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Does Robert Mulligan's *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1962) Stay True to Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*?

Do movie adaptations tend to stay true to the original source material? The answer is no. Not in the case of Robert Mulligan's *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1962). From discarding characters that bring extremely important messages to completely cutting chapters that are fundamental to Jem and Scout's character arcs and adding in new ones that are completely useless, the viewer can say that, without a doubt, Robert Mulligan tears Harper Lee's book to shreds. To summarize, Robert Mulligan's *To Kill A Mockingbird* does not remain true to the original source material (Harper Lee's book *To Kill A Mockingbird*) by erasing Aunt Alexandra's character, the chapter where Calpurnia takes Jem and Scout to First Purchase, and deleting Miss Maudie's scenes and characteristics.

First, Aunt Alexandra's arc is crucial to the novel and her being completely cut affects the message being sent to the audience. Aunt Alexandra has one of the biggest character arcs in the book. From being a stifling presence that is trying to change Scout to be a "proper lady" and trying to change the family dynamic to truly loving and caring for the Finch family; her arc brings an important message to the table. Her character being cut takes away that message. Therefore, it takes away a large part of the bigger theme. To fully understand this, the reader can look back at the chapter where the Maycomb ladies' church circle has a meeting in the Finch

house and Aunt Alexandra has a small breakdown upon hearing Atticus will go and tell Helen Robinson Tom is dead:

I thought Aunt Alexandra was crying, but when she took her hands away from her face, she was not. She looked weary. She spoke, and her voice was flat. "I can't say I approve of everything he does, Maudie, but he's my brother, and I just want to know when this will ever end." Her voice rose: "It tears him to pieces. I've seen him when--what else do they want from him, Maudie, what else?"..."I mean this town. They're perfectly willing to let him do what they're too afraid to do themselves--it might lose them a nickel. They're perfectly willing to let him wreck his health doing what they're afraid to do, they're--" (Lee 316)

There are many things to unpack in this quote. This quote is showing how upset Aunt Alexandra is over the trial and the fate of Tom Robinson. She is ranting to Miss Maudie over how the case and in turn, the town, is wrecking Atticus and wrecking his health. This rant shows true character development in Aunt Alexandra because when she was first introduced, the reader would've never guessed she would even care about what the trial was doing to Atticus's health. She is characterized, at first, to be a typical Southern lady that fits in perfectly with Maycomb's crowd. However, the quote shows that she has broken away from that mindset and is starting to act more like her brother: compassionate and sympathetic. The movie cutting her character takes away this important message; that people can change from their toxic and harmful ways. In conclusion, Aunt Alexandra has a huge character arc and her being cut takes away that arc and therefore, a huge message.

Secondly, the chapter when Calpurnia takes Jem and Scout to the black church is also important to the novel and that being cut cuts another message being sent to the reader. This specific chapter, although not the biggest theme in the book, adds to the theme of the overall story. In this chapter, since Atticus is away, she takes them to the black church where she goes. Scout notices how small and unusual the church is to her, commenting how there are no instruments and no hymn books. She also notes how the church seems tighter-knit; a prominent example of this is Reverend Sykes asking for ten dollars specifically for Helen Robinson and her children. This experience in First Purchase definitely changes Scout, for at the end she asks if she can visit Calpurnia more often after realizing Calpurnia leads another life separate from the Finches' house. The book states, "That Calpurnia led a modest double life never dawned on me. The idea that she had a separate existence outside our household was a novel one, to say nothing of her having command of two languages" (Lee 167). A huge part of this chapter is the idea of different "languages" and double lives. It shines a light on why these double lives and these different languages are spoken in different situations (in Calpurnia's case, the Finches' house and around her community). Scout realizing this adds development onto her character and therefore, adds to the theme of the book. However, the movie obviously deletes this. This takes away the message being sent (double lives and different languages) and therefore takes away from the overall theme. To summarize, Calpurnia taking the kids to church is a big and significant part of the book, and the movie cutting it takes away another message in the overall theme of the book.

Third, the movie also cuts many of Miss Maudie's scenes and narrows her down to just another Maycomb lady. This is not what Miss Maudie is. Let's first discuss how Miss Maudie is important to the book. Miss Maudie is Scout's friend after Jem and Dill start to exclude her

because she's a girl. She teaches Scout some important life lessons and some things about Atticus that Scout previously did not know. However, in the movie, many of her scenes are cut (e.g. her house burning down, talking with Scout on her porch, the church circle) and one particular (unimportant) scene is added (the scene where she sees Scout off to school). This takes away from her character when she should be important to the story. Miss Maudie is shown to be Scout's friend during the summer when Jem and Dill start ignoring her: "But I kept aloof from their foolhardy schemes for a while, and on the pain of being called a girl, I spent most of the remaining twilights that summer sitting with Miss Maudie Atkinson on her front porch...Until Jem and Dill excluded me from their plans, she was only another lady in the neighborhood, but a relatively benign presence..." (Lee 56-57). Miss Maudie being Scout's friend is a large part of the book, seeing as how their friendship seems to still be strong later on. She accepts Scout and talks to her when her brother and her friend exclude her. Miss Maudie even teaches her some lessons (Examples of this would be their conversation about Boo and their conversation about Atticus). However, in the movie, she is none of those things. She is only shown to be watering her flowers beds and seeing Scout off to school. That's all the viewers sees of her. There are none of the characteristics of Miss Maudie in the character. This takes away from the message and Scout's overall story in the movie by taking away a big part of Scout's life. In conclusion, Miss Maudie's characteristics are cut in the movie, so much to the point where the viewer can't call her Miss Maudie. Many of her defining characteristics are taken away and therefore, cuts her character down to the slim shadow of what her character once was. This takes away her importance to Scout's story, therefore taking away from the entire book.

Robert Mulligan's *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1962), does not stay true to the book it is based off of (Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*). The movie cuts many scenes and many characters, taking away from the overall message of the book. First, the movie cuts Aunt Alexandra and takes away her important character arc. This takes away from the bigger picture and the overall message. Second, the movie cuts the chapter when Calpurnia took Scout and Jem to church. This degrades Scout and Jem's character arcs and takes away yet another message from the overall theme of the book. Finally, Miss Maudie's character is cut down to just a slim shadow of what she was. By taking away many of her scenes and characteristics, the viewer could never guess that Miss Maudie was a big part of Scout's story. This takes away from the message of the book. The movie was made simply for the sake of action and excitement, not to send the original message through. So, to summarize, movie adaptations are usually never true to the books. *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1962) is just one of many examples.

Works Cited

Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York, Grand Central Publishing, 1960