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Transformative Adaptation

Preserving the Characters in a Cinematic
Adaptation

Bachelor's thesis in English

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Abstract

Adaptions have been an essential part of entertainment culture since the turn of the century. One of the most well-known, and maybe most beloved, is the Harry Potter Films. A world phenomenon that keeps fans entertained a decade after its release. The thesis examines the challenges of transformative adaptation as a style and its relationship to the source material. Specifically it focuses on the “faithful” adaptation of the Harry Potter book series into a film series. It compares scenes from the books with how they were changed to suit the cinematic format. The focus is how the main character trio, Harry, Ron and Hermione, and their group dynamic changes due to the inherent limitations and differences between the mediums, books to films. The main argument is that the limitations result in characters and relationships that are simplified and diluted from the books. This leaves the film audiences with an incomparable experience of the emotions and thoughts of the main characters and their relationships. The main findings confirm that time constraints of a cinematic work, compromises the relationship the viewer has with the main characters when compared to a reader of the book’s relationship.

Keywords: Adaptation, Harry Potter, Main Characters

Transformative Adaptation: Preserving the Characters in a Cinematic Adaptation

Harry Potter is a world wide phenomenon that is held in high regards years after its creation. Fans have experienced the Wizarding World from Harry's perspective through 7 books and 8 movies, seemingly never growing tired of the magical escape, following intensely as his character grows through years of trials and struggles. As the central characters in the story, the character trio of Harry Potter, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, and the dynamics between them, is integral for how the story is experienced, in both the books and the films. When creating an adaptation of a book, especially a book series, screenwriters and directors must compromise with the source material; one cannot fit 300 pages into a 2 hour long film, yet the story and characters must remain recognizable and familiar.

This BA thesis will discuss the topic of adaptation with a focus on adapting a longer book series into a film series. The thesis will focus on one work and its adaptation, i.e. Harry Potter, and through discussion and comparison showcase examples to highlight the changes and their impact in the cinematic adaptation. It will seek to show the effects on the characters and their relationships, made by comparing scenes from the books and films then discussing their differences and effect on the overall characterization, focusing on the dynamics in the main character trio. Harry Potter is an attempt to write a more modern story that had some depth to the characters, more normal in literary fiction as well as the "narrative first" methodology of "mass" genre fiction. The discussion will centre around whether the film adaptation is as successful at including this deeper aspect or whether it presents a narrower story. By focusing on scenes throughout the series, the thesis will showcase the differences that crop up in the long-term development of the characters because of the changes that were made in the adaptation.

There are a lot of differences inherent in books and films as mediums, and to properly realise why some changes had to be made, highlighting some of the major differences in presenting a story in the different mediums is useful. Books are largely written in accordance with a single author's vision, with some input from an editor. Films on the other hand are complex and gets passed around to a lot of different experts, all with their own specialties. Films are naturally more limited in regard to detail and nuances that can be properly shown in the allotted timeframe. This limit on what can be included from the books affects the level of detail, making the creator have to choose what changes to characters and narrative as a compromise. In

a book you could have an endless supply of grandiose scenery and grand battles, the authors mind and their words are their only limit, both free, but for the authors time and creativity. Films, on the other hand, are restricted by perceived potential and must adhere to a strict economical budget. A budget that has to fit all the necessary resources for the movie to actually be filmed, edited, marketed, and shown. Films are meant to open for and include a wider audience, and as such, compromises on some elements to both include spectacle and engaging visuals, but also simplifying details, making it more streamlined and easier to comprehend. As books are closer to the original vision, this thesis will naturally fall in to a more critical and negative perspective on the films to figure out if they properly convey the underlying themes to a sufficient degree.

This thesis will expect familiarity of both versions of the Harry Potter series, books and films, to understand the discussion of the characters changes. It will explore the detail of certain scenes, but will not summarise the larger plot. It will seek to discuss and answer the following statement: *How did the cinematic adaptation of the Harry Potter book series affect the characters' role and relationships in the story?*

