

# Literature and Cinema

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Critics, when assessing an adaptation work, should be able to identify first, the category to which the work belongs. This attempt to define classes tries to tell that fidelity criteria is over venerated, and should not be considered as a critical criterion. A faithful adaptation may definitely be interesting and attractive. This does not make an original work based on a source novel but that has reinterpreted and even transformed it, less valuable. Hitchcock has considered the novels on which he based his films as raw material that has to be reworked (“The Birds” (1963)). Both films and literature tell stories. Making a film is making a continuous unit that tells an evolving story and that’s also what a novel does. When novels use only words counting on the reader’s mental picturing, cinema gives it all in a plate with an individual interpretation of the novel. It’s a transfer from one medium to another, a visual translation. Movies supply great deal of visual information and facts. They make you see visually through the eye and literature makes you see mentally through the mind. If the idea of “seeing” is present for both media, the root difference lies between the mental and visual perception each expression art evokes. However, they undeniably have in common that propensity for narrative. To go further, the narrative besides of being a common factor may even be considered as the main transferable element from one to another. If film did not grow out of literature, it grew towards it; and what novels and films most strikingly have in common is the potential and propensity for narrative. Even if a film uses the same language of the novel it is based on, yet words are still different. The story is told differently, more or less faithfully to the original text. Brian McFarlane says fidelity to be the less exciting way to tell an original story. These are infinite ties between literature and cinema and fidelity is only one of them. Alan Spiegel explores the union in thoughts and feelings between cinema and modern novels. He considers very interesting the work of James Joyce (writer of Ulyss) who according to Spiegel “respects the integrity of the seen object ...gives it palpable presence apart from the presence of the observer”. Making people see has always been a major aim to writers. One may say that it’s the reason they write; to make the audience see, imagine, capture a meaning. To understand, one has to “see”.

**Key Words: cinema, evolution, film-maker, influence, literature, novels, research, story**

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## INTRODUCTION

Details need to be provided. In the case of literary work, words are the only tool. They have to incite mental picturing. Shakespeare, as well as many others, conscious that words have to make the readers see, usually makes his characters talk in order to describe in details what is actually going on. Shakespeare, thanks to Henry V prologue, spares the audience the effort of guessing and makes them “see” the Azincourt Battle through words. In this context, Robert Richardson claims that literature is also a visual art. His statement is based on common characteristics between the two art expressions: images dissolving into each others, the rhythmic display of things and places, not necessarily with a human presence, the focus on one image, the multiple views of one image (place, thing and characters), the rhythm of story-telling and so on. That’s what cinema also does, supplying the viewer with rich visual material and details. In both cases, we have something described (looked at), someone who reads (looks at) and what the reader (viewer) makes of what he is reading (looking at), that’s his personal interpretation. James Joyce has the outstanding ability to decompose a scene, focusing on some features of a described object rather than presenting the whole picture.

This fragmentation is seen both by Siegel and Cohen as if it were a scene from a stage presentation. Cohen underlines the convergence between cinema and literature studying the work of Conrad and James Joyce. He sees in their work an evolution in the way of telling stories. Literature evolved from representational novels, used to recount and describe events (the beginning of the nineteenth century), towards novels unfolding events dramatically, similarly to what cinema does. Based on a comparison between Griffith-Dickens works, several commentators (Bluestone, Eisenstein or Cohen)state that, apart from Dickens being Griffith’s favorite writer, their works reflect detectable similarities. They both have the aptitude to vivify their characters and to depict parallel actions. What may seem effortless for Dickens writing about London, for

example, becomes a period-piece for the film-maker. What Dickens wrote was contemporary for his readers with little or even no need to scene settings. It takes efforts and research for the film maker to reproduce the same décor and mood. The film becomes an investigation of the period: costumes, hairstyles, architecture, interiors and so on. It is possible that a film maker longing to be faithful to the original novel or classic spends tremendous efforts in reproducing the time period, which may lead to exaggerating some aspects. The director may become obsessed with the idea of realism so that he falls in his narrow vision of time and space, which he reflects through his experience and interpretation of facts. Amy Taubin, an American film critic, gives the example of Scorsese, stating that the director “does not make homage to American cinema, rather he shapes its syntax to his own experience”. Scorsese claims that the staging or movie direction, which he called “texture”, is the key to the recreation of a period; “texture, it’s all about texture”, he claims.

