Literature and Film: A bibliography

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Introduction

The following bibliography focuses on the links between Literature and Film rather than on the wider issue of Word and Screen. This is so because the former is a firmly established, booming field of research, whereas the latter is a new concept still to find its way in the academic world. Despite the widespread interest in the relationship between printed fiction and films, the bibliography on the topic of Literature and Film is actually more scarce than could be expected. There are few established classics — some of them, such as George Bluestone's Novels into Film, dating back to the 1950s. There is also a worrying tendency to either focus on excessively theoretical aspects of the adaptation or on minute, often uninspired, comparisons of particular literary texts and particular films. This is possibly due to the fact that Literature and Film is an eclectic field in which film, literary, and cultural theory are used but that sorely needs a theory of its own based on a pragmatic approach to the business and textual practices involved in adapting printed fiction for the screen.

Other problems that beset the study of Literature and Film are the undue prominence of the literary novel in the study of the screen adaptation and the often partisan tone of the comparisons, which tend to enthusiastically praise either the original text or the film adaptation without really understanding the process that links both. In general, short stories and plays — not to mention autobiographies, biographies, press articles and even essays — are much neglected in the study of screen adaptations and so was, until recently, the popular or commercial novel. Of course, most screen adaptations are based upon novels, but there is also a considerable number of adaptations based on short stories and plays. These are often overlooked by researchers because the sources are popular texts that lack a literary status. It is amazing to realise that popular plays and short stories on which major Hollywood films are based have all but disappeared for ever. It seems, therefore, necessary to speak of the relationships between printed and audio-visual texts from a wider perspective, since when we speak of Literature we neglect many kinds of printed
fiction and when we speak of Film, we underestimate other major audio-vis-
ual narrative media such as television.

The format I have chosen for this bibliography is that of annotated sec-
tions. Rather than focus on a few key texts, I’d much rather give the reader a
comprehensive reading list from which s/he can choose. The choice is quite
open, too, for those who do research on Literature and Film. Many of the
titles are self-explanatory and require hardly any additional annotation. It is
safe to say, though, that most texts are accessible to the non-specialist, for the
simple reason that they often discuss ideas commonly held by all those per-
ceptive readers and film-goers who have seen a screen adaptation of a favour-
ite printed narrative. I have avoided texts dealing with specific screen
adaptations (this could have only led to a vast, chaotic reading list), preferring
instead to select more theoretical texts discussing the general patterns of the
transfer of printed fiction to the screen.

This bibliography is divided into four main sections: first, a section on
academic journals, focusing especially on the Literature/Film Quarterly; sec-
ond, a section on short essays divided into articles in journals, essays in
essay collections and chapters in monographs; third, a section on books
subdivided into monographs, guides and bibliographies, collections of
essays and book series. I have added to these a fourth section on screenwrit-
ing, inviting readers to consider the peculiarities of the publications
devoted to writing for the screen and also to choose from a good selection
for further reading on this neglected link between (literary) writing and the
screen.

Journals

Literature/Film Quarterly

Launched in 1973, Literature/Film Quarterly celebrated its 25th anniversary
in 1998. This high quality journal, indispensable in its field, is published by
the Salisbury State University, USA, and is currently edited by James M.
Welsh. Even though contributors do use film theory, the journal publishes
relative short essays (around 3,500 words) and reviews which are accessible to
the non-specialist. The range of adaptations it deals with is very wide. The
journal publishes essays on adapted drama and fiction of all kinds. Literature/
Film Quarterly has practically no competitor within the United States and
none in Europe.

The monographic issues deserve special attention. The choice of topic
gives a rather accurate indication of the main areas of research in the field of
Film and Literature. Notice the importance of the adaptations of Shakespear-
ean plays; the volumes devoted to drama into film connote, in contrast, the
neglect of other plays which appear as the focus of «special» volumes.

American Cinema (1989 XVII.4)
Australian Cinema (1993 XXI.2)
The topic of film and literature is attractive for a wide reading public. It is not unusual to find monographic issues of film or literature journals devoted to it. The few examples chosen show that this interest is not restricted to English language academic publications. The anecdote is that even journals that may have little to do in principle with film, such as Literature & Theology, have published monographic issues on film and literature.

Literature & Theology, Vol. 12, no. 1, March 1998.
BELLS (Barcelona English Language and Literature Studies), No. 9, Autumn 1998.

Short Essays
Articles in Journals
This section lists articles that deal with the general topic of the film adaptation, rather than with particular adaptations. As can be seen from the dates of publication, the theoretical foundations on which the study of the screen adaptation is based were established in the late 1970s and early 1980s. As I have noted, some of the articles paraphrase in academic terms ideas common to most film-goers who have the experience of seeing screen adaptations. This is why the non-specialist will find them accessible. Notice that these articles have appeared indistinctly in journals on aesthetics, film or literature (film and literature only in the exceptional case of the Literature Film Quarterly).


FADiman, William (February 1985). «But compared to the original». Films and Filming 11.5, 21-23.


KAWIN, Bruce (1982). «Authorial and Systemic self-consciousness in literature and film». Literature/Film Quarterly X.1, 3-12.


