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Analysis of Character Translations in Film Adaptations of Popular Literature

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Introduction

The introduction of the novel is a milestone for the evolution of story telling. Complex characters and intricate details outlined by one person in a single bound volume to be interpreted by whoever reads it. In this sense, the novel is the most intimate form of art that one can imagine because in effect, every reader will have a different interpretation each sentence and syllable. Events, names, places, and characters each invoke a unique feeling or memory based on an individual's life experiences. This also takes into account the maturity level of the reader. A teenager reading something like *Catcher in the Rye* will definitely have a different perspective on Holden and the intricacies of it's elements once he or she is more seasoned on the more grown-up aspects of life. The second, third, and fourth reading of a novel is sure to bring new interpretations as well. The intimacy of something like a novel is also present in the way that it is created. In order to create a novel only three things are required: paper, pencil, and someone to write. A novel, more often than not, is a solitary venture; the efforts of introverted fellows who spend their time with their noses in between the pages of a book. The fundamental contradiction of the writer is that they spend so much time away from a large number of people in order to create something that will certainly reach a large audience. Trapped inside their own minds they are the architects. The pen is their hammer and nail. What they build is to be read by the masses and yet by one person at a time. A contradiction; like the designer themselves. The architect builds a cathedral complete with frescos, freezes, and altars, stain glass and mural works. There is no tour guide and only one person is allowed to enter at a time. Imagine how differently each person will interpret placement of a buttress or statue. This is especially true with the

greatest of the literary cathedrals. Novels that are widely regarded as the best. Those

novels that are constantly on the required reading lists of public schools, high schools,

and universities. Countless interpretations of these works must be taken into

consideration when one thinks about the sheer number of people who read them. The

intimacy of the novel is broken by analysis and discussion. The relationship that an

individual has with a work of fiction is compared with that of other's relationship with

the same work. The same symbols are scrutinized over and over. The characters are

evaluated in terms of their reliability and their relatibility to the real world. This kind of

discussion inevitably leads to some sort of universal interpretation of characters. This

eliminates intimacy all together but creates an understanding of the characters in a novel.

Since it's inception, film borrows stories from novels. The most well known

stories have been adapted for the screen numerous times. It is interesting that this is so

commonplace because of the differences in creation between the two art forms. Unlike

the novel, which is usually an isolated creation, a film requires many hands in order to be

as complete as possible. While it is entirely feasible for a single person to shoot, star, and

edit a film it is not a best-case scenario. Most films will have a dedicated person for each

department. Someone on board will be responsible for the lighting, another for the sound,

a director, a costume designer, a script supervisor, a cinematographer, production

designer and after the principal photography is complete the post-production team will

get to work. These are just a handful of the jobs required to complete a large-scale film.

Each department will focus on its specialty and add something different to the production.

They will interpret the story along with its characters and make artistic choices that

change the outcome of the final product. This means that an original story when put

through the machine that is the filmmaking business will often not be what it's creator intended it to be upon its origin. Granted, an author will have an editor and a publisher that might have some input to the structure and maybe some of the themes of a story but in the end the person with the control over the material is the author. In addition it is important to note how important something like a studio is to the creation of a film. The studio has the most control over a film simply because of the amount of money they often invest in the projects. In his book *Film Adaptations and it's Discontents*, Thomas Leitch states, "sometimes the crucial force behind an adaptation is an accountant" (102). Here, Leitch speaks about an adaptation from novel to film but it rings true for any kind of film endeavor. A film's budget will determine many facets of a film. A scene that might take place in a tropical setting like Hawaii will be either shot on location or in a set depending on the amount of capital available for those sequences. This will ultimately affect the film's aesthetic and as a result the way that the audience will receive it. This leads to a number of possible restrictions already for a film before proper production is underway. The budget can also determine a director, an actor, editing, and much more. Budget changes the way a film is produced. The budget can change a story meant for the screen. A writer may need to rework scenes and events because of the money involved with the production. This is in stark contrast with the creation of a novel. The novel is probably the least expensive form of art that one can create. Music requires instruments and the means with which to learn how to play those instruments. Sculpture, painting, glass blowing, photography, all also require tools that are not affordable to all in order to master and create something deemed worthy to be called art. Film is possibly the most expensive form of art. The amount of money that the highest budget films require for

production reach the hundred millions. Even the independent film landscape requires some thousands of dollars to accommodate the teams of people behind a film. It is interesting then to note that some of the most successful films are based on works of literary fiction. Film tends to gravitate towards stories written in novel form. From the outside looking in it is an obvious connection.

The stories in many novels seem ready made to be adapted for the screen because of its larger than life characters. Indeed, when one reads a novel he or she creates mental images of the characters in the story based on the descriptions that the author provides. They create their own live version of a novel every time that they pick up the book. The mental image of a character is no doubt projected onto the silver screen of their mind. Film is then the next logical evolution of the novel if one thinks about interpretation this way. The images of the book are taken and transformed to real world tangibles that a person feels like they can touch. It is a romantic notion. A person's beloved characters finally present before their eyes in the physical world; no longer confined to the chamber that is their mind. Iconic personalities of the page spring from the ink with vitality and look you in the eye as they live out the book in the physical. What individual with a loved fictional character has not wished to see that character alive and breathing? Film gives the reader that opportunity. There is however a problem with this version of interpretation. The real world version of a novel as interpreted by filmmakers is never going to live up to the expectations of the reader and the image they already have of a certain character. A reader of *Gulliver's Travels* will surely play out Gulliver Lemuel's adventures in their head complete with a physical image of Gulliver himself. Most likely, the Gulliver they picture is not the one represented in the 2010 release of *Gulliver's Travels* directed by

Rob Letterman and starring Jack Black as the titular adventurist. This version of Gulliver has him in a modern world and plays his journey for laughs. The more iconic a novel the more controversy there is going to be when a casting rumor is spread about a certain character. Despite this letdown, fans of the novel still look forward to its adaptations because it is a chance to visualize things present in the novel. It is a chance to hear a character's voice and look into their eyes. This is because of the intimacy of the experience that comes with reading a novel. An individual interprets the words even though crowds read them. This is all the more evident when a novel that is widely read is adapted for a film release. Widely loved characters are then represented on screen for a large audience.

For the longest time the way in which an adaptation from book to film is criticized seems to be very much black and white. It is either seen as a good or bad version of the written word. There seems to be no middle ground in the early world of criticizing film adaptations. The basis for most of the criticism towards a film often hinged on whether or not the film is faithful to the source material that it tries to interpret. In his introduction to *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, Robert Stam states, " The conventional language of adaptation criticism has often been profoundly moralistic, rich in terms that imply that cinema has somehow done a disservice to literature" (3). Here, Stam uses the term moralistic to describe the rhetoric of film adaptation criticism to emphasize how simple it is made out to be. Moralistic implies feelings of right and wrong. Just like it is immoral for someone to steal or commit murder, critics, according to Stam, are making the same kind of judgments towards adaptations of works of literature. They equate the act of a bad adaptation as something

that is wrong. As if they are committing an act of violence towards the source material.

Stam continues and cites specific words that are often associated with film adaptations,

"terms like "infidelity," "betrayal," "deformation," "violation," "bastardization,"

"vulgarization," and "desecration" proliferate in adaptation discourse" (3). All of these

words insinuate something more than just a bad version of the novel. They are words that

carry heavy meanings. In particular the word 'desecrations' suggests that the novel is

something that is holy and should not be messed about with. This brings into discussion

the many theatrical and television versions of biblical parables and historical claims.

