

Film Adaptation between the Pride of Literature and the Prejudice of Inferiority

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Abstract

Literature and cinema are two narrative arts that have many aspects in common and differ in many others. The connectedness of both story-telling media converges in a cinematic genre that has been subject to burgeoning debates and criticism since its conception, notably film adaptation. This latter is as old as cinema itself, and the existence of the cinematic adaptations of literary works is as long as that of the notorious friction between literature and film. Accordingly, the present paper, based on a review of the current researches related to film adaptation studies, aims at casting light on the relationship between literature and adaptation that had been seen for a long time through the prestige and supremacy of the former over the popularity and juvenescence of the latter. Besides, this article touches upon adaptation criticism and its evolution with a focus on the longstanding aporia of fidelity, and the different biases that monopolised the film adaptation parlance such as historical seniority, Logophilia and class prejudice.

Keywords: adaptation, cinema, fidelity, historical seniority, literature, pride, prejudice of inferiority

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Introduction

Film adaptation, also commonly known as screened literature, is considered as a cinematic genre that epitomises the meeting ground of the prestigious literature and the democratic cinema. Still, the chiasmic yet hostile relationship between both arts has yielded heated discussions among critics, writers, and filmmakers in literature and film adaptation studies not only about their similarities and discrepancies but also, by extension, about the status, the merit and the quality of adaptations as opposed to those of literature. Such dichotomous relationship evolved from the state of one versus the other and from the evaluation of the adaptation in terms of its faithfulness to the source, to a multidirectional approach that focuses on what is brought to the adapted text throughout the journey of our cherished stories from the yellowish pages to the scintillating screen.

Film Adaptations Defined

Defining film adaptations starts primarily with the definition of the very term adaptation. According to the Online Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2020), to adapt is to “to change something in order to make it suitable for a new use or purpose”, “to modify”, “to adjust something to something”, or “to get used to new conditions”. Konigsberg (1997) considers an adapted product as “a work in one medium that derives its impulse as well as a varying number of its elements from a work in a different medium” (p. 6). Stated differently, adaptation is the process of transposing one work originating from one medium to another one resulting in a new creation.

When it comes to the films adapted from literary works, film adaptations can be defined as the translation, transposition, recreation of written texts from a literary source such as novels, poems, short stories and plays into the cinematic mode. In fact, one of the extraordinary potentials of cinema is to rework a story from literature to screen done in a number of creative ways (Brown & Lev, 2009).

Film adaptation is also considered as a derivative work that displays the transposition of a play, novel, or other literary sources in the form of film adhering –or not- to the source material spirit or differently interpreting concepts derived from the source text (Van Vugt, 2011). Belton (2003) notes that that film adaptation “offers an opportunity for filmmakers to reread a narrative from another age through the lens of their own time and to project onto that narrative their own sense of the world” (p. 195). This is possible, according to Corrigan (1999), thanks to the fact that literature – especially novels- provides essential ingredients for cinematic rendition such as plot and the diversity of narrative points of view. In a succinct way, and in Bazin's words (1967), film adaptation is the transformation and translation of any “brilliant literary idea or trope to the film medium” (as cited in Brown & Lev, 2009, p. 2)

Bruhn, Gjelsvik and Hanssen (2013) expand their definition of adaptation from being a “transport of form or content from the area of one media-specific setting to another” to “a negotiation that takes place across the preliminary borders of the two or more works included in the process” (p. 74). The focus here is on the dynamic relationship between both media, a chiasmic exchange between the text and the adaptation in a way that the screen version infers upon the source text and vice versa.

Furthermore, in a world dominated by technology, and wherein culture continuously evolves and develops, adaptation can take limitless shapes and forms. It is not surprising, then, that literary texts find themselves adapted into video games, comic books, musicals and the likes. Actually, Hutcheon and O’Flynn (2013) in *A Theory of Adaptation* extend the definition of adaptation to encompass websites, graphic novels, song covers and other postmodern creative renditions of texts. They remark that postmodern adaptation is reminiscent of the Victorian habits to adapt in every possible way and direction stories from poems, plays, paintings, operas and *tableaux vivants*. They continue to say that “we postmoderns have clearly inherited this same habit, but we have even more new materials at our disposal not only film television, radio and the various electronic media [...], but also theme parks, historical enactments, and virtual reality experiments” (p. XI)

In short, a film adaptation is a work based on the transfer of the written text from the source to the screen with the necessary inherent changes that are implied in the process. It also offers a retelling of well-known stories with different readings of the original text through the critical lens of the filmmaker. As said by Eliot (1921), “art is derived from other arts; stories are born of other stories” (as cited in Kadam, 2015, p. 143).