There are many different ways to categorise an adaptation. They are commonly understood to be a remaking of a story in a different medium, this is, however, merely one of many forms of adaption. Adaption is, from an academic standpoint, not simply transferring a book into a series or film, but rather a term for gathering inspiration and ideas from a source and making it something of your own. Hawthorn (2017) defines adaptations: "it does not seek to replace a known work ... but to be treated as a new work, one that it is hoped will have a life of its own alongside that of the work of which it is an adaptation." (p. 185) There is much division over how adaptations should be categorised, as there are a multitude of different forms an adaptation can take. Academics have argued for their interpretations of the many styles, Cartmell and Whelehan (2007) gives us two viewpoints: "Kamilla Elliott, ... offers no less than six models of adaptation, consisting of the 'psychic,' 'international,' 'ventriloquist,' 'decomposing,' 'genetic,' and 'trumping.'" and Dudley Andrew's simpler interpretation that "splits adaptations into 'borrowing' (where the film hopes to win an audience because of the reputation of the source), 'intersecting' (in which the 'cinema records its confrontation with an ultimately intransigent text') and 'transforming' (where the adaptation "faithfully" reproduces a literary

text to the screen)” (p. 2) While Kamilla Elliott’s interpretations are varied and explores the field in depth, Andrew’s simple and more generic ones are more than sufficient to evaluate adaptations as it relates to the story of Harry Potter. The adaptation of the Harry Potter series into films are meant to be transforming, shown by the inclusion of Rowling’s input during its development, to ensure that it remained “faithful” to her original vision. For clarity through the text, “transforming” and “faithful” will both be used interchangeably when referring to the specific style of adaption.

The inherent struggle with adaptation, no matter the form, is that the re-imagining will almost always be competing with the original work. Cartmell and Whelehan (2007) levels criticism against faithful adaptations, due to their dependence on the literature, insisting that needs to change “so that adaptations are not derided as sycophantic, derivative, and therefore inferior to their literary counterparts. ... No matter how good a copy it is, however, it is qua “copy” inevitably doomed to be inferior to its original.” (p. 2) Adaptation is often critically received, caught between to diametric opinions, neither innovative or faithful enough. Hutcheon (2004) questions whether originality is something to strive for: “Our postromantic valuing of the originary is, after all, a late addition to a long history of borrowing and stealing or, more accurately, of sharing stories.” (p. 110) Preconceived knowledge and expectations from fans of the original work, has a tendency to be used against and compared to the adaptation, even if the work is mostly faithful. Scenes, characters, even single lines, may have left impressions or progression, either for the plot or characters, for the viewer. Changing them or leaving these out, while in itself not acknowledged to be important for the overall story, has a tendency to hinder the immersement for established fans. There is a discourse between what expectation is set by fans and the public to what a film will contain, versus what the ones creating the adaptation often wish to accomplish. This often has its root in how the marketing of the property is handled, when the plan for the adaptation is made. Poor communication from the creators of the adaptation makes this relationship more difficult. An adaptation’s success rests on one of two outcomes; either, it is faithful enough to please the fans of the original, else it has to be innovative enough that despite angering the original fans, it still gains enough popularity with people that didn’t know the work ahead of the adaptation. An adaptation is meant to create a new version of the same story, not to be a true one to one recreation of the original work. To view it as such would remove unique, interesting qualities and clever ideas that experiencing a story through a different

medium, with a different writer or director's perspective and interpretation, seeks to explore. Ideally an adaptation would be true enough to the source material to still be recognised as the same story, but also retain enough space for the creator to reinterpret it in their vision. The goal of an adaptation is to create a different, yet an at least as commonly and highly regarded version as the original work. This creates difficult circumstances to work within, having to balance the desire to be a creator, with the expectations of fans; that they will recognize it as what they are familiar with.

Whilst a transformative adaptation should still be free to make its own interpretations, it must take care to preserve the essence of what was originally there. This is part of why transformative adaptations are so heavily criticised within the academic field; the consensus on is that transformative adaptations are always inferior, precisely due to its status as a copy. The creative limits that are put on the adaptation as it strives to be faithful, also takes away from the resources needed to make it succeed, the exciting elements that can be utilised and explored when creating a film compared to a book. This thesis argues that neither is inherently worse than the other, but the time constraints will cause changes to occur between the mediums. The discussion will seek to highlight the sort of changes that can depreciate the characters and their relationship, if there is not careful planning, time and effort put into as the original author did.