Essays in Essay Collections and Chapters in Monographs

This section gathers together diverse texts published in books that do not deal primarily with screen adaptations. Mulvey's and Warner's essays are of special interest since these writers are among the very few to address the topic of the fairy tale and the cinema. Although it deals with a particular adaptation, Gregg Rickman's essay on Blade Runner has been included here because it offers a very interesting insight into the situation of the frustrated writer who cannot control the work of the adapter. Finally, the volume edited by David Wheeler, a collection of short stories on which famous Hollywood films are based, deserves in itself a warm recommendation. Since many of the original texts are hardly known while only very few could be regarded as part of the short story canon, this volume indirectly questions the relationship between the canons of film and literature. Regrettably, the volume is now out of print.


The books comparing and contrasting film and literature usually enjoy a long-lasting life. George Bluestone’s pioneering *Novels into film* (1957) can still compete with Brian McFarlane's *Novel to film: An introduction to the theory of film adaptation* (1996); see the review by Charles Forceville in this volume. This is because the approach used by many writers when discussing this topic, beginning with Bluestone, is essentially pragmatic. As can be seen from the subtitle of McFarlane’s book, younger scholars are trying to apply film and literary theory to the screen adaptation, succeeding only moderately. McFarlane's book is symptomatic of this brave failure: the analysis of particular films based on literary texts rests on the apparently solid foundation of theory, but when the reader plunges into the proficient shot-by-shot analysis offered by McFarlane the theory cannot fill an important gap: why the different decisions to cut, compress, summarise, or alter the original text were made during the process of adaptation. It is obvious that the structural changes follow clearly marked patterns in most adaptations — hence the growing importance of theory in the field — but the role of practical business constraints in film-making and the actual intentions of the adapter(s) remain still largely unexplored.

**Bibliography**

**Books**

**Monographs**

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Guides and Bibliographies

The obvious problem of guides and bibliographies is that they age quickly. The guides, especially, cannot cope with the constant flow of adaptation pouring down onto the screens of the world. Tom Costello's ambitious International guide to literature on film seems necessarily limited next to Internet websites such as the Internet Movie Data Base (<http://us.imdb.com> or <http://uk.imdb.com>). This informs net surfers of whether a particular film is an adaptation and of its original source and allows them to buy the original book, if it is available, via the link with the Internet book shop Amazon.

Costello's guide sees the adaptation from the opposite shore, listing the books that have been adapted. The shortcoming of his book — of any book that aspires to listing all the adaptation of literary works — shows that literature lags far behind film when it comes to the availability of pure, simple information about adaptations. It is easy, for instance, to check in a book or a website the names of the screen writers awarded an Oscar for the year's Best Adapted Screenplay. It is certainly very difficult to find information on some of the writers who created the original text that led others to Hollywood glory.

Collections of Essays

The format of the essay collection is very popular in the field of Literature and Film. But the books gathering together diverse essays on different adaptations suffer from an important disadvantage: their material is frequently too eclectic. Film and TV adaptations, popular novels and Shakespearean drama, are often mixed in collections that, while interesting to read, are much less effective as research tools. The book devoted to adaptation of
Shakespeare edited by Boose and Burt (see the review by Patrick Cook) may indicate a change of direction in this sense, with future monographic volumes also in the line of the Pluto Press series (see below).


**BRAVO, José Mª** (coord.) (1993). *La literatura en lengua inglesa y el cine*. Valladolid: Instituto de Ciencias de la Educación, Universidad de Valladolid.


**Series**

1. Pluto Press, London: Film/Fiction Series

Pluto Press publishes since 1996 an annual collection of essays dealing with aspects of film and fiction. At the moment of writing (1998), the first three volumes are available. Volume four, *Aliens across the Film/Fiction Divide*, edited
by Imelda Whelelan will appear in 1999; volume five, also edited by Whelelan and called Classics Across the Film/Fiction Divide is due to appear in 2000.


The series published by the University Press of Florida gathers together a selection of papers from the annual Florida State University Conference on Film and Literature, organised by the Florida State University Film School and Comparative Literature Circle. The conference was established in 1974 and is the most important of its kind. The topic of the 1999 conference, celebrated in January, was «Violence in Film and Literature».


Essential Bibliography on Screen Writing

Novelist Roddy Doyle has said that screenplays are not literature but a set of instructions (see the interview in this volume). Most authors writing about screenplays seemingly agree with Doyle. Despite the similarity between plays—an acknowledged literary genre—and screenplays, the fiction written directly for the screen is the subject of books in whose titles words such as «method», «workbook», «principles», «manual», can often be found. No other written genre is subjected to this pragmatic, anti-artistic treatment. The concept of creative writing often applied to the teaching of writing literary fiction is far indeed from the concepts used by the authors listed here. This is not in itself positive or negative, but it is an aspect of writing fiction that should be carefully considered. Why is the screen writer another species, different from the (book) writer? Perhaps the increasing number of volumes devoted to the voice of the screen writer through interview with them may change the perception of the process of screen writing and the status of the screen writer, helping to see screen writing as a variety of fiction writing developed in a different narrative media. This, needless to say, is essential to understand the role of the screen writer in the process of screen adaptation.


