Comparative Analysis Amid Film and Literature

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Abstract   Both literature and films can be a powerful teaching resource for audience learning about cultural norms and nuances in an individual's development. Trainees can learn about how people from specific cultures think and behave, and how this knowledge can be used to develop treatment plans. Of course, literature and films can only give some direction; further insight will come from discussion with communities and community leaders. Literature can, at times, have a fascinating connection with film. In some cases, it is evident that the two are intertwined in many more ways than the average person may realize. Whether it is a film or a piece of literature, both are written by someone that wants to impact readers or a viewing audience. With that being said, it is always a question of whether or not the author accomplished his or her goal and if the audience was impacted in the way he or she wanted. Is this intent prevalent to the audience and is the author's intent predetermined before the film or book is taken in by the audience? How the author can shape the reader or viewer and whether or not they can interpret things for themselves is another factor that must be examined when trying to answer this question. Another question that is often thought of is how power is depicted through film or literature in terms of not only sex and gender, but in class, race, and nationality. In this paper has been tried to put answer to this question.

Keywords   Literature, Film, Comparative Analysis

1. Introduction

What do you say if someone tells you something that you don't believe? Perhaps it is the common statement; "I'll believe it when I see it." This expression is possibly stating that a human's most valuable sense is that of vision. If one cannot see something then they are more likely to question the reality and validity of that object, whether it be an occurrence earlier that day on the news or in the newspaper, or a movie or novel that they may have encountered. Through literature and films, we learn about different portrayals of cultural norms and culture conflicts in different parts of the world. A basic tenet of training in cultural competence is that people become aware of the differences and similarities across cultures, allowing them to be more conscious of their own cultural world view, and also better able to deal with any differences and to learn from them. "Reading literature and seeing films can help to develop trainees' humanism and capacity for understanding and so facilitate their learning about cultural competence". (Corrigan and Timothy, 1999: P.81) One drawback of using films in this way is that the dramatic points in the literature may hinge on social stereotypes. (Denbey, 1996: P.36) For example, in several recent Hollywood blockbusters the British characters were portrayed as butlers, buffoons or villains using their accent and caricatured appearance to emphasize differences.In 1916,

Hugo Munsterburg wrote, The Film: A Psychological Study, which contained an excerpt, "The Means of the Photoplay." In this archaic but relevant to the subject article, Munsterburg compared the psychological effects used in movies (photoplays) and that of art such as plays and literature. Throughout his article, he stressed many different items within these artworks that all play on ones "stream of consciousness." They all have their own different way of creating a reality to their spectators. Though his main focus to compare in this excerpt is the theater, it still applicable to literature. Within his summary of the aspects of the artworks, two items are emphasized: perceived reality and expression. The main overall reason that Hugo Munsterberg wrote this excerpt is to answer the question, "Can film do what literature and theater do?" (Vankin: 2005: P.113-119)

2. Literature & Film; What is Reality

There are many ways in which literature and films are similar in promulgating their reality. Both have the same themes and motifs; however, they express them in very different ways. Literature presents you with a very vivid literary detail on the scene and the characters in the story, which allows your mind to project you into that situation as if you are watching it in person. This projection is done mostly through narration either by a character or possibly by an observer of the situation, however the author decides. It instills images into one's mind which in turn creates small, "plastic" recreations, which are used throughout your interpretation of the story. This is the object of reality within literature, if it is done well, through elaborate description and

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intricate adjective use. (Kilman, 1988: P.88) Though visual reality is a large part of the complete reality of a story, one must still identify with the characters through feelings and emotions. Literature broadcasts characters feelings throughout the story, once again by narration and elaborate description. Here is where a reader must take those plastic figures and establish a facial expression atop these imaginary figures. The final and possibly most important factor of reality in art is a time and place factor. In the literary art, all scenes must take place in the order in which they happen; they have to follow the laws of causality. For example, if the narrator states that two situations occur simultaneously, the reader will automatically think that the one read first occurred first. This is one element that takes the reader a little away from reality. In film, the majority of reality is brought to the spectator through visual or sound. Film has an instant advantage over literature in that it can show two simultaneous events at the same time where as described above, literature cannot. Otherwise, film and literature are very evenly matched as far as reality is concerned. Both can give adequate descriptions of including but not limited to settings, characters, and emotions; however, they go about it in many different ways. Film implants you into the situation by providing a visual depiction of the setting of the story, it shows you the emotions of the characters and it gives you the image of those "plastic" figures that are to be created in your mind throughout the reading of a novel. This in some sense makes it easier to identify with the story of a film, because it takes less effort to see than to imagine. Along with the provided figures, lighting in filmmaking can offer some sort of 3-D effect in order to show depth and effect. (Giannetti, 2005: P. 21-23)

Settings and themes in films can be exposed in very many ways. In Enrique's 1963 film version of Ambrose Bierce's short story, An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge, the setting is shown through an in-depth visual of the bridge and its surroundings. Enrique put the spectator into the film by beginning with an overhead, "bird's eye view" of the forest around the bridge, with intense realistic sounds and close-up, along with a wide-angle circular camera route of the surroundings of the bridge. Once the surroundings have been established, still keeping the sounds of the birds and the faint stream flowing in the distance, Enrique then shows a high-angle aerial view of the bridge. The camera gets closer and closer, placing you in the middle of the action on the bridge. As you get closer, you hear the sounds of the soldiers, giving and taking orders, and you are introduced with the main character, Peyton Farquhar. Payton is shown as a middle-aged man about to be hung for his wrongs against the northern army. Enrique establishes this, which is narrated in the short story, by forcing a close-up shot of his face and dress. Through this full-body descriptive shot, you can tell that the main character is one of a civilian planter, not a soldier. A close-up shot of his face, the worried look, the sweat rolling down his face, shows that the man is scared. The sound of the stream beneath his feet now amplifies as he gazes towards it, will that be his retched doom. At this point,