Books and films are fundamentally different mediums, they do not try to inhabit the same space, or even compare to each other. They both seek to entertain, and provide a escape from reality, but in wildly different ways. Books are, in most cases, a bigger mental investment than films, as they require so much of the readers time and energy. Hawthorn (2017) ponders on the effect of how time influences our perception of the different mediums: "Why are we prepared to extend our reading of a long novel over several weeks if necessary, while anything over three hours in a cinema feels excessive? A simple answer to this involves the fundamental point that we have control over our private reading of a book in a way that we do not have over a film: we can pause, flick back to refresh our memory of earlier scenes, increase or decrease the speed of our reading—or even stop and think about what we have read or talk about it with a friend—so that we can pace ourselves as we read and adjust our reading to our mental state." (p. 189) They are longer and heavier, both physically and mentally, rely on more complex words and sentence structures, and tend to extend and fill out the story, this is not possible for films. In a book the author has the space and freedom to take breaks in the unfolding of the plot, scenes seemingly

unimportant to the rest of the story, but rather endearing to the reader. Such breaks allow the reader to experience the characters in settings wildly different from the main story, exploring sides of their personalities that would else never see the light of day. Films do not have the same luxury as a book. There is a certain standard for how long a film is allowed to be, both from the audience and the studios. A film is expected to have a steady plot progression, and scenes where the characters take a 'break', are often looked upon as a waste of screentime, driving most screenwriters into fleshing out the story and plot in every minute they can. Vallittu et al. (2018) describes the differences in medium to be a change in the context of the story: "This idea of the story being connected to the medium is related to the idea of context. The medium forms an intertextual context for the story and this association is often related to a genre. In other words, changing the frame can be understood as changing the medium, changing the genre and, therefore, changing the context. For example, in traditional literature and film, genre influences the representation of the story. When the author or the director changes the genre, something is bound to change in the context of reception." (p. 161)

When reading a book, enjoyment is often limited by the scope of a persons imagination and ability to immerse themselves in the words they are reading. Grand descriptions of landscape and battles are less enjoyable if the reader can not comprehend the atmosphere and emotions behind them, which is where films thrive. A film is not simply actor talking on a screen, but rather emotions, intricate choreography, music and light design; all to immerse you in the story. "Because films rely on visual stimuli more than words to communicate, dialogue from novels is often simplified, eliminated, or integrated into the action of a screenplay, and expository passages of some length are often presented in a camera shot or two." (Baines, 1996, p. 618) Films bring the atmosphere to you, there is no mistaking what the directors are trying to convey, no differentiating imagining that reading a description wrong can cause. Words are not as necessary as the images shows us the acts we would have to read in a book. Nel (2002) highlights in his discussion exactly the trap it is easy to fall into when adapting to a multimedia like film, from a comparatively simpler book: "J.K. Rowling writes great dialogue; the conversations between her characters give us insight on their lives and allow us to care about them. For example, the film includes some of the dialogue between Harry and Ron on the Hogwarts Express, but instead of focusing on their friendship (as the book does) the movie shows off its special effects, giving us chocolate frogs that actually jump. But they do not jump

in Rowling's text and need not do so in the film.” (p. 173) The multifaceted nature of a film makes it difficult to give enough attention to all the individual concerns that compromises each scene, particularly whilst ensuring it also has interesting visuals to accompany the dialogue and the narrative progression. He argues that the special effects of the chocolate frog was unnecessary, but contrary to his argument, it is meant to show Harry's introduction to a magical world, strange and different from its non-magical counterpart. Simple scenes such as a enchanted, moving frog made of chocolate precisely translates that experience to the audience. The combination of expression that happen in a film, when compared to the more calm reading of a book, can often lead to a feeling of them being experienced as a more easygoing medium, a combination of different types of stimulation that one can hardly look away from. Comparing such wildly different mediums as a book versus a film will never be an easy task. Subjective preferences have much weight in such discussions, and there will always be differentiating opinions. However, as the original version of Harry Potter was the book series, and the films were framed as faithful adaptations of the work, there is more expectation to create something great, a cohesive series that represents the story with the respect it deserves. This can be harder for films, especially a series, that often have multiple people in charge of the work. A film cannot follow one singular vision like a book can; special effects, sets, money, music, even hair and makeup, can completely change how a movie presents itself, in a way that books rarely have to deal with. The Harry Potter movies cycle through four different directors, and while they wish to tell the same story, no director is the same. Framing, scene cuts, lighting and focus will all change the feeling of a film.

At the core of how the story is told is Harry's wonder and bewilderment by the magical world. He is a vessel for the audience to experience the magic through, living his amazement and joy as if it were their own. Harry Potter is, at face value, a rather stereotypical example of how a young hero should be. His character is made to be simple, built on being brave, self-sacrificing, loyal and protective, inhabiting the traits that young people can be inspired by and portray; a character that one can imagine themselves in the place of. He is, fundamentally, a young teenager who wishes to fit in somewhere, hoping to find a place among his wizarding peers after feeling like an outsider for most his life. Harry has no wish for fame or fortune, and does not seek out a life as the hero, yet this is the fate thrust upon him from a young age. He differs from traditional

heroes in the fact that he enters his new life already known and hailed as the one who defeated Voldemort: 'The boy who lived'.

