

## Episode 2.1 Working on Film Adaptations of Books

### Angourie [host]

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation as the traditional custodians of the land upon this work was developed and is presented. I pay my respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.

[theme music]

### Angourie [host]

Hello everyone, and welcome to The Community Library: a podcast, book club and discussion space. I'm your host, Angourie Rice.

[theme music]

### Angourie [host]

First of all, welcome to the first episode of season 2! I am super excited for this season, I can't wait to share really interesting and exciting episodes with you, and I hope you enjoy them. I've taken a lot of your suggestions on board, and you guys had some really great ideas, so I can't wait to incorporate them into the season.

So today I'm going to be talking about working on film adaptations of books. This is something that has been heavily requested by you guys, the audience, so I hope you enjoy this episode. But, before I get into the topic, I want to tell you about what I'm currently reading.

At the moment I am reading two very different, but also kind of similar books. The first one is *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* by J. K. Rowling. This is the seventh book in the *Harry Potter* series. I'm only 150 pages in, and already crying, ah like every ten pages. It's really upsetting, it's really sad, and everyone's dying, and ah ... It just breaks my heart. Also, it's coming to an end ... and it's so sentimental. I know the books will still be there when I read the last page of the last book, but still, it's quite sad for me. So, I'm getting through that – loving it, as always.

I've also decided, for some reason, to start reading *Twilight* [by Stephenie Meyer], so I'm listening to the audiobook of *Twilight*. I borrowed it from the library 'cause it was available, and I just saw it and I was like: "Yeah, let's give it a go." I have seen all the movies, I binge-watched them when I was, like, in year 11, ah, procrastinating from studying for exams, so I don't *really* remember them – it kind of all happened in a blur. I'm not loving the book so far, but I feel like I'm committed now. I'd say I'm about 70% of the way through, so I just, ah, need to get through it and, ah, see how it ends. I don't think I'll continue with the series, but, ah, who knows, maybe I will? We'll see where it goes.

I also asked you guys on Instagram what you're currently reading. I loved reading through all the responses, they were all so interesting, but I thought I would share just three of them here.

@grobe\_liz says: "I'm reading *Eragon* by Christopher Paolini! I'm living for this adventure and coming-of-age plot! And the dragons aren't too bad either!"

I haven't read *Eragon*, but it does sound really cool, and I also really like dragons, so maybe I should give it a go.

@\_thedragonwolf says: “*Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood. It’s for class and I’m only a few pages in. I’m interested and want to get more into it, but lately I’ve found that it takes me a while to get truly into a book and understand the new setting of it. I’m hoping I can get used to this one soon and start enjoying it.”

I definitely relate to that. It’s sometimes so hard to immerse yourself in a new world, especially if it’s high fantasy or high-concept and there are new rules. I hope you get into it, too! Stick with it, and, ah, hopefully you enjoy it!

@\_bellapotter says: “I am reading *The Reason I Jump* by Naoki Higashida and David Mitchell. It was written by Higashida as a 13-year-old boy with autism. As someone with autism I am finding it absolutely astounding to read about someone with such similar experiences myself that I have always struggled to put into words. Definitely worth a read for anyone who has or knows someone in their life living with autism, or for anyone who has questions about how it all works.”

That book sounds really fascinating. And this is one of my favourite things about books and storytelling in general – is that you can see yourself in a character, and relate to a character, and relate to those experiences, especially experiences that you find difficult putting into words. So I’m really happy that you’ve found a book that represents experiences that you’ve had, and it sounds like a really interesting book, and I might pick it up.

Thank you guys for sending in all of your “currently reading”. If you like this section of the episode – this is something new I’m trying out – don’t hesitate to let me know on Instagram, and maybe I’ll keep doing it.