Enrique allows the spectator to identify with the character, allows Peyton's thoughts to be heard by the audience, the thoughts of his wife and home and even thought of escape. At this time, the spectator begins to put themselves in the shoes of the main character, they begin to think, "what if that were me?" Once the board beneath Farquhar's feet is dropped, there is an underwater view of his body plunging to the bottom of the stream and shows the struggle that he goes through to get the bindings off of his hands so he can swim. Here the short story can better describe what is happening because of the lack of camera freedom. In the literature, it tells of Farquhar's neck being bound so tightly by the noose that he can neither breath nor can water get in through his open mouth. Once Farquhar struggles loose and reaches the surface, his strife is shown by a heavy gasp for air and a look back at the soldiers whom just realize their folly. At this point, the story describes his struggles to avoid the bullets shot by the soldiers and how deadly close they were to Farquhar; however, in the film you can actually see how close the bullets are in the water and noticing the fear and intensity in his eyes. Also, once again using the close-up of a gunman on the bridge, with gray eyes, in order to convey what Farquhar is thinking. Throughout the rest of the film, Enrique bring the audience even closer and closer to the main character and in the end uses a lighting effect in order to convey the supernatural effect of him reaching his wife and home and his desire to attain them. The film then concludes with Farquhar hanging from the rope which was placed around his neck in the beginning of the film. Farquhar's struggle was all in his mind, an occurrence happening at the same time as his hanging. This is one of the superior advantages of film, as other film maker has stated and is noticed in many different works. Another account of showing two simultaneous events at one time is in Persuasions, a novel by Jane Austen, which was adapted to film. The beginning of the film is a very intricate set of events that occur at the same time. While Sir Walter is at Kellynch Hall debating on how and who to give his estate up to, Admiral Croft is returning from war on a boat. This breaks all laws of causality and also shows two different regions at the same time, which is not easily accomplished in literature. These are very important scenes in the film because it summarizes approximately 2 or 3 chapters of information in 5-10 minutes. While Sir Walter is criticizing the thought of selling his estate to a sailor, Sir Walter makes several derogatory remarks about the appearance of naval men and how their faces are severely aged. At the same time, the audience can see that Admiral Croft is not at all like Sir Walter has depicted, this had to be narrated in the literature in order for the audience to understand. (Seger, 1992: P.55)

In again both film and literature power is a very important factor in most good story lines. In seems to be that reality does not have much intervention when it comes to characterizations of the leading roles. Literature can, at times, have a fascinating connection with film. In some cases, it is evident that the two are intertwined in many more ways than the average person may realize. Whether it is a film or a piece of

literature, both are written by someone that wants to impact readers or a viewing audience. (Parrill, 2002: P.13) With that being said, it is always a question of whether or not the author accomplished his or her goal and if the audience was impacted in the way he or she wanted. Is this intent prevalent to the audience and is the author's intent predetermined before the film or book is taken in by the audience? How the author can shape the reader or viewer and whether or not they can interpret things for themselves is another factor that must be examined when trying to answer this question. Another question that is often thought of is how power is depicted through film or literature in terms of not only sex and gender, but in class, race, nationality, etc. In again both film and literature power is a very important factor in most good story lines. In seems to be that reality does not have much intervention when it comes to characterizations of the leading roles.In films, it is much easier for the writer and director to completely let the audience know what the intended for them to see and feel. In the movie The Handmaid's Tale, it is very clear what is happening and why it is the way it is. The audience knows right away the background, which is clearly laid out in the first few scenes, of the story and what is happening to make the storyline. The audience knows that there is a nuclear war going on and that there is a shortage of babies and that all the women are being shipped to different places to perform different tasks. It is unclear what time period this story is around in the book. In the movie though, it is clear that they are in a time period very close, if not exactly that of the audience's. In the movie Hannibal, it is clear that the leading character Hannibal Lector comes from an aristocratic background and a wealthy upbringing. He is full of class and prestigious ness that makes his character as a serial killer with horrific killing methods, not seem that likely. Hannibal is well educated and is a renowned psychiatrist, which makes it very ironic that he himself cannot be figured out by other psychiatrists. His character is fascinating to watch and read about which makes for good reviews from the audience. In most films the depiction of serial killers is hyper- masculinized, heterosexual, elite cultured suave, aristocratic, and almost always Caucasian. Hannibal Lector seems to hold all of these characterizations to be true. It is unlikely not to see a killer in a film possess some or all of these features as he does.

3. Conclusions

Overall, film and literature get the themes and motifs of stories across to their audience in effective manners, but with very different techniques to achieve reality. Literature relies solely on words and descriptions to place an audience into a situation; whereas, a film uses visual effects and sounds effects to reach perceived reality. In order to show expression in a character, literature has to give a detailed description of that individual's feelings, thoughts, and facial expressions, while a film can simply show the face of the actor along with the words that they speak or even sometimes no words at all. For a film to more accurately depict reality, it must use many different camera angles and lighting settings to achieve what a literary work can do with words. Both film and literature play on the imagination. Literature allows the audience to depict the characters as a small film of three dimensional characters within their mind. As for the film, the audience has to transform the images displayed on the screen of the theater into their mind and mold them into three dimensional figures. Film can also engulf the audience with the surroundings and the setting by merely showing the area and allowing the natural sounds of the habitat protrudes throughout the film. Overall, film is an acceptable medium for reproducing literary arts as well as adding an explicit entertainment value.

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