Harry grew up without knowing of his fame, constantly feeling like a freak, or an outsider, around his family who did not want him. His social skills are stunted after years of not fitting in with his peers due to the oddness surrounding him, later revealed to be his magic acting up. This results in a young boy, desperate to feel like he belongs somewhere, and therefore hung up on seeming normal. Due to the hardships he goes through, his deepest wish is to have a normal family he'd belong to. It is why his fast friendship with Ron and his acceptance into their family has such a profound effect on him. In the books, Harry is more than a heroically shaped outline. In a reverse to the stereotype of spectacled fantasy main characters, Harry is not very interested in school or even learning magic, he is more of an athlete, interested in sports and playing games, primarily focusing on his magic when it is needed to overcome an obstacle in his life. That isn't to say that he's not a talented wizard. It is shown to us multiple times in the books that Harry has both an affinity to get out of tight situations, and to put in work when he is aware of the coming adversity ahead of time. He is angry, feisty, heartfelt and kind, shaped by the adversity he has faced throughout his life. Most of this characterization is only shown to the reader through his internal monologues, an expression of how he feels and who he is.

The films replaces Harry's character with a more obedient form. Harry's core characteristic is still his passion and his caring and it takes many different forms through the series. He has a good sense of right and wrong, and when he cares about something or someone, he makes them a priority. He gladly runs headlong into danger in the pursuit of what he deems right. In the books, this trait is also applicable to his more negative attributes. Harry is temperamental, making him rash, and quick to anger, often leading into conflict, fights and arguments, and if he has a negative perception of another character he can be sassy, rude and confrontational:

“‘Yes,’ said Harry stiffly.

‘Yes, sir.’

‘There's no need to call me ‘sir,’ Professor.’ The words had escaped him before he knew what he was saying. Several people gasped, including Hermione. Behind Snape, however, Ron, Dean, and Seamus grinned appreciatively. ‘Detention, Saturday night, my

office,’ said Snape. ‘I do not take cheek from anyone, Potter . . . not even ‘the Chosen One.’” (Rowling, 2005, p. 139)

Harry and Snape are on very unfriendly terms. Their interactions are confrontational, but moments like this, where it is clear that he is rude and impolite, are removed from the films, thereby lessening the antagonistic feel of their relationship, and understating some of Harry’s less fortunate traits. His more volatile traits are changed into Harry coming across as indifferent and uncaring. This is primarily because some of his strongest, most outspoken frustrations and arguments from the books are either removed or altered, allowing him only a token protest.

“But before he knew it, Harry was shouting.

...

Every bitter and resentful thought that Harry had had in the past month was pouring out of him;

...

‘FOUR WEEKS I’VE BEEN STUCK IN PRIVET DRIVE, NICKING PAPERS OUT OF BINS TO TRY AND FIND OUT WHAT’S BEEN GOING ON —’

‘We wanted to —’

‘I SUPPOSE YOU’VE BEEN HAVING A REAL LAUGH, HAVEN’T YOU, ALL HOLED UP HERE TOGETHER —’

‘No, honest —’

‘Harry, we’re really sorry!’ said Hermione desperately, her eyes now sparkling with tears. ‘You’re absolutely right, Harry — I’d be furious if it was me!’” (Rowling, 2003, p. 78-79)

After dealing with the trauma of watching one of your schoolmates be murdered in front of him, the guilt of feeling like he was responsible for him being there, Harry was returned home to his aunt and uncle for the summer. Kept there with no news while he anxiously waits for

Voldemort's next move, he stewes in that state of mind for most of the summer. And when he is finally released, and gets to see his friends, they are together, and have access to sources of information he did not. It does not matter to him in that moment that it is not enough for any of them to satisfy their worries and curiosity, it is believable and understandable when he rages at the unfair treatment. In contrast to how this was handled in the book, the film has him ask some pointed questions to make them feel guilty, but he does not react in any other way. There is a similar lack of any strong emotion at the end of the year, and the harrowing ordeal at the Department of Mysteries, and Sirius' death:

“‘There is no shame in what you are feeling, Harry,’ said Dumbledore’s voice. ‘On the contrary . . . the fact that you can feel pain like this is your greatest strength.’

Harry felt the white-hot anger lick his insides, blazing in the terrible emptiness, filling him with the desire to hurt Dumbledore for his calmness and his empty words.

...