A film that Robert Stam cites as a good example of this problem is *The Passion*

of the Christ (2004) directed by Mel Gibson. The film is an adaptation of the accounts of

the last days of Jesus Christ as told in the Scriptures. The first problem here is that the

accounts present in the bible are contradictory. As a consequence, no matter how faithful

Gibson claims to be to the source material he does not achieve total fidelity because the

story is not without it's own problems. As Robert Stam puts it, "Gibson raised the stakes

of his adaptation, first, by assuming, in a rather absolutist manner, that the source text

was infallible" (6). According to Stam, a problem with the adaptation of something like

the stories in Scripture and also with more obscure novels is the issue of fidelity. This

seems to be the biggest sticking point when someone talks about an adaptation as being

worthy or not. It is something that is obvious to a person that travels to a movie theater to

watch an adaptation of a novel. Fidelity in its most obvious terms is the plot, characters,

setting, themes, and events of a story and whether or not a film version is able to portray

those elements in a way that is true to the way they are presented in the written version.

Stam notes that it is a sense that comes from two things are intrinsically true when we say

something has been unfaithful to a source material: "(a) Some adaptations are indeed better than other, and (b) some adaptations fail to "realize" or substantiate what we most appreciated in the source novels" (14). Stam acknowledges here the idea that the general audience has some notion of the right way to adapt a novel. He recognizes that people in love with a certain novel or character within that novel immediately know how an adaptation should feel. They know how a character will react in a certain situation and judge the film based partly on character portrayal. The next logical question one needs to ask when talking about fidelity in an adaptation is how far an adaptation should go in its attempt to be faithful to a source material and to what aspects should it be faithful to. A director, producer, and screenwriter make a lot of choices in the early stages of adapting a novel to film. If one says that an adaptation should be fiercely faithful to its source material then longer novels will have to be released as hours and hours of footage that will never see the light of day or the pocketbooks of a movie going audience. Furthermore, an adaptation that is one hundred percent accurate to that of its source material is almost impossible partly due to the reality of actors. If an actor looks the part for a particular character but lacks the talent level to properly translate that character to the big screen and there is another actor who does not resemble his fictional role in the physical but does have the acting ability, should the director go with physical resemblance alone? Very few people will choose to ignore a lack of talent in order to stay faithful to the physical descriptions of the characters. On the other hand, the spirit of the character must be upheld. Physicality aside, character temperament must be the same in both novel and film. Action, reaction, and motivations need to feel true to their portrayals

on the page. Characters translated from the page can make or break a film when they are transported on screen.

Changes will always happen when a novel is transported to the screen. The issue is to think about these changes and their effects on the story as a whole. Character difference between book and film are usually judged as either good or bad. The black and white conversations that take place when critics talk about a film is not appropriate because it is obvious that film is a business that requires many people to change things creatively in order to be successful. Films based on novels are intensely scrutinized by those familiar with its source material. An audience will harshly receive a film that makes notable changes to central characters. This does not mean that an adaptation needs to be completely faithful to a source material in order to be free of criticism. However, it is important for a film to be faithful to the characters within a story in order to be relatable to an audience.

New rhetoric is needed when talking about films and the changes they make when adapting books to film. Linda Cahir in *Literature into Film* talks about forgoing the term 'adaptation' altogether when referring to these kinds of films. She is more in favor of referring to these films as translations. This is because of how the work changes from one medium to another. She says that it is more closely associated with "a process of language" (14). She also says that the same problems that are present to language translators are present to film translators. In addition, her most concrete point is, "translating creates an entirely new work. One separate from its source material and not a mutation of that source material" (14). This is a very different idea from the notions of

the past that always tether the film to its source material. Cahir suggests that a film and its source materials are more like distant cousins than brother and sister as the old critics saw the two mediums. Cahir posits that a translation of a novel be looked at as its own separate work of art that is related but not totally defined by its source material. This means that the novel is not immediately better than the film and vice versa. In order for one to understand the film "the novel should not have to be read" (Cahir 98). In this way, the novel and all of its structures are appropriate for its medium. The sentences, syllables, paragraph length all make sense in the language of the novel. When translating that novel into the language of film there are going to be changes because of the how different the language of film is from that of the novel. As Cahir suggests, this is akin to a native Chinese speaker translating something from Chinese to English. The fundamental differences between the two languages are going to cause the translator to shift words and approximate at points to get the message across. For Cahir, this is the key ingredient to a successful translation. The text is "striped mined for the riches the filmmakers can use to promote their own vision of the work, and, as a result, the film that emerges, like any translation, is a separate entity, with a life of its own" (Cahir 97). The essence of a film and its characters is what needs to get through in the translation. Like any translation, as long as the point is clear, the words involved in the message do not matter. At the same time, the translated message contains its own intricacies and inflections. The strip mining of the source material is significant in that it can change an adaptation drastically. If a screenwriter chooses to change a character from one source to another it may serve against the film. The two mediums must find a balance. The changes a writer or director makes need to make sense in relating back to its source material. Not ignoring a source

material's key characters. In fact, it can be said that if a translation of a novel into film maintains character integrity the film will be received in a positive way. With this philosophy in mind Cahir outlines four points needed for a literature based film to be successful:

1. The film must communicate definite ideas concerning the integral meaning and value of the literary text, as the filmmakers interpret it

2. The film must exhibit a collaboration of filmmaking skills

3. The film must demonstrate an audacity to create a work that stands as a world apart, that exploits the literature in such a way that a self-reliant but related, aesthetic offspring is born

4. The film cannot be so self-governing as to be completely independent of or antithetical to the source material (Cahir 99).

As a guide, these four points encompass the way that a film based on a work of literature needs to be evaluated to avoid falling into the trap of fidelity versus non fidelity. This is a basic rubric but it is specific enough so as to be useful in looking at films already released. It is necessary for a critic to understand that a film based on a work of fiction like a novel needs to be assessed as its own world. The film needs to be utilized as an extension of the novel not as a direct representation of it. The novel and the film need to be looked at side by side instead of above or below. Point four is probably the most important point that Cahir makes in regards to the separation of the two materials. A self-governing film, one that drastically changes characters or omits characters, will only achieve distancing itself too much from the source material and contradict some of its

statements. We can judge a film adaptation's independence and antithetical qualities based on Cahir's fourth point by looking at character changes from book to film.

Among the many issues that present themselves to the adapter of a piece of fiction one of the most important issues is the omission and inclusion of characters. Many great novels include large numbers of secondary characters that serve a purpose within the context of the work as a whole. The person adapting a novel has to identify the main characters in a story but also the most important ancillary characters that complement the narrative structure. In some cases, characters will be omitted or altered in order to better serve a new structure for on screen flow. Linda Seger, in her book on adapting novels into screenplays says, "Some characters will need to be recreated and redefined. In other stories, additional characters may need to be added to make the drama clear" (119). Seger knows that a screenwriter needs to chip away those characters that may not fit within the confines of an on screen time allotment. As a result, many secondary characters will be removed from a screenplay. Another possibility is the combination of a couple or more characters into one single entity on the screen. Sometimes, this course of action is appropriate in order to reign in the essential aspects of a story. In the case of a story like *Moby Dick*, omission and recreation of characters can weaken the plot and lessen the complexity of the source material.

