



Cinematic Adaptation as a Strategy in Teaching Literature

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Abstract: This paper explores cinematic adaptation as a didactic strategy in literature classes, focusing on its potential to support interpretative learning and creative engagement through the use of artificial intelligence – assisted tools. The study addresses the need to adapt literature teaching to the visual and digital profile of contemporary students while preserving the formative value of literary reading. Grounded in theoretical perspectives that regard film adaptation as an autonomous interpretative act rather than a faithful reproduction of the literary text, the research adopts a qualitative case-study approach conducted in secondary education. The teaching experiment involved a comparative analysis of literary texts and their cinematic transposition into short screenplay fragments, supported by artificial intelligence applications for storyboard generation and visual sequencing. The activity indicates increased student engagement, deeper textual understanding, and the development of skills related to interpretation, selection, narrative compression, and creative transposition. Cinematic adaptation functioned as a form of active reading rather than a substitute for literary study, demonstrating that artificial intelligence can support interpretative and creative processes without diminishing the central role of the literary text. The paper proposes a flexible didactic model that integrates digital tools responsibly and offers practical implications for contemporary literature teaching.

Keywords: creative transposition; visual literacy; digital pedagogy

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1. Introduction

In recent years, literature teachers have increasingly faced the challenge of declining student engagement with literary texts. Standardized assessments such as PISA have identified the problem of functional illiteracy among students, which, not coincidentally, correlates with their reduced interest in reading. A widely circulated remark among students – "I will wait for the film instead of reading the book" – illustrates a broader shift in reading habits influenced by digital culture and constant exposure to visual media. Contemporary learners are more receptive to audiovisual stimuli and tend to favor immediate, image-based access to meaning, which often results in reduced patience for sustained reading and interpretative effort. This context raises an important pedagogical problem: how can literature education remain relevant and formative in an era dominated by screens?

Previous research has examined the complex relationship between literature and cinema, emphasizing that film adaptations should not be regarded as inferior replicas of literary works but as autonomous interpretations shaped by distinct expressive means. While literary texts rely on narration, introspection, and ambiguity, cinema constructs meaning through images, sound, and editing. In educational contexts, film has often been used either as a motivational tool or as a simplified substitute for reading, a practice that risks superficial engagement with the literary text. However, fewer studies have focused on adaptation as a creative and interpretative process actively involving students.

This paper proposes a didactic approach that repositions cinematic adaptation as a form of active reading and interpretation rather than passive consumption. The research is based on a qualitative case study conducted in secondary education, in which students transformed selected literary fragments into short screenplay sequences. The teaching process involved textual selection, narrative compression, and visual transposition, supported by artificial intelligence tools for storyboard generation and visual planning. Canonical literary works studied in the curriculum were used to ensure curricular relevance.

The novelty of this approach lies in integrating artificial intelligence as a pedagogical instrument that facilitates, rather than replaces, literary interpretation. By translating narrative description and introspection into visual language, students were encouraged to analyze textual meaning, symbolic elements, and narrative perspective. The results suggest that this method enhances interpretative competence, critical thinking, and creative engagement with literary texts.

Further research may explore the applicability of this approach to other literary genres, age groups, and interdisciplinary contexts, as well as its long-term impact on students' reading motivation and analytical skills.

2. Prior Work

The relationship between literature and cinema has been extensively explored from both aesthetic and theoretical perspectives, with particular attention to the concept of adaptation. Early critical approaches often evaluated film adaptations in terms of fidelity to the source text, implicitly positioning literature as the primary and superior art form. Such perspectives tended to regard deviations from the literary original as shortcomings rather than interpretative choices.

More recent theoretical frameworks have shifted the focus from fidelity to interpretation, emphasizing that cinematic adaptation constitutes an autonomous artistic act. Scholars argue that each medium operates through distinct expressive systems: literature constructs meaning through language, narration, and access to interiority, whereas cinema relies on visual composition, sound, rhythm, and montage. Consequently, the transfer from text to screen necessarily involves processes of selection, compression, omission, and, in some cases, expansion of narrative elements.

