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Canadian literature into films. Yes, Canadians write books and make movies.

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Once the initial shock wears off, and one realizes that there are indeed good Canadian authors and movies, the subject of Canadian literature being turned into films can be fully and seriously explored.

When a movie is adapted from a beloved book, audiences often judge that film's success by how faithfully it adheres to the original source. But that faithfulness (or lack thereof) is only one small part of a film adaptation. Directors often have many issues to contend with—including casting actors who may not closely resemble character descriptions in books, budget limitations, and changes that must be made to certain stories in order to make them more cinematic ... and more palatable to would-be ticket buyers. In *Screening Gender, Framing Genre: Canadian Literature into Film* (2007, University of Toronto Press, 280 pages, U.S., \$45), author Peter Dickinson examines the long history of movies adapted from Canadian literature through the lens of gender studies, and discovers that filmmakers often make sweeping changes when adapting books about women, gay men or lesbians for the silver screen.

Dickinson, who teaches in the Department of English at Canada's Simon Fraser University, studied an impressively wide array of adaptations, including movies based on novels, plays, poetry and Native orature to determine why certain films are exact replicas of the books from which they originated and others are so entirely different—in scope, in plot development, in character motivations—that they seem to be completely original ideas. As Dickinson writes in his introduction to the book: "Transforming the written word into the visual language of film is necessarily an open-ended process, one that involves the quotation and intersection of a number of different 'texts,' not all of which may be recognizable as originary or even literary. There are, in other words, some things that a novel can do that a film cannot, and vice versa."

In a series of bizarrely named chapters—including "Sex Maidens and Yankee Skunks: A Field Guide to Reading 'Canadian' Movies," "Critically Queenie, or Trans-Figuring the Prison-House of Gender: Fortune and Men's Eyes and After" and "Ghosts In and Out of the Machine: Sighting/Citing Lesbianism in Susan Swan's *The Wives of Bath* and Lea Pool's *Lost and Delirious*"—Dickinson takes an in-depth look at how gender roles are often switched in modern Canadian films. Sometimes these changes are made to appeal to wider audiences. For example, *Shadow of the Wolf*, Jacques Dorfman's film adaptation of Yves Theriault's "Agaguk," retains the novel's basic plot, but turns the protagonist, who rapes and beats a woman in the book, into a character that audiences won't despise. Other times, the reasons for these alternations are inscrutable. For example, *Lea Pool's Lost and Delirious*, an adaptation of Susan Swan's novel, "The Wives of Bath," changes the reasoning behind one girl's love for another from a complicated case of gender dysphoria to a "presentation of teenage lesbian desire and internalized homophobia." Additionally, the movie version of the book, which tells the tale of friendships among three female friends at a boarding school for girls in 1960s Ontario, updates the setting to the present day, sidelines seemingly significant plotlines from the book such as a love affair between the school's headmistress and a female teacher, and changes the ending from murder to suicide. Why did the makers of the film decide on such across-the-board changes? Dickinson's not sure. But in trying to understand the reasoning behind the director's decision, he raises interesting questions about today's purportedly sophisticated movie audiences and how much lesbian activity moviemakers think viewers will tolerate on a big screen.

[ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

Dickinson also takes time out to consider how Canada's close proximity to what he terms "the American media behemoth" affects the country's film production and distribution. "For mega-chains like Famous Players, Cineplex Odeon, and even Alliance Atlantis, which make most of their money from food concessions, and therefore need to maximize the number of bums in seats, programming locally made films is simply bad business," he writes. He went on to say that this particular matter is made even thornier by the fact that the Canadian film industry has managed to acquire a reputation for making arthouse films with sexually enigmatic themes. "Molly Parker making love to a cadaver versus Arnold Schwarzenegger blowing up nasty Arab terrorists: the choice would seem clear to most moviegoers."

The further issue of films needing to play as well internationally as they do domestically means that "In the case of adaptation, this often means de-

emphasizing the gender, cultural, regional, and historical specificity of the source texts," writes Dickinson. In other words, sometimes directors feeling the pressure to make a movie that will sell tickets, and will often alter a movie's setting from Canada to the U.S. Margaret Laurence's "A Jest of God," for example, is set in a Canadian prairie town. For Rachel, Rachel, the movie version of the book, the setting was changed to a New England hamlet.

While Screening Gender provides a fascinating peek into the motivations behind film adaptations of books, Dickinson's often impenetrable prose, his proclivity for writing out long lists of unfamiliar titles, and his occasional forays into French (whole paragraphs are sometimes in French--fine, perhaps for Canadians raised in a bilingual culture, but less fine for those who were not) make this a hard book to get through. But true lovers of Canadian literature will revel in the author's dissection of works by renowned Canadian authors such as Michael Ondaatje ("The English Patient") and Margaret Atwood ("The Handmaid's Tale"). Screening Gender succeeds in explaining to readers that film treatments of books--specifically those with gay or gender-specific themes--often reveal lots in terms of the social and cultural contexts of the filmmakers.

But most of all, Screening Gender reinforces the fact that the book is always better than the movie.

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