



Research Paper

Analysis of Cinematic Adaptations of Classic Novels

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ABSTRACT

The Understanding Cinema course I completed for my bachelor's degree, which included modules on the history of cinema, film terminology, movements in cinema, and other topics, served as a major inspiration for this essay. I became aware of the unique resources needed to decipher cinema's dual language. In this course, I learned some basic filmmaking methods as well as how to interpret and analyze film. The Soviet Montage (editing), Deep Focus (camera), Mise en scene (staging shots), 180-degree rule, Eyeline matching, Lighting, Close-up, Sound, Music, and Jump cut are further major film language elements that were learned. The goal of the paper is to comprehend how different eras of film have adapted novels, using the knowledge about film that was acquired during this semester. Additionally, to comprehend various cinematic effects and how they contribute to the movie's overall impact. It offers a chance to learn about the connections between them and the influence that each has on the others. The objective is to use the skills gained in this course to determine whether the films are equally engaging as the novels for these movies.

Keywords: cinema, cinematic elements, classic novels, films

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I. INTRODUCTION

Since the discovery of cinema, many classic novels have been adapted into films. The first literary adaptations that can be traced were made by George Méliès, who produced the first cinematic adaptation of a Shakespearean play, King John, and Cinderella, based on a Brothers Grimm tale. From then on, filmmaking has increasingly embraced the practice of literary adaptation. The films selected for this study span two separate time periods, with two from the nineties and the other two from the twenty-first century. In a chronological sequence, the films are as follows: Sense and Sensibility, directed by Ang Lee in 1995, Jane Eyre, directed by Robert Young in 1997, Madame Bovary, directed by Sophie Barthes in 2014, and Little Women, directed by Greta Gerwig in 2019. Although the films originate from different eras, they all objectively portray the situation of women in the early to mid-18th century. These films were produced in either the United States or the United Kingdom; the primary language was English, and they were afterwards dubbed in other languages such as French, Spanish, Latin, and German.

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

Sense and Sensibility was originally a Victorian-era novel written by Jane Austen and premiered in 1811. After being published, the book was an instant success, and it was subsequently adapted for the stage, the screen, and television. The 1995 film, directed by Ang Lee, and its stellar cast, which includes, among others, Emma Thompson as Elinor Dashwood, Kate Winslet as Marianne Dashwood, Hugh Grant as Edward Ferrars, and Alan Rickman as Colonel Brandon, is the most acclaimed version. Although Emma Thompson, who is also the film's screenwriter, removed significant portions of the book, the movie nonetheless managed to win an Oscar. Approximately six or seven lines from the book are included in the screenplay. The style that emerged in the film is a charming half-parody that resonates with a twentieth century audience. A story that maintains its power as a study of class, wealth, and character, but focuses mostly on pure enjoyment - and humor. The goal of Sense and Sensibility is really to awaken the romantic in each of us and demonstrate that Jane Austen's view of love is just as relevant now as it was two centuries ago. Although Sense and Sensibility may legitimately be categorized as a love story, that would barely scratch the surface of what this film has to offer. Additionally, it is a historical drama that allows us to view English society in the nineteenth century. Director Ang Lee transported us to this historical period through exquisitely designed sets and locations that immediately

transported us to the heroines' hut in the countryside. With its wide-sweeping camerawork and natural environment, this film transports us to a time before loud noises from equipment and TV became commonplace.

STRUCTURE: The story's narrative pursues a chronological plot that begins with their time in Devonshire, but various flashbacks are interspersed as Elinor recounts every memory from her father's passing up until their time in Devonshire. The narrative then continues, explaining how March's hard existence is ultimately repaid with blessings.

LIGHTING: Throughout the course of the movie, natural, bright, and soft lighting has been used. It continued to give viewers the impression of being in the twenty - first century. Since the fundamental idea of the movie was to depict everything as it would have been during that time, no artificial lighting was employed during the production. Rarely are inside scenes illuminated, especially in the evening when candlelight would have been the primary source of lighting, therefore, it reinforces the atmosphere of traditional Victorian evenings and gatherings.