Character Changes in *Moby Dick*

Adapting Herman Melville's Moby Dick for the big screen is an arduous task for anyone. It is probably one the few novels of which the label 'unfilmable' can be properly applied. This true not only because of the immensity of the novel in terms of its page count but also because of the even denser language it contains. Every sentence is carefully constructed to contain as much metaphor and poetic weight as it can. A chapter title alone can be interpreted to mean a variety of different things. The novel is not one that follows seamlessly from one plot point to another either. It contains digressions about whaling culture, philosophizes about the nature of fate, speaks on evolution, and many other things. There are enough characters within the story that it is difficult to focus on only one. All of these reasons and more are why as Dave Lavery states, "there are few great books more often misread or maladapted" (94). It is true that one is hard pressed to find an adaptation of *Moby Dick* that is faithful to the tone and characters present in the novel. There have been a few well-known adaptations of Melville's tale and most of them fall short of the goal. In 1926, a silent film, *The Sea Beast* (Millard Webb)*,* features an Ahab with a brother and a spouse. More recently, a made for TV movie starring Patrick Stewart was released in 1998. These interpretations sacrifice content for action and sentimentality. Important characters are left out in favor of cinematic derivatives that fail to deliver a proper version of what *Moby Dick* is about. Lavery says, "One of the greatest of all novels still awaits a film version that captures Melville's novel in all its intricacy" (95). One of the most well known and well received of these adaptations is the John Huston directed *Moby Dick* released in 1956.

The film is regarded as one of the most faithful adaptions of the novel and one of the best versions of the tale on the big screen. However, while it is true that this version of *Moby Dick* remains somewhat faithful to the source material it also fails in translating the spirit of the novel. This film pays more attention to aspects of the novel that cater to the adventure film. Ultimately, the film succeeds in being a watchable adventure film. As an adaptation of *Moby Dick*, though, the film makes changes that convolute the novel's themes. The film combines early chapters with late ones and changes endings as well as adding extra plot lines to heighten the suspense. The writer in charge of most of these changes is Ray Bradbury, the well-known science fiction author. To prepare for the task of adapting the novel Bradbury read *Moby Dick* enough to create over "1200 pages of notes and outlines" (Lavery 96). Bradbury claimed to be so invested in the story that he became Melville. Lavery cites an interview in which Bradbury says, "The ghost of Melville was in me" (qtd. in Lavery 96). Bradbury's belief that Melville lives through his writing is what convinces him that the deceased writer would approve of the changes that he made to the source material. These changes appear to be in an effort to push the story along without stopping to think about the meaning behind the sentences.

George Barbarow explains that this version of *Moby Dick* lacks the kind of undertones that distinguish the novel from other great books. Barbarow says that the film presents things very simplistically and "we take things as they come" (271). Barbarow criticizes the choices Bradbury makes in regard to exposition. He takes issue with the dialogue and the scenes as they are presented. He feels as if all of the dialogue of note in the film hits the audience member over the head with it's meaning. He explains, "Overtones are non-existent in this pedestrian procession of "good likenesses" (Barbarow

271). Barbarow believes that the film sacrifices the deeper meaning behind scenes in order to identify events in the novel that an audience remembers from the book. This means that non-essential plot points from the novel (which the book has many of) are cut out from the final film regardless of their symbolic importance. Aspects of the novel like the chapters on cetology, the collection of whale sperm, or even the symbolism of chapters like "The Mast Head" (Melville 956) or "Measurement of a Whale's Skeleton" (Melville 1276). These absences create a film that may work as a Hollywood adventure film but not one with the name *Moby-Dick* attached to it. In addition, the film establishes the physical representation of *Moby Dick* in a way that takes from the whale's symbolic meanings in the book. We get a fake stand in for a whale that shows itself often enough to become a cliché' of a monster film. This eliminates any kind of mystery from the whale and is against what the book outlines. The novel is clear in suggesting that the whale may not be a physical whale and is instead more of a natural force. A common theme in the adaptation, the film eliminates much of the symbolism present in the novel by diminishing complimentary characters.

Apart from omitting several smaller events and chapters, Ray Bradbury decides to also omit or diminish characters that are important in the symbolic unity of the novel. One of these characters is Fedallah, the leader of the harpooners that Ahab decides to sneak aboard his ship. He is described as a dark figure that lived somewhere out east. He is a prophetic character in that he constantly has premonitions about Ahab and his hunt for Moby Dick. Fedallah is always quite literally in Ahab's shadow. He always seems to stand in the dark patch that Ahab casts on his ship. This adds to his mystery and interpretation as evil figure. Many aboard the ship believe that he may even be a devil in

disguise. He is a contrast to the figure of Queequeg, another foreign man aboard the ship who befriends Ishmael. Unlike Fedallah, Queequeg is a likeable and open presence on the ship. He is a good friend to Ishmael from the moment the two share a bed together inside of the inn. There is something universally relatable about him that eliminates any sense of the foreign about him. Fedallah, though, is a representation of the mysterious oriental world that most of society at the time has no idea about. He is an attempt to create a sense of the unknown aboard Ahab's ship. At one point, Ishmael even suggests that Fedallah has some kind of influence over Ahab: "it might have been even authority over him. All this none knew" (Melville 1040). Fedallah, in the novel, is suggested to be in the ear of Ahab. Similar to the image of devil and angel on a person's shoulders, Fedallah represents an evil influence on the captain. This adds an extra element of complexity to Ahab's motivations. Bradbury decides not to include Fedallah in the film because, "He's a bore" (qtd. in Lavery 96). Bradbury dislikes this character and even says that he does not "care what the Melville scholars say" (qtd. in Lavery 96) and that Fedallah would be "unbearable on screen" (qtd. in Lavery 96). This is an example of a case where the writer and filmmaker choose to go against common interpretations of literary characters. Bradbury allows his personal distaste for Fedallah to get in the way of a more complete adaptation of the material. He strikes Fedallah from the film mostly because of his own opinions on the character instead of looking at the character and its symbolism as part of a whole.

The book accomplishes part of this symbolism by characterizing the whale as a supernatural being that is unstoppable and having Ahab be so determined to fight it. The film fails in this reading because it reduces the whale to a physical being and diminishes

the struggle between Ahab and fate as well as eliminating characters that added complexity to others.

Ishmael is put aside as a secondary character for a large part of the film. In addition, Ishmael is made out to be a man with very little experience aboard a ship. He is played as a lovable ignoramus. In the novel, Melville makes it clear that Ishmael is no novice aboard a ship. He writes Ishmael as a person that craves the open ocean. Melville writes that Ishmael always goes aboard a ship as a sailor "because of the wholesome exercise and pure air of the forecastle deck" (799). Ishmael in the novel is a man that enjoys working on the deck of a ship because of its freedom and excitement. He likes being a part of a team and enjoys globetrotting. He is confident aboard any ship. In the film, Ishmael makes mistakes that are appropriate only for a novice. When he first approaches the Pequod to sign up for a whaling expedition he manages to offend the Quaker aboard the ship because Ishmael does not know the proper sailing lingo. In addition, this scene reveals Ishmaels motivation for wanting to go whaling. In the film, Ishmael tells the Quaker that he "just wants to see what whaling is like" (Moby Dick). In the novel, Ishmael's motivations are much broader and mysterious. He hints at his assignment aboard the Pequod as being predetermined. Ishmael says he can see very little into the motives that "the Fates, put me down for this shabby part of a whaling voyage" (Melville 799). Ishmael does not know why exactly he takes part in the story of Ahab and the whale. He also mentions the whale as a reason for his desire to board a whaling ship. He marvels at the size and mystery of the whales. He beckons for the "undeliverable, nameless perils of the whale" (Melville 800). These motivations not only help us understand why Ishmael is involved in the story but also help flesh out Ishmael as a

character. The novel paints Ishmael as a man of adventure and deep thought. He

contemplates the natural beauty of the whale and its habitat. Ishmael wants to witness the

whales in the wild because they represent nature in its purest form. The film glosses over

his motivations and boils them down to curiosity. There is no passion in the Ishmael

presented by the film. He seems naïve and over his head. Instead of creating a more

interesting man in Ishmael, the film takes him and places him aside in favor of Ahab.