The idea of adaptation got reinforced since cinema has been seen as a narrative media, similarly to literature. Thus, film makers tend to use literature as a source material because novels, especially successful and well know ones, are assumed to attract more people. Novels present a ready-made material as well as a pre-tested stories and characters. That’s a commercial reason. Another reason is the high-minded respect for literary work. According to the latter argument, the popularity achieved in one medium tends to replicate itself in the other medium. That’s what makes some film directors too faithful to the original, even if the fidelity criterion is to be discussed. The audience is attracted by adaptations of classics, judged to have highest quality.

According to Georges Bluestone, almost the third of Paramount and Universal production are adaptations of novels. That’s to emphasize the influence of literature on film-making. Oscar Wilde’s “Dorian Gray Portrait” was brought to cinema by Albert Lewin adaptation of the novel in 1945, which won three awards in 1946: an Academy Award for best cinematography, black and white, and a Golden Globe Award for best supporting actress (Angela Lansbury), as well as best Hugo Award for best Dramatic presentation. “The invisible man” a classic by H.G. Wells published back in 1897, was initially adapted to screen in 1933 by James Whale. A series of adaptations has since then followed.

In 1931, the same director, H.G. Wells adapted to the screen the very famous “Frankenstein” a horror novel written by English author Shelley in 1818. To name a few, Baz Luhrmann brought Scott Fitzgerald’s “Great Gatsby” to cinema and Sidney Franklin brought Nobel prize-winning Pearl Buck to the screen with the adaptation of “The Good Earth”. So was the case of the adaptation of the great work of Steinbeck, one of the most influential authors of the twentieth century and who was awarded the Nobel-prize in 1962. A major part of his work was dedicated to working-class communities whose destinies were in a way controlled and dictated by political and social events. His novels were adapted and became films. Some of them are pointed to as references and considered as studies of the great depression period, sometimes, more than documentaries are.

Two major adapted novels were: “Of mice and men” directed by Gary Sinise and starring John Malkovitch, and “The Grapes of Wrath”, a realistic story taking place during the 1929’s depression, directed by John Ford and Starring Henry Fonda. “The Grapes of Wrath” won two Oscars: an Oscar for the best director (John Ford) and an Oscar for the best actress in a supporting role (Jane Darwell). Elia Kazan adapted in 1955, part of the Steinbeck novel published in 1952, “The East of Eden”, starring legendary James Dean. More than ten novels of Steinbeck were turned into successful screenplays with great audience. The examples are numerous and most of the American classic literature is concerned. Several adaptations were sometimes made for a same novel. Hemingway’s “Farewell to Arms” was directed by Charles Vidor in 1957 and his “Old Man and the Sea” was directed by John Struges in 1958. Herman Melville’s Moby Dick was brought to cinema by John Huston. “The scarlet Letter” written by Nathaniel Hawthorne and published in 1850 was initially directed in 1926, by Victor Seastrom. Twenty six movies were made with reference to Mary Higgins Clark’s thrillers. These are few samples of what literature brought to cinema.

The influence of classics on cinema is therefore undeniable. For the audiences, studies show that people watch adaptations and continue to watch them, despite the complaints about eventual violation of what they thought they read. Christian Metz says that the reader-viewer may not find his film, since he is watching someone else’s fiction or fantasy. In fact, a movie can not be a perfect match of a classic or a novel. Dudley Andrew claims that what distinguishes adaptation is the “matching of cinematic sign system to a prior achievement in some other system”. The film maker presents through his adaptation of a literary work a translation of a prior idea or vision, using his own tools, either mental or technical tools. As a result an adaptation may be seen as an “appropriation” of a prior vision. Even if the original story is the same, the way that novels and films supply the story is different which brings a value added to the adaptation. Miguel Delibes claims that “Adapting a novel of normal pagination to the cinema forces inevitably to synthesize it, because the image is unable to absorb the wealth of life and tones that the narrator has put in his book”.