SYMBOLISM: The state of nature—country and city—is a powerfully symbolic representation of the narrative. In Devonshire, a place known for its lush countryside, happy occasions like Marianne's love for Willoughby and her acceptance of Colonel Brandon after overcoming Willoughby's breakup also occur. Elinor also receives an engagement ring from Edward, which is then followed by the sisters' wedding scene. In contrast, everything goes terribly wrong in London: Marianne's lung sickness, Willoughby's rejection of her, and Elinor's predicament are brought on by the environment.

SOUND: The importance of the music and sound in this movie is minimal to nonexistent. But just like the movie and the women it focuses on, the music that has been used is gentle and soothing. With ease, the music moves through each scenario. In this film, Marianne deals with music through her piano.

CUTS AND TRANSITIONS:

A. **CLOSE-UP** :- It's peculiar how Lucy Steele tells Fanny Dashwood about her covert engagement with Edward Ferrars. Since Steele teases Fanny about her secret for a while, the close-up assists in amplifying the tension in this moment. A slow close-up is used to progressively draw more attention to Fanny's face, emphasizing her cunning and eager expressions. The close-up jumps back and forth between Fanny and Lucy until coming to a conclusion when Fanny discovers Lucy's secret.

B. **DEPTH OF FIELD** :- This method has been used in numerous scenes and frames. Elinor is standing in a corner, listening to Marianne play the piano, when Edward first approaches her. Here, Elinor and Edward are the main subjects, and the camera centers on them, instantly switching the audience's perspective. Additionally, as the spectator knows little about Marianne prior to this scene, this approach lends her character greater intrigue. The second time is when Elinor and her mother are discussing Colonel Brandon's benefits for Marianne. The latter two are also in the picture's main focus. Giving the viewer a sense of completion throughout the process.

JANE EYRE

The 1997 British television movie *Jane Eyre* directed by Robert Young, starring Samantha Morton in the title character, debuted on ITV. It is an adaptation of the identical-titled novel by Charlotte Bronte, published in 1847.

STRUCTURE : In contrast to other films, this film features a speaker who narrates the plot in a linear fashion. The narrator serves as the film's protagonist. The audience experiences the movie through Jane's perspective from the beginning till the conclusion. The narration by Jane is used to rush ahead in time, omit portions from the original novel, and move through situations relatively quickly, such as Jane's time at Lowood with Helen. The voice-over in the movie is applied to reveal Jane's feelings about Mr. Rochester.

SOUND: The soundtrack in this film significantly contributes to the cinematic experience. Several different sound effects have been used throughout the film. Especially when young Jane is imprisoned in the crimson room in the first scene. The director manipulates the audio and visual elements to create a supernatural atmosphere. By simply increasing the volume at this moment, the situation is intensified. Instances of visual manipulations include the curtain shifting and the teacup falling. Moreover, Jane as well as the viewer are both unaware of the constant noises because they are non-diegetic. The ominous mood is accomplished by these noises.

EDITING: The editing is not entirely consistent. There are numerous occasions where it is possible to discern a disparity. For example, it's afternoon when Rochester and Jane declare their emotions for one another, but the moment Rochester leans in for a kiss, it's dark and twilight. Similar to this, when Rochester and Jane are arguing and Jane decides to leave, Rochester brings Jane to their "spot," which is near to the tree where they professed their affections, in an effort to stop her from going. The following scene shows them standing beneath the tree after the spectator has only seen Jane's footsteps in the distance for a brief minute. This appeared abrupt, leaving a gap between the two frames.

SYMBOLISM: A close-up of the ring falling from the minister's book is shown as Richard Mason (Bertha's brother) interrupts the wedding. In this close-up, "micro physiognomy" (one of the methods proposed by Bela Balasz) suggests impending conflict or a potential separation for Jane and Rochester.

CUTS AND TRANSITIONS:

A. **CROSS-CUTTING** :- This occurs while Rochester and Ingram are singing and Jane is sobbing in another room. The first-person narration carries on in the background, enhancing the overall impact of the scene.

