albeit for a specified duration. A literary composition embarks on a relatively extensive voyage compared to its cinematic counterpart. With each page of the written work, one is inexorably drawn into diverse realms, as imagination knits itself with every line. The latitude for creativity burgeons proportionately, fostering unbridled ideation facilitated by the boundless expanse of imaginative inner realms. The likes of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Tolstoy's *War and Peace* exemplify this phenomenon, where the very act of reading metamorphoses into an intricate process of imagery synthesis within the mind. Contrastingly, these dynamic experiences inversion when transposed into the cinematic arena (Esslin, 2001: 35).

In cinematic consumption, the viewers' experience is founded upon perceiving images, both visual and auditory, meticulously crafted and presented. In stark contrast, the act of reading triggers an inner imagery generation, housed within one's imagination. Consequently, multiple individuals can traverse the same literary terrain yet cultivate distinct character portrayals in their mental theater. In cinema, however, the creative process remains circumscribed by what is encapsulated in the cinematic rendition. The vivacious images that blossom uniquely within the minds of readers from the textual canvas metamorphose under myriad influences in the cinematic context. The vivid tapestry woven by an author's words finds its boundaries only within the confines of the reader's imagination (Kale, 2010: 267).

In the realm of literature, the canvas of imagination unfurls distinctively for each reader, engendering a personalized odyssey. In this realm, unburdened by constraints of time, location, or character, imagination embarks on a coalescent journey with the individual's creative faculties. Currie, in his exposition, characterizes cinema as a conduit for visually articulating narratives, thereby liberating stories from the constraints of linguistic constructs (Currie, 1995: 164). In this light, films, distinct from the novels and theater plays we peruse, manifest distinct features.

A deeper examination reveals that while the interplay between literature and imagination is inherently tethered to an individual's imaginative proclivities and creative faculties, cinema introduces a host of additional elements, including directors, actors, and settings. Within literature, the process of conjuring characters culminates predominantly through individual imagination; however, in the realm of cinema, the construction of a character transcends the individual's imaginings, incorporating external influences such as the visual representation of the character, their aesthetic qualities, attire, and demeanor. In this context, the palpable divergence in experiential dimensions between verbal and visual forms of expression comes into sharp focus.

Narrative in Adapted Films and Adaptation Issues

Historically and in contemporary times, the dynamic interplay between cinema and literature remains perpetually central. Within this intricate landscape, adaptations emerge as a cardinal facet of cinematic narrative, a domain imbued with intricate complexities and inherent contradictions. The enduring relationship between cinema and literature, still extant, often finds its portrayal as a realm characterized by competition and strife, rather than a symbiotic alliance with mutually reinforcing attributes (Stam, 2005: 4).

In the context of adapted films, the objective invariably centers on crafting the most impactful narrative within the confines of the allotted screen time, thus steering focus away from the innate uniqueness of the source material. Consequently, the literary opus, not being subjected to a meticulous line-by-line

translation, undergoes a transformative process wherein pivotal narrative junctures are distilled into a new configuration.

Dmytryk and Dmytryk, in their discourse, identify three principal reservoirs—namely theater, novels, and original scripts—as the wellspring of cinematic content (Dmytryk and Dmytryk, 2007: 19). In practice, the majority of film narratives emanate from adaptations of novels, a paradigm engendered by the extended length of an average novel, necessitating judicious curation and substantial condensation. During the adaptation process, segments encapsulating the cardinal motifs of the film congregate, often supplemented by the integration of pivotal links that bestow significance and coherence upon these segments.

Aligned with this perspective, editing within an adaptation film metamorphoses into the art of paring down and subtracting. The comprehensive portrayal of characters' trajectories in their entirety becomes a feat beyond cinematic reach. Instances that would span two hours in reality—such as a revelrous party—can be condensed to a mere four minutes in the film's narrative or possibly elongated to five minutes. Similarly, the act of traversing from London to Istanbul, typically a four-hour endeavor, might be encapsulated in minutes within the filmic storyline. This approach to cinematic narration is coined as "filmic time." While cinema functions as a narrative modality akin to literature, it is paramount to contemplate the dynamic of how literary works have been navigated since the inception of cinema.

Robert Stam discerns the differential perception of literature and cinema's societal standing as stemming from the juxtaposition of the millennium-spanning heritage of literature and the comparatively centenary lineage of cinema. Concurrently, Stam posits that cinema wields an array of transmission resources that collectively render it more potent and valuable than literature. The potency of cinema's impact can be further underscored with instances wherein cinema supplements the written word with visual spectacles and musical accompaniments. However, it is imperative to recognize that these augmentations remain insufficient to discredit the enduring influence of literature; their role, rather, lies in elucidating the multifaceted spectrum of cinema's communicative efficacy (Stam, 2014: 21).