Nevertheless, for a long time, film adaptations had been put under the mercy of a discourse drawn from the ascendant stance of literature over the seventh art. Screen adaptations of literary works had been downplayed as secondary, artistically inferior and subsidiary, and associated with popular culture rather than the high culture that makes the prestige of literature.

The Ascendance of Literature over Film Adaptations

The discussion on the relationship between film adaptations and the adapted works had long been related to the supremacy of literature over film. A supremacy based on the historical and artistic legitimacy that holds literature (mainly the novel) as primary, and cinema (filmic adaptations) as secondary. An assumption resulting in the bias of the one is better than the other.

Hutcheon and O’Flynn (2013) describe the supremacist discourse considering adaptation as “likely to be greeted as minor and subsidiary and certainly never as good as the original” (p. XII) as a criticism abuse that contributed to the construction of the subaltern status of popular adaptation of reduced to “belated, middlebrow or culturally inferior” (Naremore, 2002, as cited in Hutcheon & O’Flynn, 2013, p. 2). Similarly, Stam (2000) notes that much of academic criticism of film adaptation “quietly reinscribes the axiomatic superiority of literary art to film, an assumption derived from a number of superimposed prejudices” (p. 58).

One of the most dominant prejudices that fuelled the ‘putative’ inferiority of cinema in general and adaptations in particular, among the defenders of artistic prestige, is the historical seniority and anteriority. This premise stipulates that the oldest is the best. In this sense, the *a priori* valorisation of the ‘historical legitimacy’ makes literature an august art, higher in rank than the young art of cinema. In this vein, Stam and Raengo (2004) say:

Within this logic, [literature] is seen as inherently superior to the younger art of cinema, which itself is superior to the even younger art of television, and so forth *ad infinitum*. Here literature profits from a double "priority": (a) the general historical priority of literature to cinema, and (b) the specific priority of novels to their adaptations (p. 4)

The subjective assessment of the value of the young cinema vis-a-vis the old literature bears a biased corollary that upgrades literature to have the status of the best and downgrades cinema to the worst. It is a binary opposition that crowns the seniority of the novel over the narrative film that presumes an acrimonious imaginary rivalry.

The rivalry between the two arts takes its motives from the essential difference between the two media, as literature is a verbal, and cinema is a visual art. The prejudice is rooted in the cultures that bestow a privilege upon the written word and dismiss the visual arts. Stam and Raengo (2004) label this source of hostility as Logophilia, or in Cartmell, Corrigan & Whelehan (2008) term Logocentricism, which refers to the valorisation of the written language as the highest form of human expression which makes literature highly better than film. This kind of attitude also expands to other disciplines. Stam and Raengo (2004) point out:

It is symptomatic, in this sense, that many *littératures* reject films based on literature, that most historians reject films based on history, and that some anthropologists reject films based on anthropology. The common current... is the nostalgic exaltation of the written word as the privileged medium of communication. (p. 6)

Beside the prestige ascribed to the written word, another prejudice is added to the continuum of judgments that discredits film adaptations. It says that the visual rendition of words is seen as superficial, lacking the depth that words can reach. This image versus word prejudice is construed on the idea that, as opposed to writers who can register all sorts of abstraction, a filmmaker with his camera recording merely what shows on the surface and therefore, it cannot be art. This adverse judgment is called by Stam and Raengo (2004) the myth of facility. This latter is expressed as "it takes no brains to sit down and watch a film" (p. 7) or is likened to Virginia Woolf's abhorrent statement that film viewers' eyes mindlessly lick up the screen; a misconceived version of the issue of reception, indeed.

