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### Beautiful Creatures - Book To Film

When any piece of media is adapted from one format to another, we end up with just that - an adaptation. No piece of media can be exactly translated from one medium to another - allowances and changes must be made to fit the new format. Movies often rely heavily on visuals, and are limited by time, whilst books have few constraints on length, and often go into great detail regarding secondary plots and characters that there is little or no time for other types of media. Things diverge even more for radio and television productions, as well as the secondary media types, such as comics, graphic novels and video games - whilst the main theme or characters may be relevant, often there are many changes required in order to “fit” the adaptation into the target type.

In the primary case of the book to movie adaptation of *Beautiful Creatures*, we see a relatively long book for the genre (592 pages in the paperback version). This implies that there will be significant cuts in order to make a movie of average length. The interpretation of *Beautiful Creatures* that is shown as a movie makes significant changes and removals and ends up being a fairly loose interpretation of the original story. While most of the major plot points are kept intact, such as Lena’s Claiming, most of her powers, the intolerance and bigotry of the town and the interference and disguise of her mother, many other plot points are changed or omitted entirely. The downplaying of the flashbacks and the lack of Kelting contribute to this change, and

the changed ending is a prime example of where these stories diverge. The most profound differences are the differences in the subplots - including the betrayal of Larkin, Seraphine being hidden, the missing interactions between Link and Ridley, and the requirements of ending the curse are all different in the film version. In addition, there are fairly significant changes in the characters and characterizations in the film.

The film adaptation of this story easily stands alone as its own acceptable piece of media. Although it's not as in depth, and certainly not as compelling, it manages to stand fine on its own as an entertaining story. The lush visuals that director Richard LaGravenese includes make it easy to envision both a muggy, swampy modern day Gatlin, South Carolina, as well as the beautiful, expansive Civil War era plantations as a throwback for the much reduced flashback sequence.

Reading the book before seeing the movie is not necessary, and in fact could lead to a certain amount of disappointment with the film, as many points have been cut or changed, and subplots have been removed or reduced, leading to a possible sense of disappointment with the flow and ending of the film, due to its shortened nature and the lack of explanation for some items. A perfect example of this is the removal of the subplot between Link and Ridley, detailing Ridley's machinations to control Link and subvert his natural desires and beliefs. After growing up as Ethan's best friend, Ridley had to put a lot of work into controlling Link in order to subvert him both subtly and entirely against Ethan. This subplot was reduced to two minor points: a 10 second scene of Ridley and Link kissing, and an offhand comment by Ridley, leading the viewer to merely infer what may have happened between the two, and to imagine what control Ridley may have had over Link.

The most significant departure of all the major formal elements of this adaptation is the vast difference in characters and characterizations. The transition to the shorter medium of film caused many plot elements to change or be cut entirely, and the characters become the collateral damage to these cuts. The most significant of these (and there are many), is the merging of Marian Ashcroft's character with the seer and housekeeper Amma. In the book, each plays a significant secondary role, and is effective as a foil to the other. In the book, Marian represents the academic, or scholar: a person devoted to book learning, while Amma represents the earthy, folksy, opposite. Both have a great deal of knowledge, and both care for Ethan in a caring motherly sense. The characters exist to show that despite diverse backgrounds and means, both can co-exist and be working towards the same goal - a distinct parallel to the concept of the Caster vs Mortal relationship that Ethan and Lena have. In the film, however, the character of Marian is removed entirely, and merged into a single "Amma" character who attempts to portray both sides - she is the Librarian, the Caster Librarian, and also the hoodoo-type mystic magician. The character suffers from not being filled out enough - we don't ever properly understand her motives in the film, other than that she cares for Ethan and watches out for him.

Several characters suffer from reduced roles due to the changes in plot. A primary example of this is the characterization (or lack thereof) of Ethan's father. In the book, he's effectively an absentee parent, but his presence in the house, his occasional foray out of the study and the final reveal about his mental illness provide a constant, chilling shadow over Ethan's lack of adult relationships and the difficulty he's enduring regarding the loss of his mother. The complete lack of a father character in the movie simply leaves a hole there, with no reinforcement of these themes and Ethan's struggle in these areas. Other characters suffer from

reduced roles due to the removal of subplots as well. Lena's cousin Larkin suffers from this - he plays a pivotal position as a Dark Caster hiding amongst the members of Lena's family in the book, but has a vastly reduced role in the film.

The final change of character and characterization that affects the adaptation was the role of Macon Ravenwood. The book portrays him as a much darker character, whose role is less clear cut than in the movie. Although his main job remains unchanged, the movie never refers to him as an Incubus, and the scene where he is shown to have been feeding on Ethan's dreams is altered significantly. In addition, the script and Jeremy Irons' acting both contribute to changing the view of Macon to be more quirky and less powerful. The movie scene where he is taken aside by Seraphine's character in the church, and ends up yelling something that seems out of place when he returns helps to contribute to the overall feeling that Seraphine is well in control, and that Macon is clearly less powerful. The book, however, attempts to portray him as an exceptionally powerful Dark Caster. Although many of these characterizations are different, few of the changes feel successful - most are clearly made due to the differences in format and time, and some feel completely unintentional. The characters in the book are more clearly defined, and their motives are better understood, directly because of the amount of attention that is given to them in the written format.

While many of the themes in the book are changed, the primary message of this book is about stereotyping and judgement of both ourselves and others - the parallel to *To Kill A Mockingbird's* major theme comes through unchanged, and loud and clear. The examples of this are plentiful and varied. The obvious one is the chronic persecution of Lena by nearly everyone in the town - it begins the first day at school, and she is considered an outsider and evil, just

because of her relationship to Macon Ravenwood. This continues throughout the movie, with more and more people judging and attempting to expel and ostracize her, despite not knowing her at all. This is reacted to with outrage by Ravenwood, who confronts the entire town during the hearing. Through this and other actions, we can see that he is apparently oblivious to his hypocrisy regarding stereotyping others. As time goes on, we see that he is so caught up in his superiority complex as a Caster that he is extremely judgmental and patronizing towards mortals, to the point of locking himself up in his house and avoiding all contact with the people of the town, exactly as Boo Radley does in *Mockingbird*, a reference that is clearly intended by the author. In the movie, this is taken to an even more extreme level, as the movie shows Macon Ravenwood taking a much more active role in attempting to break up the relationship between Ethan and Lena, refusing to admit for a long period that Ethan could be helpful in any way. The movie succeeds in keeping this message at the forefront and does so in a well written and dramatic way. The acting of Jeremy Irons and the controlled anger in his portrayal of Ravenwood during the church scene, as well as the interaction of the religious zealotry of Mrs Lincoln, Emily and Savannah throughout the movie have a distinctly biting edge that ensures the viewer doesn't forget that Lena (and eventually Ethan) are being viewed with distaste everywhere they go.

The movie and book come from the same roots and share the same overarching themes and main characters. While the movie has some specific constraints that force many of the changes in its adaptation, they both succeed in keeping the same main themes and messages. Both are enjoyable, and although we can take away the traditional cliché that one should not judge a book by its cover, perhaps we should instead conclude that we should not judge a movie by its book.

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