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Literature and Cinema:
My Doubts, My Challenges and My Hope

The ongoing discussions about the relationship between literature and cinema are far from the final line; it's even getting more extended, controversial and confusing. Obviously, modern technology, particularly information technology (IT) innovations dramatically change not only the language and aesthetics of these two media, but our ways of consuming them. At the same time, contemporary political-economy, sociology and cultural studies actively develop new policies, doctrines and concepts about art and its role in society, pushing us to reconsider our traditional approach and understanding of art. Criteria of artistic quality and originality are now joined by economic benefit and financial sustainability as must-have components of the most of today's creative works. In this situation, dialogues and interactions between different media occupy a much wider domain and range of interest beyond the traditional academic studies like literary or film theory.

I think contemporary film adaptation cases openly demonstrate the high presence of criteria dictated by market requirements, industry standards and commercial revenues in the process of creating them - starting from the choice of literary material to the delivery of the final visual product. In many cases, the collaboration of literature and cinema becomes only the producer's "security belt" and an efficient promotion tool. Most likely, Alfred Hitchcock's warning, "A good book does not necessarily make a good film," doesn't apply to film marketing, as all industry players prove that any well-known work of literature or writer's name is a powerful marketing tool. Probably Hitchcock didn't mean all these bestsellers when he said "a good book." But nowadays, when an average bestseller transforms into its screen equivalent, the producer's intention to have a "minimum guarantee" for financial revenue is an open secret. In that case, the most we can discuss about the marriage of two media is how faithful the film is to the literary original or how many stars are involved into the film project. By the way, I think there isn't a theoretically significant difference between narrative cinema and narrative literature.

Another phenomenon is the profusion of "how to" screenwriting manuals, which teach everyone to be a writer. I have nothing against teaching people basic knowledge about the profession. But I have some doubts as to why these books look like a combination of a manual for your new electronic device or cookbook mixed with popular lectures on business and marketing. According to the statistics,[1] there is a screenwriting manual which was reprinted nineteen times in the United States and fourteen times in the United Kingdom. There is another manual with 500 thousand printed copies, and selling 200 to 250 thousand copies is more the norm than the exception for these "how to" manuals. Now they are incorporated into online platforms, subscriber-based how-to websites, how-to blogs, and all of them teach with unshakable confidence concrete techniques that turn screenwriting into a manageable labor and a successful business. So, we can probably declare that the "how to" screenwriting manual is a genre and a good business in itself.

And this "genre" is becoming popular in my country as well. The reason is banal: thanks to this "genre," writing screenplay looks like quite doable and manageable labor compared to writing a complicated literary text or making a film, which requires additional financial, human and technological resources. As a result, we have learned to produce screenplays with the requisite number of pages and scenes, the

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[1] Conor, Bridget, "Gurus and Oscar Winners: How-To Screenwriting Manuals in the New Cultural Economy." *Television & New Media.* Feb 2014, Vol. 15, Issue 2: 121-138.

correct font, the essential conflict between protagonist and antagonist, the beginning, middle, and end. However, our expectation of turning quantity into quality still remains a distant hope.

Unfortunately—or maybe fortunately—the screenplay is a specific genre written for specific readers, not for general readers or audience. It doesn't matter whether it's an adaptation or an original idea. Because every screenwriter wishes and hopes his work will be transformed into a great film someday, they would rather send their screenplays to various producers than to publishers, and they are more concerned about a producer or director's comments on their work than a serious literary critic's opinion. Briefly, a screenwriter should accept that his work is a blueprint—an intermediary form in the chain of complicated transformation of the text to the visuals. Perhaps, therefore, not only ordinary readers but also academic scholars, professional critics, and their theoretic studies always focus more on an original literary text, if it exists, and the final film, ignoring the actual screenplay. Here appear quite interesting questions: how do we approach and analyze an original screenplay—with use of more literary theory or film theory? Is the screenplay as a written text able to give a true representation of the future film?

Regardless of the answers to these questions, one thing is clear: screenplay is still text on the page, so there is definitely a difference between the screenplay and the actual film. Trying to be as close as possible to its screen adaptation, a screenplay loses the most significant power of the written text. The literary text has the ability to activate the reader's figurative imagination to create its possible interpretations in our minds without any restrictions and limitations. But screenplay has narrow access to our imagination due to its specific use. In other words, literary text creates an imaginary world within us while cinema presents an imaginary world *to* us, which it constructs according to a certain continuity. Also, time in the text is constructed with words. In the cinema, it will be constructed with actions.

These main differences create the most difficult challenge to filmmaker: First, ideally all specific literary texts—internal monologue, self-analysis of characters, author's commentary, etc.—should be transformed into action. Second, all actions should be narrated within limited time duration. For example, the novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* by Milan Kundera was transformed into the 172-minute screen adaptation. We know Kundera's novel is significantly shorter than, for example, *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy, but Philip Kaufman's film is longer than usual industry standards for film length. To tell his visual story, Kaufman (a highly respected, well-known film director) rearranged the events of the novel in chronological order, eliminated the narrator entirely, and cut one of the four main characters down to a few minutes of screen time. He had an excellent team: famous French screenwriter Jean-Claude Carrière, great Swedish cinematographer Sven Nykvist, and brilliant cast members Daniel Day-Lewis, Juliette Binoche, Lena Olin, Derek de Lint, etc. The film garnered high praise from critics, and two screenwriters were nominated at the Academy Awards for Best Adapted Screenplay. Indeed, I think it's a professionally well-made film. But still, these five words—"*the unbearable lightness of being*"—written by Kundera in this particular order awaken me, shake me, bewilder me, disturbing my mind and emotions much more strongly than the 172-minute long film. Probably that's the magic and power of the literary text and the challenge for everyone who is going to translate it into the visual story. It's my main motivation, the reason why I continue trying to make a film—a film as a literature.