

## Double Exposure: An Intriguing Look at the Creative Alliance between Two Artistic Processes

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### Abstract

For centuries there has existed an interrelationship and mutual influence between literature and other forms of artistic expression, resulting in painting and music based on works of fiction, drama, and poetry. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, a creative exchange was initiated between literature and a new art form called film. The uses of language in film serve to establish more firmly its connections with literature. The nature of each respective medium requires change. A book is not a film script. A film is not a performed novel. But the sequence of images on a screen could tell a story in much the same way as a sequence of words on a page. Discourse in this field tends to follow and focus on the formalistic differences between adaptations, or judgment calls on which source is “better.” This paper examines the print and screen version of *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* to analyze the successes and failures of adaptations from the emerging Young Adult dystopian genre. The purpose of this comparison is to explore, if film adaptation promoting those

stories and messages more effectively than print forms or vice versa. Also it highlights some of the consistencies, omissions, and formalistically-driven changes found in the original texts and the adapted films. This paper sets out not only to explore the art of adaptation but also it's an attempt to redress the balance.

Keywords: Film Adaptations, Novels, Literature, Dystopia, Young Adult, Comparison.

## Introduction

Debates on film adaptations of literary works have been for many years prevailed by the issue of fidelity to the original source and by the assumptions that prioritize the literary texts over their screened versions. In fact, adaptation by its nature implies necessary modifications, additions or omissions that may result in something of utmost importance to be left out. Such alteration, scholars argue, makes film adaptations in an unfavourable position. It is impossible to exactly transfer a book into a movie form due to time and medium restrictions. Some scenes, although important to characterization and metaphorically resonant, need to be excluded for the story to flow smoothly and quickly. Alteration and omission in any novel adaptation is arguable. The source material is so dense, and the resulting film so constrained by standard viewing time, that it is expected that something must be cut in the process. Accordingly, this paper examines the print and screen version of *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* to analyze the successes and failures of adaptations from the emerging Young Adult dystopian genre.

Today's theaters are full of film adaptations of popular novels, in particular from the budding Young Adult dystopian genre. Young Adult literature genre is broad and difficult to define. As stated in *The Guardian* article "What are YA Books? And Who is Reading Them?" comes from writers at the Young Adult Literature Convention who "agreed that the sine qua non of YA is an adolescent protagonist, who will probably face significant

difficulties and crises, and grow and develop to some degree” (Williams). Dystopias were originally meant to be satires; they are often portrayed as social structures that have collapsed under an environmental burden and political regime that could be possible threats for humanity as seen in the original texts and its film adaptations taken for this study *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*. Due to their very nature, they are often set at some indefinite point in the future in societies that do not decay over years but over decades. In a way, watching these movies and reading these novels, signaling the underlying intention that dystopian works might make the readers and viewers to criticize the contemporary world we live in.

#### Differences between the Novels and Films

Exploring the alternative arts provides a fascinating view of the complex interactions among readers, novel, viewers and movie. Books unfold in the mind, but movies unfold in the senses. Books are mental and based on written language whereas films are visual and aural. Theorist George Bluestone comments on the basic structural difference in communication, in which “the moving picture comes to us directly through perception” but “language must be filtered through the screen of conceptual apprehension” (21). These are the basic differences between a novel and a film.

#### Narration: Print vs. Screen

Books often offer an interiority that is inaccessible in films through the first-person perspective writing technique, or the narrator’s voice. Readers are granted access to see the narrative world through the eyes of the protagonist. For example, in *The Hunger Games* Katniss’ hard survival-driven perspective on life is more evident in the book- when she mentally appraises the iconic Mockingjay pin as “Real gold. Beautifully crafted. It could keep a family in bread for months” (Collins 12). This internal dialogue gives insight to her poverty and her survivalist motivations, immediately equating the accessory to food, whereas

in the film she contemplates buying it from a vendor. Since the camera can only show the surface, the film has to use some other methods to express people's thought.