One of the most glaring differences between the novel and the film versions of

Moby Dick is that often it is Ahab that is put in the forefront instead of the novel's central

character Ishmael. The film feels like it is Ahab's story when in fact it should be

Ishmael's version of the hunt of Moby Dick. This is possibly due in part because Ahab's

whale chase lends itself well to cinematic set pieces with all of the harpoons and violence

necessary for a whaling expedition. Ray Bradbury feels like the audience is more

interested in Ahab's struggle with his obsession than with Ishmael's interpretation and

musings on whaling. The film begins appropriately enough. It opens up with the iconic

first lines of the novel, "Call me Ishmael" (Melville 795) and proceeds to pretend as if

Ishmael is the main character of the film. However, the film quickly separates itself from

the outline of the novel. In the novel, Ahab is introduced 28 chapters into the story. The

novel leaves him mysterious because he is such an elusive and complex character. The

film introduces Ahab about five minutes into its run time. As Ishmael enters an inn other

whalers who explain to him how he needs permission from the local community to begin

his whaling confront him. They then hear the sound of hard wooden footsteps. We cut

from Ishmael to a window. Nothing is visible through the window because of the

darkness of night until a lightning bolt strikes and illuminates Ahab as he walks off

screen. The whalers inside of the inn then explain to Ishmael and the audience about captain Ahab. The introduction of Ahab as a central character so early on in the film points to a film that will spend its time with Ishmael and Ahab but not equally.

Ishmael is set aside in favor of Ahab in order to highlight the hunt for Moby Dick which Bradbury felt was the most intriguing plot point in the novel. Other crewmembers aboard the Pequod are changed to add more cinematic suspense to the film. One of these crewmembers is Starbuck. Starbuck is the first mate of the Pequod and one of the most intriguing characters in the novel. He is a very religious man who is also very superstitious and brave. He believes in only doing the job that he came out to do. He does not want to get into any more danger than he already is in. This does not mean that he is a coward. On the contrary, Ishmael describes him as a person that values courage as a necessary tool when appropriate. Ishmael says that for Starbuck, "courage was one of the great staple outfits of the ship, like her beef and her bread, and not to be foolishly wasted" (Melville 915). This means that for Starbuck it is foolish to take risks when they are not needed. He is not stranger to perilous events but he prefers avoiding them if at all possible. This presents a problem because of Ahab's obsession with the white whale. Ahab is willing to place his entire crew in danger in order to slay his monster. In the novel, when Ahab outlines his plan to hunt the white whale, Starbuck is first to refute the captain. Starbuck calls his pursuit of the whale a blasphemous thing. Ahab calls out Starbuck's challenge and tells him to hang back if he must. However, Starbuck does nothing and "the wind blew on; the sails filled out; the ship heaved and rolled as before" (Melville 968). Starbuck plays a much more passive role in the novel but the film changes his demeanor.

In the novel, Starbuck is weary of Ahab's vision but he is also unable to do anything about it. Starbuck does not act on his protests. He publicly demonstrates his displeasure but he does his duty all the same. Ray Bradbury and John Huston decide to take Starbuck's protests to the next level. Bradbury includes a scene where Starbuck talks to a couple of shipmates about committing mutiny. This adds a subplot to the movie that may make it more interesting but in the end it is all for nothing because Bradbury decides to change Starbuck's opinion on the whale once again. On the last day of the chase, when the Pequod has the white whale in its sights and Ahab is already dead, Starbuck decides he wants to kill the white whale and charges recklessly after it. His decision proves fatal for him and the rest of the crew that joins him. This action is so unlike the characterization of Starbuck in the novel that it is glaring and distracting. It is only one of the ways that Bradbury decides to change the ending.

The finale of the film is something entirely different from the outcome present in the novel. To begin, it is necessary to look at the depiction of the white whale itself. The novel presents the whale as a metaphysical force that cannot be stopped. The whale can be a symbol for God or the devil. It represents the unstoppable way of the world. It is debated in the novel whether or not the whale is an actual whale. He is a product of nature that has been present "for some time past" (Melville 984) and only a few men "had knowingly seen him." (Melville 985). The crewmembers sometimes say that the whale is at multiple places at the same time. This is a supernatural force that is quite formidable. The film makes mention of the ferocity of the whale but there is no sense that the whale is anything other than an animal. In fact, during the final showdown between the whale and Ahab, Starbuck diminishes the representation of the whale. Starbuck says, "Moby

Dick's no devil he is a whale, a monstrous big whale aye but a whale no more. We're real whaling men no less, we do not turn from whales we kill them" (Moby Dick). This completely defies the traditional representation of Moby Dick as something more than just a whale. This makes Captain Ahab seem even more foolish for chasing after something that is just doing it's best to protect itself from attack, like any other animal would in its position. It eliminates any sort of deeper connection with God and the supernatural that make the story of *Moby Dick* so interesting. In addition, Ahab's demise at the hands of the whale is changed as well. Bradbury decides to take Fedallah's death and gives it to Ahab. Fedallah dies by being tangled by harpoon ropes around the whale as the whale dives. The film borrows this death and makes it more cinematic. Ahab somehow finds himself on top of the whale and proceeds to stab it over and over again with a harpoon in an attempt to finally bring it down. He shouts as the harpoon penetrates the whale's body. The whale dives and once it surfaces again Ahab is attached to the whale by the many harpoon ropes that stick out of the whale's body. It is certainly a very cinematic way for the captain to go. The novel has Ahab die very quickly. As he clears a harpoon from a whaling canoe a rope attached to Moby Dick catches Ahab around the neck. Ahab is then "shot out of the boat, ere the crew knew he was gone" (Melville 1406). It is one sentence and Ahab is not addressed again. He dies quickly, kidnapped by the white whale. Ahab's death symbolizes man's eventual submission to the forces that govern our lives. No matter how hard man tries to fight fate man will lose. The book means for this to be a reading of its ending. However, the film ignores the book's conclusions and instead chooses something it deems to be more appealing to an audience.

It changes character motivations by simplifying them and takes the complexity out of their struggles. These unrecognizable characters betray the original spirit of the novel.

Visual Style as Character in *Sin City*

Novels, classic or not, are not the only works of fiction that are being transformed into feature length films. Over the past few decades the comic book field has emerged as one of the most popular sources for adaptations. Tim Burton's *Batman* enjoyed a box office triumph when it was released in 1989 and Richard Donner's *Superman* debuted in 1978 to eager audiences. The success of *Batman* and *Superman* in particular gave studios the confidence that audiences can relate to comic book characters. For the next few years, up until about the year 2000, a comic book based film was released maybe every few years. However, with the release of *X-Men* (Bryan Singer) in the year 2000 there was a shift in thought about the comic book movie. First of all, it was no longer just *Batman* and *Superman* on the big screen. Studios began to push out comic book characters that used to be known only to avid comic book readers. *X-Men*'s nearly 300 million dollar worldwide gross at the box office made it a smash for the summer of 2000 and ushered in a new era of the Hollywood blockbuster.

