

## **The deterioration of tragic characters within literature whilst exploring it's cinematic adaptation**

"Novel is a norm and the film deviates at its peril," (Bluestone, 1966) This dissertation proposal will focus on the deterioration of tragic characters within literature whilst exploring it's cinematic adaptation. Focusing first on adaptation itself and it's deterioration, the controversy behind it using tragedies as an example. Then the characters come in and it'll illustrate how adaptation after adaptation changes the original character. Finally the future for these characters will be explored, why the text is no longer relevant during the adaptation process.

"Film department and the field of film and literature, began to emerge in the U.S and the U.K in the 1960s and the 70s," (Aragay:2005) Numerous films started appearing during the 60s and 70s, indeed technology had become more apparent and adaptations are not ceasing to end. There has been many debates when it comes to the cinematic adaptation. Numerous thinkers discuss how the adaptation is ruining the original. Indeed Aragay quotes Virginia Woolf whilst comparing the "rhetoric of cinema as a rapacious animal of prey or parasite devouring 'it's unfortunate victim', literature." (Aragay:2005 p12) The loss of the original work, as well as the outrageous amount of consent needed when it comes to copyright is constantly debated. Whether it is "correct" to take an artists work and modify it completely. Most people respond positively to this statement, it is a freedom people should be granted "when consent is given" to do as they please. This is explored by thinkers such as Barthes and Nietzsche. "According to these writers, their protagonists are enfants terribles who completely escape from their control once they have been conceived," (B.Kalney:1997) the text no longer belongs to the author, the author is dead. However this is all to an extent. André Bazin mentions that certain adaptations must honor the piece, "all it takes is for the filmmakers to have enough visual imagination to create the cinematic equivalent of the style of the original, and for the critic to have the eyes to see it," (B.Kalney:1997) one needs imagination to be able to create something as wonderful as the original or "bring something truly personal and original to it, thus turning their films into the expression of a personal vision."(Aragay:2005)

Wagner also defends adaptation immensely as he even defines each sort of adaptation. Indeed Geoffrey Wagner categorized adaptations within three different categories. One is “transposition,” which means that there is no change whatsoever. The novel is directly on screen without any big difference. “Commentary” is the filmmaker taking a text and altering it with a different intention, he puts his own personal input in the story. “Analogy” is the third category where the text is simply a point of departure, everything else is different therefore the author isn’t copying. Despite their differences they all highlight a positive outlook on adaptation.

It is however something which has been present centuries ago in the Middle Ages. All the visual adaptations of certain biblical themes. Nevertheless the idea of authorship is fairly recent. Only now has copyright been present. People should be able to create something new with what they already have. However there is a limit for calling something an adaptation. Once the original text is gone, inked out, is it still an adaptation?

“Don Quixote and Gargantua dwell in the consciousness of millions of people who have never had any direct or complete contact with the works of Cervantes and Rabelais. I would like to be sure that all those who conjure up the spirit of Fabrice and Madame Bovary have read (or reread, for good measure) Stendhal and Flaubert, but I am not so sure.” André Bazin (B.Kalnay:1997) illustrates that these characters are talked and re-talked about however a large amount do not know of the true adaptation. These characters almost become myths and legends. Not only do people not read these works but they create an “adaptation” which kills the whole of the original authors work.

“The very principle of cinematic adaptation, whose aim is to simplify and condense a work from which it basically wishes to retain only the main characters and situations,” André Bazin (B.Karney:1997) gives this as the definition of adaptation. Following this idea it can be seen that some do not follow this definition. The characters are no longer retained, the author’s creation is desmembered, ephemere. This will be shown in different adaptations of Flaubert Gustave’s Madame Bovary.

First for Minnelli’s 1949 adaptation. The first couple of dialogue from the narrator situate us perfectly within the depths of Emma Bovary’s character, “she lived in a world of love, lovers, sweethearts (..) gentleman brave as lion gentle as lambs,” (Madame Bovary, 1949) this hints to the audience that something, reality will eventually hit her. Even though Minnelli choses to focus on Emma in the beginning then introducing Charles Bovary unlike the novel, the way he

illustrates his Emma represents Flaubert's perspective perfectly. During the Waltz scene in Minnelli's adaptation, the audience sees a Madame Bovary who is completely swept away, as she stares into the mirror she sees herself as the woman she has always desired to be. The spinning of the chandelier could possibly illustrate her being swamped with this enchantment, she is taken away which causes a huge problem to her notion of reality. Indeed this fairytale scene, where people break windows with chairs on her demand, will make her reality with Charles seem even duller, creating disillusion. Before the dance finished Emma hears Charles's voice calling her name, him interrupting and saying that he would like to dance with his wife, the whole of Emma's illusions and desires are taken away from her, inking her back to reality.

