

## Literature Through the Cinematic Lens: Film Adaptations as a Teaching Strategy

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### **Abstract**

In a society marked by media culture, the teacher's practice should be to consider adaptable instruments fit to meet the needs of students in the classroom and beyond. Literature instruction in EFL classrooms cannot remain oblivious to the effects of students' everyday exposure to audio-visual content. Film adaptations have gained popularity among a wide range of researchers as well as professionals who have been providing strategies and ideas to maximize their usage. They are thought to be a powerful tool to accomplish literary teaching goals. The goal of the current study is to offer certain strategies of pedagogy for the teaching of literature through the filmic adaptation that considers the issue of fidelity to the resource, the intertextual chiasm, a necessary comparison, and the students' reactions to the adaptation.

**Keywords:** Literature, film adaptations, education, fidelity, and intertextuality

The fact that there is significant interest in including movies in English language classes in general and cinematic adaptations in the instruction of literature specifically is not accidental. The underlying assumption is that visual representations of literary works are more likely to reassure reserved readers and give them the self-assurance they need to join in discussions, interpret information, interact with the text, and, most importantly, grow as critical readers. To do this, the teacher must support the use of literary adaptations in the classroom while adhering to a set of particular pedagogical considerations. This essay discusses a few

strategies that are intended to encourage interaction between literary texts and their filmic counterparts, including reconsidering the question of fidelity, the inter-textual relationship between both the source text as well as its adaptation(s), using comparative studies for critical level of comprehension, and valuing students' reactions to the alteration in favour of the artist's concept.

### Reassessing the Fidelity Issue

The discussion of literary film adaptations has long been dominated by the topic of fidelity. Deliberations on what kinds of modifications should be utilized in conjunction with the actual text in class have stagnated with regard to its application in the instruction of literature. Although critics of adaptations agree that fidelity is an unattainable standard that cannot be used to assess the value of an adaptation—such as the impossibility of turning Charlie Chaplin's performance into a dialogue, choosing the film version based on how faithful it is to the original seems to be a good practice in a classroom setting.

Teachers must choose the most revealing and truest to the original piece among the various forms of adaptations when students struggle to understand the literary work's subject matter. The "close adaptation" (Hawkes & Desmond, 2006) or "literal" and "conventional" (Cahir, 2006) adaptation is the kind of cinematic adaptation that fulfils this description.

These adaptations stand out from other kinds of adaptations because they faithfully recreate the key literary elements of the primary text. According to Andrew (2000), there are two different types of fidelity: fidelity to the "spirit" and "letter" of the original text (p. 32). He contends that maintaining the "spirit" of the original while maintaining the original's tone, values, visuals, and rhythm is a very difficult endeavour. Regarding adherence to the "letter," he notes that

The literary elements that are simple to translate into a film, such as the characters and their relationships, the geographic, sociological, and cultural details that provide the fiction's context, and the fundamental narrative elements that establish the narrator's point of view, are all examples of fidelity to the "letter" (p. 32).

Numerous literary classics, including *Pride and Prejudice* (1995), *Gulliver's Travels* (1996), *Daisy Miller* (1974) and *Oliver Twist* (2005), have been

adapted for the big screen. All the directors of these versions shared a strong commitment to maintaining the integrity of the original texts, which served as a unifying factor among them. The phrase “faithful adaptation” is accurate; it “takes the literary or factual experience and seeks to convert it as accurately as possible into the cinematographic experience” (Dean, 2009, p. 9). The goal of faithful adaptations is to stay true to the author’s intention and also to convey the emotions he would want to be voiced by the lines and the pages, and to “keep as similar to the spirit of the predecessor as possible,” even though some changes or exclusions in terms of plot sequence analysis or story ending are not to be discounted (Giannetti as cited in Malchow, 2001, p. 3).

As a result, the faithfulness criterion fulfils the standards of literature class due to its resemblance to the authentic printed text. Therefore, it is advised to use these kinds of modifications because they maintain the original’s spirit without distorting it. When combined with the print book, the adaptation can help students better understand the plot by bringing the characters, themes, tone, mood, and events to life.

