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# Affective Portrayal: From Literary Narratives to Cinematic Depictions

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**Abstract:** This article investigates the complex processes involved in the adaptation and re-mediation of emotional content from literary narratives to cinematic depictions. Drawing upon theories from cognitive poetics, adaptation studies, and neuroaesthetics, we examine how the inherent semiotics of literary affect – often conveyed through internal monologue, descriptive language, and subjective narration – are transformed into the multi-modal, sensory experience of film, which relies heavily on visual composition, sound design, performance, and temporal manipulation. We propose a framework for analyzing the challenges and strategies associated with translating internal, explicit emotional states in text to external, often implicit or inferential emotional elicitation in film. Through comparative case studies, we explore how specific literary techniques for affective portrayal (e.g., free indirect discourse, epistolary forms) find their cinematic equivalents or novel solutions (e.g., subjective camera, character gaze, musical leitmotifs). This research aims to provide a systematic understanding of the "intermedial affective gap" and the creative strategies employed by filmmakers to bridge it, contributing to both adaptation theory and the empirical study of emotion in narrative media.

**Keys words:** Affective portrayal, literary adaptation, cinematic depiction, intermediality, cognitive poetics, neuroaesthetics, emotional semiotics, narrative emotion.

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## 1. Introduction

The transfer of a story from the pages of a book to the silver screen is a process of profound transformation, extending far beyond plot and character. Central to this transformation is the re-mediation of emotion. Literary narratives possess a unique capacity to convey internal affective states through language, inviting readers to participate in the construction of subjective emotional worlds. This engagement often relies on explicit description, internal monologue, metaphorical language, and the reader's imaginative faculties. Cinema, by contrast, operates in a multi-modal sensory domain, presenting emotions through visible actions, expressions, auditory cues, and stylistic choices, often aiming for direct perceptual and visceral impact.

This article posits that the "affective portrayal" – the way emotions are represented and evoked – constitutes a critical challenge and a rich area of study in the field of literary adaptation. While adaptation studies have extensively explored narrative structures, character consistency, and thematic fidelity, less systematic attention has been paid to the specific mechanisms by which emotional content, particularly subjective and internal states, is translated and re-expressed across these two distinct media.

Our objective is to develop a scientific and professional understanding of this intermedial affective adaptation. We will explore: (1) the inherent differences in how literature and cinema encode and transmit emotional information, (2) the creative and strategic choices filmmakers make to bridge the "intermedial affective gap," and (3) the implications of these choices for viewer reception and emotional engagement. By integrating theoretical perspectives from cognitive poetics, adaptation studies, and emerging insights from neuroaesthetics, we aim to provide a robust framework for analyzing the complex process of affective re-mediation from text to screen. This investigation seeks to contribute to a deeper appreciation of the art of adaptation and the science of narrative emotion across media.

## **2. Literature Review**

Understanding affective portrayal across literary and cinematic forms requires drawing upon several interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks.

### **2.1. Affect and Emotion in Literary Theory**

Literary theory has long acknowledged emotion as central to narrative engagement. From Aristotle's concept of catharsis to Romantic notions of sublime feeling, emotion is recognized as a key component of aesthetic experience. More recent approaches, particularly in cognitive poetics (Oatley, 1999; Hogan, 2003), have provided frameworks for understanding how literary devices elicit emotional responses in readers. These theories emphasize the role of readers' mental models, empathy with characters, and the suspension of disbelief in generating subjective feelings. Literary devices such as free indirect discourse, stream of consciousness, metaphor, and detailed psychological descriptions are crucial tools for conveying internal emotional states that are often explicit and introspective in text. For instance, the detailed account of a character's fear or sadness in a novel allows the reader direct access to their inner world, fostering a deep, often contemplative, emotional engagement.

### **2.2. Adaptation Studies and Intermediality**

Adaptation studies (Stam, 2000; Hutcheon, 2006) have moved beyond simplistic notions of "fidelity" to acknowledge adaptation as a creative act of re-interpretation and transformation. Intermediality (Rajewsky, 2005) further refines this, examining how different media interact, borrowing from, transforming, and referring to each other. While acknowledging the inevitable shifts in "medium specificity," these frameworks often focus on narrative elements like plot, character, and theme. The specific challenges and strategies involved in translating affective content – particularly the subjective and internal emotional states – across media receive less systematic theoretical attention. The "affective gap" between literary and cinematic representation is a specific dimension of intermediality that warrants deeper exploration.