Minnelli's piece takes the words written by Flaubert and makes this piece whilst sticking to the metaphors, the romance and the harsh 'dull' reality within Flaubert's novel. He creates a piece of his own as well, emphasizing more on Emma's disillusion on screen. Taking Wagner's three adaptations and creating the "transpositional," "analogical" adaptation.

This is however not seen at all within the 2014 version of this tale. This character who has the desire of romance and beauty, a character who's dreams and expectations brought her to her fatal, extremely realistic death. This character's story had been adapted several times. However time after time, her surroundings and the characteristics which make her the face of "Bovarism" is destroyed and forgotten through time.

All the little elements where Flaubert says are considered to be "pearls," vanish. Within the newest adaptation of Madame Bovary, not only are the little gems forgotten but Madame Bovary is not seen to have a daughter at all. The daughter within the text who was part of the destruction, the deterioration of the make belief life Emma had dreamed of having. Indeed naming the daughter "Berte" sounds familiarly to the french word: "yuck."

She is not a heroine, she never was intended to be someone of power nor strength. She is the perfect illustration of someone who is in the wrong time and space, "she wanted to die, but she also wanted to live in Paris." She is not a sweet loving character, instead a character quite like Blanche DuBois is Streetcar named Desire, both live in fantasies and find themselves incredibly alluring.

For Mr. Bovary, he is supposed to be a humble yet pitiful character. From Madame Bovary's eyes his speech is "as plain as the sidewalk," this is not seen in this new adaptation

indeed he is more of a polished, slim, charming man which makes it completely unrealistic as to why Emma would leave him.

In the death scene, Flaubert uses an enumeration of adjectives describing all the symptoms Emma has, he uses alliteration of “s” “r” “f” words to make the scene seem harsher. He uses words to bring Emma into this tragic reality, to her fatal realistically disturbing death. Indeed the laugh she gives before her death is described to be: “an atrocious, frenzied, desperate laugh.” Flaubert doesn’t give Emma Bovary any mercy, anything to make her death less painful. This is slightly aparraint within Minnelli’s adaptation as well as the 1991 version. Indeed In the 1991 version, Emma is seen almost decaying on her bed as she dies. However this is completely neglected by Sophie Barthes.

For the death scene in the new adaptation Emma runs away and dies in the woods alone, this could possibly be interpreted that she dies within a fairytale like death, away from reality. She has escaped within the woods far from Charles or anyone. This death scene does not even last 2 minutes. Charles’s character is not seen within the last 10 minutes of the film, he is simply heard, even though within the novel he is present in the first to last chapter.

It could be then seen as Wagner would describe as an analogy adaptation. However the entire concept of Emma as a tragic hero dies through this film. The words Flaubert writes dies as well, it decays as the piece moves along. This could be seen as another film loosely inspired by Madame Bovary but it no longer “honors” not the story but the words of Flaubert, it was taken from him and completely transformed.

This illustrates perfectly the decayment of tragic heroes within literature to film adaptations. The text itself and the actual characters disappear leaving people the freedom to dislocate and demember the novel whilst still calling it an adaptation which honors the writer’s work..

The future of adaptation is then put to question. Lots can observe that film after film the original text is truly lost, generation after generation would never hear of the original piece. Our society and points of view have changed adaptations as well, forcing certain elements on an original text in order to make it more “ethically” correct, for example having a certain percentage of the cast of crew to be of a mixed race or sex. This triggers the loss of the original text. One example could be in a Streetcar named desire, even though in the play Stella stays

behind with Stanley the movie shows an independent woman running away from a “bad” marriage and raising her child on her own. Something female audiences would have probably liked to see during the post war 50s. The evolution is also triggered by advancement within technology. The focus quickly becomes more on the aesthetic side, losing the plot completely. Examples could be the numerous Walt Disney live adaptations for the Grimm Brothers or Anderson’s works. The Marvel or DC Comics adaptations. The use of Special Effects dominate the entire focus of the audience to the extent that they even loose track of the storyline.

To conclude, the relationship between film and literature has always been something addressed by thinkers. The extent of adaptation. One can adapt freely as long as they do not dishonor or murder the words of the author. Your freedom end when someone else’s begins. However one could also decide that there is no longer original texts, the ideas one has now is simply a composition of various ashes from every other distinguished source. “It is possible to imagine that we are moving toward a reign of the adaptation in which the notion of the unity of the work, if not the very notion of the author himself, will be destroyed,” (Aragay, 2005:27) the reign Bazin mentions has clearly already happened. Adaptation is inevitable. Why should there be a limit? People should be free to use whatever source they have if it permits them to create something new and innovative.

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