The instructor, however, is not limited by loyalty. The choice of the adaptation is based on the lecture’s goals as well as the topics and ideas covered and the applicability of the writers’ message to the readers or the students’ own experiences. In fact, it is crucial to draw students’ attention to how the adaptation strays from the letter in favour of larger perspectives. The adaptation encourages students to draw connections between their own experiences, memories, and affiliations with other modifications of the actual text when the film revamps the spirit of the text and exercises its autonomy on the original framework, setting, characters, and events as a depiction of the filmmaker perception intended for a new audience. In doing so, the teacher can choose an adaptation that is not compelled to be faithful to the source; with a misplaced setting or altered characters, after understanding the original work and its primary message.

This enables a contemporary audience to advance the analysis and comprehend the applicability of universal concerns from many angles, concentrating on the concepts of the scenes that were adapted from the text to discover its undertones that are applicable to the modern world. Or, to say it another way, when the source of the information is examined through ‘loose’ adaptations, it is linked to contemporary issues and

becomes more accessible. In conclusion, loyalty to the original text is a vital determining factor when it comes to the choice of the appropriate version for a fruitful application of adaptations based on classes in literature. However, a paradigm of intertextuality must be used to deal with a successful assimilation of cinema adaptations.

### **A Strategy to Adaptation Through Intertextuality**

The potential for treating filmic versions from such an intertextual perspective is increased by the proposal of an integrated strategy that seeks to use the strengths of screen adaptations to support the teaching of literature, in a way that reinvigorates students' engagement with literary works and engages them in an essential analysis of the work.

The initial step in pursuing the adaptation based on an intertextual assumption is to treat it as another variation in a discrete medium; a text per se endowed with virtues derived from its cinematic components, to serve the root text far from any hierarchizing antagonism or demeaning comparison that would lead to the perennial fallacy—which one is better than the other? Such a fallacy places the source text, which is superior and at odds with the film, in a context that, on the one hand, distances the literary analysis from a dynamic interpretation of the original text's complexity and, on the other, prevents students from challenging their earlier interpretations, which they took as gospel.

This claim is based on the supposition that trying to find a single meaning is a fruitless endeavour, on Kristeva's theory of intertextuality, which states that "a text cannot exist as a self-sufficient entity and texts exist in an even dialogue with other texts; in a dynamic of texts among other texts" (Becker-Leckrone, 2005, p. 108) and on the axiom that "adaptation is a subset of intertextuality existing on a continuum of intertextual relation" (Cartmell, 2012, p. 89), and on Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, which emphasizes the idea that "everything means, is understood, as a part of a wider whole—there is the ongoing interplay between meanings, all of which have the capacity of shaping others" (as cited in Snyder, 2011, p. 246).

In light of this, it is necessary to position the source text as well as its adaptation as interconnected texts that cannot be divorced from a variety of meanings in order to effectively teach literature using film adaptations. The author of the adaptation has material to read, go over

again, and then present in a movie, thanks to the source text. In light of the adaptation, the elements of the original take on a new appearance and meaning. This latter infers from the adapted version and vice versa, resulting in a conversation between the two original texts that plays with influence and meaning.

The intertextual perspective enables both the educator and the learner to interpret both versions as two texts in a continuous dialogical process and to regard the adaptation and also its source text as one cohesive whole. As a result, it is possible for the learner to switch between the meaning and interpretations of the predecessor text as they relate to the context in which it was written, and the interpretations that the filmmaker's reading of the sourcebook (one of many reads a text may generate) has produced. In order to reconcile the interacting meanings, a chance to navigate the intricacy of the text in connection to the source is offered. This forces them to actively analyse the material in order to provide a more thorough critical examination of the text.

The students are compelled to acknowledge that there are many meanings and interpretations that may crossover with one of the original texts by using an intertextual technique to "read" the adaptation. It is true that it maintains the chiasm between the two texts by introducing students to both the writer's original meaning and the filmmaker's interpretation, which they will try to analyse critically. To put it another way, when making an intertextual correlation between both the text and the movie, students are forced to consult the original text, which is crucial to understanding the story, the psychology of the characters, and the author's message. They are then forced to expand their analysis to include what the movie suggests while taking into account any modifications and changes made during the adaptation process. Placing the source text next to its modification as segments of an intertextual network makes it more approachable for students who are intimidated by the difficulty level of the source text; this encourages them to compare what they have reviewed with what they have viewed as well as heard which significantly lessens the frustration in the classroom (Brown, 2009, p. 12).