On the other hand, the film is told in the third- person narrative, and this allows viewers to learn more about the events that are happening away from the protagonists. In the movie, Katniss see her best friend Gale Hawthorne only before the game begins. She thinks about him, and explores her feeling for him, but this character does not reappear in the book. Since, the movie is in third- person narrative, the viewers can see what Gale is doing while Katniss participates in the games. Gale misses her and also upset by the on-screen relationship that is developing between Katniss and the fellow tribute, Peeta Mellark.

The downside of the first person narrative in the book makes the reader to think only from the perspective of the protagonist. For example, in *Divergent*, Tris protects Al by volunteering in the knives throwing session, consequently Four keeps taunting her. Tris thinks he is being a jerk and that is what it looks like from her point of view; but as he tells her later, he was actually trying to support her by reminding her of the generous thing she was doing. There are several moments like this, where the protagonist either misses or misinterprets what is going on. Since the readers see everything from the protagonist's point of view, they have to roll with these changes. These differences between film and novel actually give the viewers and readers different experiences.

#### Exclusions: Print vs. Screen

Some of the necessary exclusions in film adaptations include minor characters, lengthy dialogue, unnecessary scenes and events, as they are not of much significance to the plot. For example, in *Divergent*, when the initiates receive their rankings, a vicious boy named Peter scores the second place behind another initiate, Edward. That night, Tris wakes up to screaming and sees a horrific sight, "Edward lies on the floor next to his bed, clutching

at his face. Surrounding his head is a halo of blood, and jutting between his fingers is a silver knife handle. . . . I recognize it as a butter knife from the dining hall. The blade is stuck in Edward's eye" (Roth 202). Tris attempts to comfort him, and realizes that Peter is responsible.

This scene is excluded from the film, although it was shot and the deleted scene can be viewed online. There are many significant layers in this scene that are therefore lost in the film: the atmosphere of fear, risk, and violence in Dauntless training and Tris' varied dimension as a fighter and a caretaker. But ultimately all those messages are easily translated across other scenes in the film, and while the "butter knife scene" is a favorite among fans it is clearly not necessary to the plot. As the director Burger explains in regards to the cut, "even though it's a good scene, that's really the art of trying to figure out where the movie is working and sometimes what's slowing it down is one of your favorite scenes, and you've got to cut it out" (qtd. in West). Some scenes, although important to characterization and metaphorically resonant, need to be excluded from the story for a smooth and quick flow.

#### Varied Dimensions in projecting the Protagonist: Print vs. Screen

In a key scene, in the book *Divergent*, Eric and Four breaks the Dauntless initiates into two teams to play paintball guns. Tris, Christina, and Uriah work together to make it to the flag:

The flag hangs from a tree branch, high above my head. I reach for it, and so does Christina. "Come on, Tris," she says. "You're already the hero of the day. And you know you can't reach it anyway." She gives me a patronizing look . . . and snatches the flag from the branch. Without looking at me, she turns and gives a whoop of victory. (Roth 153-54)

This scene creates some tension between the protagonist, Tris and Christina. In the film, the scene is moved up right after Tris' hospitalization and the guns are loaded with 'stim-dart' that simulates gunshot wounds. Later, Tris pulls down the flag first and then both Tris and Christina share their glory. Unlike the print version, this scene allows the viewers to maintain their interest and attention towards the protagonist, Tris.

In the novel version of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss is very aware of the televised nature of the games. She knows she must constantly be performing in order to earn the support of sponsors watching her. For instance, during Katniss and Peeta's alliance in the arena, Katniss says, "I'm about to leave when I remember the importance of sustaining the star-crossed lover routine and I lean over and give Peeta a long, lingering kiss. I imagine the teary sighs emanating from the Capitol and pretend to brush away a tear of my own" (Collins 281). Here, her motivations are clearly focused on her image rather than her feelings. In the film, while Katniss does equate expressing affection with receiving food and supplies, the entire internal facet of her actions is lost. Her motivations are simplified from survival to attraction, and her character is reduced as a love-stuck girl. The book does a great job of showing a young woman caught up in a whirlwind of events much bigger than herself. Whereas the movie highlights her character as a star more than an agitator and a political critic.

