Women on Screen: With a Focus on Book to Screen Adaptations

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From books to movies, it has become a modern trend for books to be adapted for both the small and large screens. Books turning into movies has been occurring since 1938, when the *Adventures of Robin Hood* was release and swiftly followed by the famously classic version of *Wizard of Oz* starring Judy Garland. Starting in the 1980's, the number of books being turned into movies significantly increased. By the very early 2000's, the numbers boomed with adaptations of Harry Potter and the Lord of the Rings. Since then there have been a great number of books which have been adapted, some good and some not.

There have also been some adaptations in which female characters from books have been developed into more prominent and complex characters on screen. One prominent example is that of Hermione granger -- between the books and movie adaptations, the character was portrayed as being a stronger more outgoing character. An even more recent example of a female protagonist being portrayed more eminently has been in the adaptations of *The Hobbit*. While mentioned in the fictional world created by J. R. R. Tolkien, Tauriel was a very minor female character, however, in the movie adaptation she was reconceptualized into a prominent female character.

There have been a number of recent examples of strong female protagonist adaptions made both on the large and small screens, several of which have become great successes, including the *Hunger Games*, *Wonder Woman*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Big Little Lies.* The *Hunger Games* features the strong female protagonist Katniss Everdeen, who fights to survive in a post-apocalyptic world. *Wonder Woman* was originally a comic book character making her debut in 1941. Since her conception, there have been several adaptations. More recently, in 2017, Wonder Woman made a substantial return to the big screen. The *Handmaid's Tale* features Offred, a handmaid in Gilead (T. Christina, 2018). Since its debut, airing in 2017, The Handmaid's Tale has become very popular. *Big Little Lies* was a hit with an A list cast that featured a group of women whose lives collide with a mysterious murder.

Over the years we have seen an increase in strong female protagonists featured on screens with both book to screen adaptations and other film and TV content. One study conducted by the Geena Davis Institute, however, found that between 2006 and 2009 only 29.2% of movies had

distinct speaking characters which were female (A. Scott & M. Dargis, 2014). From the evidence presented in this study, prominent females' roles still have a long way to go. On the positive side, the types of roles women are being cast for are changing. Historically, women have largely been typecast as bratty sisters, well-behaved daughters, or housewives.

While typecasting still occurs, there is are increasing opportunities to show the world that women too can be strong protagonists or antagonists. Over the years, there has been a move towards less stereotypical strong female roles, such as in the *Hunger Games*, *Divergent (2014)*, and *Hanna (2011)*. In the *Hunger Games* Katniss is a transformative character who transitions from a solitary warrior to a heroine. *Divergent* character, Tris, grows from a seemingly meek girl to a strong warrior. *Hanna* portrays a girl who is trained over the years by her father to hunt and is thus made into the perfect assassin.

While we have seen a positive turn for women's roles on screen, we still have a long way to go before strong female characters become a norm rather than an exception.

References

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