B. **DISSOLVE EFFECT** :- This happens right after the previously mentioned shot. This effect can be noticed twice in a matter of minutes. First, as Jane enters the room, the singing between Ingram and Rochester stops. Second, the scene where Rochester and the guests are enjoying a game fades into an empty image of the space. This effect has been used in several scenes, including the dance scene where Rochester and Jane are dancing the night before their wedding.

C. **PEDESTAL SHOT** :- Rochester is waiting for Jane to come back while perched on top of a brick wall. Rochester begins a conversation shortly after Jane arrives, and suddenly leaps off the wall. The jump was captured by the camera moving up and down, but the clear cut rendered the entire jump sequence strange.

LIGHTING: The visual tone of the entire film was extremely peculiar. More than enough brightness and insufficient contrast were present. Consequently, eliciting a pale experience for the viewer. There was a lot of whiteness because of the high exposure. The lack of cohesion between the attire, stage dressing, and props made for an uninspiring encounter. The usage of a filter to achieve that appearance is suggested by the fact that the screen seems excessively blue during the evening or night scenes rather than dark.

MADAME BOVARY

Sophie Barthes is the author and director of the 2014 historical romance drama film *Madame Bovary*. It is a cinematic adaptation of the scandalous novel by the French author Gustav Flaubert. Mia Wasikowska, who plays Emma Bovary, Henry Lloyd-Hughes, Ezra Miller, who plays Leon Dupuis, and Logan Marshall-Green, who plays the Marquis or Rodolphe Boulanger in the novel, make up the phenomenal cast of the movie. *Madame Bovary* was met with conflicting reactions. "Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* has remained an extraordinarily difficult novel to film over the years - and this rendition adds another dismal addition to the list," one of the reviews of the film stated. The narrative follows Emma's increasing boredom, her irrational passions, and her ultimate downfall as it moves through the movements. "Disclosing that she passes away at the end of Flaubert's book might be giving away the plot, but Ms. Barthes employs the tried-and-true cinematic technique of announcing the conclusion in the first scene and having almost everything else take place in flashbacks. This is a quick route to feelings that the movie doesn't do much to elicit, and it also distorts the inexorable, purposeful uniformity of Flaubert's story (Scott, A.O, 2015)". While some passages are leisurely, brooding, and frequently wordless to symbolize Emma's seclusion, major emotional upheavals occur unexpectedly. Nevertheless Barthes' film manages to feel like *Madame Bovary* the way it was intended to because of the extravagant artistic trappings and the emotional flatness.

STRUCTURE: The plot of this film is dramatic or progressive. It followed a chronological structure to create the film's background (18th-century setting) and conflict (Emma's dissatisfaction with her life). Then, through a series of events, such as her affairs and indulgence in worldly pursuits, reached a climax. Ultimately concluding the film with her suicide.

LIGHTING: This film's tone of voice is quite crucial. An astute observer can infer that the tone of the movie and its meaning are related. Each shot is given priority. To create a realistic impression and accurately depict the era, natural lighting has been incorporated. In the film, Barthes plays with light, dark, and neutral color tones. Both of these tones also have subliminal connotations.

For instance, the tone of the wedding scene is warm and bright at first, indicating a cheerful environment, but in the scene after, when Emma is watching Charles, the tone darkens, suggesting her uncertainty and fear about the future. The film's tone dramatically shifts when Emma first meets Leon Dupuis and starts conversing with him, showing Emma's new optimistic side. However, when Leon admits his feelings for Emma, the exposure is incredibly low, which highlights Emma's ambiguous sentiments for Leon. When Emma approaches the Marquis, that situation is also odd (Rodolphe). The art direction in this scene is outstanding; the tonal contrast has been carefully considered, and the tone of the backdrop and the props is neutral as opposed to that of the characters and their attire, allowing the character's face, expressions, and speech to take center stage and maximize the effect. The lighting in the movie has a big impact on the feelings it wants to convey.

SOUND: The music and sound effects employed in the movie are pertinent for the mood and purpose. Continuously and subtly, piano music plays in the background. But in significant scenes, such as the one where Leon professes his emotions for Emma in the above paragraph, thunderous clouds add to the scene's overall impact. In order to increase the impact of crucial situations, the sound usually gets louder.