‘Harry, suffering like this proves you are still a man! This pain is part of being human —’

‘THEN — I — DON’T — WANT — TO — BE — HUMAN!’ Harry roared, and he seized one of the delicate silver instruments from the spindle-legged table beside him and flung it across the room. It shattered into a hundred tiny pieces against the wall.” (Rowling, 2003, p. 850-851)

In the book, we get to see some of what Harry is experiencing and feeling. Unlike its film counterpart, it shows us his anger for his loss, his situation and for not being given all the information. His anger is directed at Dumbledore for all the secrets he's been keeping from him. Harry understands the path it lead him on, having to act on the lacking information he had, lead into a trap that ensured the death of his godfather. Contrastingly, in the film he is shellshocked, robbing *him* of his agency and the viewer of their compassion and understanding. Sirius' death is

meant to be impactful, the final straw, robbing him of the last vestiges of his childhood. In the following year, he is much more focused on Voldemort, working with Dumbledore to find out how Voldemort survived, figuring out what plots Voldemort is enacting on Hogwarts through Draco Malfoy. Cedric's death filled him with sorrow and guilt, but Sirius' death hit much closer to home. Harry's anger is one of his few big character flaws, and one of the few characteristics he has that is distinctly unheroic, showing us a more well rounded and developed character. Without it he ends up seeming distinctly two-dimensional and unconcerned events unfold. In addition, the lack of his anger also changes how the viewer understands and feels about the connection between him and Voldemort, and undercuts the eventual impact and understanding that Harry is a Horcrux. One of the key flaws with Harry Potter's character in both versions, is despite his role as the main character whom the plot largely revolves around, he lacks agency in his own story, he is ineffective at deliberately influencing it. He leads his group of friends, but he doesn't often take the *lead*, they often end up reacting to or following plans of either of the adult factions. He has a talent to get himself and those he cares about through difficult situations, being good at adapting and utilising a healthy doze of luck. In the end, Harry didn't really come up with the plan to beat Voldemort. He was blessed with the protection his mother's sacrifice extended him, followed a plan laid out before him by Dumbledore, and committed to the ultimate sacrifice in the hope that would lead to saving his friends. His only agency was choosing to follow through a plan he didn't make, in the hope it would turn out well for the rest of the world, because he couldn't see a better alternative. This lack of agency is enhanced and worsened by his lack of reaction to how that makes him feel.

In the films, Hermione's flaws are diminished. At the start of the books, Hermione is a shy, antisocial girl, stemming from her lack of friends during her childhood. As such, she struggles to make friends, has a habit of lecturing people when she tries to help and trusts authority and adults to a fault. Hermine can also be vengeful and vindictive, such as when she cursed the sign-up sheet for their illegal study group, Dumbledore's army, during the fifth book. As revenge on those who'd betray them the curse would make sure they could find out who the traitor was: "her face was horribly disfigured by a series of close-set purple pustules that had spread across her nose and cheeks to form the word 'SNEAK.'" (Rowling, 2003, p. 634) Neither the curse, or the character who was the traitor appeared in the film. A lot of Hermione's flaws are hidden across the films, presenting us with a character that seems infallible and difficult to

connect with. In the third book, *Prisoner of Azkaban*, both Ron and Hermione fights throughout the book, over how Hermione's cat, Crookshanks, keeps attacking Ron's rat, Scabbers, and making him run away. Harry doesn't want to deal with, or get in between his friends, but still tends to take Rons side in the matter.

“Ron was enraged that Hermione had never taken Crookshanks's attempts to eat Scabbers seriously, hadn't bothered to keep a close enough watch on him and was still trying to pretend that Crookshanks was innocent by suggesting Ron look for Scabbers under all the boys' beds. Hermione, meanwhile, maintained fiercely that Ron had no proof that Crookshanks had eaten Scabbers” (Rowling, 1999, p. 196)

Hermione's disregard for Ron's pet is a character flaw, showing her stubborn immaturity and lack of care for things she doesn't understand, i.e. why anyone would want to own a rat. This doesn't get as much screentime in the movies, changed instead for a more upbeat teasing between friends about their unruly pets. However, the scene where Harry originally gets a new broom for Christmas anonymously is removed. Yet another of Hermione's unflattering moments:

“Well ... who'd send Harry something as expensive as that, and not even tell him they'd sent it?” said Hermione.

‘Who cares?’ said Ron, impatiently. ‘Listen, Harry, can I have a go on it? Can I?’

‘I don't think anyone should ride that broom just yet!’ said Hermione shrilly.

Harry and Ron looked at her.