The story of Peter Parker and his encounter with a radioactive spider on a field trip one fateful day is the stuff of Saturday morning cartoons. After the success of Fox's *X-Men,* Sony, who had bought the film rights to *Spider-Man* from Marvel a few years back, decided the climate was right for the wall-crawler to step out of the shadows and land on the big screen. Sam Raimi directed the picture and *Spider-Man* opened in 2002. The film was a critical and financial success. Many see *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* as the two films that spawned the current obsession with comic book characters. After these two smash hit movies comic book inspired films debuted in the summer every year. Ian

Gordon in his article *Blockbuster Art House* notes that after the success of *Spider-Man* and *X-Men* a box-office analyst writes, "comic book movies, if properly marketed, are exactly what mainstream audiences want to see in their summer movies" (qtd. in Gordon 110). This seems to ring true when one thinks about the billions of dollars some comic book inspired movies gross worldwide. On the other hand, many successful comic book movies are also some of the most critically panned films. However, based on box office success, it seems like audiences watch comic book inspired movies in part for their memorable characters instead of their artistic merit.

As comic book blockbusters became more and more frequent studios and creators began digging deeper into the comic culture in order to find darker stories that can be marketed to older viewers, among other things. This led creators to the comic book's darker more mature cousin: the graphic novel. The superhero narrative is not a staple of the graphic novel. Their stories are usually darker in tone and are intended for a more mature audience. These novels may employ story-telling techniques that are radical and sometimes innovative. Critics and studios alike usually treat films based on graphic novels more seriously. This is partly because some graphic novels require cinema to be creative with the technology at their disposal to recreate the worlds and events present in some graphic novels. Graphic novel based films like *V for Vendetta* (James McTeigue 2005), *A History of Violence* (David Cronenberg 2005), or *Road to Perdition* (Sam Mendes 2002) usually require more thought process in part of a viewer to understand in addition to adopting a visual style that is considered 'graphic' in an artistic sense. One of the most, if not the most, faithful translation of a graphic novel to film is the adaptation of Frank Miller's *Sin City*. The graphic novel first appeared in 1991 to critical acclaim. It is

a neo-noir style graphic novel that intertwines various characters and their stories to tell a larger tale. Robert Rodriguez co-directed the film with the story's original creator Frank Miller and the film was released in 2005.

When one looks at the graphic novel and the film side by side it is astonishing how faithful the adaptation truly is. The graphic novel is separated into thirteen separate stories or chapters. Each story takes place in a city called Basin City and has some intertwining characters to connect the stories. Rather than try to cram the entire volume into one film Rodriguez chooses three separate volumes to tell his version of *Sin City*. The first volume Rodriguez focuses on is called *The Hard Goodbye.* It is the story of Marv, a disfigured psychotic, who is framed for the murder of a prostitute. Having spent a wonderful night with the woman Marv vows to find those responsible for her death. In his search for the truth he uncovers a conspiracy that leads him to a serial killer and a corrupt Cardinal. He uncovers the truth at a price. He is put in the electric chair and is electrified twice before he is finally killed. *The Big Fat Kill*, the second volume Rodriguez focuses on, is the story of a group of prostitutes who take revenge on a corrupt cop. The cop's death is sure to create havoc on the truce between the police and Basin City's underworld so the girls attempt to make sure his death is kept a secret. The third story is *That Yellow Bastard.* It is the tale of a close to retirement cop and his hunt for a pedophile. These stories are all presented faithfully in the film. Rodriguez makes no dramatic changes in their translation to the screen other than allowing some secondary characters survive their deaths from the graphic novel. Rodriguez feels confident enough in the strength of the plot and its intricacies that he does not stray from their plot. Instead,

he makes sure to transpose the look of the graphic novel and its characters straight to the screen. This emphasizes the focus Rodriguez places on the look of characters in the film.

The first ten minutes of the film focus on two stories that chronologically do not appear in the original release of *Sin City*. The first volume of the graphic novel is called *The Hard Goodbye*. It is the story of a man named Marv and his journey to find the murderer of a prostitute Marv is framed of killing named Goldie. This story appears ten minutes into the film and follows the outline given in the graphic novel almost panel by panel. The voice over dialogue is the same as in the graphic novel line by line except for some occasional omissions. The omissions are usually small paragraphs or sentences that can be explained visually rather than through dialogue. A broken air conditioner is mentioned in the dialogue of the graphic novel but omitted from the voice over in the film. Visually, Robert Rodriguez takes the panels and painstakingly recreates the angles at which Miller originally presents every movement and action. It truly is a translation of the graphic novel to the screen. Every shadow, light reflection, and character position is taken from the panels of the graphic novel. Techniques usually only used in illustrations are also put on screen. These techniques are recreated and adapted to the screen as responsibly as translating an important character. There is a panel in the opening pages of the first volume that consists of an overhead view of a heart-shaped bed with Goldie and Marv on it. The heart-shaped bed is the only thing white in the panel. Everything else is a deep black to give the impression of a lonely heart in a sea of darkness. The film recreates this image but changes it slightly. In the novel the bed is white and Goldie and Marv are drawn in silhouette. Miller and Rodriguez instead decide to color the heart-shaped bed a vivid red and give Goldie's long hair a golden glow. Everything else is kept

in black and white. This selective coloring is most likely done in order to give the audience something more visual and cinematic on the screen. It also establishes the very stylized look of the film. The movie continues in the same way for the rest of the run time. It follows its source material to the end and stays close to it the entire way. Rodriguez finds many of Miller's depictions of characters iconic and translates them faithfully to the screen. He gives Marv all of his scars and places his face in many close ups to show the detail of his history. Rodriguez treats the style of the graphic novel as a distinct character that must be translated faithfully on screen.

The film version of *Sin City* is so stylistically faithful to its graphic novel that it "literally broke Hollywood rules" (Gordon 113). Robert Rodriguez is quick to call the film a translation rather than an adaptation. He attempts to mimic all of the visual nuances present in the *Sin City* graphic novel. This is because Rodriguez treats the art style of *Sin City* as another character. He knows that brushing aside Miller's artwork is akin to ignoring a central character in the novel. Style in *Sin City* is a character because much of the tone of the novel is presented through its visual depiction of the city. The hard blacks create a place full of danger and shadow. Black and white images reflect the duality of Basin City. Corrupt cops mix with the loyal ones and it is hard to distinguish between the good and bad. Rodriguez mimics Miller's style by forgoing set building and on location scouting in favor of an all green screen set and digital camera use. This choice makes sense for the extremely stylized and grindhouse film Rodriguez wants to make. *Sin City* takes place in the fictional Basin City. Miller illustrates it as this wide metropolis and chooses to depict it in black and white in his illustrations. The black and white is highly contrasted against each other. In the graphic novel only certain colors are

added in order to emphasize specific characters or events. Blood is a deep red sometimes. A character with a special defining trait will have that trait highlighted a color. For instance, in one of *Sin City*'s volumes there is a character named the fat yellow bastard and he is colored a putrid yellow throughout many of the panels. He is the only character to be fully colored in that way. A female character will have her lips colored red to show her sexuality. The unique style of the world that Frank Miller establishes in his graphic novel is something that Rodriguez wanted to get across in his film translation of the source. Camila Figueiredo in her look at transpositions from graphic novels to films realizes how significant Rodriguez's decision to be as faithful as possible to Miller's world is for the story. She notes that it is perhaps "the first time that the comic book effect is successfully achieved by means of digital technology" (9). She goes on to say that the film does more than just imitate the characteristics of the graphic novel. Camila says that the film aims to reproduce the artistic "signature and view of the world" (11). According to Camila, by being as faithful to the source material as he is Rodriguez is successful in reminding the viewer of the source text. The viewer knows that they are not only watching a film, they are watching a film translation of a very specific graphic novel. Miller's character bleeds through the pages as his artwork in the novel and Rodriguez wants to emphasize it in the film.