In educational research, film has been frequently incorporated into literature teaching as a motivational aid or as a means of facilitating comprehension. While such practices may increase student interest, they often reduce the literary text to a preliminary stage before viewing, reinforcing passive consumption rather than critical engagement. Studies on visual literacy and multimodal learning suggest, however, that guided interaction with audiovisual texts can foster analytical thinking when students are encouraged to decode images, symbols, and narrative structures.

Pedagogical approaches that treat adaptation as a creative task remain relatively underexplored. When students actively participate in transforming literary texts into cinematic forms, they engage in higher-order cognitive processes, including interpretation, synthesis, and evaluative judgment. The integration of digital tools, and more recently artificial intelligence applications, has opened new possibilities for such practices, although their didactic potential in literature education has not yet been sufficiently examined.

3. Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative, case-study approach aimed at exploring how cinematic adaptation can function as a didactic strategy in literature classes. The focus is on observing and analyzing the processes through which students interpret literary texts, transform narrative elements into visual representations, and develop creative and analytical skills through guided adaptation exercises.

3.1. Teaching Context

The research was conducted in a secondary education setting with students aged 15–17, studying the Romanian language and literature curriculum. Two canonical literary works were selected for the study: *Moara cu noroc* by Ioan Slavici, representing realistic narrative prose, and *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, exemplifying symbolic and allegorical literature. These selections allowed for comparison between adaptation strategies for different genres and narrative styles.

3.2. Procedure

The teaching activity followed a structured sequence:

- a) **Selection of Textual Fragments:** Students identified key passages, focusing on scenes rich in narrative detail or symbolic content.
- b) **Textual Analysis:** Students examined narrative perspective, character introspection, and thematic elements, highlighting aspects essential for adaptation.
- c) **Scenario Development:** Fragments were transformed into short screenplay sequences. Students applied principles of cinematic storytelling, including scene selection, dialogue simplification, and visual representation of internal states.
- d) **Artificial Intelligence Integration:** AI applications (e.g., StoryboardAI) were used to generate visual storyboards. Students directed AI to depict settings, character actions, and symbolic elements, allowing them to explore spatial, temporal, and visual narrative relationships.

- e) Presentation and Reflection: Students presented their short cinematic adaptations to the class, followed by discussions on interpretative choices, narrative compression, and creative solutions.

Literary text	Film script adaptation
<p>„De la Ineu drumul de țară o ia printre păduri și peste țarini lăsând la dreapta și la stânga satele așezate prin colțurile văilor. Timp de un ceas și jumătate drumul e bun; vine apoi un pripor, pe care îl urci, și după ce ai coborât iar în vale, trebuie să faci popas, să adapi calul ori vita din jug și să le mai lași timp de răsuflare, fiindcă drumul a fost cam greu, iară mai departe locurile sunt rele. Aici în vale e Moara cu noroc. Ori din care parte ar veni, drumețul se bucură când o zărește din culmea dealului pleșuv, căci, venind dinspre locurile rele, ea îl vestește că a scăpat norocos, iară mergând spre ele, la moară poate să găsească ori să aștepte alți drumeți, ca să nu plece singur mai departe. Și fiindcă aici se opresc toți drumeții, încetul cu încetul s-a făcut bătătură înaintea morii, și oarecum pe nesimțite moara a încetat a mai măcina și s-a prefăcut în cârciumă și loc de adăpost pentru tot drumețul obosit și mai ales pentru acela pe care noaptea-l apucă pe drum. În cele din urmă, arândașul a zidit cârciuma la un loc mai potrivit, departe de câteva sute de pași de la râuleț, iară moara a rămas părăsită, cu lopețile rupte și cu acoperământul</p>	<p>Frame 1 – Exterior, <i>The Lucky Mill</i> – hollow by the road – late afternoon</p> <p>The low sun slants across a DIRT ROAD that rises and falls, winding between a RUSTLING GREEN FOREST on one side and a barren strip of CHARRED TREE TRUNKS on the other. In a hollow below, the MILL crouches, smoke lazily drifting from its chimney.</p> 

ciuruit de vremurile ce trecuseră peste dânsul.