‘What d'you think Harry's going to do with it – sweep the floor?’ said Ron” (Rowling, 1999, p. 174)

She gives a token attempt to reason with Harry and Ron, but quickly determines that they would not listen to her. The boys did not listen to her, but she also did not try very hard before deciding she was right, and they should listen to her. Without actually telling them of her suspicions, she seeks to go above their heads, by telling a teacher:

“Coming?” Harry said to Hermione.

‘No,’ Hermione muttered. ‘I want a quick word with Professor McGonagall.’

‘Probably trying to see if she can take any more classes,’ yawned Ron

...

Hermione walked around them, sat down, picked up the nearest book and hid her face behind it.

‘So that’s it, is it?’ said Professor McGonagall beadily, walking over to the fireside and staring at the Firebolt. ‘Miss Granger has just informed me that you have been sent a broomstick, Potter.’

...

‘What did you go running to McGonagall for?’

Hermione threw her book aside. She was still pink in the face, but stood up and faced Ron defiantly.

‘Because I thought – and Professor McGonagall agrees with me – that that broom was probably sent to Harry by Sirius Black!’” (Rowling, 1999, p. 177-179)

The broom is taken away, inspected for dark curses. Hermione is later shown to be correct, Sirius Black did send Harry the broomstick. Suspecting that he would curse it, as he was suspected of wanting to kill Harry, at that point in time. It turns out not to be, as Sirius was not out to kill Harry. Hermione did the right thing in the situation, but the way she choose to do it, removed the choice from her friends, and they felt betrayed by her lack of trust. Hermione’s character in the books starts out as very trusting of authority figures, sometimes to a fault. The films sidelined the whole situation, and removing yet another scene that shows her as a more complex character, and their group dynamic.

Ron’s best moments are often taken from him. Several of his best moments are given to Hermione, particularly moments focusing on his compassion, bravery and his knowledge of the wizarding world. Ron plays the part of the loveable sidekick with a heart of gold, overshadowed by and jealous of his older brothers’ achievements. He brings a good strategic mind, and experience and knowledge from growing up in the world we are introduced to, i.e. The wizarding world. In *Chamber of Secrets*, the second book, there is a scene where Malfoy calls Hermione the slur “Mudblood”. It is Ron, who grew up in the wizarding world, that understands its severity and has to explain it to the other two:

“Malfoy called Hermione something — it must’ve been really bad, because everyone
‘It was bad,’ said Ron hoarsely, emerging over the tabletop looking pale and sweaty. Ron
dived out of sight again as a fresh wave of slugs made their appearance. Hagrid
‘He didn’!’ he growled at Hermione.
‘He did,’ she said. ‘But I don’t know what it means. I could tell it was really rude, of
‘It’s about the most insulting thing he could think of,’ gasped Ron, coming back up.
‘Mudblood’s a really foul name for someone who is Muggle-born — you know, non-
magic parents. There are some wizards — like Malfoy’s family — who think they’re
better than everyone else because they’re what people call pure-blood.’” (Rowling, 1998,
p. 88)

In the film, Ron is robbed of this moment. What was already an excellent way to show Ron’s good qualities and knowledge is instead played for laughs, as he sits there feeling sorry for himself, whilst vomiting up snails. In the books this is not enough to distract him, his concern and outrage for Hermione’s sake allowing him to power through it. Hermione is the one to explain what it means to Harry and the audience. Ron’s experience due to being raised in the culture is diminished, so that Hermione’s character as the one that “knows everything” can shine. Moments that let Ron shine are often traded to Hermione, allowing her to shine brighter and him to fade.

“‘Stop moving!’ Hermione ordered them. ‘I know what this is – it’s Devil’s Snare!’
‘Oh, I’m so glad we know what it’s called, that’s a great help,’ snarled Ron, leaning back, trying to stop the plant curling around his neck.
‘Shut up, I’m trying to remember how to kill it!’ said Hermione.
‘Well, hurry up, I can’t breathe!’ Harry gasped, wrestling with it as it curled around his chest.
‘Devil’s Snare, Devil’s Snare ... What did Professor Sprout say? It likes the dark and the damp –’
‘So light a fire!’ Harry choked.
‘Yes – of course – but there’s no wood!’ Hermione cried, wringing her hands.

‘HAVE YOU GONE MAD?’ Ron bellowed. ‘ARE YOU A WITCH OR NOT?’”
(Rowling, 1997, p. 225)

This scene is from one of the obstacles the trio faces on their way to stop the yearly school catastrophe. In the book version, Hermione comes up with the solution to the Devil’s Snare they’re facing; They need fire as the plant fears light and warmth. However, paralyzed from the fear and tension of the moment, her logical brain comes to a halt at the lack of wood available to make a fire. Ron, being wizard raised, questions is baffled by the time it takes her to reach a conclusion that to him is gut-instinct and yells for her to use her magic. This differs from the film where instead of Ron having a calm head, he flails about in fear for comic relief whilst Hermione, calmly in the face of Harry’s urging, saves the day.