Critics point out to the fact that some parts of a literary work are lost in adaptation. Movie directors tend to alter the unfolding of the story, highlighting particular sequences. The audience is lead into another direction and some aspects are emphasized rather than others. Movies may be based on only a part of a novel rather than the whole story (Steinbeck's *East of Eden* adaptation or John Ford's adaptation of Sinclair Lewis's "Arrowsmith"). These statements or facts may be considered as window to cinema contribution. Adaptation is indeed a rewriting of a story, which can't be a copy paste of the original. It's a subjective interpretation of the director, inspired by a text, and then crafting his film differently. He may insist on some passages of the story than others or expand a single move briefly described in a novel, to a three-shot sequence, with discontinuity between the shots, deliberately changing the pace and the perspectives. Directors may reproduce the context or time period of the novel, but they also may keep only the highlights of the story, its main events, and then make the events take place in another time period, adapting the narrative to another time outline instead of adapting the characters to the period time of the novel.

These infinite possibilities are in fact the value added of cinematic methods and aesthetic, even if no one can deny the enthusiastic attachment of most of the adaptations to stick to the original layout, especially when it comes to the adaptation of classics. According to Brian McFarlane (1996), films have been greatly inspired by the Victorian era and the classics of that period. Cinema seems to be more influenced by literature from an earlier period, as if it were perceived to be more prestigious and high-minded. Modern plays such as 'Death of Salesman' or 'M. Butterfly' seem to have lost a part of their representations of time and space when transferred to the screen. While cinema has more difficulties to suggest things and feelings than to show them, literature tries to make you catch things through words according to your own imagination and background. Magny doesn't share this statement, considering that cinema is as capable as literature to capture and transmit deep, complex feelings and thoughts. Cinema is hence as inspiring as literature is. The influential aspect of cinema is discussed in the next section.

### CINEMA INFLUENCE ON LITERATURE

María José Fresnadillo Martínez states that "Cinema is ... an authentic "empire of senses, Cinema agglutinates space and time, image and word, reality and fiction, knowledge and feelings"". The cinematographic script is itself a manifestation of the connection between cinema and literature, a script being a materialization of images. Cinema needs words to express and literature needs physical space, or at least a reference to it. "In some way, on the cinema stories are seen with opened eyes and in literature with closed ones". During the ninetieth and the twentieth century literature used to be considered as the major art expression, whereas actually cinema is considered the universal art according to Linda Catarina Gualda for whom cinema is the art that unites the biggest number of interested people. Just the way literature used to inspire films, literature tends to be itself inspired by movies. Stam. Robert<sup>19</sup> dressed the question of literature being influenced by cinema. He was inspired by American writers and novelists from, what used to be called, the "Lost generation". The expression, popularized by Ernest Hemingway in his novel "The sun also rises" refers to the generation that came of age during World War I, judged to be disoriented and confused. Remarkable American authors are part of this generation such as; Ernest Hemingway, Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, Alan Seeger and so on. Don Passos is not the only author to be influenced by cinema. It was also the case for Faulkner, Hemingway and Steinbeck.

That was the beginning of an era where cinema is considered as an art apart from literature. The camera replaces the pen and expresses deep abstract thoughts and feelings as brilliantly as literature does. We can talk then about cinematographic writing which is as important as literary writing. Stam. Robert says that cinema has literary qualities so that it is as inspiring and distinguished as literature. The ties between the two media became obvious after World War II. "Hiroshima my love", 1958, is considered by critics as the renewal of the relationship between film makers and writers. Cinema provided writers with a framework defying the notion of linearity and forward evolution of time, and with inspired cinematographic techniques. Dos Passos admitted he owes a debt to cinema for his book "Manhattan Transfer". He has even entitled some chapters of his book "USA": "the Camera eye". According to Claude Edmonde Magny, Dos Passos created something new in American literary history, which she called "impersonal novel" that used the techniques of montage of Eisenstein in order to catch the American society under capitalism.

