

Film, Play, Book Comparison

Amy E. Morgan

The Writer at the head of the table sighed. "We've been in this room for hours and we're not getting anywhere. I don't mind telling you all that I am getting a little disheartened."

Film paced back and forth in front of the window, and glanced down at the street far below. Without missing a step, he took a sip of coffee in his hand and a bite of a glazed donut. Mouth full, he replied, "Well now, we are talking a children's story here. How long can their attention span be? Best to just spit it all out for them I say."

"So they're children! Give them a chance." said Play. He stood from the overstuffed chair in the corner. He continued with a step forward, arms rising above him and slowly descending in a circle to his sides. "Imagination, my dear Film. Think of it. The oversized background painting of a barn with the door open. Here we see Charlotte, perched in the middle of her web looking down upon Wilbur, resting alone in the pen below. "Salutations!" she says to the little pig." With this, Play leaned forward and stared down at the floor as if seeing the pig. In a moment he rose. "I tell you Film, it was made for the theater."

The Writer observed the three collected before him. He looked to the end of the conference table. "Have you nothing to say on your behalf?"

In a moment, Book opened his eyes and slowly scanned the others before him. He closed his eyes and recited. "Poor Wilbur was dazed and frightened by the hullabaloo. He didn't like being the center of all this fuss. He tried to follow the instructions his friends were giving him, but he couldn't run downhill and uphill at the same time, and he couldn't turn and twist when he was jumping and dancing, and he was crying so hard he could barely see anything that was happening. After all, Wilbur was a very young pig – not much more than a baby, really. He wished Fern were there to take him in her arms and comfort him. When he looked up and saw Mr. Zuckerman standing quite close to him, holding a pail of warm slops, he felt relieved. He lifted his nose and sniffed. The smell was delicious – warm milk, potato skins, wheat middlings, Kellogg's Corn Flakes, and a popover left from the Zuckerman's breakfast." When he'd finished

reciting, he opened his eyes and spoke. "Sight, sound, smell, touch and taste. Which of you could portray the essence of the five senses in just one scene?"

"Not fair, I say, not fair at all." said Film. He got another cup of coffee and put in three heaping teaspoons of sugar. The metal spoon clanked against the sides of the mug. "I may not be able to read aloud the description of the rotten goose egg when Avery falls on Wilbur's trough and breaks it, but one look at Avery and Fern's face, awash with tears and holding their noses expresses quite adequately to anyone watching just how rancid it is. We ALL draw on our audiences collective senses old boy, whether it be by implication, memory or association."

Disturbed only by the sound of the clinking spoon, the room fell silent.

The Writer stared at the offending sound and waited until Film looked to him. "Do you mind Film? I find it hard to concentrate with that distraction."

With a sigh, Film stopped clinking, stood and returned to the window where he began to sway in stony silence.

"I'm sure we can all agree, that puts another feather in my cap." Rising again and coming to the table, Play rested his foot on the chair, placed his elbow against his knee, and looked directly at the Writer. "When the Tucker's find SOME PIG, the second message that Charlotte writes in her web, and they decide to take Wilbur to the state fair, the anticipation is high and we have a delightful pause between acts. The audience is afforded the time to reflect on what is happening." He held up his hand as if to speak, held it in mid air for a moment, then slowly returned to his seat. "The element is the HUMAN connection you see. There is nothing that can compete to that. As you all sit staring at me, I can honestly say I do command your total attention. There is no popcorn eating and drink slurping", this with a sideways glance to Film, and then redirecting his gaze to Book, "and no phone interruptions or laundry to change." This last line, delivered with a flourishing bow as he sat down.

Book laughed out loud. "I'm quite sure there's been a candy or cough wrapper crinkled during one of your performances Play!" Sitting straight in his chair, he placed his hands under his chin in contemplation. "Focused attention is a problem for all of us I'm sure. What we are here today for is to decide the best medium for this particular story."

The Writer stood and walked slowly around the room. He stopped first at Film and lay a steady hand on his shoulder. "My friend of perpetual motion, there is no denying that I see you first as a highly visual medium. So much happens in your short span of audience attention, yet surely there is the opportunity for at least one or two defining and memorable moments. Whether it be the delicate, eager voice of Fern as she first tries to convince her father to not kill Wilbur the runt pig, or a particular visual image, you have the capacity to stay with someone for a lifetime."

Play stood as the Writer moved toward him. Gently the Writer guided him back down to the chair and crouched before him. "No need to put on airs here my friend. Save that for the audience. True, the connection is there. There is no mistaking the thread of human feelings that pass from one to another as they experience something together. There is a depth and rawness in living an experience as you watch it performed when the lights go down. Like film, there may only be a one image that stays with the audience, yet remember, it is unavoidable that a small, personal piece of you goes away with each person as well." Play leaned forward and the Writer gave him a small hug before standing and moving back to the table.

"And so Book, my dear friend, I find myself back to you." Book sat rigid and still as the Writer spoke. "Often times, I feel you are the most difficult. There is not the degree of easy manipulation available to you such as light, sound and music that are available to Film and Play. You must forge a direct line to your audience's imagination and mind. It is with great skill and craft that they be guided upon a journey. If they are a learned traveler, often the only chance that you will get is when they open the cover. If you stumble or fail, you will be closed and put down. Play and Film most always have the advantage of a plural audience. Your lot in life is generally a solitary one."

The Writer stood and walked to the window before turning to face the table. "However, you do have the singular advantage of time and opportunity. Time to dwell and ponder, time to leave and come back to, and the opportunity to go back a page and reread. If you are fortunate your pages will become tattered at the edges from constant turning or thumbing. Particular passages that touch a soul will be read and reread, sometimes underlined or copied and shared. The permanence of black print upon the white paper can be a proud yet humbling responsibility."

The Writer swept his hand to all three. "So hours after we begin, this is where we end up. Play, you come into a life and are gone. There is but the memory of you to linger. You and Film are not always available to everyone. Film, you come larger and quicker than real life. You can, of course, sometimes be viewed another day. This leaves you Book, as the physical keeper of the three. The tangible one that is available to anyone. Yet all three of you, tangible or not, are capable of touching an audience that stays with them always."

The Writer returned to his seat at the head of the table. "I think therefore that I will allow you all to tell the story of a little girl named Fern, who loved a pig named Wilbur, and of Wilbur's dear friend Charlotte, a beautiful large gray spider. Take to each audience's imaginations and soul all that you have and allow them to meld it with whom they are. Allow them to define for themselves what they gained from each of you. Ultimately it is their choice and what they bring to the relationship that will define for them who best tells the story."

The Writer walked to the door and opened it. As they filed past, Film, Play and Book shook his hand. They joked and walked together down the hallway, making plans for where to go for dinner. He called after them, "Let's try again next week. Maybe we'll find that one story that one of you can call his own."