

# Free essay on comparison of the novel to live with the film to live

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Literature is normally presented through several mediums among them written work and film. Yu Hua's novel *To Live* has been given an interpretation through film and this presents a couple of similarities and differences when examining the story through film and written work. These interpretative variances present phenomenal differences of the same storyline but then, the end result is that they communicate the same story that the author intended. The storyline evokes different interpretations because of a number of reasons. But then, both follow the story of Xu Fugui and his family over a time frame of four decades focusing on a number of issues including among others, filial piety, personal change and growth and how politics affect the life of an individual. Most importantly, the novel and film version criticize traditional Chinese culture as well as the effects of the communist regime on the citizenry. Even so, there are a number of ways in which the novel and the film show differences through different aspects such as character development, the setting and the general depiction of life in China in the 20th century. The novel and its film adaptation show a number of similarities and differences as will be shown in this paper, and these differences do affect the way both are interpreted.

The novel depicts the main character Xu Fugui as an irresponsible young man who goes on to squander his family's fortune in gambling and renders them poor. It is after they suffer that misfortune that Fugui's family and life takes a different turn. In the novel, Fugui loses his family members, one after another until he is left all alone. It all starts by him losing his father and mother, then he is dragged into war during the Civil War but despite that, together with his wife they try so much to give their contribution to their

country. In no time, his wife Jiazhen dies from a certain illness, his son Youqing also dies when he was donating blood (Manning & Felix). His daughter also dies as a result of bleeding to death after child birth. When he thought he was left with his son in law and grandchild, he loses them too, Erxi from an accident while his grandchild dies from choking while having a simple meal. According to the novel, Fugui loses all his family members and is left all alone in the companionship of his old ox.

Contrary to the novel, the film adaptation does not portray all the members of the family as dead save for Fugui. In the film adaptation, the lives of Jiazhen, Erxi and Kugen, whose name had been changed to Mantou, are spared. Perhaps the difference that this brings is the fact that there is a ray of hope in the film, pointing to the fact that in as much as there is so much pain and suffering, there is a ray of hope, now that there are people who are left to live and have a chance at life. At the very end of the film, the family members who are alive hold a conversation which shows that they are looking forward to a promising future and, therefore, had a reason to live one more day, unlike in the novel, where they are all dead except Fugui. But again, one more character is seen more persistent in the film than in the novel. Chairman Mao and he is made to look like one of the main characters, but one who is minor in the novel. Perhaps what the film is trying to communicate is the fact that there is always hope for a better tomorrow in as much as life could be difficult at some point. The novel has a bleak presence and ending whereas the film has a positive ending.

Upon a closer scrutiny of the novel, one will not fail to notice that Fugui remains to be blamed for all that happens to him and his family members.

Fugui remains to be blamed for what befalls his family. His family lost its fortune because of his careless life and gambling. The novel also insinuates that it is the difficulties that the family thrived in that led to the deaths of the family members, especially his parents who died from what may be seen as shame and agony brought about by their son. The circumstances under which the rest of the members die are questionable, and all point back to Fugui. But that cannot be said to be true according to the film adaptation of the novel. According to the film, the misfortunes that befall the family can be centrally blamed on poor politics and bad policies brought about by the country's communism stand. Erroneous state policies are the cause of the family misfortune. For the few members of the family who die in the film, their deaths seem to be blamed on the turbulent times that the country faced during the time period when the country was under the Chinese Communist Party. It is bad politicking and policies that are to be blamed in the film, but then in the novel, all the blame squarely lies on Fugui.

According to the film, the Red Army goes on to capture Fugui and then later releases him when the revolution comes to the end. But this is in contrast to what happens in the novel. In the novel, Fugui together with the other nationalists are allowed to join or return home out of their own volition. Fugui chooses to return home. Upon arrival at home, he meets his wife making water deliveries as her means of making ends meet. But it is in an urban setting according to the film. Contrary to the novel that depicts the peasantry setting that is seen all through the novel. The differences here are seen through the setting and the reasons and way in which Fugui returns home. Also, upon returning home, Fugui is faced with the scene of Long Er,

facing execution. In the novel, the fate of Long Er is as a result of him being a landlord but the film communicates otherwise (Manning & Felix 31).

