

**Seminar on
Film and Literature Interface
Organized by
The Department of English
Vidyasagar University, Midnapore, W.B.**

Concept Note:

The interaction between film and literature has been controversial, to say the least. Literature has always been a rigid medium when it came to the inclusion of pictures or graphic images while cinema insisted on its status as a purely visual medium. Poststructuralist critics such as Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, J. Hillis Miller, and W. J. T. Mitchell all believed in the basic opposition between word and image. Mitchell claimed that words and images are antithetical to each other while Hillis Miller argued that they could never come together. In the seminal work of film theory *Novels into Film* (1957), George Bluestone puts forward the view that “the film and the novel should remain separate institutions, each achieving its best results by exploring unique and specific properties.”

Hardly any attention is paid to the literal pictures or illustrations in novels. Symptomatic of this neglect are works such as William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, many of the novels of Charles Dickens (illustrated by Hablot Knight Browne) or the general lack of attention given to the illustrations in William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* to much of postmodern fiction that relies on extensive use of pictures. Film words suffer a similar neglect in film criticism and theory where words are either seen as secondary to the visual imagery of the films or are regarded as a threat to the visual medium. Some of the greatest films in film history have been studied for their visuals rather than for their dialogues. The dream-like images of Andrei Tarkovsky’s films, for example, abbreviated by snatches of dialogues and poetry (some of them written by his father, Arseny Tarkovsky) are made subservient to the visual poetry in film criticism. The films of Terrence Malick or Bela Tarr such as *Badlands* (1973) and *The Turin Horse* (2011) are often read as purely visual without much emphasis put on film words. This simplistic dichotomy between word and image and the semiotic purism to be found in both the mediums lessens or underestimates the complexity and the potential of the mediums. Cinema, for

example, consists of much more than just a series of images it constitutes at once of words, images, sounds, dialogue and music.

Although there has been a deliberate attempt on the part of both mediums to insulate one from the other it must be realized that the novel is not a uniquely verbal medium and the film is not a uniquely visual medium. Even if one were to consider the illustrations inconsequential to the novels or poems one cannot ignore what Robert Stam and Alessandra Roengo call “the interdependency of the senses” which refers to the visualizations inherent in the written word or the image it elicits in the reader and the “language-ness of the image” meaning that a film image can also elicit words in the mind of the viewer. There are complex interdisciplinary connections between the two which extend the scope of the overlapping mediums. The overlapping or the interaction between literature and film includes adaptations (novel to film and film to novelization) but is not limited to them.

Screen adaptations are often seen as disappointing. Even today legions of disgruntled book fans are up in arms against filmic adaptations whether it be the adaptation of a children’s classic like *Harry Potter* or the 1974 adaptation of the classic American novel on the American dream – *The Great Gatsby*. Some of the harshest critics of film adaptations or transposition particularly Hollywood adaptations have been Geoffrey Wagner and John Orr. The former claiming that adaptations are only satisfying to children (taking cue from I.A. Richards’ view of illustrations in books) while the latter calls adaptations no more than blurbs. One cannot however completely dismiss the fact that screen adaptations sometimes reinterpret or provide new ways of interpreting the text. The interaction between film and literature also takes place in terms of its formal elements; in terms of narrative or themes while also focusing on their shared culture, values and history. A common example in terms of a shared theme is the comparison between Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927) and Kafka’s novel *The Trial* both of which talk about the reduced agency of an individual or individuals. The seminar will address but is not limited to the discussion on the interdisciplinary nature of films and literature and their points of intersections and departures whether it is in the field of adaptation theory or the shared cultural backgrounds of the two cultural productions.

Themes and sub-themes –

- Theories of film adaptation
- Film language and language of literature
- **Influence of cinema on literature and vice versa**
- **Intersection of genres and techniques in film and literature**
- **Cross-media themes**
- Cross-media contexts
- Formalist elements in films and literature

Dates to remember –

- 15.02.2018 – Submission of Abstracts
- 18.02.2018 – Confirmation of Acceptance
- 15.03.2018 – Submission of Full Paper*
- 19.03.2018 – Date of the Seminar

*We plan to bring out a Seminar Proceedings

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