The critic David Thomson finds that a great part of Hemingway's work is closely related to film's techniques, as if the writer constantly looked to replace the camera. Gautam Kundu states that American writers from the twenties and the thirties like Dos Passos, Hemingway and Faulkner wanted to craft verbal language, looking for the fluid movement in time cinema offers through visualization, montage-like juxtaposition of discontinuous images and occasional documentary realism. Faulkner who has worked for almost twenty years in Hollywood used techniques acquired from his experience as a film scenarist. According to Peter Lurie, Faulkner was conscious of the culture industry brought by Hollywood and he consequently adopted its methods and visual techniques into the language of his writings in the thirties. Faulkner, studied closely by Lurie seems to be aware that "the modern mind has been formed, informed and deformed by the cinema". Peter

Lurie underlines that Faulkner's literary work exposes the American culture history influencing the development of the writer's modern novels. Lurie suggests and explores the cinematic presentation in his novels. "Sanctuary" and "Light in August" relate both individual and collective acts of voyeurism. "Absalom! Absalom!" and "Light in August" expose clichéd and cinematic patterns of thought about history and race. In fact, "Absalom! Absalom!" appears to be inspired by the movie "Birth of Nation", among others, while his novel "If I forget thee, Jerusalem" evokes popular forms like melodrama. Fitzgerald is also considered among those who have been greatly influenced by cinema, its techniques, its way of seeing, telling and structuring a narrative. He has also worked in Hollywood and thus has developed ties with the cinematographic world and its personalities.

He was aware of the movie-making techniques and screenwriting skills. Studies related to Fitzgerald literary work noticed these ties. In his short novels, the writer uses not only metaphors and techniques from films, but also makes of Hollywood universe his material ("Diamond as big as the Ritz" or "Jacob's ladder"). Cinema provided writers with new vocabulary allowing them to capture, and then communicate descriptions. More than a holistic narrative, cinema is used to capture perspective, a sort of a shorthand way of describing. In this context, Fitzgerald's perspective-based visualization is quite cinematic. Cinema aesthetic came with nontraditional art expression methods. Time has become reversible and there is no longer a linearity obligation. Besides, space is segmented, partialized. Fitzgerald used modern film aesthetic to make his readers discover and cope with modern issues and themes he reveals in his novels: isolation, memory, obsession, disillusion, money, greed as well as sexual and social tensions. Fitzgerald was deeply interested in the narrative possibilities of cinema. Critics, such as K.G.W. Cross, Edward Murray, Henry Dan Piper, Sergio Perosa and so on, have underlined the "cinematic imagination" of Fitzgerald they perceived through his novels:

"This Side of Paradise", "The beautiful and Damned", "Tender is the night", "The last Tycoon", as well as in his short stories: "Magnetism" and "Crazy Sunday". Robert Martin states that Fitzgerald used films not only as an inspirational source for the techniques he employed but also as a background reference, theme and subject. He used the metaphor of cinema to discuss serious issues related to the futility of life, disillusion and determination to fight. According to some other critics, he also used biographical details and elements of his own life in Hollywood to feed his novels ("Some Time in the Sun" and "Crazy Sunday", which is a fictional reference to Fitzgerald's drunken behavior at a Hollywood party). Roland Berman pointing out to the undeniable influence of cinema on Fitzgerald's work, claims that some scenes of "The great Gatsby" are "openly cinematic" and need the audience to be familiar with motion picture techniques and technology, so that they can produce the intended effect. The reader needs to be familiar with film staging, lightings, flashbacks and cinematic perspective.