In the the third book, Ron stands up in front of Harry, squares of with what he knows to be a serial killer, on a broken leg, declaring himself Harry’s shield:

Ron, however, spoke to Black.

‘If you want to kill Harry, you’ll have to kill us, too!’ he said fiercely, though the effort of standing up had drained him of still more colour, and he swayed slightly as he spoke.

Something flickered in Black’s shadowed eyes.

‘Lie down,’ he said quietly to Ron. ‘You will damage that leg even more.’

‘Did you hear me?’ Ron said weakly, though he was clinging painfully to Harry to stay upright. ‘You’ll have to kill all three of us!’ (Rowling, 1997, p. 262)

In the books we are shown Ron’s loyalty, and his willingness to sacrifice himself for those he cares about. This scene is robbed from him in the films, where Hermione takes on the same role he was meant to.

The films has a tendency to characterise Ron as a bad friend. His criticism of the people around him is more cutting and at times just plain mean. The films also escalated som of his worse moments from the books, such as when he instead of defending her, agrees with Snape when he ridicules Hermione:

“‘That is the second time you have spoken out of turn, Miss Granger,’ said Snape coolly.
‘Five more points from Gryffindor for being an insufferable know-it-all.’”

Hermione went very red, put down her hand and stared at the floor with her eyes full of tears. It was a mark of how much the class loathed Snape that they were all glaring at him, because every one of them had called Hermione a know-it-all at least once, and Ron, who told Hermione she was a know-it-all at least twice a week, said loudly, ‘You asked us a question and she knows the answer! Why ask if you don’t want to be told?’”

(Rowling, 1999, p. 134)

In the films, Ron instead turns to Harry and whispers to him that Snape has a point. This severely tints how we see Ron’s character. He is not as he is in the books, someone that stands up for his friends when they are ridiculed, but instead laughs along with those that bully them. In the same vein, one of the most drastic changes to Ron’s character in the film series, is not as big on paper, but the tone changes when it is performed by real people. The scene in question is when he leaves Harry and Hermione in the tent and abandons them during their hunt for the Horcruxes in the 7th film, *Deathly Hallows: Part 1*. In the book, it is clear that he is affected by the Horcrux, but he is still his awkward self:

“‘Oh, you’re sure, are you? Right then, well, I won’t bother myself about them. It’s all right for you, isn’t it, with your parents safely out of the way—”

“My parents are dead!” Harry bellowed.

“And mine could be going the same way!” yelled Ron.

“Then GO!” roared Harry.” (Rowling, 2007, p. 241)

While he is callous of Harry’s emotions regarding his parents, he is not wrong. Harry is not worried about his parents lives. The change to the films is that instead of him attempting, poorly, to explain to Harry his concerns and what that makes him feel like, he screams in Harry’s face that he has no parents, and so cannot understand the worry he feels. This is distinct as a very harsh, unsympathetic change to the way he seeks to make himself understood, and Harry as well as the audience will both be affected by that change to their relationship. This change alone, only casts Ron in a less charitable light, and is not so problematic in and of itself. They are all under a lot of pressure and the influence of a Horcrux, so there are concerns that can help justify his actions. The contrast of how Harry and Hermione’s characters are comparatively less flawed,

than their book counterparts, whilst Ron is more flawed, makes him stick out as quite unpleasant when measured against them, sowing doubts on their friendship.

For all that the premise of Harry Potter a story about a wizard school where children go and learn actual magic, little of the themes have anything to do with magic. Harry doesn't even cast a single spell in his first year. Thematically, Harry Potter is a story about coming of age, overcoming great adversity, the power of love, and finding where you belong, often with regards to how these are related to each other. As such it deals with themes and challenges associated with growing up, becoming an adult, facing the changes that comes with it: Confronting your fears, dealing with death, the power and importance of love, navigating interpersonal relationships, physical changes to a growing body, coming to terms with your fate and accepting and tolerating the people, and in the wizarding world, beings around you, and perhaps most central: figuring out who you are and where you belong. Central to the trio's motivations, is their identity as a group of people who are looking for a place to belong. Harry who has been raised to feel like an outcast by his own family, Hermione who has been too intellectually advanced and well-read to feel like she fit in with children her age. Finally we have Ron, who always felt like the worst brother of 7, the least talented, accomplished, or liked compared to his brothers.