So as I said, this week I’m going to be talking about working in film adaptations of books. Now, book to film adaptations are, I think, quite controversial. Everyone always says that the book is better, and most of the time people are very angry with the changes that they made in the film. And I’m always interested to see film adaptations of books, especially books I love, because it combines two things I love: books and films. I’m an actor, and I’ve been lucky enough to be in three films that were adapted from books. The first one was *Jasper Jones*, based on the book of the same name by Craig Silvey (published in 2009); *Every Day*, based on the book of the same name by David Levithan (published in 2012), and *Ladies in Black*, based on *The Women in Black* by Madeleine St John (published 1993). I loved working on all three of these films, and all were very unique experiences. And so today I want to talk about my experiences in working on films that have been adapted from books. I also asked you guys to send in questions on Instagram, so I’ll answer some of them at the end of the episode.

I would like to talk about *Jasper Jones* first, because this was the first film adaptation of a book I worked on. *Jasper Jones* is a coming-of-age novel by Craig Silvey and was published in 2009. It won lots of awards and quickly became a popular book to study in schools. *Jasper Jones* is set during the summer of 1965 and follows 13-year-old Charlie Bucktin, a shy book-lover with a passion for writing. One night, a young girl goes missing and Charlie gets tangled up in a web of lies as he tries to find out what happened. It’s a classic Australian novel about love, bravery, loss and also cricket (of course). In the film I play Eliza Wishart, the younger sister of the girl who has gone missing.

I auditioned for *Jasper Jones* in late 2014 and got a call back in Sydney in early 2015. @ellen.arun asked if I had already read *Jasper Jones* before I auditioned for it. I had heard of the book before,

but we didn't study it in school and so I hadn't read it. When I found out I got a call back, I started reading the book and I finished it on the plane to my audition in Sydney. We filmed *Jasper Jones* in the spring of 2015 in a small town called Pemberton, which is about 350km south of Perth in Western Australia. Craig Silvey, the author of the novel, co-wrote the screenplay with Shaun Grant, so Craig was quite involved in the production process. He was with us on set almost every day, and it was really great to have him so nearby so we could ask him about the characters. He worked quite closely with our director, Rachel Perkins, as well, and they were a great team to have on set. He was also cricket consultant. Um, for those of you who've read the book or seen the movie, you will know that cricket features quite heavily in both. Craig is a big fan of cricket himself so he was the expert in that, and he actually personally taught Kevin Long, who played Jeffrey, to play cricket. This has been the only project I've done where the author of the book has been so involved in the process, and it was really nice. It was great to know that he was on board with all the changes that were made. I always worry that the author will see the movie when it comes out and, like, shake their fist and say "What have you done to my masterpiece?!". But because Craig was so involved, I knew that wouldn't happen with him, which was comforting.

In terms of adapting the book into the film, a few things changed. First of all, it's quite a long novel, so a few themes and elements had to be cut because there just simply was not enough time. A general rule for screenplays is that one written page equals one minute on screen. So the film is 105 minutes, and the book is almost 400 pages, and it's just impossible to fit all that content into an hour-and-45-minute-long film. So the biggest reason why things from the book didn't make it into the film, and the reason why it happens so frequently in book to film adaptations, is that there's just no time. If you tried to fit everything in, it would be way too long and way too confusing. So then it becomes a question of what should be cut and what should be kept? What is the essence of the story and how do you take that from the book and capture it in the film? If you ask me, the core themes and concerns in *Jasper Jones* are love, bravery, secrets and racism in 1960s Australia. I think the film captures each of these, but perhaps in a different way from the book.

@mitch.png asked: What's the best way to have the internal thoughts of a character onscreen without exposition? So this question leads me into the main thing I want to talk about with *Jasper Jones*, which is narrative perspective. *Jasper Jones*, the book, is told in the first person, and books are wonderful in that they allow the reader to see the characters exact thoughts – especially when it's from first person perspective. It doesn't matter if the lead character doesn't have anyone to confide in, because the reader knows what they're thinking anyway. The first person perspective also means that sometimes our narrator can be unreliable in the way they tell the story: the things they notice, the things they don't notice, it all gives us a subjective view of the story. In films, it's quite different, because the narrative perspective comes from the camera, and it's a lot more objective. The camera really guides the audience through the story, and tells us what's important and what's not. And because the audience doesn't get to read the character's exact thoughts, it's the actor's job to convey all those thoughts and emotions through their performance.