This speaks to a problem that filmmakers encounter when trying to adapt a graphic novel or comic book. Unlike a conventional novel that only contains text, a comic book or graphic novel will also contain images. This means that the adaptation must also take into account the visual style already established by artists that chose every color, panel, and cell carefully when illustrating the plot and characters. An artist is

unique and their characters are embedded in the works they create. It is easy to say that

the visual component of the graphic novel only helps to translate the source text because

of the ready-made storyboard appearance of the comic book panel. However, the opposite

is often true. Most of the time the visual style of a graphic novel is not ideal to bring on

screen. *Sin City* is one of the graphic novels that many saw as being very difficult to

faithfully bring on-screen. This is due in part to its disjointed narrative and distinct black

and white pop art. The graphic novel is a combination of *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino

1994) style narrative combined with 50's film noir and common superhero tropes. Robert

Rodriguez manages to recreate the high contrast black and white images from the graphic

novel by filming digitally in color and then going back in post-production and changing it

to black and white. Traditional black and white films are actually grey and white, which

would not work to serve the images of the graphic novel. The high contrast style is

important to the depiction of the characters as they appear on the page of the graphic

novel.

Robert Rodriguez accomplishes his goal of translating the visual characteristics of

the graphic novel by choosing to include Frank Miller as his co-director. Rodriguez, in a

DVD interview of *Sin City* says when making the film he thinks about "taking cinema

and turning it into the book" when usually it is the other way around. In the same

interview he goes on to say that the two mediums are very similar and that the graphic

novel and its images are "snapshots of movement." This explains why Rodriguez felt that

it was so important to include the creator of those images Frank Miller as a director.

Robert Rodriguez says, "I don't want to make Robert Rodriguez's Sin City, I want to

make Frank Miller's Sin City." In an interview for a behind the scenes commentary of

Sin City Rodriguez mentions specific instances where Frank Miller's creative ideas helped the film do things that had not been done before. Rodriguez outlines one scene where a character cuts a person's throat and is then splashed in the face with blood. Frank Miller told Rodriguez that he wanted the blood to hit the character in the face and for the character not to blink when the blood reached their eyes. Miller wanted this to happen because it had not been done before. Rodriguez completed this shot by first shooting the characters face with their eyes open and then had them close their eyes as the blood hit them in the face. Rodriguez then went back and digitally superimposed the character's open eyes to make it look like they didn't blink as the blood splashed them in the face. The effect of this shot makes it a lot more in the spirit of the graphic novel.

The digital manipulation of the film is so extensive that there is a version of the film in which the digital manipulations are left out. This version of the film is the final cut as it was shot with the digital camera. Behind and around the characters are large sections of green screen. The only things present in front of the camera are the actors themselves along with a few props. Most of the work put into the film was done in postproduction. What then did Frank Miller have to do on the set of a film that mostly took its shape after initial photography? Rodriguez says that he and Frank Miller both loved the source material and they "didn't want to stray from that and really wanted to translate it to the screen." In this particular adaptation both the creator of the source material and the director of the film really wanted the source material to be absolutely faithfully represented on the screen. Rodriguez also states the some of the direction that comes from Frank Miller during the shooting is sometimes very specific. He gives an example where Miller did not like the way a character was holding a gun so he went over

and positioned it himself the way he wanted it to look. Rodriguez explains that this is because Miller knew when something did not look like one of his drawings or something that he would create. He wanted his illustration style to be true in the live action medium. The filmmakers went as far as adding prosthetics and makeup to their actors to make them look as much as possible to their graphic counterparts. The film stays true to the novel's characters and as a result it does not contradict any themes from the source material.

Sin City is an example of a film that takes its source material and follows it to the letter in a way that has never been done before. By having the creator of the source text so involved with the creation of the film it keeps the spirit of the novel present on screen. The themes are still there and the characters are completely accurate to the novel they come from. It is a dream creation for those that complain about the way adaptations feel as if they should change in order to belong on the big screen. The translation of characters from page to screen is faithful down to the finest details. Rodriguez makes it a point to take Miller's characters without altering them because he knows that these characters are iconic Miller creations. They are on screen with every scar, wrinkle, and defect that Miller draws them with. The art is given the importance of a character and translated with great importance.

Blanche's Rise in *A Streetcar Named Desire*

One of the most well received films of all time, *A Streetcar Named Desire* is based on the play of the same name written by Tennessee Williams. Directed by Elia Kazan and released in 1951, the film was received with much critical acclaim. The film is often placed amongst the greatest movies ever made. It is often that the film version of William's play is most recognized. This is because of the many awards it received during its debut. Many people may not know that the film is based on a story written for the stage and not the screen. The film received twelve Oscar nominations. Because of the many strong performances in the film it won three Oscars in acting categories (Oscars.org). It was one of the first films to do this. This is in part because the play and the film owe much of this drama to relations between characters. It is an examination of love, loyalty, psychosis, cruelty and other heady topics. With all of these accolades and triumphs one can assume that the film succeeds in adapting the material it is based on. A leap can then be made in that not only did the film excel in transferring themes from stage to screen but that it also enhanced the roles of principal characters within the story. This is partly due to the collaboration on the script by the story's creator Tennessee Williams. He is brought on board by the studio to help give the film the right kind of feel. His collaboration with Kazan is what made the film as successful as it was. However, the process of adapting the play was not an easy one. They faced pressure from the studio and from themselves to make the film as complete and true to the stage play as they could. This meant that some changes needed to be made in order for the film to thrive.

In order for the film to portray the kind of themes present in the play Kazan and

Williams needed to collaborate closely on the script and fight studio executives to include

controversial material. Kazan and Williams enjoyed a close working relationship that led

to the two collaborating on each other's respective fields. According to some observers

"the director was involved in the play's writing from very early on and the playwright

was involved in the production process throughout its development" (Bray 71). This

leads many people to wonder if Kazan deserves credit for writing the play. Kazan denies

any sort of in depth involvement in writing *Streetcar* and gives all credit to Williams.

Regardless of these kinds of allegations, the pair "yielded to an affinity and friendship

which, at least to some extent, transcended individual ego" (Bray 73). The two would

need this tight bond in order to succeed in transferring some of the more controversial

aspects about the play into the film version. The play contains some references to

homosexuality, a rape scene, a suicide, and domestic violence. All of these things were

adamantly opposed by the production code in place at the time of the production of the

movie. A lot of dialogue is cut from the initial version of the film and it is only replaced

in a version released in 1993 that includes many of the changes made to the film by the

censors. The censors cut out the references to Blanche's husband and his homosexual

tendencies as well as much of the intensity of Stanley's violence towards Blanche and

Stella. One of the changes that Kazan and Williams were strongly against was the rape of

Blanche by Stanley. Williams wrote to the production code director that without the rape

scene "the play loses its meaning, which is the ravishment of the tender, the sensitive, the

delicate, by the savage and brutal forces of modern society" (qtd. in Bray 75). In the end,

the rape scene is included but it is not something violent or intense. It is portrayed more

symbolically and softly than what Kazan wanted. These changes to the play are all changes suggested by outside forces not involved in the production of the film. Some changes, particularly changes to character portrayals, are inspired by Kazan and Williams themselves. It is the character of Blanche that is changed more drastically from stage to screen because of Kazan's experience with the viewing of the performance.