The films changes to the main character trio completely shifted the group dynamic. In the books, Harry seems to prefer Ron as a friend to Hermione. This can be seen when he admits to himself that he misses Ron:

“‘You miss him!’ Hermione said impatiently. ‘And I know he misses you—’

‘Miss him?’ said Harry. ‘I don’t miss him. ...’

But this was a downright lie. Harry liked Hermione very much, but she just wasn't the same as Ron. There was much less laughter and a lot more hanging around in the library when Hermione was your best friend.” (Rowling, 2000, p. 347-348)

Harry appreciates Ron more as they are more similar, and Ron shares his interest in fun and games, letting Harry fulfil his deep-seated wish to feel normal. Harry's preference for Ron in the books is the cause of how Hermione often comes across as feeling like less of friend to Harry. This is something she remarks herself in the third novel:

“OK, side with Ron, I knew you would!’ she said shrilly. ‘First the Firebolt, now Scabbers, everything’s my fault, isn’t it! Just leave me alone, Harry, I’ve got a lot of work to do!’” (Rowling, 1999, p. 196)

This scene, as well as the events she argues about are completely changed in the films. Hermione and Ron’s fight about Scabbers is changed to be more of a laughing matter, the sort of playful arguments that naturally occurs between friends, and as for the broomstick, the film changes the scene entirely, first moving it to take place in the outro of the film, as well as Hermione encouraging Harry with an inside joke, as the hippogriff feather it comes with makes the two of them clearly aware that Sirius had sent it. Contrary to the books, in the films we see none of Harry’s inner thoughts, and so he seems much quieter and less opinionated. This and the removal of scenes that represent Harry and Hermione having conflicts, such as the fight surrounding the firebolt, can make Harry come across as being better friends with Hermione than Ron.

The characters in the Harry Potter films does not get the same space to shine as they do in the books. This is natural, as a limitation of the much shorter run-time, and the breadth of details that was needed to make the story come together. The results of this, is a polished experience, jam-packed with details and jaw-dropping effects. However, that “polish” also extends to the characters. It pushes them away from what is more typical in literary fiction, with rich and developed characters and relationships, into something more common for the “mass” genre fiction which is at the root of fantasy. It does explain why some of the fans were disappointed when the characters aren’t as familiar as they had expected. They are prettier, shinier, “Hollywood-esque” versions, that appeals to a broader audience. The films definitely succeeds at depicting Harry Potter’s story, but what it fails to do is to properly present it from Harry Potter’s perspective. Time spent with the characters and the details learned are an essential to the book-readers experience. That limit is the primary reason for all the changes between the films and the books: there is not enough time to get to know them the same way, and there is not enough space to make the same amount of detail fit into the allotted timeframe. This limitation causes the Harry Potter films to be recognizably the same overall story, however, the medium imposes natural limitations that, along with the way it is reinterpreted still ends up feeling distinctly different from the books. The books make you feel as if you lived the story, that you were there

along the way. Like a confidant of Harry's, able to understand every step in his path. This is where the films fail, limiting their audiences to the role of an onlooker, watching it all happen from the outside. Instead of giving you the feeling as if you were a part of this tight-knit group of friends, joining in on all their adventures, the films make you listen to a rendition of a story. A story that whilst grand, feels more akin to the gossip-rendition of their school classmates that, whilst having most of the larger details, also doesn't actually know the main characters. The story comes through, but the little details that make story personal and the characters familiar, are gone.

The differences between the mediums likely gives origin to the sense of inadequacy fans of the books are left with. Adaptations are not meant to be in competition with their origin, because neither can win. The differences inherent in the medium chosen to convey the story carry unique advantages and disadvantages, each fulfilling their role as a way to engage with the same story. Films do most of the hard work ahead of time, letting the viewer experience the story as a finished product, letting them relax as they engage with it. Books require their readers to do more of the creative work for them, creating the images the words convey in their own heads. But for those that read the books, who feel as if they were there along the way, who have grown attached to the characters and the stories almost as if they were their own memories, it is simply not the same. Whilst the characters of the books do change in the adaptation, these changes aren't enough to make them different "people". Their differences stick out, make them feel less consistent, but enough of their pivotal moments are the same or similar that it is recognizably Harry Potter. The effect the changes have on them can, however, influence the relationship between them and the audience. The Harry Potter character in the films is the definitive Harry Potter, it is not him that has changed so as to be a different character.

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