As Magny says, cinema is a source of inspiration, either conscious or unconscious, for modern novelists. They are influenced by its techniques which they incorporate in their literary work. Modern American novelists use fragmentary, discontinuous story-telling, rather representational than interpretive. They use ellipsis, deliberately omitting some pertinent pieces of information, so that the reader (similarly to the viewer in a movie) is pushed to imagine the missing parts by himself. Moreover, modern writers use "cutting" and even "cross cutting" mechanism, which has become an essential part of the framework of modern novels. The first two techniques or methods, narration and ellipsis, are told to be "metaphysical" according to Gautam Kundu, since they relate the existential condition of modern humans. The latter, the "cutting" device, is temporal, giving the impression of continual present time, a major feature of films. Cutting and cross cutting are typical of the American modern novelists experimentation, which started with Gertrude Stein's innovative modernist "Tender Buttons", which defied the boundaries of literary language, and continued with Jack Kerouac and John Barth among others. Truman Capote said once "I think most of the younger writers have learned and borrowed from the visual, structural side of movie technique. I have". Murray underlines in his study of Truman Capote literary work, the filmic structure of his novel "Cold Blood".

The novel that the writer claimed to be non fictional, includes four chapters subdivided in eighty six scenes. Murray reports a few pages in length with constant alternations of viewpoints. It looks like a screenplay with no chapter headings and numbered sections. The narrative evolves fluidly thanks to a succession of scenes unfolding with a rapid rhythm. The writer continually crosscuts between the characters, showing alternatively the contrast between the conditions of the personages. Capote also uses shifts in perspective, in a manner so objective, that the reader may forget Capote as a narrator. John Fell<sup>26</sup>, discussing the interaction between films and narrative traditions, claims that motion picture has always been part of the Victorian Era tradition. Even if pre-cinematic cross cutting already existed (he cites Flaubert's Madame Bovary as an example), the major part of the examples he exposes are contemporaneous with cinema development. So is the work of Joseph Conrad, Thomas Hardy and Edith Wharton. Fell suggests that the use of cross cutting in novels first emerged in America with Edwin Porter's "The Great Train Robbery" back in 1903, "The Ex-Convict" in 1904 and "The Kleptomaniac" in 1905. European novelists intentionally started using some of cinematic narrative tools, later in 1922, with James Joyce's

“Ulysses” that Fell consider to be among the first novelists using alternation of narrative actions to give the reader an impression of simultaneity, intensifying the dramatic tension of the scenes.

The impact of cinema on literature being irrefutable, it is, however, essential to say that “The influence of a film on a novel can be fruitful if the novel is a novel and not a thinly disguised scenario in search of a camera”.

### CONCLUSION

The paper exposed the dynamic relationship between literature and cinema, demonstrating that the two art expressions have convergences and divergences. The creation of cinema has brought new considerations as well as new techniques and approaches of the literary text. Films have been greatly influenced by literature. Adaptations of classics confirm the fact that novels have widely inspired film-makers. Classics provide cinema with ready-made, pre-tested material, especially successful classics. Cinema is considered to be a visual and aural narrative. Adapting a novel is thus translating words into a succession of moving pictures, telling a story. One pertinent question about adaptation is not the degree to which a film is faithful to its literary reference but the possibilities offered by cinema to treat a literary work. Both cinema and novels have the narrative in common, even if stories may be told differently. Similarly, films have had a great influence on American modern writers of the twentieth century. Several novelists adopted cinema aesthetic and techniques in their narrative. The traditional perception of time and space changed thanks to cinematic methods. The linearity is no longer essential. Time progression is not the same and flashbacks are integrated. The space is fractionated. The pace is rapid and even the language used has changed. Film makers are inspired by literature and tend to translate books, especially classics or best-sellers into screen. Similarly, novelists, especially after WWI, are widely inspired by cinema. Hemingway and Fitzgerald, among other authors of the twentieth century, illustrate examples of the influence of cinema on their writings. Consequently, it appears clear that films on turn have been greatly influential on modern novel. Cohen cites Virginia Woolf and Truman Capote, to mention a few as examples demonstrating how the modern novel was influenced by the techniques of Eisenstein an montage in particular and cinema aesthetic and methods in general.

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