A natural comparison seeking for similarities and differences between the two texts leads the student to a point where he or she must comprehend those alterations motivated by artistic decisions and their repercussions

on the source work. This comparability is an additional step towards gaining a thorough grasp of the literary source because it helps to clarify and defend the alterations made in order to engage in a fruitful inter-textual discussion with the adaptation.

### **Contrasting and Evaluating the Adaptation and the Source Text**

Students are given the ability to think analytically about what they learn and see by using the comparative method to analyse literary works and their adaptations as components of an intertextual web. The teacher asks the students to draw a contrast on their viewing log to contrast the components of the book as well as their transposition in the movie after they become familiar with the literary elements that regulate the aim of literature as they, a priori, mentioned them with the educator while viewing the screen version. As per Chatman (1980), comparing the text's critical analysis to its film adaptation will help pupils comprehend the material. It also exemplifies "the meticulous willingness to evaluate texts time after time, for their open as well as resistive character" (Hartman as cited in Brown, 2009, p. 12) when it switches from one medium to another.

This can be done by picking out clearly defined elements of the work that the director has preserved or changed to achieve a particular outcome, such as the creation and growth of the characters, the mood, the tone, the order of the events, and the key moments. This equips pupils with more resources to comprehend and analyse the chosen literary work. The comparison must, however, be more than just a list of significant additions, exclusions, and changes because that will lead to the students' sterile judgmental response that "it wasn't like that in the book" (McFarlane, 2007, p. 3). Instead, the comparison has to go farther to add more strata for a more in-depth conversation since it moves pupils beyond rigorous analysis to a higher level of critical reading.

In actuality, having a wealth of knowledge before watching the audiovisual adaptation of a literary work allows for having a load of understanding, a previous knowledge that enhances the audience of the film. The students are prompted to do a succession of cross-referencing and comparisons of the differences and similarities as a result of this activating a natural mechanism of comparison. In truth, the adaptation requires maintaining portions of the narrative while excluding others,

and changing what the director feels is most suited to communicate the writer's ideas and vision for the work. This may have to do with the narrative coherence when the narrator continues to speak in voice-over, the lack of the first person anonymous narrator, or the author's decision to highlight characters that weren't as important in the narrative and give them various psychological characteristics. The apparent distinctions, in turn, "emphasized the significance of using contrasting instances of narrative to the specificities of each" (Bousted & Ozturk, 2004, p. 3).

By categorizing the work into what McFarlane (1996) refers to as primary cardinal functions, the teacher can help students begin this process. These are the key narrative events that resonate throughout the book and may be contrasted with their filmic counterparts in the adaptation. This calls for paying special attention to the components that were added, changed, or removed during adaptation. These discrepancies force a close examination of literary elements that were previously glossed over because of hesitation regarding the linguistic nature of the text. In other words, it involves carefully examining the interpretations that are drawn from the text and examining the text's altered elements in order to determine how they affect the plot. This happens when the teacher asks a sequence of questions that progress from general to more detailed so that the students can focus on the important implications of leftovers and departures from the narrative.

Such comparative analysis might be expressed through queries like which portions of the novel were included or excluded in the film? Does the movie have any additions to the plot, the characters, the events, etc. that aren't in the original text? Do the characters in your imagination resemble or differ from those in the movie? Or is there something in the movie that stands out more than others?

Such inquiries encourage close interaction with both media and aid in a more thorough examination of the narrative in both the text as well as the audio-visual form by posing more precise queries like: What consequences does the alteration have on the original message? What is the point of making the villain seem more likeable in some ways? Why do you assume the adaptation had to include the deleted scenes?

According to Socrates, "all thinking begins with amazement," and one could also say that every comprehension starts with a comparison, this encourages students to reflect and ask questions. Comparing the adapted

and the original text causes students to adopt what Cutchins refers to as “a persistent double-mindedness” (2010, p. 88), which is beneficial because it encourages the growth of logical and critical thinking abilities, the ability to draw conclusions and form critical judgments, and the ability to assess the author’s perception.