According to the film, he had committed evils going beyond possessing a huge chunk of land; he is being accused of beating up a CPP besides owning a large home. In the film, he is called a counter- revolutionary saboteur because he had beaten up someone.

In the characterization, the novel and film draw different characteristics and representations of various characters. For instance, in the novel, Wan Erxi, the husband of Fugui's mute daughter gets married to a disabled porter. The film on the other hand portrays him as a lame factory worker that is a leader of the Red Guards at the factory. In the film, Erxi takes home the other factory workers to go and repair the roof tiles of the house. In the mean time, they paint the Mao portraits, something that does not happen in the novel. Other differences seen in the characterization of the novel and the film includes among others, the differences portrayed in the novel and the film comes towards the end. In the film, Mantou asks Fugui about what will happen when his chicks grow to adulthood. Fugui tells him that they will become geese, then sheep and then oxen, but geese on to tell him that they will not benefit him because his mode of transport will change and become airplanes and trains. This ending is very different from what is seen in the novel, where Fugui is left alone without the company of any member of his family. In the novel, Fugui leads a very miserable life and the only thing he talks to is his old miserable ox. Fugui is left alone in the novel but contrary to that, there are family members who he shares old age.

In the novel and film, the citizens experience traumatic experiences that

achieve the one theme that cuts across, the social truth about the ills that dogged China in the twentieth century. The film and novel achieve this by critiquing leadership in China at the time and they use death as a tool that helps bring out the political critique of the urban and rural settings as used by the two mediums. In as much as death is used in both, it is not as serious in the film, as it is in the novel. The variance is brought about by the presence and absence of Mao altogether. He plays a very important role in bringing out the differences seen in the film and novel, and this indeed has a great impact on the overall presentation of the storyline.

The differences exhibited in the novel and film is significant in that they help in the interpretation and understand, first the differences between rural and Urban China at the time, and also for both of them create their independent emphasis on different aspects of the time period reflected. To a huge extent, the depiction of urban life in the film as contrasted to rural life shows a few advantages of urban life as compared to rural life. For instance, the Fugui family living in an urban setting led a better life as compared to the Fugui family found in rural China (Manning & Felix 109). They have better housing and have not been adversely affected by the famine and exhaustive work in the labor fields. In the novel, there is continuous accumulation of misery and problems that leave the old man Fugui desperate and in a deteriorated state all the time. But contrary to the film, he leads a relatively better life and in as much as this is fiction, the differences help in the understanding of how the two mediums of representation of the novel create a multiple understanding of it.

The film and novel create a different lot of characters in and their attributes

in several ways. A good example can be seen through the continued absence of Mao in the novel but his persistent presence in the film. Perhaps, what is achieved through this contrast is the fact that he is a clear representation of how the CPP failed to instill its policies in the rural areas in fact; Mao's absence can be likened to irresponsible behavior and character as depicted by the likes of Fugui. The CPP activities are evident in the film as seen through the urban dwelling and perhaps the reason this is the case is because Yu Hua wanted to show how discrimination of rural and urban areas was a basic problem in China at the time. Particularly, during the wedding of Fengxia and Erxi, his portraits are painted in bold red and white, and it is not surprising that Erxi said, " In good times, we think of Chairman Mao. Let's sing a song" (Yimou).

The film adaptation of the book is a better view and gives a different adaptation of the story. It gives the story a different perspective that is intended to make the viewer develop a need to watch it to the end. That affects the way the storyline is interpreted and understood in the long run. The film has a story of optimism beyond the challenges that the family faces. The novel, on the other hand, is a sad story from way far when all the family members die. But in the film they are kept alive, perhaps to make the movie a little bit positive to entice the viewer. The disappointments seen in the novel are somehow lessened when the characters are rewritten and given a new perspective from where they are seen. Something worth noting is that through the differences that are seen in the two versions of To Live, the film is meant to give a different view of the same story. The film, therefore, is more interesting than the novel.

## **Works Cited**

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