The depreciative attitude towards films, which supports the ascendance of literature, was still of actuality in the early twentieth century. An essay in the *Bookman* in 1921, entitled "The Motion Pictures: An Industry Not an Art", regards movies as "an institution by illiterates, of illiterates, and for illiterates" (Cartmell & Whelehan, 2010, p. 47). This view about art was accepted by the famous British philosopher G.B. Shaw who considered the pursuit of art and the pursuit of money are impossible to combine. It refers to an elitist vision that considers cinema and adaptation, the off-spring of industry and commercialisation, a vulgar art destined to the populace. This class-based assessment created what Stam and Raengo (2004) name "a subliminal class prejudice" that regards film as 'the art of democracy'.

In 1932, William Hunter entitled his essay, in the inaugural issue of the literary journal *Scrutiny*, “The Art-Form of Democracy?”. He wanted to show how the terms art and democracy are incompatible. Hunter was upon the view that art cannot be democratic, and that cinema is not art (Cartmell & Whelehan, 2010). In other words, art cannot be destined to the masses but only to the elite, and art is not to be mass-produced. In this regard, Stam and Raengo (2004) claim that this assumption degrades cinema because of the companies it keeps and the common lower-class people it targets, a guilt by association. As a matter of the course, film adaptations, in this view, is reduced to "dumbed down" versions of their source novels, designed to gratify an audience lacking in what Bourdieu calls "cultural capital"; an audience which prefers “the cotton candy of entertainment to the gourmet delight of literature" (Stam & Raengo, 2004, p. 7).

This view was “the root of the problem dogging the appreciation and the academic study of film adaptations for most of the twentieth century” (Cartmell, 2012, p. 3), to the point that steps were taken for “a valorisation of literature against popular culture in general and film in particular...and an effective moratorium on any serious study of adaptations in the English literary curriculum” (Cartmell, 2012, p. 3).

Film Adaptation Seen through Moralistic Criticism

Alongside the multitude of prejudices voiced against cinema, adaptation criticism has often been moralistic pronounced with striking terms that connote and denote a presumed dishonour and deceit on the part of the adapted version of literary works. Words that call adaptations as "tampering, interference, violation" (McFarlane, 1996, p.12), “deformation, vulgarisation, desecration” (Stam & Raengo, 2004, p. 3), or contaminating, degrading, and potentially threatening the literary text (Corrigan, 2007) set the manifold obloquy against adaptation.

In 1908, Leo Tolstoy said about the nascent film “You will see that this little clicking contraption with the revolving handle will make a revolution in our life -in the life of the writers. It is a direct attack on the old methods of literary art” (as cited in Griffiths & Watts, 2013, p. 7). The statement of the famous Russian writer signals the beginning of a rivalry between cinema and literature which will become a source of hostility. This latter, according to Stam and Raengo (2004), is derived from what they call ‘Dichotomous Thinking’ that assumes a bitter rivalry between the two arts; each has the secret wish to stab the other in the back. This interrelation between the two arts is seen as a struggle rather than a cooperation. Actually, adaptation becomes “a zero-sum game where film is perceived as the upstart enemy storming the ramparts of literature” (Stam, 2005, p.4).

This opinion considers film as a threat that can turn literature into obsolescence, weakness, and insubstantiality, and “the adaptation as oedipal son symbolically slays the source-text as father” that causes “the erosion of the powers of the literary fathers, patriarchal narrators and consecrated arts” (Stam & Raengo, 2004, p. 4). This is linked to the Platonic view that sees films and other visual arts as a source of corruption of the audience’s mind through delusional forms of fiction. A view fervently verbalised by Theodore Dreiser in 1932. He claims that:

[Film adaptation of novels] is not so much a belittling as a debauching process, which works harm to the mind of the entire world. For the debauching of any good piece of literature is – well, what? Criminal? Ignorant? Or both? I leave it to the reader (as cited in Cartmell, 2012, p. 2)

Likewise, Miller (as cited in Baresay, 2006) stands against adaptations and claims that “most novels are irreversibly damaged by being dramatized” (p. 23). This damage is the result of displaying what novels originally do not. In this sense, “to visualize the character, destroys the very subtlety with which the novel creates this particular character in the first place” (Giddings, Selby & Wensley, 1990, p. 81). Accordingly, the main criticism is related to the issue of perception distorted by the visuality of film adaptations. Chatman (1980) explains such a problem by claiming that a film adaptation “narrows down the open-ended characters, objects or landscapes, created by the book and reconstructed in the reader’s imagination, to concrete and definite images” (p.118).