### **Making the Most of Viewers’ Reactions to the Movie**

As previously mentioned, the idea behind using screen adaptations to impart literature is based on the dynamic interaction between the two. Additionally, it is predicated on the idea that the textual source need not be viewed as “a work/original carrying within itself an eternal soul which the adjustment must precisely recreate, but as a text to be continually (re)read and appropriated in new situations” (Aragay, 2005, p. 22).

An adaptation “always includes not merely a connection to a work of literature on which it is based, and also an interpretation of it—and a reading which will strike us as convincing and fitting or seem to us reductive, even untrue,” according to Boyum 2 (as cited in Brown, 2009, p. 17). The same is true according to Hutcheon and O’Flynn (2013), who claim that “adaptation includes, for its informed audience, an interpretative double, a conceptualization toggling back and forth within the works we know and the one we are experiencing” (p. 39).

Based on his or her interaction with the book, the reader constructs a perception of the text as well as a meaning in their minds. This necessitates a focus on the way meaning is constructed during the receiving process. The dialogical and “visible” nature of literary texts, according to proponents of aesthetics of reception, gives the reader the ability to appropriate the text. In keeping with this, Jauss (1982) believes that:

A work of literature is not a standalone thing that presents the same perspective to every reader throughout time. It is not a landmark that discloses its eternal essence monologically... A literary event can only continue to have an impact if those who follow still or respond to it - if readers continue to use the previous work or authors continue to try to replicate, outdo, or challenge it (as cited in Arragay, 2005, p. 22).

The aforementioned assertion appears to apply to literary adaptations, which result from the filmmaker’s appropriation as well as recreation



of the actual script in a different setting and for a specific audience. The filmmaker can therefore be thought of as a reader in his or her own right, and the text he or she adapts is the product of a unique reading process. This suggests that an adaptation, as a reaction to the source material, can be viewed as a literary commentary, a legitimate interpretation, or a style of critical essay that facilitates a dialogue between the original text and its interpreters.

In contrast, the students who find it difficult or nearly irrelevant to read a written text are more open to participating in the adaptation on the grounds that it is “a simpler attempt to make texts ‘relevant’ or understandable to new viewers and readerships via the procedures of proximation as well as updating” (Sanders, 2006, p. 18). Boyum thinks that film adaptations “give us a greater critical autonomy and personalization of reaction” (as cited in Brown, 2009, p. 12), which encourages even the most reserved pupils to participate in this form of text-based inquiry. In fact, the adaptation—which is entertainment par excellence at its core—provokes student engagement, stirs up their emotions, shapes their viewpoint, and leaves room for viewers to respond to the text through the film’s sequences that are taken from it.

The film can stimulate students’ responses through their perception, attitudes, and conditions that lead to the text by being cognizant of the nature of the interaction between the film adaptation and the textual form of the piece as intertexts. Their understanding of the distinctions between the two text types that the teacher draws their attention to is another factor in this response.

Additionally, this understanding might assist learners in determining how to respond, deciding whether to accept the picture distorted by adaptation or to reject it; they become aware of, in Fish’s words, “their own repertoire[s] for arranging events in the world (as cited in Fish, 2009, p. 8). Their reaction to the original creation as viewers or readers is made concrete by engagement with the adapter’s reading of it. As a consequence of their binary outcome to both versions, pupils experience self-consciousness and become aware of their own readings or viewing.

It might be argued that the adaptation’s capacity to stimulate students’ affective and imaginative involvement aids in achieving involvement with the story while maintaining fidelity to its actual source while taking care to consider their various distinctions in terms of form and substance.

All these convert the students' viewing of the movie into reading the text, and then they return them to the book. A type of narrative that keeps students actively engaged in the process of meaning creation "by conceptualizing based on the language given on the document or by a conceptualizing based on the varied perceptual data gleaned while viewing the screen as well as listening to the music score" (McFarlane, 2007, p. 20) eventually helps students advance their extent of pivotal reading and text analyses.

### Conclusion

Even though they have different mechanisms of transmission, literature and cinema adaptations have a dynamic relationship that, when employed together by the teacher, is likely to give the student a deeper literary experience. Instead of perceiving the adaptation as an "unfaithful" imitation or a simple simplification, this research suggests approaching it from an intertextual perspective and investing in the students' responses. Therefore, it is expected that using the adaptations in this way will give students more possibilities to understand, evaluate, and critique the original text.

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