The stage version of *A Streetcar Named Desire* features some of the actors that would later reprise their roles in the film version. One of these actors is the great Marlon Brando. Marlon Brando plays the role of Stanley Kowalski, a working class salesman who served in WWII. He is known for his quick temper and often has domestic disputes with his wife. Brando plays this man in both stage versions released in 1947 and 1948. On stage, Brando plays Stanley Kowalski as a brute of a man. Louise Kronenberger calls him a "No sense roughneck" (Leff 35). Brando seems perfect. Scott McGee says that Williams came away from the audition sure that "Brando was perfect for the role" (McGee). Brando is able to portray all of the raw emotions present in Stanley's character. According to McGee, Brando began a workout regiment in order to properly portray the physicality of his character. This added a level of attractiveness to the character that was not before seen. Williams wrote a letter in which he praises Brando's performance:

> I can't tell you what a relief it is that we have found such a God-sent Stanley in the person of Brando. It had not occurred to me before what an excellent value would come from casting a very young actor in this part. It humanizes the character of Stanley in that it becomes the brutality or callousness of youth rather than a vicious older man. I don't want to focus guilt or blame particularly on any

one character but to have it a tragedy of misunderstandings and insensitivity to others. A new value came out of Brando's reading, which was by far the best reading I have ever heard (qtd. in Bray 78).

The praise given to Brando is not mentioned only to state how obviously talented he was but to show how much of a presence he is on stage. The audience responded to Brando much more favorably than his Co-star Jessica Tandy who played Blanche. The director of the film version, Elia Kazan, thought that Blanche was the central character of the play and pays greater attention to her. However, because of Brando's incredible portrayal of Stanley, Kazan remembers, "The audiences adored Brando. When he derided Blanche, they responded with approving laughter" (qtd. in Bray 79). Tandy's performance as Blanche was a good one but Brando seemed to be overpowering her with his performance. This led to Blanche being recast with Vivian Leigh in the film version. This is an example of a director making a decision based on reactions he sees first-hand. This is something unique to the adaptation of the stage play when compared to the adaptation of a novel or short work of fiction. A director and screenwriter cannot know the first impressions of a person when they encounter a character for the first time in a novel. Sure, the person can later give their opinions on the character as they envisioned them in their heads. However, the reader's description will always be different person to person. With a play, an audience is seeing a character as portrayed by a physical actor that they can see and smell and touch. The actor on stage creates his or her own version of a written character and displays it to the world. This character has established quirks and ticks that are witnessed by a large number of people at the same time. A play gives the director a chance to see how a character impacts an audience and their interpretation of the story. In

the case of *Streetcar* and Brando, Kazan realizes that Brando's likeable persona influences the audience into thinking that his character is the hero. When on stage at the same time as his co-star Brando commands the eye away from Tandy. Stanley steals the sympathy of the audience away from Blanche. Kazan does not want the audience to shift in favor of Blanche. He attempts to accomplish this by casting Leigh in the role of Blanche and using set design and camerawork to project Blanche's mind on screen.

The decision to create more sympathy for Blanche is because she is often seen as either an attention seeking drama queen or a sympathetic tragedy. This is because of Blanche's vulnerable demeanor. Some see her vulnerability as genuine and others suspect her of feigning vulnerability for attention. Blanche is certainly a complex character. She shows signs of mental breakdowns as well as an appetite for the dramatic. She plays the part of a southern belle in distress to perfection. Her vulnerability and attraction to men confuse viewers who do not know whether her vulnerability is feigned in order to get the attention of men or a genuine cry for help. A review of the Broadway show by *Variety* magazine calls Blanche "a nymphomaniac, the explanation for her disintegration being that she had been married to a degenerate who committed suicide" (qtd. in Leff 4). *Variety* is not the only person who sees Blanche as a woman in search of physical satisfaction. As mentioned before, audience members did not take kindly to Blanche and instead side with Stanley. This being a significant decision in the part of the audience given how cold Stanley is to Stella and Blanche. John Mason Brown analysis Blanche's downfall as coming "Most particularly, from her selfishness and her vanity, which are insatiable" (qtd. in Berkman 2). Clearly, partly because of Brando's incredible turn as Stanley and partly because of her ambiguous characteristics, Blanche is a controversial

figure. Some critics ravage her for her vanity. Blanche's time on stage is marked by divisive moments and harsh criticism. A number of people did not feel any sort of emotional connection with her. Blanche, though, has on her side the two most important people in her creation: Kazan and Williams. The pair is determined to give Blanche the limelight in the film version.

Kazan and Williams take Blanche's side and put a lot of focus on her emotional downfall in an attempt to restore the sympathy that was not afforded to her by the audience in her stage appearances. Kazan "remained determined not to allow Brando's stage dominance to overshadow the character of Blanche" (Bray 79). Kazan wants the audience to feel Blanche as she spins out of control at the hands of Stanley and his aggressiveness. Kazan agrees with Leonard Berkman when he says, "Blanche cannot at all be accurately seen as the weak hypocrite John Mason Brown portrays her as being" (4). Williams also wishes to see Blanche given more attention to. Williams composes a letter to Kazan in which he says, "Blanche must finally have the understanding and compassion of the audience" (qtd. in Bray 79). Kazan attempts to show Blanche's inner turmoil by building Stella's and Stanley's home in small sections "so that as Blanche feels more constricted and threatened inside the Kowalski home, the walls could literally move in and create a claustrophobic tension within the space" (McGee). This set design choice is part of how Kazan chooses to give Blanche more attention. Kazan utilizes film techniques not available in the stage version to express Blanche's thoughts to the audience.

The film begins with a wide shot of a train chugging along an empty plain. The smoke rises above the frame of the screen. There is a cut to a busy train station in New Orleans. We are introduced to Blanche as she steps off the train looking around in a confused state. The camera follows her and stays on her in medium close up as a marine in the station who offers to help Blanche with directions approaches her. Blanche clutches her handbag to her chest with both hands as she explains to the marine where she needs to go. He helps her onto a streetcar and then the film cuts again. This time it is a wide shot of Blanche as she dodges puddles and groups of people walking from one place to another. Blanche seems lost amidst the busy night streets of New Orleans. She meets with her sister at a diner and sits down with her for a conversation. Normally, the conversation is shown in shot-reverse-shot but with much greater focus on Blanche. When Stella, her sister, responds to Blanche the film does not cut away from Blanche. During the conversation, Blanche brings her hands up to her face. She is lit with her face half in light and half in dark. She clings to a cigarette in her right hand. These beginning couple of sequences establishes how Blanche will be shown as a more sympathetic character in the film. She uses her hands as a form of protection from the people she converses with. The camera stays on Blanche even when there are other characters interacting with her.

The difference in stage to screen versions of *Streetcar* is that Kazan can use close ups and camera angles to guide a viewers' eye to the most important elements in a scene. About a few minutes into the film, Blanche is already staying with her sister. Stanley and Blanche are alone in the apartment as Stella is outside on the porch. The camera follows Blanche as she moves through the apartment getting dressed. She asks Stanley about a

poker game that the women are not invited to. This conversation then leads to Stanley interrogating Blanche about her clothes and her home. Stanley is very demanding about the truth and grabs Blanche's arms to intimidate her. The back and forth between the two is photographed in shot reverse shot which gives us direct contact with Blanche's eyes and quivering mouth as she tries to seem as truthful as possible to Stanley. Blanche also brings her hands up high as if in an attempt to cover her face from Stanley's gaze. At one point during the interrogation Stanley goes through Blanche's suitcase and throws some of her letters on the floor. Blanche dives to collect the letters and the camera follows her to the ground. She seems so small and hunched over in the frame of the screen. Then the film cuts to a low angle shot of Blanche on the ground with Stanley standing over her, demonstrating how vulnerable she is alone.