In film *Divergent*, Tris does not seem in control of the situation, and her agency is reduced. Her internal strength is similarly hidden- when Jeanine tells her Abnegation is breaking laws, Tris' reaction is to glance down and around nervously, and say "No, I didn't know that," before clearing her throat and finishing "but if that's true I'm, uh, I'm glad that I left" with a weak smile and half nod (*Divergent* 1:21:41-50). When she was questioned again, whether she will enforce the law even if broken by her loved ones, Tris again glances uncomfortably around before responding with a breathy "of course" (*Divergent* 1:22:02-03).

Her mental strength is also lost without the internal monologue. Ultimately the level of character complexity is a spectrum, the film adaptation of *Divergent* may not fully explore Tris' inner strength as in the book, but the growth of her determination and defiance are slowly revealed through the subtle nuances in Tris' posture and facial expressions as she becomes successful in Dauntless.

#### Improvisation: Print vs. Screen

Film adaptations can take steps to improve the messages of the book - for instance in the novel *Divergent*, Tris fears intimacy: “‘You’re afraid of me?’ ‘Not you,’ I say. I bite my lip to keep it still. ‘Being with you . . . with anyone. I’ve never been involved with someone before, and . . . you’re older, and I don’t know what your expectations are . . .’” (Roth 402). This scene in the novel can be seen as an unnecessary portrayal. In short, the movie transforms Tris' fear of intimacy into the fear of rape. The choice implies that fear of intimacy is less easy to understand or visually translate. It is easy to see why filmmakers alter such a scene. In a society where gender expectations and tropes are being redefined, the film voices a positive message by teaching young girls that they can be emotionally and physically strong. This comparison comes only for those who are familiar with both the text and the film but part of the issue is that those who are unfamiliar with the novelized version are missing out on having this fear represented and discussed, and thus validated, through media.

Furthermore, in the novel *Divergent* Tris is attacked and nearly thrown off a ledge to her death:

A heavy hand gropes along my chest. “You sure you’re sixteen, Stiff? Doesn’t feel like you’re more than twelve.” The other boys laugh. Bile rises in my throat and I swallow the bitter taste. “Wait, I think I found something!” His

hand squeezes me. I bite my tongue to keep from screaming. More laughter.

Al's hand slips from my mouth . . . (Roth 279)

This scene is absent in the film adaptation, also writers like Caitlin White, who explains, "I'm tired of people using rape as a plot device, and it was unnecessary in the book from the start. The reason they tried to kill her was because they saw her as a worthy adversary, not because she was a woman or weak. It doesn't fit" (qtd. in White). The scene in the novel can be seen as an unnecessary abuse, or capitalizing on sexual violence to increase the drama of the scene. In the movie, the scene is made more powerful by that omission, because it puts a laser-focus on the murder attempt, partially executed by Tris' friend Al, and how Tris responds. Thus, the screen version of *Divergent* demonstrates how an adaptation can take steps to improve the messages of the book.

#### Distinctions in showing the Climatic Moments: Print vs. Screen

In the book *The Hunger Games*, the characters of the game makers are not fully developed. The readers do see and feel that the game is falling apart, but they do not really see any more of this story. On the other hand, in the film many of the backstage machinations are revealed. Viewers watch the producers of the game inventing ways of keeping the tributes close to each other. In this regard, the villain, President Snow plays a much bigger role in the movie, where he appears in several scenes discussing the games with Seneca. So the viewer's learn more about the game makers. In fact inference is made that the game makers are going to be punished because the game is falling apart, but the viewers do not see it happen. The viewers are left with the game maker, Seneca Crane being locked in the room with a bowl of some poisonous berries. The film shows in detail how much backstage works are involved in getting the games to play in an entertaining area and engaging fashion.



In the book *Divergent*, Tris has to stop the computer simulation that is controlling the Dauntless members' minds and instigating them to kill the Abnegation members. When she gets to the control room, she finds only Four guarding the computers. Eventually, Tris overcomes the simulation that is controlling Four's mind, and he shuts down the simulation that is controlling the rest of Dauntless. There is no final fight in the book and the readers do not become very familiar with Jeanine, the villainess. They only know that she is up to no good and is plotting something bad.