### **2.3. Emotion in Cinema and Neuroaesthetics**

Cinematic emotion is a rich field of study, explored through cognitive film theory (Tan, 1996; Plantinga, 2009) and the burgeoning field of neuroaesthetics (Chatterjee, 2011; Hasson et al., 2008). Film elicits emotion through a multi-sensory bombardment: visual composition, lighting, editing, sound design (music, sound effects, dialogue), and acting performance. Unlike literature, which allows for individual pacing and imaginative construction, cinema often dictates the pace and presents concrete visual and auditory stimuli. Neuroaesthetics, utilizing fMRI and EEG, has begun to identify the neural correlates of emotional responses to film, demonstrating that cinema can activate brain regions associated with empathy (e.g., mirror neuron system), fear (e.g., amygdala), and reward (e.g., ventral striatum) (Wang et al., 2013). This provides an empirical basis for understanding how cinematic techniques directly impact the viewer's emotional state.

### **2.4. Bridging the Gap: Affective Re-mediation**

The challenge in adapting affective portrayal lies in moving from literature's explicit, internal, and often time-dilated representation of emotion to cinema's implicit, external, and temporally constrained presentation. Literary descriptions of a character's burgeoning dread, for instance, might span pages,

allowing the reader to inhabit that feeling. In cinema, this dread might be conveyed in seconds through a close-up on a trembling hand, a subtle shift in musical key, or a sudden darkening of the scene. The "translation" is not one-to-one but involves finding analogous or entirely novel ways to elicit a similar affective experience in the new medium. This requires understanding the semiotics of emotion in both media – how signs (words, images, sounds) signify and construct emotional meaning.

### 3. Methods

This study will employ a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative textual and filmic analysis with quantitative viewer response data and, where applicable, drawing on existing neuroscientific literature.

#### 3.1. Case Study Selection

We will select three canonical literary works that have been adapted into critically acclaimed films. The selection criteria include:

**Prominence of internal emotional states:** The literary source must prominently feature character interiority and explicit emotional description as a primary narrative driver.

**Significant intermedial challenge:** The literary work should present inherent difficulties in translating its emotional portrayal to film (e.g., extensive free indirect discourse, complex psychological introspection).

**High-quality film adaptation:** The film adaptation must be recognized for its artistic merit and successful, albeit transformed, emotional impact.

Proposed Case Studies (Illustrative):

**Case Study 1:** Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (novel) vs. Joe Wright's *Pride & Prejudice* (2005 film) – examining the portrayal of romantic tension, pride, and prejudice.

**Case Study 2:** Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (novel) vs. Stephen Daldry's *The Hours* (2002 film, adapted from Michael Cunningham's novel, which is itself an adaptation/homage to Woolf) – focusing on internal monologue, melancholy, and existential angst. (Alternatively, a direct adaptation of Woolf, if a suitable single film adaptation is chosen that foregrounds this aspect).

**Case Study 3:** Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (novel) vs. Anthony Minghella's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999 film) – exploring the conveyance of psychological suspense, envy, and duplicity.

#### 3.2. Qualitative Analysis: Textual and Filmic Semiotics of Affect

For each selected literary narrative, a detailed qualitative analysis will be conducted focusing on:

**Explicit Emotional Language:** Identification and categorization of words, phrases, and metaphors used to describe character emotions.

**Narrative Perspective & Interiority:** Analysis of free indirect discourse, internal monologue, epistolary elements, and other techniques granting access to character's inner emotional life.

**Descriptive Affective Cues:** Examination of how setting, objects, and actions are described to convey emotional atmosphere or character feelings.

**Pacing and Emotional Arc:** How the temporal structure of the narrative contributes to the development and release of emotional tension.

For each corresponding film adaptation, a detailed qualitative analysis will be conducted focusing on:

**Visual Semiotics of Emotion:** Analysis of cinematography (framing, camera movement, depth of field), *mise-en-scène* (costume, set design, props), lighting, and color palette in conveying emotional states.

**Auditory Semiotics of Emotion:** Analysis of sound design (diegetic and non-diegetic sound effects),

musical score (leitmotifs, orchestration, tempo), and dialogue delivery (prosody, tone, volume).

**Performance and Kinesics:** Analysis of actors' facial expressions, body language, and vocal inflections as primary conveyors of emotion.

**Editing and Temporal Manipulation:** Examination of pace, rhythm, montage, and cross-cutting in building emotional impact, suspense, or melancholy.

**Subjective Camera and Gaze:** How cinematic techniques simulate character perspective and emotional states (e.g., point-of-view shots, sustained close-ups on character reactions).

### 3.3. Quantitative Analysis: Viewer Response (Secondary Data)

Where available, we will incorporate existing quantitative data from reception studies or neuroaesthetic research on the selected films. This includes:

**Audience Surveys/Ratings:** Analysis of audience feedback regarding emotional impact, character identification, and perceived emotional accuracy of the adaptation.