The problem, though, is how you convey information integral to the plot. It's much easier in a book to read the character's internal monologue saying: "I didn't know John very well, but people had told me he was bad news." So how would you convey this information in a movie? Especially considering if you're really cut for time. Maybe you can have the protagonist tell another character this information, for example: "I don't know John very well, but I've heard he's bad news." But what if the protagonist doesn't have anyone to confide in? So this was the thing about Charlie in *Jasper*

*Jones* – he confides in his reader, rather than any other character in the book. Because *Jasper Jones* is about secrets, and Charlie is harbouring a huge secret that he can't tell anyone, it means that the book is so focussed on his perspective and his internal thoughts. So to solve this problem, the film has a voice-over. Levi Miller, who played Charlie, voices the narration and we hear it at the beginning, when we're establishing who the characters are and how Charlie's feeling. And this is used in a lot of films to make information more explicit to the audience. A lot of the time, if it's good, you'll forget that it was even there and it just fits seamlessly in with the story.

The next film I want to talk about is *Every Day*, which was based on the book of the same name by David Levithan. *Every Day* was published in 2012 and tells the story of A, a soul who wakes up in a different body every day. One day, A wakes up in the body of Justin, the boyfriend of Rhiannon. A and Rhiannon spend a wonderful day together, but of course, the next day, A has left Justin. As the story unfolds, the two of them keep meeting, and it's about falling in love for the first time, learning to live in the moment, and realising that it's what's on the inside that counts. In the film, I played Rhiannon.

@iamalexa.andyeah asked if I had read *Every Day* before I knew about the film. And, yes, I read the book in about 2015 and really, really liked it. So when the email came through that they were making a film version, I was really excited about it and I – I knew I wanted to be a part of it. I auditioned when I was 16, so, in early 2017, and we filmed it that year in summer, in Toronto. @hunter.poitra asked if there is a pressure to live up to the book, and there definitely is. It's a huge pressure, and there's been pressure with all three of these films, but I think I felt it the most with *Every Day* because I was also part of that fanbase. I put even more pressure on myself because I had been a fan of the book before I even knew about the movie.

@voidbookshelves asked me if reading the book as prep for filming is a different experience than if I had read it for pleasure. I think this is really interesting when considering *Every Day*, because I first read it for pleasure and then read it again knowing I'd be in the film version. So I try not to read it differently, because if I analyse every little detail then I won't fully immerse myself in the story and the atmosphere. I think I just pay a bit more attention to the character details and the emotions I feel when reading. It's less analytical and critical and more observant of emotions. That being said, the book is not the main thing I come back to when I'm actually working on the project: it's always the script, because, I mean, at the end of the day, you're shooting the script, you're not shooting the book.

David, who wrote the book, didn't write the script. It was written by Jesse Andrews, who wrote the book and screenplay of *Me, Earl and the Dying Girl*. So he had already written a novel and adapted it into a film and so he really understood that process, and I think he did a great job on the script. I think *Every Day* was an interesting one because the script went through a lot of different versions before settling on the one we shot, and I think this is for a few reasons. The book is really complex and has so many high-concept ideas crammed into 350 pages, and not all of it could translate to film. So I read versions that focussed on different combinations of elements from the book before the shooting script was decided on. The book also does something very unique, which is quite simple to represent in a book, but is very, very tricky in a film: one character, several different bodies. So it meant that the character of A had to be a consistently believable and sympathetic character, but played by fifteen different actors. And I think this is part of the reason why the screenplay shifted a bit to focus more on Rhiannon, because she is the constant in all of this.

