

Laura Stokes, 7.4 Reflecting on Film Fidelity

This module has been one of my favorites so far. I have been exposed to reading many of the original books to the films that were my favorite as a kid. It is interesting because my point of view is different than some others may be. Since I had seen the movies first it was hard to imagine the book coming first, especially when there were differences present. I sometimes felt that the movies were better because that had been what I was exposed to first. I wonder if my opinion would have changed if I had read the books first without any influence from the films.

I felt that the films did a better job of developing the characters than the books did. This goes for *Mary Poppins*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and *The Little Mermaid*. In the books, it seemed as though there wasn't too much going on with the characters. They were very flat, and overall uninteresting. I think the major example is *The Little Mermaid*. Her character didn't even have a name, and we didn't really know what she looked like. Aside from her age, and that she was beautiful, there wasn't much for the reader to decide about her, except that she loved the Prince more than her family. It wasn't very easy for me to become attached to her character because of the fact that I didn't really feel a connection to her.

The Little Mermaid was one of my favorite movies as a child. I used to sit and watch it with a fork nearby so that I could participate in "brushing my hair with it" like Ariel had done in the film. When I read the story that it was based on, I must say that I was a little disappointed. There were not as many details as I thought there should have been, and it didn't give me the same warm fuzzy feeling that the film did. I think this is a good thing and a bad thing at the same time. To me, the story of *The Little Mermaid* was not meant to be a fairytale, but perhaps to tell a different story altogether. Maybe about following your dreams even though they may not always turn out the way you expected. Perhaps it was to show you that you should listen to your family and put them first, it is very difficult to say. The message was obviously NOT to say that when you fall in love, you will end up riding off into the sunset with your arms around Prince Charming. The fact that the movie completely changed the story makes me think that is not necessarily a good thing. The author wrote the story for a purpose, and I feel that the purpose was taken away completely and a new one was put in its place. On the other hand, (this may stem from the fact that I grew up with the movie, not the book) I think that making it into a happier ending story added an element that the story lacked and I enjoyed the film more. It made it more upbeat and a story that left you satisfied at the end. One thing our culture seems to

crave is satisfaction. From food, entertainment, life in general, and films also. With the story, this level of satisfaction was not achieved. The reader was left angry because the happy ending was not achieved. Instead the complete opposite happened. I am always very disappointed when this happens in films. When the main character ends up with the person you didn't want them to, or when something happens that you expected not to etc. Overall, this is how I felt when reading the story. On this note, the movie was able to give me the level of satisfaction that left me happy and content with the overall story of *The Little Mermaid*. When the audience is happy, in my eyes, the movie or story has been a success.

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory is a film that has two different perspectives of the book. Since there were two different versions, it gave me more to build my opinions on. Again with the first film, I had seen it before I read the story. When I read the story, I was a little disappointed that there were some differences, such as the fact that Charlie had two parents in the story, and only one in the original film. I didn't see the relevance in eliminating this fact when the book became a film. This seemed to be a bad choice because it added another level to question about the film such as what the importance was that Charlie was in a fatherless home. In the book, Charlie, along with all of the other Golden Ticket winners aside from Violet, had both parents present for most of the film. In the story they were allowed to bring both parents, yet in the first film they weren't. This made me think that perhaps the filmmaker of the first film felt some sort of a connection with the concept of a two-parent household. I can't quite put my finger on it, but although it may seem like a small change to make, overall it was one of the biggest differences I saw between the book and this film. It was interesting to see that in the second Wonka film, this little detail was not left out and remained the same from the book to the film. This made me think that the filmmaker perhaps felt the same way as the Dahl when it came to the importance of involving both parents for each child.

Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory seemed to be the film that stayed more true to the original book. I did see some slight differences but overall it had the same feeling as the book. However, as I have mentioned before, the movie seemed to develop the characters and the storyline a little bit better than the book. Apparently the filmmaker did feel the importance of the idea of parents and the role that they played. You can clearly see this with the development of the relationship between Wonka and his father throughout the film. You can see where his insecurities come from and can feel more informed about Wonka's character. This idea was developed more in the book than the movie. Again, I feel that it is OK

to steer away from the original as long as the filmmaker isn't changing the main idea and instead is allowing it to develop on a deeper level. This movie seemed to do that especially with the relationship of the father. You also get to see a better relationship between Charlie and his family. That was something that you knew was present in the book, but again it was developed better in the film. As far as the fidelity to the original, I think it is safe to say that this movie did the book justice while adding its own twists and turns. It stayed true to the main ideas that the book presented and added more information to the audience to better understand those ideas.

As for believing if a film should have some fidelity to the original or not, I do believe there should be some ties. I don't think it is necessarily acceptable to take a book and completely change it to make the film. When this is done, so much is lost or translated into other meanings that it is almost like the book never existed, as with *The Little Mermaid*. I have given my opinion onto why I did enjoy the film better, but I do believe that it steered completely away from what the book was saying. The filmmaker interpreted it as a happily ever after story versus the depressing story that Christian Andersen actually wrote. I do want to bring in a different kind of fidelity here. Disney has its own criteria to live up to. Given that since the making of *the Little Mermaid* there have been other films that don't necessarily fit their older mold, but in the times of when this particular movie was created, Disney had a name to live up to. They had a fidelity to themselves as filmmakers. The films that Disney created left hope in the hearts of young girls especially. It made them believe that the happy ever after existed and they would find it someday. Had they created a film that stayed true to the book, they would have abandoned their own concept that they had created for themselves. When we look back at what the story was however, they definitely did not stay true to the meaning of it. While I do feel that the movie was great and enjoy it tremendously, I do think that it was a disappointment as far as staying true to the book. One of the criteria that I feel makes the fidelity of a movie important is its ability to delve deeper into the same meanings that the book had already displayed. With that criteria, *The Little Mermaid* failed miserably.

My main criteria can also cause a problem when looking at the success of a film and its ability to hold some fidelity to the book. Again I will contradict myself because *The Little Mermaid* was very successful, but did not stay true to the book, nor the main ideas that it presented. Does that mean that it was not a good film after all? I would say no because as I said it is one of my favorites. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* seemed to hold more closely to the book, and *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate*

Factory beat both out by its ability to stay true to the book. I think when it comes to someone who has read the book first, the fidelity is more important. I find it difficult to enjoy a book only to have the movie ruin what I had enjoyed so much about the literature. It seems less important though if you are the type of person who never reads the books to begin with. You wouldn't know what you were missing out on, and you wouldn't have any grounds to be upset with the film's fidelity to the book. Sadly in our society, with me as a prime example, most people do not read the text before seeing a film. They would have no idea what was different or that the movie added or left things out. I enjoyed *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and *The Little Mermaid*, and I had not read the books. When I read the books, I could see the differences. I was only really upset with the differences among *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* because I was happy with how Disney had changed *The Little Mermaid*. I am not sure if I am making sense, but I was so distraught over the thought that in the story the Little Mermaid did not end up with the Prince, but was very happy that she had in the film. With *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, the happy ending remained so therefore I was forced to pay closer attention to the other details such as the role of the parents and the attitudes of the children. I was able to be more picky about differences that I may not have noticed, had the ending changed to something that I was not expecting. Again, I would have been completely satisfied with all three films, had I never read the books. I would have nothing to base my opinion on aside from the film.

Therefore I strongly feel that the fidelity of a film to the book really only matters to those who actually read the books before watching the films. That is one thing I am struggling with during this class because I have been exposed to all of the movies we have seen before reading the books. It makes me wonder how different my opinion of the films would be if I had seen them after. When you read the book first, there is always an expectation you hold to the film. This is true in all films, not just children's films. I think of all of the *Twilight* books, and the Nicholas Sparks' books and the audience that is watching those films. Most of them have read the books and therefore there is definitely an expectation not to change anything but to stay true to the books. If the filmmaker does change something, even if it is small, the audience tends to be very disappointed. What I have taken is that the fidelity makes the biggest difference to those who have read the books.