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Discussion of Children Literature to Film Adaptation:

Why there are large changes to storyline?

兒童文學到電影改編: 為什麼劇情有了巨大的改變?

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Academic Year: Semester 2, 2015

Abstract

This paper is to explore the potential reasons and causes for adaptation from literature to films. You may have once watched a movie adapted from a household work, but you couldn't realize why it was totally different from the story you used to know. Here I will discuss further and analyze different aspects of features by providing some convincing sources written by experts and scholars, and then give you a comparison between original and adapted ones to see the difference clearly. Moreover, as now the younger generations rely too much on film versions to read a literary work, I found it important to indicate to the public. My analysis will be surprising you because the factors include tensions from life, stereotype and benefits of box office are three major reasons that movies tend to change the original literature. I initially explain the intent of children literature and take Charles Perrault as an example to make it clear, and compare lifestyle to different eras. Later in the paper you can see a gigantic change of the notion that men and women are equal and people shouldn't decide their social position and personality by gender. Lastly, adding or deleting plots, movie producers increase people's propensity to watch the adapted films. If people view this change as a new way to appreciate literature works, they will ruin the chance to feel the original production of emotions, meanings, or it will be hard for them to engage in the story with their own minds. Shallow and superficial edited versions easily misguide audiences' understanding of original versions. My paper may help understand the significance of reading and critical thinking, and so that the public does not ignore the problem of changing storyline. After reading this paper, I assure that it will be more fun to have a taste of literature before watching adapted movies.
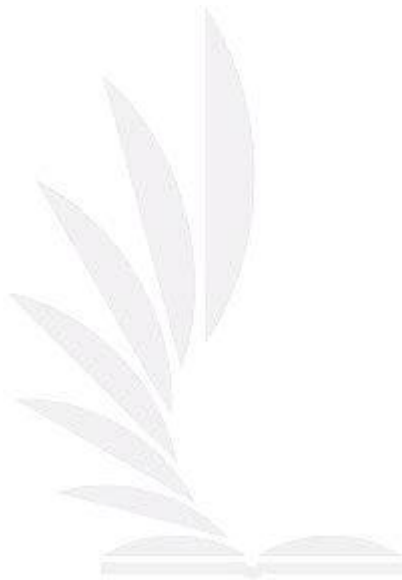
中文摘要

　　此份研究報告目的在於探討文學改編電影大大修改其劇情的潛在原因，我們也許都有過相同經驗，就是當你看著大螢幕上播映著膾炙人口的故事時，卻發現電影的劇情發展與你所知道的故事內容完全不同。為了用不同角度更進一步討論分析，將提供許多專家和學者的文獻資料並且比較原著和改編後電影的不同之處。再者，因為現代年輕人太依賴從電影中去閱讀經典文學，我們忽略了其中的問題和危機，理應藉由這份報告讓大家重視這個問題。文章內提及的劇情改編原因可能令你感到訝異，原因包括三點: 我們日常生活中的壓力、性別刻板印象的突破、電影公司的利益考量。第一點以 Charles Perrault 為例，比較不同年代生活方式和風格，促使現代的高壓症候群。第二點是近年社會對男女生定義的改觀，性別平等對待和性別角色的改變。最後一點為電影公司對劇情刪刪減減，以便增加觀眾對改編電影的興致和興趣，衝高票房。如果大家認為看電影去了解一個文學作品是新的方法，他們將會失去一個去了解、感受作者內心意涵的機會，而且他們會更難融入劇情產生共鳴。許多膚淺粗糙的文學改編電影誤導民眾對一些作品的欣賞，希望能藉由此份報告讓大家了解到閱讀和批判思考的重要性，別忽略的電影改編的潛在問題，我也相信閱讀完此篇文章，必定會促使大家在看電影之前，有了更多動力和熱情去閱讀原著的精華和靈魂。

關鍵字：兒童文學、性別議題、英美文學、電影改編、電影

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Discussion of Children Literature to Film Adaptation:

Why there are large changes to storyline?