In contrast, in the film adaptation with Jeanine in the Dauntless control room, Tris and Four have to physically stop her. When she makes a move to speed up the execution of the Abnegation members, Tris throws a knife into her hand and pins it to a computer screen. After fighting off with guards, Tris and Four inject Jeanine with a mind control serum and get her to shut down the simulation herself. She comes to sense as she realizes that all her plans have fallen apart. As a climactic moment, this is more satisfying than the novel version. Also as a villainess, Jeanine involves in several other scenes than she has in the literary origin.

Sound vs. Silence:

In the opening scene of the film *The Hunger Games*, Katniss is shown singing a lullaby to Prim. The film captures the strong bond between Katniss and Prim during the emotional Reaping scene through lingering camera, facial expressions and the use of shakiness in camera. The film viewers could receive the information from both images and sounds, while the novel readers only from the text. The sound in the film could create the environment in which the viewers could feel the characters' emotion. The magic of the sound in films is that it could duplicate the sounds in real life, and together with the images, it creates and displays the real life to the viewer's directly and immediately. By contrast, the novel could only describe things through silent words. For instance, in the book *The Hunger*

*Games* as the story progresses, many youngsters inevitably die in the hunger games. Some of these deaths are gruesome and prolonged, showing the perseverance that some of these characters have in their final moments.

In contrast, in the film these deaths take place quickly and added up with music, noise and real expression. Also the film does not need to prolong the moment any longer because this is an area that the viewers can easily understand being condensed. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the multilayered film is much more powerful in creating the real life than the novel. However, from another point of view, the weak point of novel can be a great advantage. It is just the silent and arbitrary nature of the signs in the novel provided unlimited space for the reader. Consequently, every reader could create the most excellent and imaginative world in their mind.

Both the original texts and its film adaptations share many similarities but there are differences in characterization, motivation, methods of narrating violence, handling romantic angle, climactic scene and the pace of the stories. The main conflict generally remains the same in both the book and its film adaptations. Film adaptation might miss some pieces, but those who have never read the book, gain almost the entire story, and all the messages that come with it. It is undeniable that parts of the book die in the adaptation; sometimes this is a necessary loss in order to gain even more such as the music, motion, colour, and the life of the film that is unique to the medium. While some parts die, new and beautiful parts are born. Those unique losses are balanced by unique gains; some messages are silenced, while others are brought to light. What is important in the end is to recognize and celebrate the ways in which these adaptations positively promote literature to next level.

Young Adult novels, and their adaptations, give youth role models, and help formulate their understanding of the world. For example, *The Fault in Our Stars* forces its

audience to confront the brutal reality of cancer. *Twilight* started national debates in hallways and social media about what an ideal relationship should be. *If I Stay* explores what is worth living for. All these address the great human questions of life, love, and death. Thus film adaptations have an impact on its audience than simply the narrative events. They teach lessons, provide heroes, and expand worldviews.

Accordingly, D.W. Griffith is often accredited as “the father of film technique,” for he is best known for laying the foundation of modern film language (Cook 51). He introduced many now-commonplace techniques, including subjective camera “point of view” shots and flashbacks (Cook 55-56). It is said that Dickens’ work “is generally credited for inspiring the innovations— the use of the close-up, parallel editing, montage, and even the dissolve” (qtd. in Boyum 3). Literary adaptation helps to bring various outlooks in filmmaking. They have given us culturally iconic characters, classic plots, and specific visual literacy.

Film is a multifaceted medium fulfilling many purposes at once. However, a content analysis of film adaptations suggests that books are being underutilized in their potential to diversify the types of stories being told. This is based on the practices of alteration and omission in the translation of the each film. As with all adaptations of books, comics, historical tales and autobiographical stories, film adaptations help draw attention to their underlying issues and expose those stories and messages to a new and wider audience. The simple fact is that when a film is based on a novel, it tends to evoke curiosity among the readers and the viewer’s rather than discouraging it. On the whole, film adaptation helps to enhance literature and filmic developments to a new wider level. In retrospect, the creative alliance between film and literature may be seen as one of the most valuable and revitalizing developments in the history of artistic expression.

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