Another scene that demonstrates the use of film techniques in order to establish sympathy for Blanche comes near the end of the film. Mitch who discovers that Blanche has been lying to him about her age has just confronted Blanche. She is alone in the apartment and wandering around aimlessly. A police officer comes to her door and she prays for him to go away. There is a fade to black and we now see Blanche dressed elegantly with a crown on her head. She is talking to herself and dancing to invisible music. This is all shown in medium close up. Stanley comes into the apartment and interrupts Blanche's moment alone. He has been at the hospital with Stella who is about to give birth. He will spend the night at the apartment. Blanche realizes that this means the two will be alone together. The film demonstrates her nervousness by keeping Blanche in frame for a few seconds. A wall on the right side of the screen encloses her to her right and a door to her left. Stanley comes in and out of frame as he walks into rooms.

The focus is on Blanche who guards herself with her hands and shields her body with clothing. Stanley begins to drink and later on in the night he makes an advance towards Blanche. He chases her and she tries to defend herself with a broken bottle. He overpowers her and the scene ends with a close up of a shattered mirror with Blanche's defeated face distorted by the cracked glass as music reaches a climactic high. This is intended to demonstrate Blanche's rape by Stanley. It is the final outcome of the many interactions between Blanche and Stanley. The rape is not obvious but it is clear from the close ups of Stanley's crazed face and final image of a broken Blanche in the mirror that Stanley violates her. Here, it is not Brando that is sympathetic. The camera follows blanche throughout the film and prioritizes her story. Stanley is the villain and the intruder. Kazan and Williams succeed in giving Blanche her story through the film version of *Streetcar*.

CONCLUSION

Film translations of literature will contain changes as deemed appropriate by the filmmakers. These filmmakers will interpret signs and symbols differently than others. The differences will result in changes to a novel, short story, play, or comic book that might turn off those with intimate knowledge of a source material. It seems that the closer a director or screenwriter works with the creator of a source material the more successful the film version becomes. This is because the person responsible for creating the original world supervises the inevitable changes that arise in the translation from page to screen. *Sin City* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* are great examples of the beneficial partnership between director and creator. In both cases, the directors have access to previous incarnations of the characters and story they try to bring to film. In the case of *Sin City*, Robert Rodriguez has the graphic novel as a guide. Elia Kazan has *Streetcar*'s physical incarnation of its characters in the stage versions to influence the changes he makes as he adapts the story to the screen. Both directors decide to stay as true as possible to the letter of the source material. Rodriguez chooses to make minimal changes to the plot and characters as they appear on the page. Kazan chooses to make changes to character focus as well as changes to controversial material.

Rodriguez and Kazan place special attention to character representation, one of the biggest aspects of their films. Kazan's version of *A Streetcar Named Desire* places much more emphasis on the character of Blanche. Influenced by audience reaction in the stage version of the story, Kazan in collaboration with Williams decide to place Blanche at the center of the story because of how strong they feel about her importance in the

story. The two felt that the audience was influenced by the momentous performance of

Brando and therefore did not empathize with Blanche as Williams originally intended for

them to. The reception of Blanche in the live version of the story is the catalyst for

change from page to screen. Through camera work and set design, the film is able to

place more focus on Blanche's vulnerability. Although more changes are made to

accommodate for sensitive material, these changes do not alter the themes of the story in

a way that separates the play from the film. By having Williams as a collaborator on the

film, Kazan is able to keep the spirit of the play in his film. Kazan's version of *Streetcar*

is separate from the play in that it is not as controversial. It places much more emphasis

on Blanche and her mental struggle. In this way, it follows Cahir's fourth point about

being its own world and yet not negating its source material. The film accomplishes this

by being true to the characters of the play and their natures as created by Tennessee

Williams.

Another fruitful partnership, Rodriguez and Miller collaborate closely in the

production of *Sin City*. Unlike Kazan and Williams, Rodriguez credits Miller as co-

director of the film. Rodriguez does this because he loves Miller's art and story in the

graphic novel version of *Sin City*. Like Kazan, Rodriguez is influenced by previous

incarnations of the characters within the narrative of the work he is adapting. Rodriguez

admires Miller's artwork and chooses to translate it as meticulously as possible from

page to screen. He does not make drastic changes and instead simply adds movement to

the pages as they appear in the graphic novel. He chooses characters that most appeal to

him and translate their stories to the screen. Rodriguez loves the look of Miller's

characters so much that he has his actors wear prosthetics in order to give them a look as

close to the source material as possible. He gives Marv all of his disfigurements and bandages. Rodriguez chooses to feature Marv so prominently because of how impressive he is on the page. His superhuman strength and endurance make him a memorable character in the graphic novel. In addition, Marv's noble quest is one that an audience can root for. Despite being featured briefly in the graphic novel Marv is emphasized in the film. Rodriguez sees Marv as a memorable character. Also, the more outrageous characters are translated as faithfully as possible. Fat Yellow Bastard is given his distinctive yellow glow and is one of the only full color characters in the film. This is part of the graphic novel's distinct art style, which Rodriguez treats as a character itself. The high contrast images add another layer of interpretive depth to the story. It is difficult to say whether or not the film is its own entity since it follows the graphic novel so closely. However, it is more important that it is not antithetical to its source material.

Kazan and Rodriguez are fortunate that they were able to speak to the creator of their source materials. John Huston and Ray Bradbury in their adaptation of *Moby Dick* are not afforded this luxury. Melville is long dead before Bradbury begins work on the screenplay of *Moby Dick*. However, this does not stop Bradbury from claiming to be in communication with the ghost of the deceased writer. The changes made from the book version of *Moby Dick* to its on screen counterpart are made because of Bradbury's personal opinions on the piece. Specifically, Bradbury is bored by certain characters in the story and chooses to ignore them or omit them entirely from the film. Fedallah is a minor character in the novel but he adds another layer of complexity to the story. Bradbury does not understand why he is included in the novel and decides to leave him out of the film. Ishmael, the novel's narrator and the person who guides us through the

novel is pushed aside in favor of more focus on Ahab. Starbuck's demeanor throughout the film is one of rebellion against Ahab and his decision to chase the whale. However, the climax of the film sees Starbuck change his mind and cause the death of his shipmates in pursuit of the whale. The whale itself is diminished as a symbol and turned into any other movie monster. Huston and Bradbury's *Moby Dick* is an adventure movie. It follows and focuses on Ahab's hunt for the whale. The changes made to the source material are done so in order to make the story fit the mold of the adventure movie. Unlike *Streetcar* and *Sin City*, *Moby Dick* is a film that is its own entity and yet is also antithetical to its source material. The characters in the film *Moby Dick* are very different from those in the novel. As a result the film is an adventure film that bears the name of a well-known literary piece without sharing many aspects or critical acclaim.

The characters in a story can be one of the most memorable parts of the experience of reading. Authors spend a lot of time adding backstory and complexity to them in order to create a sense of the familiar within them. When a filmmaker decides to adapt a piece of literature into a film they must translate the characters as well as they can for the movie to be successful. Changes will have to be made yes, but those changes must not oppose the themes and characters in the source material. A film and its creators need not be slaves to the source material. Being completely faithful to another piece of art can only help to confine the creativity of those on board. Differentiations happen so as to allow films to stand "as meaningful works of art on their own" (Cahir 129). This allows films based on works of literature to stand alongside their source material instead of below or above them. Characters are an integral part of this process. With familiar and

faithful characters, a film can contain separations from its source material and still be

connected to it.

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