

Can the adaptation of a literary work in film or theatre enhance its original message or theme?

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Adaptation is not photocopy; it is reading in light, sound and bodies. Each new medium decides what to carry, what to transform, what to make newly audible. As Hutcheon argues, adaptations are ""repetitions without replication"" (Hutcheon, 2006). Can change enhance a work's message or theme? Often, when filmmakers read attentively. Joe Wright's *Pride & Prejudice* (2005), Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) and Greta Gerwig's *Little Women* (2019) show cinema surfacing feminism, power and authorship already latent.

Wright's film enhances Austen's proto-feminist critique by freeing Elizabeth Bennet from drawing rooms into weather and landscape. Framed, as Fraiman notes, as ""mobile"" and ""largely outside the social matrix"" (Fraiman, 2010), Elizabeth strides through mud, fields and wind; movement stands where the novel's irony and free indirect style register dissent. Marianelli's unsettled piano undercuts ballroom decorum; glances become currency and manners choreograph class. The hand flex after Darcy's touch and the rain proposal externalizes restrained desire, translating interior tension into visible energy (Wright, 2005). Longbourn's clutter against Pemberley's symmetry keeps romance tied to hierarchy. Sensory immediacy sharpens Austen's entwined themes of romance and class.

Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* heightens Shakespeare's collision of passion and power by staging Verona as branded, broadcast capitalism. A newscast prologue, neon Montague and Capulet towers, and guns stamped "Sword" fold feud into advertising. Kinetic cuts, devotional iconography and genre shifting soundtrack create a media ecology where attention is currency (Ebert, 1996). Letting Juliet stir as Romeo dies presses tragic inevitability against late rescue, intensifying the sense that spectacle outruns human timing (Luhrmann, 1996). Excess some critics found gaudy reveals how private love is trapped inside public economies of violence and image, extending Shakespeare's warning about factional power.

Gerwig's *Little Women* amplifies Alcott's inquiry into girlhood, labour and choice by making authorship visible. Opening with Jo selling pages in New York, the film then braids past and present so memory edits narrative; colour coding (Jo red, Meg lavender green, Beth rose, Amy blue) individuates paths while holding sisterhood in frame (Dargis, 2019; Gerwig, 2019). Domestic warmth contrasts cooler professional rooms where contracts are negotiated. Where Alcott herself bargained with publishers over endings acceptable to readers, Gerwig stages that bargaining onscreen, reminding us that markets shape narratives (Alcott, 1868/69). Printing "Little Women by Jo March" refracts Alcott's equivocal ending through creative ownership, foregrounding the economic terms of female art. Adaptation here answers who controls a woman's story, by giving her the pen.

Taken together these films show enhancement works differently: through landscape, spectacle and authorship, yet each clarifies something seeded in the text. Thoughtful adaptation converses with, not replaces, its source. Wright externalises Austen's critique; Luhrmann exposes the market around Shakespeare's feud; Gerwig reclaims Alcott through authorship. Each reveals themes still urgent. Classics survive on screen because new media lets us feel what the page implies and sometimes feel it more.

References:

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