So this, I think, was the most challenging and interesting thing about making this film: getting 15 people to play the same character. How do you do that? How do you make it consistent? In a book, it's quite simple because the narrative voice is unique and strong and consistent. But give 5 actors the same speech and they'll all read it completely differently. So our director, Michael, wrote a letter about the character of A to all of the actors who played A, including me. And in this letter, he explained the character's background, who they are, what they want. He talked about the consistency of A waking up, and making that the thing that tells the audience that this new actor is playing A. So every time we see A waking up, they look at their hands, they look at their room, they take a selfie to see what they look like. The letter also asked the actors to read the whole script – which, may seem obvious, but sometimes people don't – and to know A's character as if you were going to play them in the whole film. So I think it was a combination of things in the end that made the character of A consistent: Michael's direction, the actors' preparation, the scriptwriting (they always spoke the same way and repeated certain phrases), and also the casting – I think each actor who played A had a certain old soul quality about them.

Of the three book-to-film adaptations I've done, I think this one was the most different from the book. A few plot details were changed or omitted, but I think the essence and heart of the book is that it's about falling in love for the first time, and I think the film really tells that story.

The final film I want to talk about is *Ladies in Black*, which was based on the novel *The Women in Black* by Madeleine St John. Set in Sydney in 1959, this tells the story of a group of women working at a department store over Christmas, and I play Lisa, a 16-year-old girl who has taken a temporary position in the Ladies' Cocktails department. It's all about friendship, love, finding confidence, acceptance, and of course, beautiful dresses.

I auditioned for *Ladies in Black* when I was in Canada, actually, filming *Every Day*, so that was mid-2017. We filmed it at the end of 2017, when I was just about to turn 17. I read the book after I had been cast, but before we started filming. And the film was directed by Bruce Beresford, and co-written by Bruce and Sue Milliken. Both Bruce and Sue were friends with Madeleine St John, the author, and had always wanted to make a film adaptation of her book. Unfortunately she passed away in 2006. Sue and Bruce kept the script as close to the book as possible, and I think it's a really faithful adaptation. Most of the dialogue was taken directly from the book.

In terms of adapting the book into the movie, I think Bruce and Sue did a wonderful job. I think the book really lends itself to being made into a movie; it has a great ensemble cast of characters, everyone has a different story but they're all really nicely linked. It's told in third person, so it's slightly more objective, and it's also about fashion and aesthetics, and has a really beautiful setting, so it's just a joy to see that come to life onscreen – all the 1950s dresses, and beautiful Sydney.

One of the changes that was made in adapting the novel was to do with costumes. So in the story, my character, Lisa becomes obsessed with a beautiful dress that's for sale in the department store, but it's much too expensive for her. And this dress is a representation of what she wants to be: confident, unapologetic, and fabulous. And in the book, the dress is, and I quote: "a froth of red pin-spotted white organza with a low neck, a tight bodice, a few deep ruffles over the shoulders, artful red silk piping edging these ruffles and three tiers of gathered skirts." End quote. Those of you who have seen the movie will know that the film version of the dress does not look like this.

The dress went through many design changes and I remember going into multiple fittings and having them pin different fabrics around me in different ways. The dress described in the book feels quite young and quintessentially 1950s, and the costume designer, Wendy Cork, wanted it to feel a little more mature, and more edging on 60s, because the film is set in 1959, so the fashions are changing. Now, I don't want to spoil what the dress looks like in the film, because you should all go and see and find out for yourselves, but I think what Wendy came up with is just gorgeous, and fits the tone of the film so well. I just remember trying it on, and feeling like this was exactly the type of dress that a sixteen-year-old would see in 1959 and go: "I want to be the girl who wears that dress."

I think the great thing about film is that it can instantly tell a story visually – with no words. And this comes down to design; costume design, set design, hair and makeup design. I think in *Ladies in Black* – and with my character especially – the hair, makeup and costume teams did a wonderful job in representing Lisa's visual transformation, and that mirrors her emotional transformation as well. And for me, costume and hair and makeup are such an important part of building the character that I'm playing. Something as simple as wearing a different dress or curling the hair in a new way, completely changes the way I play the character.

