Peter Hoffman

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Paper 1: High Fidelity
"The book is always better than the movie" (Cahir 13). When a piece of literature is produced into a film, the majority of viewers who have also read the text generally agree that the text is better. In her book, *Literature Into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches*, Linda Costanzo Cahir argues that in order to avoid the bias for text over film, the viewer needs to approach the film as a product of translation. The idea of film as a translation of literature is highly sensible. Consider a language. A sentence spoken in English and translated into Spanish has taken on a completely different form, yet no one would consider the statement in Spanish any less valuable or viable than the statement in English. It is just different, requiring the reader/listener to change his approach so as to fully appreciate the statement in both forms. In fact, during the process of translation it is very likely that some meaning may have been gained. The same is true of the translation of literature into film. Cahir defines three types of translations: 1) a literal translation, 2) a traditional translation, and 3) a radical translation. *High Fidelity*, directed by
Steven Frears and starring John Cusack, based on the book *High Fidelity* by Nick Hornby, would be considered a traditional translation bordering on the literal.

Cahir defines a traditional translation as an attempt by the filmmakers to “stay as close as possible to the original literary text, while making those alterations that are deemed necessary and/or appropriate. These changes may be made in service of the filmmakers’ interpretive insight or stylistic interests, but just as often they are driven by a need to keep the film’s length and its budget manageable, and to maintain the interests and tastes of a popular audience” (Cahir 21). This is the most accurate way of describing the translation of *High Fidelity* from text to film. There is little deviation between the novel and the movie. However, there are some variations such as deletion and alteration of certain events that serve mainly to control the length of the film, but also, as the definition above points out, to maintain the interest of the audience.

Ninety eight percent of what happens in the movie corresponds with the book, right down to the
dialogue of the characters. While the similarities of the film and book are so abundant, it seems only fair to discuss at least one well done translation achieved by the director, that of the main character, Rob, and his employees, Dick and Barry. While Rob (John Cusack) is true to his character in that, as the narrator, he speaks directly to the audience of both the novel and the film, the secondary characters of Dick and Barry are an even greater accomplishment as they truly capture the characters of the text. If the viewer has had just a small amount of exposure to the text, he will find Dick and Barry are so accurately brought to life on screen that it produces a comfortable feeling, for the viewer almost feels as if he knows the attitudes, demeanors, likes and dislikes of the characters ahead of time. The viewer appreciates that Dick is exactly who you would have imagined him to be: small, timid, kind, while Hornby seems to have written Barry’s character for actor Jack Black, who perfectly captures Barry’s spastic, goofball personality.

The greatest variation found between the text and the film is the deletion of certain material covered
in the book and the slight rearrangement of certain events in the film. This can be reasonably expected when taking a 323 page novel and turning it into a one and a half hour film. However, these deletions and alterations are done in such a way that there is little lost in translation. For example, the novel begins with Rob relating his “all time, top five most memorable splitups, in chronological order” (Hornby 7). That was Then. It isn’t until Now, Chapter One, that the reader sees Laura, Rob’s ex, leave. Because the Then is important to fully understanding the story, it would be impossible for the film to keep out this introduction of Rob’s past love life, but this is not where the film starts. The viewer gets to see Laura leave before they are introduced to Rob’s “top five.” The “Then” of the novel is then cleverly, and very effectively intertwined with “Now” in the form of flashbacks. Although the order of presentation has been altered, this technique allows the viewer to get the necessary background information while progressing through the present, allowing the film to stay true to many parts of the novel without losing meaning.
There are some films that would be considered “loosely” based on a piece of literature. There are others, such as many Shakespearian films, which follow the text word for word. *High Fidelity* is an excellent example of a film that does adapt part of the text to suit its needs, as is required in any form of translation, but does not lose anything in the process. While there are some events in the text that are not as developed in or are completely deleted from the text, the overall meaning is not lost.

Works Cited