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April 23, 2015

Introduction and Statement of the problem:

Every time when I watched movies, I noticed that film production company preferred to change plots of original books. I started wondering why they omitted the essence of literary works, and they made a large change of storyline. What's more, I had read some stories before the movies were adapted. It was enjoyably evocative while I watched these films. So why does film production change the storyline from the original ones? "Literature offers insight into culture, relives important events in history, and lends people different interpretations and viewpoints" (Christine A. Nelson, 2013). Nowadays we are situated in common effect used in cinema— surrounded sound, which could make an aircraft fly over the heads of the audience or lead people to travel through different times. Does the meaning of the work change? Does the meaning become clearer and more powerful, or weaker and more perplexed? Although both of films and works reach the same goal—keeping the central idea of the work, they evoke some problems such as a monologue of adapted movies, and reduce the chance for students to think on their own.

Research questions:

So, why are there large changes to storyline? It is roughly divided into three major factors. First, nowadays people long for happy, wonderful, and perfect ending of the stories to make a compensation for their stressful lives (Watching a Movie Will

Relieve Stress, 2012, December). To get comfort, they need to find a new way to evacuate themselves from the real world. The result is that there are full of positive influences over the movies rather than end the stories miserably. Second, there are different characteristics of female or male in modern times. Women in the fairytales, for example, they always represented fragility and vulnerability, but there seems to be a huge changeover for these few decades. For instance, women have increased their ranks in the top management jobs, compared to a Margaret Gallagher study in 1995 that showed women occupying on average of only 12% of the top management positions in 239 nations. The new global study shows women in 26% of the governing and 27% of the top management jobs (Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media, 2011). We recognize one thing: more and more gender issues and the topics of controversial gender discrimination have gained attention in the public. At length, the stories focus on exaggerated plots. Companies have to attract more attentions from audiences by visual effects.

Purpose and significance of study:

As for literary works we chose for this discussion, *Oz: the Great and Powerful*, *Maleficent, Into the Woods* and *Alice in Wonderland*, all produced by Walt Disney Pictures, and they were based on *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, combination of *Red Riding Hood* and *Cinderella*, and *Alice's Adventures in*

Wonderland respectively. We will explore further from the key elements of these children literature to their film adaptations in different aspects. The significance of this study will reveal social problems related to film adaptation, and it makes people know the real value of literary works. Most important of all, the research encourages everyone to appreciate the original text instead of understanding classic works through the movies, specifically focusing on the decisions the director has made and compare those to the original version of the work. In this paper, it will first analyze reasons that people need to relieve their tension from the fast life-pace by watching movies.

The first factor: tense lifestyle drive people to find comfort through movies

The exaggerating plots in the movies help relax the viewers. The pace of life

does change tremendously from the past to the present, while we can observe it

through each story and films. *The Sleeping Beauty*, for example, focuses on pure and

innocent love that possesses such tangible strength which can defeat anything. The

plot puts much emphasis on love; it means that love can conquer all. The sleeping

beauty was written by a French Charles Perrault in 1697. From the very beginning,

thousands of years ago, tales were told to create communal bonds in the face of

inexplicable forces of nature, to the present. When introduced to fairy tales, children

welcome them mainly because the stories nurture their great desire for change and

independence (Jack Zipes, 1991). Early fairy tales were told for adult entertainment.

They were often gruesome and sometimes suggestive in nature. Charles Perrault

reworked the old fairy tales and adapted them to his times and society. "Perrault

transformed the stories from adult entertainment stories to tales for children, with

clear morals and lessons" (Mark Wheeler, 2012). This phenomenon caused the

simple storyline at that time, it represents that the story spread the concept of love and

benevolence instead of complex humanity or greedy desire of human from stressful

lives. On the other hand, let's get back to the modern time. Take *Maleficent* as another

example, Maleficent is portrayed as a good fairy who protects the Moors, a realm of

supernatural beings, from the neighboring human kingdom. Having befriended Stefan

when they were children and slowly falling for each other, Maleficent was betrayed by

Stefan and she decided to take revenge on the king Stefan by placing a curse on the

king's newborn Aurora to fall in a forever sleep until she received the kiss of true love.