In the same line of thought, lamenting the intellectual negative effect of adaptations, let alone its disservice to literature, Virginia Woolf (1926)¹ reduced the process of adaptation to the “unnatural and disastrous” that “appears to only divert the sight, rather than engage the intellect” (as cited in Boyum, 1985, p. 6). Admittedly, on the adaptation of *Anna Karenina*, she once said in her essay *Cinema*, reflecting the shared opinion within the academic circle of her time, that its translation to the screen was hardly recognizable. According to her, recreating a literary work, is not merely an ill service to literature but to film as well, Woolf argues that:

So many arts seemed to stand by ready to offer their help. For example, there was literature. All the famous novels of the world, with their well-known characters, and their famous scenes, only asked, it seemed, to be put on the films. What could be easier and simpler? The cinema fell upon its prey with immense rapacity, and to this moment largely subsists upon the body of its unfortunate victim. But the results are disastrous to both. The alliance is unnatural. Eye and brain are torn asunder ruthlessly as they try vainly to work in couples. (Woolf, 1950, as cited in Cartmell, 2012, p. 2)

Seemingly, Woolf sees adaptation as a culmination of a profit-based and obsessed system that preyed on the audience – readers of the book – by churning out worthless adaptations for mass consumption (Jenkins, 1997). Cartmell (2012) considers her statements as a comment on a predatory and significantly male cinema’s rape and pillaging of the literary text as a perfect reflexion of the concerns both film and literary critics had with film adaptations “that try vainly to work in couples, a marriage characterized by jealousy, deceit, and an obsession with who owns what” (p. 2)

From the arguments *supra*, screen versions are believed to be worthlessly dumbed-down versions of their source novels, illegitimate, disobedient to the authority of the literary fathers, green-eyed monsters and preying on the consecrated arts. All these construct in one’s mind the image of adaptations as parasitic on the art of literature; a parasite feeding off the body of the parent text, and exhausting its vitality. In this vein, Stam and Raengo (2004) note that it is frequent

to hear that a given adaptation has drained the life out of the original. And yet, adaptations are seen as “mere illustrations of the novel and reviewers constantly trot out the same hackneyed put - down - that an adaptation is only ‘the Classics Illustrated’ version of the novel” (p. 8). Similarly, Elliott (2003) remarks that adaptations are perceived as doubly ‘less’; they are less as novels because they are mere imitations of the original, and they are less as films since they do not represent ‘pure film’; thus they lack representational fluency on their own reels.

This uncongenial mood, that emanates from the artistic and intellectual circle, penned all the charges that sentenced cinema and film adaptations to years of inconsideration being accused of usurping literature and judged as ‘vulgar’ or at best as mere illustrations of the novel. They are perceived substandard in a twofold manner; adaptations are not cinematically peculiar and not original works of literature either. From this, several scholars and critics, though with subliminal assumptions, pledged allegiance to the canon, and began to qualify the worth of an adaptation as good when it is faithful to the parent text. Therefore, the doctrine of fidelity was set out.

The Fidelity Issue

The most common and prevailing issue, that is recurrently invoked in debates and discussions on cinematographic adaptations of literary works, is the issue of fidelity to the source. “The pull and push of the practices and debates surrounding [...] fidelity pervade the entire history of the cinema from 1898 to today” (Corrigan, 2007, p. 32), and in McFarlane’s description, it has inhibited and blurred adaptations study since its inception” (1996, p. 194). From that time until 2006, according to Hutcheon and O’Flynn (2013), adaptations were being “judged in terms of quality by how close or far they were from their ‘original’ or ‘source’ texts - especially when adapting classics such as the works of Dickens or Austen” (p. XXVI). The focus has been on “the rather subjective question of quality of adaptations, rather than on the more interesting issues of (1) the theoretical status of adaptations, and (2) the analytical interest of adaptations” (Stam & Raengo, 2004, p. 4).

