

If Literature Inspires Film, What Does Film Inspire?

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The organizers pose a familiar question to adaptation scholars (What issues have scholars overlooked in foundational and recent research in adaptation studies?), and while I don't feel that the ensuing proposal addresses an act of "overlooking," it does seem requisite to consider the logical extension of adaptation studies into the realm of the inspirational qualities of film across a range of textual media. The field of adaptation studies is now on firm footing; this conference exists (even in the time of COVID); adaptation analyses are common staples at other academic conferences (cinema studies and otherwise), and there's a plethora of scholarly resources to draw on for studying the transition from printed page to moving image.

But the absence arises when considering the undeniable extension of the influence of cinema on other adaptations, many of them static (i.e. written or drawn). Other forms of adaptation move the big screen to the small screen (a process that also works in reverse). Still other forms of adaptation involve reimaginings of the cinematic primary source (a primary source that may actually be adapted from a written text). There is work in this area (e.g. S. M. Gauriento's *Light into Ink*) but the field seems too fertile to not till. So, let's consider some of the following as places to break ground.

Films that inspire written texts

Many of the questions we ask about cinematic adaptation (see Thomas Leitch's seminal essays that articulate the questions and mistakes we make when discussing adaptations) can be applied to works that are inspired by cinematic texts. For example, Dean Owen (Dudley Dean McGaughey) published a series of novelizations of schlocky horror flicks (*Konga*, *The Brides of Dracula*, and *Reptilicus*) that added steamy sex scenes absent from the films

themselves. These adaptations destabilize the generic placement of the original work (similarly to pornographic parodies of popular media—more on this later) and raise questions about authorial/publisher purpose.

We can also ask similar questions of fan fiction involving existing cinematic works, particularly western co-opting of anime. How are the originals influenced and changed by Western eyes and sensibilities? Are there significant narrative, thematic, or structural changes in fan fiction? Are such changes damaging? And what does the community aspect of these texts mean for adaptation studies?

Moving from written texts to graphic texts, we can also: How do static graphic texts draw from a dynamic visual medium? How is the writing different? Is it subservient to the visual? What place might fidelity concerns have in the translation? A good starting point here might be the crossover graphic novels where the Looney Tunes meet stalwarts from the DC Universe, or the re-imaginings of Hanna Barbera staples in edgier storylines.

The History of Adaptations

Plotting the history of texts that get adapted and readapted over time reveals quite a lot about history (cinematic, social, political, and so on). We know that texts are not created in a vacuum, and the influence of both technological advancement and cultural change on adaptations that go through multiple versions and media is fascinating and revelatory. Factor in the role of nostalgia as a driver of both production and reception and the matrix becomes even more tumultuous. Tracing, for example, the evolution of *Pride and Prejudice* from novel to films to “updated novel” (*Eligible*) to web series (*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*) shows audiences much about the life of texts beyond the page.

Big Screen Meets Small Screen

The word “film” in the organization’s name privileges a certain class of visual text, but the

same things that we talk about concerning the translation of written text to film can be applied to movement from large to small screen (or even asked of cinema specifically for the small screen). In other words, maybe the time is nigh to consider films as inspirational texts that can, and do, drive adaptations to smaller media. The case of M*A*S*H might apply here. It began as a book (which also had a sequel!), evolved into a lauded Robert Altman film, then morphed into one of the most popular tv shows ever, a show that inspired three spin-offs, two pilots focused on the nurses, a cartoon (M*U*S*H) and two porn parodies. The reverse of this adaptation is also worth study; what does the production of big screen versions of small screen shows suggest about not only the movie industry but the nature of adaptable texts? What role do questions of fidelity play in such translations? How are the new larger scope texts to be judged?

Parody and Appropriation

As alluded to earlier, the pornographic film industry makes much hay by creating XXX versions of popular movies and television shows (yes, there is a place other than *Showgirls* to see a version of Jessie Spano naked!). This tendency is not as new as one might believe, the pornographic film industry has long relied on the liberal use of tropes and structures from more mainstream media and film as basis for its output (e.g. *Beach Blanket Bango*, *Please Don't Eat My Mother*). While investigating the films themselves isn't for everyone there is grist to be milled by considering the role of appropriation in these texts. It's also interesting to consider, again, what the existence of such films tells us about cultural production? If porn isn't your thing then it's also possible to pose similar questions and study similar aims by looking at the films from The Asylum that are either inspired by public domain characters (*Sinister Squad*, the alternative version of *Suicide Squad* to name one) or coded as "mockbusters" (*Snakes on a Train*, *Atlantic Rim*, *Homeward*, there are many). Similarly, the impulses driving porn parody can be interrogated here. Are such films signals of minds bereft of originality or is it a highly innovative form of appropriation (or even adaptation) to draw inspiration from popular and higher profile media?

Essentially, the field of adaptation studies does seem ready to take a step in perhaps a slightly different direction. At its core the discipline is concerned with intertextuality, the ways in which texts converse with each other across time and media. The examples here provide us with some possible directions, moving from the known (page to screen adaptation) to different conversations, which, given the rise of personal technology and creation/production mechanisms, are perhaps the next phase of adaptation/appropriation that will be part of the conversation for the ensuing generations of scholars and fans.