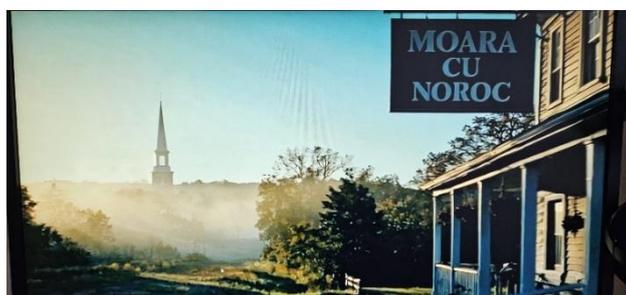
Cinci cruci stau înaintea morii, două de piatră și trei altele cioplite din lemn de stejar, împodobite cu țircălamul și vopsite cu icoane sfinte; toate aceste sunt semne care-l vestesc pe drumeț că aci locul e binecuvântat, deoarece acolo unde vezi o cruce de aceste a aflat un om o bucurie ori a scăpat altul de o primejdie.”

„Dacă aruncai privirea împrejur, la dreapta și la stânga, vedeai drumul de țară șerpuind spre culme, iară la vale, de-a lungul râulețului, cât străbate ochiul, până la câmpia nesfârșită, afară de câțiva arini ce stăteau grămadă din jos pe podul de piatră, nu zăreai decât iarbă și mărăcini. La deal valea se strâmtează din ce în ce mai mult; dar aici vederile sunt multe și deosebite: de-a lungul râulețului se întind două șiruri de sălcii și de răchite, care se îndeasă mereu, până se pierd în crângul din fundul văii; pe culmea dealului de la stânga, despre Ineu, se ivește pe ici, pe colo marginea unei păduri de stejar, iară pe dealul de la dreapta stau răzlețe rămășițele încă nestârpite ale unei alte păduri, cioate, rădăcini ieșite din pământ și, tocmai sus la

Frame 2 – Five old wooden crosses rise from the ground like warning signs, their long, crooked shadows stretching out.



Frame 3 – In the distance, trembling in the heat, the church steeple of Fundureni pierces the horizon like a pale tooth.



<p>culme, un trunchi înalt, pe jumătate ars, cu crengile uscate, loc de popas pentru corbii ce se lasă croncănind de la deal înspre câmpie; fundul văii, în sfârșit, se întunecă, și din dosul crângului depărtat iese turnul țuguiaț al bisericii din Fundureni, învelit cu tinichea, dară pierdut oarecum în umbra dealurilor acoperite cu păduri posomorâte, ce se ridică și se grămădesc unul peste altul, până la muntele Bihorului, de pe ale cărui culmi troienite se răsfrâng razele soarelui de dimineață.”</p>	
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In certain situations, a film adaptation does not only involve condensing the literary text, but also supplementing it, especially in the case of symbolic or allegorical works. One such example is *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, where the simple and metaphorical dialogue requires additional visual concretization.

Literary text	Film script adaptation
<p>Chapter XXI It was then that the fox appeared. “Good morning,” said the fox. “Good morning,” the little prince responded politely, although when he turned around he saw nothing. “I am right here,” the voice said,” under the apple tree.” “Who are you?” asked the little prince, and added, “You are very pretty to look at.” “I am a fox” the fox said. “Come and play with me,” proposed the little prince. “I am so unhappy.”</p>	<p>Frame 1 – Exterior, SMALL PLANET – FIELD OF GOLDEN GRASS – SUNSET A soft light bathes a small, curved planet. The LITTLE PRINCE stands in the knee-high golden grass, his green coat and yellow scarf fluttering in the gentle breeze. FIREFLIES drift like stars. At the edge of the field, a SINGLE TWISTED APPLE TREE leans over, its red apples glowing like lanterns. A quiet buzzing is heard... A calm, unseen voice breaks the silence.</p>

“I cannot play with you,” the fox said. “I am not tamed.”
“Ah! Please excuse me,” said the little prince.
But, after some thought, he added:
“What does that mean-- 'tame'?”