The “near-fixation with the issue of fidelity” (McFarlane, 1996, p. 194) or the “Chimera of Fidelity” (Stam, 2000, p. 54) refers to a “differential notion that purportedly measures the extent to which a work of literature has been accurately recreated (or not) as a movie” (Corrigan, 2007, p. 32). It means faithfulness and loyalty of the adaptation to the original in terms of transposing, supposedly, the specificity of the text i.e., the narrative voice, language, characters, settings, plots and its spirit to the visual medium. The process of adapting a literary text to a film entails omissions, additions, alterations that result in essential elements of the original to be left out. Such changes, due to the transfer from one medium to another, scholars argue, make film adaptations in an unfavourable position. Resultantly, other chief accusations are cast in the debate like infidelity, betrayal and deformation (Stam & Raengo, 2004) pushing people to utter the often heard reflex response: the book was better than the movie.

Stam (2000) links the issue of fidelity to the expectations of the readers/viewers and their ‘phantasmatic relation’ to the original. He considers that qualifying an adaptation of ‘unfaithful’ expresses the disappointment felt when film adaptation fails to capture what is regarded as fundamental narrative, thematic, and aesthetic features of its literary source.

The notion of fidelity then “gains its persuasive force from our sense that ... some adaptations fail to “realize” or substantiate that which we most appreciated in the source novel” (Stam, 2000, p. 54). He adds that words like infidelity and betrayal in this sense “translate our feeling, when we have loved a book, that an adaptation has not been worthy of that love” (Stam, 2000, p. 54). This feeling is confessed by Georges Perec when he said: “We left the theatre sad, it was not the adaptation of which we had dreamed ... it wasn't the film we would like to make. Or, more secretly, that we would have liked to live” (as cited in Stam, 2000, p. 55)

Hitherto Bluestone (1957), in his seminal book *Novels into Film*, argues that there are too many crucial differences between the two media that influence the transfer from one to the other; adaptations had been judged according to their ability to replicate the original version. In 1936, Seldes (as cited in Bane, 2006, p. 29) assumed that adaptations are not inherently worthless but “corrupt” distorting characters, twisting plots, changing endings, or carrying different messages. Seldes, like Bluestone, argues that cinema and literature are basically unlike forms by virtue of the essence of the movie which is movement whereas the essential element in the originals is the word. Consequently, an adaptation is incapable of being an exact reproduction of a novel. He further adds that directors are compelled to do away with “descriptions, conflate minor episodes and characters, and minimize dialogue, relying on the visual aspect of the medium to fill in any gaps that may appear”. Therefore, the very translation from the page to the screen “disturbs [the source’s] equilibrium” (Bazin, 1997, p. 68), diluting “the symbolic richness of the books and missing their spirit” (Hutchoen, 2006, p. XII).

From a vantage point, it is seen that due to the nature of the process of adaptation and all that it implies, and because of the discrepancies between the two arts, film adaptations are doomed to fail in faithfully reflecting the original. Fidelity in adaptations, by extension, seems perplexed by what extent, precisely, an adaptation should be faithful to. Should it be to the writer’s purpose, style, each detail, setting, plot, characters, or the spirit and letter of the work?

The extent to which the adapter keeps track of the departure version varies considerably from one adaptation to another. Shakespeare and Austen’s adaptations have usually been more willing to experiment ‘unconventional’ audiovisual rendition of the source. Both authors have proven able to adapt and update like in *Lost in Austen* (2008) to actual time travel, as twenty-first-century fans of *Pride and Prejudice* find themselves moving in different places with Elizabeth Bennet. Shakespeare and Austen’s adaptations have also bloomed in new cultures. Vishal Bharadwaj’s *Omkara* (2006), as an example, retells *Othello* from an Indian culture perspective, and too does Gurinder Chadha’s *Bride and Prejudice* (2004) for *Pride and Prejudice*. Likewise, does Rajiv Menon’s Tamil-language *Kandukondain Kandukondain* (2000) for *Sense and Sensibility*, while Rajshree Ojha’s *Aisha* (2010), which closely followed *Clueless*, iterates treatment to *Emma* (Cartmell, 2012).