To make sure that her curse was completed, she was in a company of the child till she

turned to eighteen. However, Maleficent felt regretful because she realized the girl

was totally innocent. After Aurora fell in a deep sleep, Maleficent became the person

who woke her up to save her life. "True love kiss" is not a romantic kiss of prince

anymore. Curse can be broken by an affectionate deed of anyone. We may notice the

significant theme of being genuine and kind in this film. Nowadays we are situated in

a competitive generation and society so that stressful people work too hard to care for

their beloved ones. The point is that we forget how to love, to give, to cherish, to share.

They can only relieve their daily pressure by watching movies or doing other leisure

activities to comfort. This is called *comfort movie*, a movie that a person likes to

watch and fall asleep to and feel comfortable doing so, but they may have seen the

movie countless times and they know it forward and backward (Urban Dictionary).

The feature of modern comfort movies includes pursue of dramatic development of

films and inextricably woven storyline. People need a compensation for their

high-paced lives, or they unleash their emotions from real world. This is because

viewing a film transports the person into a different world where he can forget his

problems even for a few hours. Though it must be said that viewing a film will not

erase the problems that you have in real life, it will at least enable you to stop thinking

of those problems for a while which means your mind will be able to unclench itself

(Maristela, Jojo, 2012).

The second factor: different definition of male and female

Another reason is a new concept for gender stereotype. For fairytale heroes, they are celebrated for their acts of bravery and some demonstrations of their power. Also, men are counted on to take care of their families. While for women in the fairytales, they always represented fragility and vulnerability. They didn't even have the rights to choose their lives and destiny. Take *Into the Wood* for example, which is inspired by Cinderella, the protagonist Cinderella is the epitome of "subservient roles" (Russell, David, 2012). Women are typically associated with cooking, serving, and subordinate. Women have been cast as the fairer sex, but also the weaker sex, weaker physically, emotionally, and intellectually. The storyline is guided in the direction of Cinderella's dream coming true by meeting her prince-charming. Again, the male character is viewed as being the strong, fearless rescuer for the damsel in distress. However, there seems to be a gigantic breakthrough for recent years. Different points of view toward gender characteristic become a main stream in the society. According to Emma Watson, who gave a speech on Gender Equality at the UN in 2013, claimed that stereotypes of and expectations for masculinity have got to change.

"Why has the word become such an uncomfortable one? I am from Britain, and I think it is right I am paid the same as my male counterparts. I think it is right that I should be able to make decisions about my own body. I think it is right that

women be involved on my behalf in the policies and decisions that will affect my

life. I think it is right that socially, I am afforded the same respect as men."

Not like we mentioned as the fixed perspective for gender, modern females get

more unbending and persevered with their destiny, future, or rights.

"Women's economic agency as a force for poverty reduction continues to be

overlooked in the policy discourse. However, enhancing women's access to various

resources and ensuring that greater social value is given to their contributions lies

within the domain of policy-makers and its pay-offs are likely to be enormous."

(Kabeer, Naila, 2003)

Thousands of cases on gender discrimination gain its attention in various events

globally. So let's get back to films, we can easily feel through adapted source from *Oz:*

the Great and Powerful, the protagonist Oscar Diggs is a magician and gets involved

in wars between naive witches and wicked witches. This time it happens on Oscar's

decision of bad and good within three witches. Namely, the situation is controlled by

three women instead of men. Male is portrayed as a weaker and insecure side in real /

fictional world.