The relationship between cinema and literature has been a subject of conflict among writers and critics over the years. Literature, as a word-based art, was traditionally positioned above the visual art of cinema and regarded as more prestigious and elite (Stam, 2014: 223). However, this relationship involves two different language systems—writers and directors, literary culture and visual culture.

While both cinema and literature employ narrative techniques, they offer distinct approaches that lead to varied interpretations. Despite cinema benefiting from literature's narrative prowess for visual storytelling, the same narrative can undergo a transformative process when presented through the visual medium of film. Consequently, even with collaboration between the author and the film crew in a literary adaptation, the resulting movie often presents an interpretation distinct from the original written work. This frequently gives rise to a central conflict between the writer and the filmmaker in all adapted films (Yüce, 2005: 5).

Adaptations have often been dismissed due to concerns that they might lead to negative judgments and conclusions. However, it is essential to consider the cultural benefits and issues associated with adaptation, rather than focusing solely on the potential drawbacks to literature. Bazin argues that in the realm of cinema as an art form, formal and avant-garde interactions at the aesthetic level are enriching. While cinema, as an industrial phenomenon, may encounter challenges with adaptations due to the pressures of popularization and simplification, adaptations contribute to the advancement of cinema rather than causing any loss to culture or literature. Bazin supports adaptations (Bazin, 1995: 125).

Film adaptations broaden the horizons of the source text. They are more than mere imitations of the original; they involve the translation of an excerpt into a new medium, resulting in its inevitable re-contextualization. As a consequence, adaptation spreads the meaning of the source text through a transformative process, rather than erasing it (Ray, 2000: 45). Reproduction facilitates the dissemination of the original work's copy to the audience, whether through photography or recording. Simultaneously, the technique of reproduction reproduces and modernizes what has been duplicated. From this standpoint, adaptations not only expand and diversify what was originally created within one context but also renew and reproduce it within a different context. The visibility of adapted films, especially those that remain in theaters for an extended period and garner more views, increased in tandem with the distribution of novel prints subsequent to the film release, leading to a subsequent increase in readership.

Various approaches exist regarding the multifaceted issue of adaptation. The conventional adaptation discourse, particularly prominent in the field of literary studies and centered around fidelity to the source text, has long maintained its dominance as the primary perspective. Films were consistently evaluated in comparison to the novels, with the moral concept of loyalty serving as a criterion for criticism, perpetuating the viewpoint that literature holds superiority over cinema. Consequently, discussions about adaptations often carried an inherent bias, leading to a dismissal of this relationship.

Conversely, another approach, gaining prominence with the growing importance of film studies in recent years, challenges the notion of fidelity to the text. This perspective asserts that maintaining fidelity between two distinct art forms, each with its own ontological characteristics, is an unattainable goal, and that an equitable correspondence between the source text and the adapted version cannot be achieved. While Stam highlights the prevalence of mediocre or misguided literary adaptations, he also argues that debates revolving around the notion of literature's superiority over cinema, rooted in deeper unconscious assumptions about the interplay between these two art forms, often result in unfavorable judgments against films and adaptations. These discussions tend to emphasize the shortcomings of the source text, literature, and misinterpretations of specific adaptations, while neglecting the gains achieved (Stam, 2005: 3-4). It is reasonable to state that this approach, critiquing the discourse of fidelity by contending that strict fidelity to the source text is neither feasible nor necessarily desirable, is supported by well-founded reasons.

Examples of responses from a research study on cinema-literary adaptations include the following (Kayadevir, 2019: 468-470):

- i. "I generally find films adapted from literature to be successful. While they may at times deviate from the text, the power of imagery often surpasses that of the written word. Certain nuances and flavors can be challenging to translate visually. Elements like the protagonist, settings, and historical context, which individuals imagine uniquely in their minds, can lose some of their subjective essence in cinema."
- ii. "It's quite natural for solitary reading to have a greater impact on individuals. Imagine each reading experience as a distinct movie production. Cinematic adaptations of literary works ought to maintain fidelity to the original text. Nevertheless, the pressures of staying current and achieving box office success frequently lead films to diverge from the source material and cater to popular tastes."
- iii. "I believe there are individuals who are motivated to read the book after watching the film. There's a certain intrigue generated by this sequence. People are curious to witness how the book aligns with the cinematic rendition, particularly because of the snippets they've heard. The books associated with such films start to gain popularity and receive increased promotion."
- iv. "We often come across highly accomplished films adapted from literature. After all, cinema has its roots intertwined with literature and written expression. Cinema possesses a remarkably

strong narrative potential. Both mediums exhibit strengths in terms of conceptualization and expression, and the symbiotic relationship between them is virtually boundless in terms of mutual enrichment."

- v. "Adaptations generally don't quite match the experience of reading fiction books. I often find that my imagination doesn't fully translate onto the cinema screen, leading to a sense of unfulfillment."