EDITING/CUTS AND TRANSITION:

A. J-CUT :- To present this technique, the scene began before the scene. That is to say, the opening scene was presented before the audience heard the sound of someone running, the sound of trees rustling, the sound of a strong wind creating the sense of a forest, and other sounds. Emma is seen racing through the woods in desperation.

B. THE HANDHELD SHOT :- The departure of Emma and Charles from Emma's house is one instance where this tactic has been applied. The camera appears to be moving on the carriage as they are seated on it. Additionally, it appears that the camera is moving during Emma's sprinting in the opening scene. The viewer experiences motion because of the raw, unsteady impression of the camera's movement through the scene.

C. THE RACK FOCUS :- After meeting, there is an immediate connection between Leon and Emma in the church scene. When Emma turns and casts a glance behind her in this scene, the first focus is on Charles, then it quickly changes to Leon. As a result, it refocuses the audience's attention while also signaling Emma's change of heart.

SYMBOLISM: Particularly, there are two occurrences that can be viewed as metaphorical. The flower from Emma's wedding may be a sign for her sad marriage. Additionally, she works to save her marriage in the same manner that she removes the spiders and webs. After the hunt, Emma's perspective changes dramatically. It can be assumed that Emma's rebirth was implied by the antler's death.

LITTLE WOMEN

An enthusiastic feedback of the film reads, "If every generation deserves its own 'Little Women' adaptation, Greta Gerwig has done this one proud with a lively — if oddly nonlinear — retelling" (Debruge, Peter 2019). Greta Gerwig is the writer and director of the 2019 American coming-of-age historical drama movie *Little Women*. This is the seventh movie adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's same-titled novel from 1868. Saoirse Ronan plays the character Josephine "Jo" March, Emma Watson is Margaret "Meg" March, Florence Pugh portrays Amy March, Eliza Scanlen performs as Elizabeth "Beth" March, and Laura Dern embodies Marmee March. While, Meryl Streep acts as Aunt March, and Timothée Chalamet dons the role of Theodore "Laurie" Laurence. Without using overt anachronism or pedantic antiquarianism, Gerwig has created a narrative that seems both wholly loyal to its nineteenth century roots and thoroughly contemporary. On the one hand, Gerwig's screenplay subtly criticizes the traditional view of marriage as a structure where men are expected to support women financially. On the other hand, it also promotes love and marriage as decisions equivalent to those related to job aspirations; after all, Meg does decide to start a family and justifies her choice to Jo in a subtly feminist scene. We wanted you to feel completely immersed in the realities of the moment, Gerwig said to ScreenDaily. The movie was successful in allowing the spectator to experience the protagonists' time journey, and it flows quite well (Zhang, Stella 2021). The audience has the opportunity to consider women's marriage and pursuit in novel ways and to engage in thought-provoking discussion.

STRUCTURE: The plot of the film is nonlinear. The gap amounts to nearly 7 years. Because there are two different time periods at play—their childhood and the current adulthood—it works in flashbacks, so we move back and forth frequently in the film. With the exception of the kiss at the conclusion and the opening Christmas

letter from Father, Gerwig opts to reorganize the scenes rather than narrating "Little Women" in a chronological order as did Alcott and her earlier interpreters.

LIGHTING: Yet again, the movie's lighting and overall tone are quite important. Because the story jumps back and forth, it was essential to create a different film tone for each time period. For instance, during the girls' childhood moments, the color tones and colors were warmer and brighter along with the tone in set clothing and wardrobes (the girls wore lighter shades like red, green, pink, etc.). However, as they mature, the tone in set dressing and clothing changes, as do the color tones and hues (the girls begin wearing darker shades like black, gray, and blue, etc. in their adulthood). The contrast between the day their father returned home and the day Jo arrives home to meet Beth is most striking; the cottage looks darker and everyone in the frame is dressed in darker hues. As a result, the variation in film tone not only distinguishes the era but also captures the mood and feelings of the characters. Another memorable scene occurs when Fred Vaughn asks Amy to marry him. At first, everything is vibrant and brilliant, but as soon as the scene changes and Amy tells Aunt March that she declined the proposal, the colors grow darker and bluer. The conversation between Beth and Jo on the beach is one of the most moving passages in this film. Here, every last element is harmonious. This scene is significantly influenced by lighting and camera angle. When the camera is angled straight, the tone becomes much brighter, the exposure is fairly high, and the sky is nearly white, showing Beth's serenity with her impending death. When the camera is angled sideways, the tones are deeper, depicting Jo's frustration with the situation.