So, I think that's all I want to talk about in terms of my experience with the three film adaptations I've worked on. Before recording this episode I asked you guys on Instagram if you had any questions about book to film adaptations in general, so I'm going to answer them here.

I'm going to start off with two questions about the Harry Potter film adaptations.

@yannick.marot asks: "What did you think about the Harry Potter movies? Were they accurate or not?"

In general, I quite like the *Harry Potter* film adaptations. They hold a very special place in my heart, there's a lot of nostalgia associated with them. I think the films really capture the atmosphere of the books, and they represent the Wizarding World very vividly. Like many die-hard *Harry Potter* fans, I have some issues with how some of the characters were represented in the movies, but overall I think they did a pretty good job; they stuck to the central themes of love, friendship and courage, and I think is the most important thing.

@renatovlbarros asks: "In your opinion, which of the *Harry Potter* films better adapts its equivalent novel?"

I think my favourite adaptation is *Prisoner of Azkaban*, but I don't think it's necessarily the most faithful adaptation. This question depends on what you consider to be a "good" adaptation. I think the two most faithful adaptations are *Philosopher's Stone* and *Chamber of Secrets* – they follow the book almost scene by scene. But they're not my favourite, because I think they're just visual representations of the books. I like *Prisoner of Azkaban* because the director brought something new to the world and created an aesthetic that influenced the rest of the films in the series.

And this answer actually leads me into the next question, which is from ...

@rafaflores10: "Do you prefer adaptations really faithful to the source material or do you like it when they add some new stuff to spice it up?"

In the case of *Prisoner of Azkaban*, I loved the new stuff they added. I think the great thing about film is that you have the opportunity to tell the story in a completely different way. It's a

completely different format, and not everything that works in the book is going to work in the film. And like I said with the first two *Harry Potter* films, I don't want to see the book scene by scene, I want something a little different. I think as long as they keep the heart of the film the same and stay truthful to the characters, it's okay.

@antipodean.books asks: "What book do you wish could be turned into a film / TV show?"

So, I have a few answers for this one. Growing up, I loved the *Georgia Nicolson* series by Louise Rennison. They made a film version of *Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging* a little while ago, but I would love to see, like, a Netflix TV series of the *Georgia Nicolson* diaries, because that would be really fun. I'd like to see a film adaptation of *Fangirl* by Rainbow Rowell – I think that really lends itself to being a fun teen film. Also, *On the Come Up* by Angie Thomas. They'll definitely make that into a film, and I think it would really work because you'd actually get to hear the raps. And when they make it into a film, the soundtrack will be amazing. I also think books in the YA urban fantasy paranormal genre would make great films. So books like *The Raven Boys* by Maggie Stiefvater or *The Diviners* by Libba Bray. They both have very distinct aesthetics and fun characters that I think would really work in a film or a TV show. That's all I can think of right now, but there are so many.

@realllynotkevin asks: "If you could choose a book to be adapted into a film that hasn't been before, which character would you play?"

I'd probably like to play Evie O'Neill in *The Diviners*, or Jude in *I'll Give You the Sun* by Jandy Nelson.

@natasha\_bodnarchuck asks: "What are your favourite film adaptations of books?"

I'm not going to answer this here, because I have a whole episode about this coming soon, so stay tuned for that!

@branyantowe asks: "How do you feel about studios splitting one book into two movies?"

I think it's a reasonable thing to do considering how much content is in books and how limited the time is in movies. I think often, though, it can feel like neither of the movies are whole movies on their own, because they're obviously two parts of a whole. But I think it can be done, and I think I would prefer for them to split the story over two movies than cram everything into one and skip out on important stuff.

@elizabeth.liana asks: "To what extent do you think a director or screenwriter should take creative liberties?"