THE FOX



Good morning!

The Little Prince turns around, his eyes wide, seeing only the swaying grass and drifting seeds.

THE LITTLE PRINCE



Good morning!

His small voice echoes faintly from the direction of the apple tree.

THE FOX



I'm right here, under that apple tree.



The prince narrows his eyes toward the twisted roots. A pair of SHINING EYES and A BROWN SNOUT slowly emerge from the shadows.

Frame 2 – Exterior, SMALL PLANET – UNDER THE APPLE TREE – SUNSET

Beneath the apple tree, light filters through the leaves, casting shifting patterns on the moss-covered ground. The FOX steps fully into view, her orange fur glowing against the green foliage.

The Little Prince approaches, curiosity softening his features.



THE LITTLE PRINCE

Who are you? You look very beautiful.

The Fox sits patiently, her tail wrapped around her paws, ears twitching at a distant rustle in the grass

	 <p>THE FOX I am a fox.</p> <p>THE LITTLE PRINCE Come and play with me. I'm so sad.</p> <p>The wind seems to fall silent to listen. The Fox lowers her gaze.</p> <p>THE FOX I cannot play with you. I am not tamed.</p>  <p>THE LITTLE PRINCE Ah! Please, excuse me. What does "tamed" mean?</p>
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3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

Observations, student storyboards, and classroom discussions were systematically documented. The analysis focused on:

- Students' ability to interpret and translate literary meaning into visual language;
- Strategies used to preserve narrative coherence and thematic integrity;
- Evidence of enhanced engagement, critical thinking, and creative problem-solving.

This methodology emphasizes the active role of students as interpreters, while artificial intelligence serves as a supportive tool rather than a replacement for critical reading and analysis. The approach allows direct comparison of adaptation strategies between realist and symbolic texts, highlighting how different narrative forms require tailored interpretative and creative solutions.

4. Results

The classroom implementation of cinematic adaptation exercises yielded significant outcomes in terms of student engagement, interpretative competence, and creative thinking. The study focused on two literary texts with distinct narrative structures: the realist novella *Moara cu noroc* by Ioan Slavici and the allegorical *The Little Prince* written by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

4.1. Adaptation of Realist Narrative: *Moara cu noroc*

Students were tasked with transforming extended descriptive passages into visual sequences. For instance, a detailed description of the landscape surrounding the inn was condensed into a storyboard highlighting key elements: the winding dirt road, the isolated mill, and the five crosses as symbolic markers. Narrative introspection and exposition were represented through gestures, facial expressions and spatial arrangement, maintaining the story's atmosphere and tension.

The results indicated that students successfully identified the essential narrative elements, selectively compressed the text, and used visual language to communicate suspense and character presence. Classroom discussions revealed that students developed a deeper understanding of narrative techniques, symbolism, and the relationship between text and visual representation.

4.2. Adaptation of Symbolic Text: *The Little Prince*

In adapting *The Little Prince*, students faced the challenge of representing abstract and allegorical concepts visually. The encounter with the fox, for example, was translated into a storyboard emphasizing color, lighting, and character positioning, while maintaining the thematic significance of domestication and friendship. AI-generated visualizations allowed students to concretize metaphors without losing interpretative depth.

Students demonstrated the ability to translate dialogue and symbolic meaning into visual storytelling, reflecting an increased sensitivity to narrative nuance and the interplay between textual suggestion and cinematic depiction.

4.3. General Observations

Across both literary genres, the exercise fostered:

- Active engagement: Students were more motivated to read and analyze the text when tasked with adaptation.
- Critical interpretation: Selecting which narrative elements to visualize required careful textual analysis.
- Creative problem-solving: Students explored multiple ways to convey internal states and symbolic meaning visually.
- Collaborative learning: Group discussions on adaptation choices enriched understanding and highlighted diverse perspectives.

