Turning Stories into Visions

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ENG 102

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8/11/2025

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At first, I intended to research the extensive interaction between art and literature in different forms such as poetry, music, and sculpture. But it also occurred to me that this was too broad to concentrate on. As I revisited my favorite works, I realized many them were novels that had been turned into movies, like *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Lord of the Rings* (Araujo & Smith, 2021). This realization led me to refine my research question as follows: How do filmmakers adapt literary tales into visual ones?

The more I thought about it, the more I wondered how filmmakers know what to maintain and discard in novels and how they can turn prose into images and sounds. Certain adaptations feel like homage and new creations, others like hollow imitations. Originally, I posed a broad research question on how literature affects contemporary art. In earlier studies, I was introduced to adaptation studies, which provided me with the language and context to study this area (Nikolić & Petrović, 2023). My research focus was further sharpened by Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation*, the persuasive theory that suggests adaptations are not inferior imitations but original new creations driven by their material. I stopped perceiving adaptation as translation and began to see it as creative discourse (Adumati & Okoro, 2023).

In that sense, my research question became: How can filmmakers translate literary texts into filmic narration? This question produced my thesis: filmmakers interpret literary stories into visual narratives by selectively compressing the narrative, translating descriptive prose into visual imagery, creatively re-reading themes to fit cinematic style, and balancing artistic intent with audience demand. My purpose is to describe adaptation as not a copy but a transformation.

The first key point in my thesis is narrative compression, which addresses the difference in scope between novels and films. While books can span hundreds of pages, filmmakers have

only a few hours often less than three to tell a story. This compression requires omitting certain elements. In Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings*, for example, characters like Tom Bombadil and minor subplots were omitted without harming the main storyline (Araujo & Smith, 2021). As McFarlane notes in *Novel to Film*, condensation is not only predictable but necessary (Nikolić & Petrović, 2023). Narrative compression shapes pacing and emotional focus, making it an essential aspect of adaptation.

The second point translating prose into visual language stems from my realization that watching is a very different experience from reading. A novel might spend hundreds of words describing a sunset; a filmmaker must achieve the same mood in a few seconds. Baz Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby* captures Fitzgerald's prose through costume design, color saturation, and music. This is supported by cinematic semiotics research, which studies how visual symbols communicate meaning without words (Nikolić & Petrović, 2023). Cinema does not merely present a story; it depicts it.

The third point is creative reinterpretation of themes. Some adaptations intentionally alter tone or focus to resonate with modern audiences. Greta Gerwig's *Little Women* (2019), while faithful to Louisa May Alcott's novel, strengthens feminist elements, making Jo March's writing a declaration of independence (Monteverdi & Clark, 2024). Hutcheon's theory supports this: adaptations are shaped by the adapter's cultural context and intended audience (Adumati & Okoro, 2023). This reinterpretation is not betrayal—it is part of making the story timeless.

Of course, there are counterarguments. George Bluestone, in *Novels into Film*, claims literature and film are too different for true adaptation (Khissoga & Mwangi, 2023). I do not argue that movies perfectly replicate novels; rather, I believe they retell them in an equally

valuable form. Encountering this opposition has strengthened my thesis by clarifying that adaptation is transformation, not duplication.

I selected my sources for their authority and relevance. Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* offers theoretical grounding. McFarlane's *Novel to Film* provides detailed analysis of adaptation processes. Bluestone's *Novels into Film*, though dated, remains a significant text in adaptation criticism. In addition to scholarly work, I have studied the films themselves to see adaptation in practice.

In my final paper, I will open with a hook perhaps recalling the moment I realized many movies I loved began as books. I will then present my thesis, followed by my three main points in order: narrative compression, visual translation, and thematic reinterpretation. Counterarguments will follow, and I will conclude by reflecting on the creative essence of adaptation.

This project has helped me develop a logical argument supported by credible sources. It has also shown me the pitfalls of viewing adaptations solely through the lens of faithfulness to the source. My perspective values transformation as much as preservation. I hope my work encourages others to view adaptation as a creative art.

References

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