Hence, the extent of fidelity, within a spectrum made of various properties, variables and choices, becomes blurry to perceive and takes many shapes, especially when faithful adaptation may mean and suggest many things and modes to many people.

Coming to Terms

Being confronted to the prejudices based on moralistic rhetorics that put adaptations under the rut of worth evaluation, supported with the axiom of literature primacy, and the parlance of fidelity that defines the quality of a filmic version of a novel, adaptation theorists like Hutcheon (2006), Leitch (2003) and Stam & Raengo (2004) have contributed to a manifest evolution of the adaptation terrain. They challenged the vestiges of film and literature binary oppositions, notably the “literature versus cinema, high culture versus mass culture, original versus copy” (Naremore, 2000, p. 2) which drained the way one may think about both means of artistic expression.

The premise, actually the ‘straw man’ argument, that claims that the precursor text is better than its adaptation based on the primacy of literature over cinema is criticised by Bane (2006), he points out:

If we take *primary* to mean simply occurring first in time or sequence, then obviously the novel on which the film is based is the primary text. However, if we take *primary* to mean highest in rank, quality, or importance, then I will argue that many adaptations rise above their source texts while others raise their source texts to new levels of awareness or importance. Any medium that is able to do either of these cannot be considered secondary. (p. 6)

Hutcheon (2007) argues this privileged position of the source text. She reckons that it becomes impossible to retain such a hierarchy of artistic forms with at its top literature in a world that witnesses changes in technology and the addition of new media and means of expressions to people’s repertory of favourite arts. Temporal precedence does not mean forcibly artistic priority. Many arguments have come as a reaction to the denigration of adaptation in a culture that “still tends to value the ‘original’ despite the ubiquity and longevity of adaptation as a mode of retelling our favourite stories” (Hutcheon & O’Flynn, 2013, p. XX).

Film adaptation is more than a vulgar medium that seeks respectability in recreating and revisiting canonical texts. Yet, it also gives a second breath to classics to be, then, represented to a new audience since “it is the business of the moving picture to make [classic novels] known to all” (Bush as cited in Boyum, 1985, p. 4).

Admittedly, adaptation is “damned with praise in its ‘democratizing’ effect: it brings literature to the masses but it also brings the masses to literature, diluting, simplifying, and therefore appealing to the many rather than the few” (Cartmell, 2012, p. 3). In the same line of thought, Stam and Raengo (2004) opine, “we can see filmic adaptations as mutations that help their source novel survive” (p.3). Hutcheon (2006) concurs and says that film adaptations “do not, leave it dying or dead, or it is paler than the adapted work. It may, on the contrary, keep the prior work alive giving it an afterlife it would never have had otherwise” (p.176). Said another way, the elitist idea that degrades films to a vulgar art cherished by the mass indirectly pays tribute to cinema since this latter, in its turn, pays direct homage to literature through film adaptations.

Accordingly, this claim is supported by Giddings et al. (1990) who claim that surveys show that a considerable number of people purchases the printed literary work as a result of viewing its adaptation. Whelehan (2006) adds that writers such as Virginia Woolf, who are somewhat less accessible, gained a larger readership circle after screening their *Mrs. Dalloway* (1997) and *The Hours* (2002).

The process of adaptation can also be praised for its ability to reinvigorate other art forms. Circa the end of the nineteenth century, the Anglo-American theatre lived a moribund situation. George Steiner describes the situation as “one in which ‘the Shakespearean shadow’ fell between the knowledge that English drama desperately needed to be rejuvenated and the actual process of writing these new plays” (Steiner, as cited in Cartmell, 2012, p. 5).

Furthermore, Cartmell (2012) tells us that in March 1838 Charles Dickens, who used to affirm that “every good author, and every writer of fiction, though he may not adopt the dramatic form, writes in effect for the stage” (p. 54), expresses, in a letter, his intention “to dramatize Oliver [Twist] for the first night of the next season” (Churchill, as cited in Cartmell, 2012, p.56). She informs us that London’s theatre-going public was likely to welcome *Oliver Twist* on stage. This denotes the general positive reception of the idea of transferring their beloved stories to performance art.