Observing some of the responses provided in the study reveals a trend: a significant portion of viewers discovered the novel through the medium of film. Additionally, many of the adapted films were deemed successful, although they often diverged from the original written source. This study essentially echoes Stam's perspective that discussions about adaptations tend to predominantly focus on their drawbacks while disregarding their beneficial aspects.

Literary works offer filmmakers and screenwriters a plethora of resources to explore when it comes to aspects like identifying script themes, refining these themes within the context of the subject matter, crafting narratives and dialogues, manipulating visual elements, designing settings and costumes, and even staging scenes. The pre-existing content that literature supplies to cinema, encompassing dialogues, themes, subjects, settings, and visual imagery, serves as a valuable reserve that filmmakers can draw from. Filmmakers are often intrigued by the wealth of material that literature offers.

The impact of literary works extends to directors and producers, influencing their creative decisions. Notably, novels, short stories, and plays, due to their intricate narratives and thought-provoking themes, lay out dramatic elements that can be immediately translated into screenplay ideas. Primarily within this context, cinema harnesses the resources of literature, while literature, in return, capitalizes on the potent reach of cinema for dissemination.

With the existing narrative already present within literary works, the foundation for the screenplay is established. In the project development phase, cinema often turns to adaptations due to the practicality they offer in terms of decision-making, idea exchange, seeking assistant producers, clarifying management and role dynamics, and estimating production costs ahead of filming. One of the significant advantages of adaptations lies in the aspect of commercial security. This is particularly evident in the context of American cinema. When a bestselling novel or a long-standing stage play is adapted, the project benefits from an existing audience base and pre-established advertising efforts. Furthermore, authors hold a certain public recognition. A novelist or playwright might labor over their work for an extended duration, while the original screenwriter generally works within a shorter timeframe due to the concise nature of cinematic storytelling. Collaborating with a director, the screenwriter may find certain thematic elements readily available. Adaptations, in this sense, offer a degree of convenience to the screenwriter. The storyline is already in place, with the beginning and end clearly defined. Although subject to alteration, having the introduction, development, and conclusion of the narrative pre-established facilitates a swifter and more straightforward writing process.

Over the years, numerous film and series adaptations have emerged across both traditional cinema and digital streaming platforms. Some adaptations are based on best-selling novels, while others take inspiration from classical literary works. Certain stories have gained recognition primarily through their cinematic portrayals. Nevertheless, the enduring connection between cinema and literature persists, suggesting that these two art forms will maintain their symbiotic relationship, continuously enriching and influencing each other.

Conclusion

The evolution of cinematic language has brought about a corresponding transformation in the language of film adaptations. Renowned French critic André Bazin asserts that in today's context, directors and writers stand on equal footing, highlighting the substantial creativity required for the transition of novels from page to screen. He criticizes filmmakers who treat bestselling or classic novels merely as sources for characters and plots, neglecting their potential for deeper exploration.

Over the years, discussions around adaptation predominantly centered on the faithfulness of the cinematic rendition to its literary origin. Contemporary film theorists, however, stress that a multitude of relationships can exist between film and literature. They further question the extent of this faithfulness. In this context, modern theorists underscore the value of the concept of intertextuality in any discourse about the essence of adaptation. The central concern no longer lies solely in determining whether the screen adaptation accurately mirrors the source material, but rather in understanding how one narrative serves another, and to what degree a specific approach to the literary source contributes to the creation of an entirely new work of art.

Indeed, literary adaptations frequently receive unfavorable evaluations from both writers and critics. Throughout the adaptation process, concerns arise that much of the original essence of the novel has been omitted and that the film fails to capture the same emotional depth as the book. However, cinema adds value to literature by enhancing its recognizability. The publication of an unfamiliar novel might experience a surge in sales following the release of its cinematic counterpart. Similarly, the film adaptation of a popular novel can draw a substantial audience. Additionally, literature serves as a significant literary reservoir for the world of cinema.

In the 21st century, cinema has become one of the most readily accessible mediums for swift consumption, granting it a distinct advantage over other narrative forms. While cinematic adaptations employ literary narratives, their primary focus lies in utilizing the visual storytelling approach inherent to cinema. Consequently, the cinematic interpretation shapes and frames the literary work through its unique lens, often placing more emphasis on the cinematic methodology rather than adhering strictly to the original literary material. Viewing a film prompts individuals to opt for the visual experience over reading due to the convenience and entertainment it offers, both in terms of time and enjoyment. This inclination can be understood as a choice aligned with the contemporary demands of the era.

Engaging with a literary work demands a specific time commitment. Conversely, a movie condenses the same narrative into a concise duration. What spans thirty to forty pages in a novel can be conveyed through only 3 to 4 shots in a cinematic context. Even a 300-page novel can be transmitted to the audience within the span of 90 minutes. Occasionally, a single chapter lasting a page or two can offer the screenwriter a wealth of content. The inherent convenience stemming from both content selection and time efficiency has propelled cinema to a higher level of popularity when compared to literature.

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