**Neuroimaging Studies:** Review of any published fMRI or EEG studies on the selected films or specific scenes, focusing on activation patterns in emotion-related brain regions (e.g., amygdala, insula, prefrontal cortex) in response to key emotional sequences. This will provide an objective correlate to the subjective emotional experiences.

### 3.4. Comparative Analysis

The core of the "Results" and "Discussion" sections will involve a comparative analysis across the literary and cinematic representations of key emotional moments or character arcs within each case study. We will identify:

**Points of Equivalence:** Instances where literary affective cues find direct or analogous cinematic equivalents that successfully evoke similar emotional responses.

**Points of Divergence/Transformation:** Instances where literary affective cues are transformed into novel cinematic strategies, or where the emotional impact differs significantly due to medium specificity.

**Strategies for Bridging the Affective Gap:** Identification of recurring cinematic techniques employed by filmmakers to translate internal literary emotion into external cinematic experience.

## 4. Results

Due to the hypothetical nature of this article, illustrative results for the case studies will be presented, highlighting key findings from the comparative analysis.

### 4.1. Case Study 1: *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen vs. Wright)

The novel *Pride and Prejudice* often conveys emotional states through Elizabeth Bennet's internal reflections, letters, and dialogue marked by subtle irony. For instance, her evolving feelings for Darcy are meticulously detailed through her inner thoughts.

In Wright's 2005 film, the affective portrayal of this evolving romance is largely externalized. Elizabeth's pride and prejudice, and later her burgeoning affection, are conveyed through:

**Visual Metaphors:** Wide shots of Elizabeth walking through natural landscapes (e.g., on the moors, at the peak district) visually represent her independent spirit and contemplation.

**Performance:** Keira Knightley's subtle facial expressions and gestures (e.g., her guarded glances at Darcy, the slight widening of her eyes when she realizes her misjudgment) are paramount.

**Camera Work:** The film frequently uses subjective camera work, mirroring Elizabeth's gaze, or employing close-ups to emphasize her emotional reactions.

**Music:** Dario Marianelli's evocative score underscores emotional shifts, providing an auditory layer to

feelings that are internal in the novel. For example, the swelling music during Darcy's second proposal emphasizes the emotional weight of the scene, which in the novel is conveyed purely through dialogue and internal thought.

**Key Finding:** The film effectively translates Elizabeth's internal emotional journey by externalizing it through a rich interplay of performance, visual composition, and an emotionally resonant score. The literary emphasis on dialogue and thought is balanced by cinematic reliance on non-verbal cues and sensory immersion.

#### 4.2. Case Study 2: Mrs Dalloway (Woolf) and The Hours (Daldry)

Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* is characterized by profound psychological interiority, stream of consciousness, and a melancholic tone exploring memory, regret, and the fear of mortality. Emotional states are largely revealed through the characters' unadulterated thought processes and highly descriptive prose.

*The Hours*, while an adaptation of a different novel, captures a similar affective landscape, demonstrating cinematic strategies for internal states. The film employs:

**Subjective Flashbacks/Montage:** Non-linear editing and fragmented imagery represent characters' memories and inner turmoil, mirroring Woolf's fluid temporality.

**Sound Design:** A pervasive, almost melancholic, soundscape often without explicit diegetic source, creates an atmosphere of introspection and sadness. Philip Glass's recurring piano motifs amplify feelings of longing and existential weight.

**Actor's Gaze and Stasis:** Nicole Kidman's portrayal of Virginia Woolf, for instance, often involves prolonged, pensive gazes that convey deep internal thought and emotional struggle without dialogue. Julianne Moore's character's suppressed anguish is shown through her meticulous, almost ritualistic, daily actions and subtle facial cues, rather than explicit verbalization.

**Visual Symbolism:** Recurring motifs like flowers or specific interiors become laden with emotional significance, symbolizing life, beauty, or decay.

**Key Finding:** The film navigates complex internal emotional landscapes by translating stream-of-consciousness into visual and auditory poetic associations, relying on performance, atmosphere, and non-linear narrative structures to create a similar sense of profound inner life and melancholy.

#### 4.3. Case Study 3: The Talented Mr. Ripley (Highsmith vs. Minghella)

Highsmith's novel delves into the chilling internal monologue of Tom Ripley, making the reader complicit in his psychopathy, envy, and anxiety. The suspense is deeply psychological, rooted in Ripley's inner machinations and fears of exposure.

Minghella's film adaptation successfully translates this psychological suspense into a compelling cinematic experience through:

**Narrative Voice-Over:** While often avoided in film, Minghella judiciously uses Ripley's voice-over to retain some access to his internal thoughts, but this is balanced by other techniques.

**Performance and Subtext:** Matt Damon's portrayal of Ripley's chameleon-like nature, his forced smiles, nervous glances, and chillingly calm demeanor after violent acts, conveys his internal duplicity.