Another argument against the castigation of the process of adaptation, according to the hierarchy of genre and medium, is brought by Virginia Woolf herself. Hitherto she likened the film to a parasite and literature to a prey, she envisioned that film had the potential to develop its own independent artistic identity, she points out that “cinema has within its grasp innumerable symbols for emotions that have so far failed to find expression [in words]” (Hutcheon & O’Flynn, 2013, p.3).

Similarly, the film semiotician Metz views cinema as an art that “tells us continuous stories; it ‘says’ things that could also be conveyed in the language of words, yet it says them differently. There is a reason for the possibility as well as for the necessity of adaptations” (as cited in Hutcheon & O’Flynn, 2013, p.3). In other words, adaptations tell stories using the same tools used by storytellers. They concretise the ideas to be conveyed to the target audience, they omit and modify but also extrapolate the story elements; and “they make analogies; they critique or show their respect, and so on” (as cited in Hutcheon & O’Flynn, 2013, p.3).

Leo Tolstoy in his turn, though he warned against the threat of the cinematic practice on the literary form, gave hints to a nascent form of writing such as writing adaptation for the screen. He praised the potential of films to express what is usually expressed through the prestigious arts, and called for a disposition on the part of the writers to adopt this new way of expression *viz* cinema. He said:

We shall have to adapt ourselves to the shadowy screen and to the cold machine. A new form of writing will be necessary... But I rather like it. The swift change of scene, this

blending of emotion and experience- is much better than the heavy, long-drawn-out kind of writing to which we are accustomed. It is closer to life. In life, too, changes and transitions flash before our eyes, and emotions of the soul are like a hurricane. The cinema has divined the mystery of motion. And that is greatness (as cited in Griffiths & Watts, 2013, p. 7)

The arguments uttered to dilute the tenacity of the superiority prejudice ascribed to literature over cinema, and by extension to screen adaptation, are also related to the intellectual value of the audiovisual media. Within this stance, the move from the paginal to the filmic form had been judged as “a wilfully inferior form of cognition” (Newman, as cited in Hutcheon & O’Flynn, 2013, p. 3), and that “film makes fewer demands on the imagination than a book does” (McFarlane, 2007, p. 16). It suggests that viewing a film is a passive activity that requires no mental effort, which is merely prescriptive in its viewing as opposed to the novel that offers room for imagination development while reading.

This does seem to be a superficial claim that is allegedly reductive. It is like saying turning the pages of a novel requires no brain. It brushes off the considerable perceptual act, the visual deciphering, the inference from the narration and the meaning construction inherent in the viewing process. Besides, it turns eyes blind to the fact that “like novels of any complexity, films too bear ‘rereading’, precisely because so much can be missed in a single viewing” (Stam & Raengo, 2004, p. 7). That is why it would be fair enough to say that “what matters in both cases is understanding what one sees or reads” (Stam & Raengo, 2004, p. 7). The viewer, in fact, is not merely passive since the visual rendition of films requires similar acute analysis like any novel or literary text does. The fact of the matter is that a film requires a close attention to the complex interaction of *mise-en-scène*, the editing, voice over and sound (McFarlane, 2007).

Spack (1985) praises the educational qualities of the filmic counterpart of literary. He points out that such films “provide students with a visual interpretation of the stories and present the costumes, scenery, and sounds of the works” (p. 710). Besides, since literary texts and their screen versions share the same story, adaptations can offer various examples of literary interpretations. Indeed, the visuality of filmic adaptations offers an educational asset that refutes the cognitive nullity claimed by the detractors of this medium. It can offer a lively visual context for students who are unacquainted with literary terms and concepts that develop their understanding and interpretation of the work. As Shklovsky says, an image is “a practical means of thinking” (as cited in Brown, 2009, p. 8).