SOUND: This film's audio element has received a moderate amount of attention. The sound and music are appropriate for the character's mood. Even the rhythm changes depending on the character and how they move. For instance: The sound gets faster as Jo starts running in New York after selling her article. There is the fidelity of sound, often known as parallel sound, which refers to the audience hearing what they anticipate hearing based on what they see.

EDITING/CUTS AND TRANSITIONS:

A. **THE HANDHELD SHOT** :- Most often, long shots and wide angles have been used in the childhood sequences to fit the complete family into one frame. The movement of the camera gives the impression that it is doing so to emphasize the energy and joy of their childhood.

B. **THE STEADICAM** :- The camera is much stronger and more exact when showing them as adults, highlighting each of the sisters individually.

C. **THE CRANE OR BOOM SHOT** :- The moment in Mr. Laurence's house while Beth is playing the piano. There are no cuts in this sequence; instead, the camera tilts and moves more widely to highlight Mr. Laurence's presence on the stairway.

D. **ZOOM** :- The most original sequences are those in which the letter's sender, in a brief monologue, narrates the letter. The viewer is given a distinctive sensation as the camera gradually zooms in on the character's face. Additionally, it draws attention to the characters' feelings.

II. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, each director's liberty of choice is subjective. They added a personal touch to their own films and didn't strictly follow the novels. A visually appealing movie was produced as a result of Ang Lee's careful balancing of all cinematic elements. He was able to convey a cozy rural atmosphere while still drawing attention to topics like materialism, women's standing, and the significance of marriage in the 18th century. Through the use of the film's lighting, costumes, and settings, he brought the past to life. *Sense and Sensibility* is unquestionably a classic movie.

Another well regarded book is Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, which has been the subject of countless film adaptations. Unfortunately, Robert Young's adaptation fell short of both audiences' and critics' expectations. While careful consideration was given to the setting, settings, and character styling, the crucial cinematic elements were missed. The other features simply outweighed Robert's attempt to evoke a sense of a rural romance. In comparison to *Jane Eyre*, which came out two years earlier, *Sense and Sensibility* had a greater impact on readers. This demonstrates how important it is for a director to have a subjective understanding of cinema and all of its facets because this affects the audience and their reaction.

Sophie Barthes was successful in creating the most endearing adaptation of the contentious book, *Madame Bovary*. The 2014 version easily outshines the competition. From the very beginning to the very end, the viewer is captivated. Because of the film's cinematography, interest is maintained. Barthes mostly concentrated on the underlying meaning and the aesthetic consequences. The understanding of camera

movements and editing approaches in the entertainment business had advanced greatly by this time. As a result, Barthes used a lot of cuts and transitions, and the camera movement is more sophisticated than in the previous two films. We did get a glimpse of eighteenth-century society via Barthes' eyes.

Little Women (2019) is the best adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's book, much like Madame Bovary. With this coming-of-age tale, Greta Gerwig outdid herself. Gerwig updated the book, but it still had all of its relatability. Each character had enough time and space to establish their personality with the viewer. Since this is the most recent of the four films, it is impossible to notice the advancement in cinematography. Greta's contemporary style gave the bygone era new life. In this movie, the significance of lighting was vividly illustrated. There are several memorable scenes in this movie.

A sense of the 18th century was successfully created through the settings, places, and clothing. This film, like Sense and Sensibility, discusses the value of marriage to a woman's life. For the audience, each character offers a moral lesson.

The four films all essentially deal with the same subject, yet their depiction and impact are quite different. There are differences in how male and female directors approached it for their films. In comparison to the other two, Madame Bovary and Little Women were much more believable and compelling. Sense and Sensibility did succeed in capturing the correct mood, but Madame Bovary and Little Women had a stronger visual impact.

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