**Ironic Juxtaposition:** The film often juxtaposes beautiful Mediterranean scenery and vibrant social scenes with Ripley's dark internal world and violent actions, creating a disquieting emotional tension.

**Musical Score:** Gabriel Yared's score plays a crucial role, shifting from idyllic Italian melodies to tense, dissonant themes that underscore Ripley's increasing anxiety and impending violence, often providing emotional cues where the character himself remains inscrutable.

**Close-ups on Objects/Details:** Shots of a cigarette ash, a drop of blood, or a suspicious glance become highly charged, building suspense and hinting at Ripley's psychological state.

**Key Finding:** The adaptation skillfully translates internal psychological suspense by externalizing it through masterful performance, ironic juxtaposition of visuals and sound, and strategic use of subjective techniques (like voice-over) to maintain access to Ripley's complex, often disturbing, inner world while preserving the enigmatic quality essential to the character.

## 5. Discussion

The comparative analyses across these case studies demonstrate clear patterns in how affective portrayal is adapted from literary narratives to cinematic depictions. The "intermedial affective gap" is consistently bridged by strategic transformations that leverage the unique strengths of the filmic medium.

### 5.1. Strategies for Affective Re-mediation

Several recurring strategies emerge:

**Externalization of Interiority:** What is explicit internal thought in literature often becomes implicit external action or reaction in film. This includes character performance (facial expressions, body language), visual cues (mise-en-scène, cinematography), and sound design (music, diegetic sounds).

**Sensory Immersion:** Cinema's multi-modal nature allows for direct sensory input that can evoke emotions viscerally. A literary description of a character's "heart pounding" might become a rhythmic sound design, a shaky camera, and a close-up on a frightened face in film, impacting the viewer on multiple perceptual levels simultaneously.

**Symbolic and Metaphorical Translation:** Literary metaphors for emotional states are often translated into visual or auditory symbols in film. A character's feeling of being trapped might be represented by restrictive framing or bars of shadow in the cinematic adaptation.

**Temporal Manipulation:** Film's ability to manipulate time through editing (slow-motion, rapid cuts, flashbacks, montages) allows for the acceleration or deceleration of emotional impact, contrasting with the often more linear or reader-paced progression of emotion in literature.

**The Power of the Gaze:** Cinema's unique ability to direct the viewer's gaze, particularly through close-ups on character faces or significant objects, makes it a potent tool for conveying emotional information and fostering empathy or suspicion.

### 5.2. Implications for Affective Experience

The re-mediation of affect has significant implications for the viewer's emotional experience. While a reader's emotional engagement might be more introspective and imaginative, a film viewer's experience is often more immediate, visceral, and guided by the director's specific choices. This can lead to a more universally shared emotional experience within an audience, compared to the potentially more varied individual emotional constructions of readers.

Neuroaesthetic research provides an empirical lens for understanding these differences. If a literary description of fear activates language processing areas and relies on the reader's mental imagery to stimulate the amygdala, a cinematic depiction of fear might directly activate the amygdala through rapid visual cuts, loud sounds, and startling imagery, potentially bypassing some higher-level cognitive processing required by text.

### 5.3. Limitations and Future Directions

While this study offers a systematic approach, it is limited by its focus on a small number of case studies. Expanding the corpus to include a wider range of genres, cultural contexts, and adaptation approaches would strengthen the generalizability of the findings. Future research could also incorporate empirical viewer response data, such as real-time physiological measures (e.g., skin conductance, heart rate) or neuroimaging data, directly comparing responses to literary excerpts versus their cinematic counterparts. Furthermore, exploring the role of individual differences in viewer susceptibility to

cinematic affective manipulation would be a valuable avenue.

## 6. Conclusion

The adaptation of affective portrayal from literary narratives to cinematic depictions is a sophisticated process that demands creative and strategic re-mediation. This article has illuminated the inherent differences in how literature and cinema encode and transmit emotional information, and the diverse strategies filmmakers employ to bridge the "intermedial affective gap." By moving from the explicit, internal, and often language-dependent emotional landscape of text to the implicit, external, and multi-sensory realm of film, adapters engage in a profound act of transformation.

Our comparative case studies demonstrate that successful affective adaptation involves a mastery of cinematic semiotics – manipulating visual composition, sound design, performance, and editing to evoke analogous or intensified emotional responses. This understanding not only enriches adaptation theory by focusing on a critical yet often overlooked dimension but also contributes to the broader scientific study of how narratives, in their various forms, shape and engage human emotion. As media landscapes continue to evolve, a systematic approach to affective re-mediation will remain crucial for understanding the enduring power of storytelling across all platforms.

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