Overall, the results confirm that cinematic adaptation, supported by AI tools, can serve as a powerful pedagogical strategy, transforming passive reading into active interpretation while respecting the autonomy of both literary and cinematic media.

5. Discussion and Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study demonstrate that cinematic adaptation can serve as a dynamic pedagogical tool in literature education, promoting both interpretative depth and creative engagement. By translating textual description, internal states, and symbolic meaning into visual forms, students actively construct understanding rather than passively consuming narratives. This approach addresses a critical

challenge in contemporary classrooms: the declining attention span of students and their preference for visual media over sustained reading.

5.1. Differentiated Strategies for Literary Genres

The study highlights that adaptation strategies must be tailored to the literary genre. Realist narratives, such as *Moara cu noroc*, require text compression and selective focus on observable actions and settings, whereas symbolic or allegorical texts, such as *The Little Prince*, demand visual concretization of abstract themes. Teachers should guide students in identifying which narrative elements are essential for cinematic representation while maintaining fidelity to thematic meaning.

5.2. Role of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence proved to be an effective support tool for storyboard creation and visualization. AI applications facilitated the generation of visual sequences from textual prompts, allowing students to experiment with spatial arrangements, lighting, and symbolic representation. Importantly, AI functioned as a cognitive aid rather than a replacement for analysis, encouraging students to make interpretative decisions rather than passively accepting pre-generated outputs.

5.3. Competency Development

The pedagogical approach contributed to the development of several key competencies:

- Critical thinking: students evaluated which textual elements to prioritize in visual representation;
- Creative problem-solving: multiple solutions were explored for representing internal states or symbolic meaning;
- Collaborative learning: group discussions and peer feedback enhanced understanding and interpretation;
- Digital literacy: students gained experience in responsible use of AI tools within an educational context.

5.4. Implications for Literature Teaching

This study suggests that integrating cinematic adaptation exercises into the curriculum can transform students' perception of literature, positioning films and visual media as interpretative extensions of literary texts rather than substitutes. Teachers can leverage AI and visual media to engage learners meaningfully, strengthen interpretative skills, and bridge the gap between traditional literary analysis and contemporary multimodal literacy.

6. Conclusions and Further Research

This study demonstrates that cinematic adaptation, supported by artificial intelligence tools, can serve as an effective pedagogical strategy in literature education. By engaging students in the process of transforming literary texts into visual narratives, the approach fosters active reading, critical analysis, and creative interpretation, bridging the gap between textual comprehension and visual literacy. The exercises conducted with *Moara cu noroc* and *The Little Prince* illustrate how adaptation strategies differ according to genre, with realist narratives emphasizing compression and selective visualization, and symbolic texts requiring creative concretization of abstract themes.

The results indicate that students not only developed a deeper understanding of narrative structures, symbolism, and character introspection but also enhanced their collaborative, critical, and digital competencies. Importantly, the study shows that AI applications function as supportive tools that facilitate interpretative decision-making without replacing the analytical thinking required for literary study. This confirms that cinematic adaptation can transform passive engagement with film into a learning experience that reinforces literary interpretation.

Further Research

Future research may explore several directions:

1. Expansion to other literary genres: applying adaptation exercises to poetry, drama, and contemporary prose.
2. Longitudinal studies: examining the impact of cinematic adaptation on reading motivation, interpretative skills, and creativity over time.
3. Interdisciplinary integration: combining literature, media studies, and digital arts to foster multimodal literacy.

4. Evaluation of AI tools: systematic assessment of various AI platforms and their potential for enhancing student creativity and comprehension.

In conclusion, the study highlights the pedagogical value of cinematic adaptation as an interpretative and creative process, demonstrating that literature and film can coexist as complementary, autonomous forms of artistic expression in education.

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