Fidelity wise, the striking majority of those who devote their effort to the subject of adaptations since the pioneering study of *Bluestone Novel into Film (1957)* have called to end the persistent fidelity discourse as a sole and efficient standard to judge the worth of film adaptations of literary texts. Bluestone (1957) sets the foundation for the anti-fidelity parlance insisting on the limits of each medium. According to McFarlane (2007), it should not be “necessary after several decades of serious research into the process and challenges of adaptation to insist that fidelity to the original text [...] is a wholly inappropriate and helpful criterion for either understanding or

judgement” (p. 15). This approach is due to the fact that any adaptation of a text is “always influencing the original work and even the most ‘loyal’ or repetitive adaptation is bound to be unsuccessful in terms of copying the original (Bruhn et al., 2013, p. 70), or as Leitch (2003) puts it, “whatever their faults, the source text will always be better at being themselves” (p.161).

The venture of believing that the faithfulness to a text is essential is misunderstanding the medium of film. It is impossible since it is incongruous with the very nature of reading a literary text given that every single reading is “a highly individual act of cognition and interpretation; that every such response involves a kind of personal adaptation on the screen of one's imaginative faculty as one reads” (Farlane, 2007, p. 16). Stated differently, it is simply illusionary to expect a literature-based film to live up the individuals’ understanding and response to the source text. It is weird, then, that one is prone to dismiss the response and interpretation of the filmmaker once it does not overlap with that of the viewer.

Furthermore, the process of adaptations is a collaborative work and a furore that involves detailed discussions, setting and dialogue to see how sophisticated any adaptation is. Using the film-making arsenal, the director aims not at making images of a film as a mere substitute to the image of words, but rather at screening his/her own interpretation of the work that can significantly differ from that of other readers and viewers (Boyum, 1985). Therefore, evaluating film adaptations, with regards to fidelity to the original, is like an illusion or a vain effort by the director, and a delusion by the critic.

Hutcheon and O’Flynn (2013) add another reason that may undermine the fidelity approach to film adaptations that is the emergence of adaptations forms like video games and graphic novels. They observe that “the ‘success’ of adaptation today in, the age of transmedia, can no longer be determined in relation to its proximity to any single ‘original’, for none may even exist” (p. XXVI). They add that taking the popularity or even the diversity and extent of dissemination can be an alternative criterion for evaluation. In this vein, they note that “the continuing ubiquity and longevity of adaption strategies across ever-changing and ever-developing new media suggest a more optimistic future where such dismissive evaluation just might disappear” (p. XXVII-XXVIII).

At last, it is manifest that cinema and literature are two different arts of story-telling. This difference makes deciding which one is better than the other impossible and of extreme bias. A novel tells the story through the written word, whereas the film through image and sound. This implies that changes are inevitable. Thus, “it would have been more fruitful to analyse how stories travel from medium to medium” (Ray, 2000, p. 41), and not how they are identical in both media. Stam (2000) suggests a criticism of film adaptation not in terms of its loyalty to the parent text as an absolute authority but against the backdrop of its relationship with other texts and media. Adaptations are not only a mere reproduction of the adapted text but also an appropriation and interpretation which are “endlessly and wonderfully, about seeing things come back to us in many forms as possible” (Sanders, as cited in Hutcheon, 2007, para. 27). Besides, analysing adaptations is not to be nurtured with a moralistic discourse as saying that film is an impure art form. Instead,

the main interest should be directed towards the potential of cinema to visualise and express brilliant literary tropes and ideas in a number of creative ways.

Conclusion

In the light of what has been mentioned above, literature and cinema, adaptations and originals have much in common to enable them to leave the field of opprobrium. They “might be seen, if not as siblings, at least as first cousins, sometimes bickering but at heart having a good deal of common heritage” (McFarlane, 2007, p. 28). Such a dynamic relationship cancels literature primacy, abridges the prejudice of the “hierarchy of artistic prestige” (Martinez, 2005, p.59) and gives film adaptations their fair share.

Author’s Notes

¹ She composed the essay *The Cinema* after watching *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. Published in the 3 July 1926 issue of *The Nation and Athenaeum*, *The Cinema* captures both Woolf’s fascination with and apprehension towards film, an art form that was still in its infancy. ‘Film’ in 1926 meant black-and-white and silent film. Source: www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-cinema-by-virginia-woolf-from-the-nation-and-athenaeum.

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