The third factor: attract more viewers by exaggerating plots

From original sources, we realize that authors only expressed the essence and main concept of stories. As we mentioned above, early tales were told for adult or children entertainment. There was no need to take profits into account since the works were ways of freely imagination at that time. Stories provided people a chance for making decision on their own as they could get a fantasy on everything including voices, smells, or visions from books. Original textual sources keep simple and reasonable trials such as saving a damsel in distress or escaping from somewhere you don't know. By contrast, nowadays adapted films gain audiences' attention by exaggerating the plots to make profits. Whereas they constrain and delete the detail of works, films usually have to fit the central theme of a work of literature into a time frame of less than two hours. But we miss out that a work of literature is normally the result of one specific person, the author. In films, you will see how director performs a literary work and how director feels from the same book you read. "Their usefulness is that they offer a different viewpoint/interpretation of the original work of literature" (Leitch, 2007). Furthermore, students don't allow having their own perspective after watching the films even though the movies are more powerful through a visual representation. "Many critics list the failure of film adaptations to be that it doesn't follow the exact frame in which the original work was created. Film

adaptations are already in a compromising position with people uneasy about an

interpretation that doesn't remain completely true to the original work"

(Mehmood-Arshad, Anila, 2013). Adapted films spend much money on star cast,

visual effects, or sound effects to satisfy audiences' imagination of works. However,

"(e)ven though this engages audiences initially, the real meaning comes from a

project that allows for dialogue. It's easy to find celebrities, but it's hard to create

works that contribute to finding meaning that keeps audiences engaged" (Tweeddale

& Kelly, 2012). There is much competition everywhere and also in film industry.

Producers will stand out only by creating a fascinating film to make it as a blockbuster.

If the film company followed the original plot, it might be too mild for audience. Or

the company cannot assure a stunning box office success, and it is possibly to lose

their money.
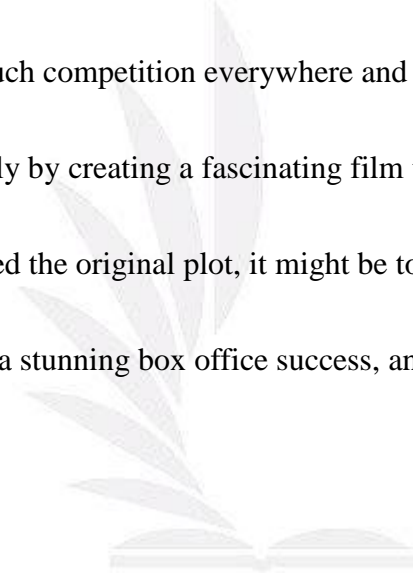
Conclusion

Finding and discussion:

As we realize that more and more people prefer to understand the literary works

through adapted films, they miss out a chance to read and appreciate textual source, an

initial passion from author. I am also surprised to figure out that there are three

reasons, which cause this huge change to storyline. The reasons include a typical

high-stress lifestyle, a transition for gender definition, and potential worries over

companies and students. What's more, too many shallow and superficial adapted

versions misguide audiences' understanding of original versions. Those grand

contributions of literature shouldn't be viewed as useless sources. Product companies

have already shown what they want people to think about the movies, and they

inculcate a fixed spirit of films without giving them an opportunity to feel inner

essence. Also, what if we previously known gender positon by reading original texts,

and then fight for our new perspectives of male and female with more knowledgeable

and convincing argument?

Limitation:

This paper demonstrates and supports many viewpoints from professors, teachers, and

literary scholars. Most of them were retrieved from internet, articles, books, or

magazines. Trying to combine my opinions with these experts, I need to read a great

variety of topics such as history of literature, filmmaking techniques or stress

management and did some research on literary background and academic reports.

<u>Further development:</u>

By exploring new knowledge of different fields, I realized the significance of reading

and critical thinking. In the future, I would need to interview some people about their

ideas for children literature toward relevant adapted films. We may as well get an

intriguing discovery and deeper questions of this topic.

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