Ah, I think this is a really tricky question to answer, because it of course depends on what kind of film they're making. I think it's important for the director to have their own vision for the film, but I understand why fans of the book don't want the film to stray too much from the original. I think a few things are important to maintain when adapting from book to film: things like tone, central themes, character development. But there's no reason why people should police it in any way – I think the only person who has authority over it is the author of the book. And even then, I mean, the book exists on its own as written fiction, and the film exists on its own, too, as a completely different art form.

@zander\_cz asks: "Do you believe an adaptation should be more authentic to the characters or the story?"

I think both of these things are intertwined. The characters are who they are because of what they do in the story. But I think character consistency is quite important for me personally, because I

care about the characters and connect with the characters more than I do with a plot. I love character-driven novels, and character-driven films, so I don't mind if the plot differs a little, but I think it depends on the book. So something like Harry Potter or Percy Jackson; these are both very plot-driven series, and so I think it's important to maintain the narrative structure because it shapes the characters. Something like a Jane Austen novel, which is very character-driven, the characters actually shape the plot, so I think in terms of adaptations, there's slightly more wiggle room to shift scenes around or merge scenes together. But I think it just comes down to what the individual viewer prefers.

@carlosjijon asks: "Do you believe the experience changes when you've read the book before watching the movie?"

Yes, definitely. I recently saw *The Goldfinch*, and I had read the book, and when I discussed it with my friend later, I kept saying: "Well, in the book ..." Um, and I think it was very annoying for my friend, but I think having read the book beforehand helps me understand why they changed the things they did, and why a film does or doesn't work as an adaptation.

@reannalangdon asks: "Would you rather films take direct quotes from the book or change it a little bit?"

I quite like it when films include direct quotes from the book. I don't want it to all be word for word, and sometimes it can't be because scenes need to be shorter, or it doesn't sound natural enough. But I think all the dialogue that is in novels is there for a reason, you know, it tells the story and it tells you more about the characters, and essentially, you want to do the same thing with dialogue in a film.

That is all the questions we have time for today. I hope you enjoyed this episode – I certainly had fun making it. Before I sign off, I want to give a quick shout out to @emmavelez on Instagram, who sent me a lovely message on Instagram. Emma sent me a message saying that she also felt she had been in a reading slump since graduating high school, but she's finally ready to get back into reading! And it's so nice and heart-warming to hear that someone else related to that feeling of exhaustion when reading because it's so associated with school. So, Emma, I hope you find joy in reading again, and thank you so much for your really nice message!

I also want to tell you that the discussion pick for this month is *Emma* by Jane Austen. But, because this month is also movie adaption themed, we will also be discussing the movie *Clueless* in the same episode. So you can choose to just read the book, or just watch the movie, or maybe you wanna do both! I will be doing both and I'll talk about both the film and the book in comparison with one another. I think it's going to be a really interesting episode, and I can't wait for you guys to hear it!

[theme music]

Thank you very much for listening and for starting the journey into season 2! So if you enjoyed the episode, you can subscribe on iTunes so that you never miss an episode. You can also rate and review on your podcast platform of choice. You can follow The Community Library on Instagram @the\_community\_library, and you can also use the hashtag #thecommunitylibrary on Instagram and Twitter. This really helps me find tweets related to the podcast, and also Instagram posts that are related to the podcast. If you're enjoying it, or if you wanna show me what you're currently reading, then just, ah, yeah, use that hashtag. I also have a blog, which is [angourieslibrary.wordpress.com](http://angourieslibrary.wordpress.com), and there you will find full transcriptions of the episodes, extra



*The Community Library – Angourie Rice*

resources and notes on the episodes. The podcast artwork is designed by Ashley Ronning. You can look at more of her work at [ashleyronning.com](http://ashleyronning.com), or you can go to [helio-press.com](http://helio-press.com), that's dash the symbol. Once again, thank you for listening, and I'll talk to you next week. Bye!

[theme music]