

Cinema and Literature in Medical Education

José Elías García Sánchez, Enrique García Sánchez

Departamento de Medicina Preventiva, Salud Pública y Microbiología Médica. Facultad de Medicina. Universidad de Salamanca (Spain). IUCE (Instituto Universitario de Ciencias de la Educación). Universidad de Salamanca (Spain).

Correspondence: José Elías García Sánchez. Facultad de Medicina. Avda. Alfonso X El Sabio s/n. 37007 Salamanca (Spain).

e-mail: joegas@usal.es

Received 11 November 2012; accepted 20 November 2012.

"A picture is worth a thousand words" is a popular saying that, as regards medicine, is very close to reality. Inspection is a crucial part of physical examination and is often useful on the pathway to diagnosis, or even for its definitive establishment. Image based techniques, from X-rays to positron emission tomography and diagnostic ultrasonography, provide essential data for diagnosis, therapeutic decision taking and treatment. This can also be applied to endoscopy. Image is also essential in other complementary diagnostic procedures such as those involving microbiology, pathological anatomy or haematology. Needless to say that visual guidance is essential to carry out any type of surgery.

Much more could be added to all of the above, since other diagnostic tests are carried out through automated image reading. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that the entire diagnostic process starts, or should start, with the words recorded in the patient's medical record following a thorough and complete doctor-patient interview.

Cinema was born in the late 19th century as a type of visual art. In *La sortie des ouvriers des usines Lumière à Lyon Monplaisir* (1885), by the Lumiere brothers, and in the films made immediately after, picture sequences were everything and there was no possibility of establishing equivalence with words. What was to be shown was done so exclusively through moving pictures. How many words were they equivalent to? Millions? It soon became apparent that in many instances picture sequences were not enough for the viewer to be able to follow the plot, so that frames with text, intertitles, were intercut with the scenes, facilitating understanding and opening doors to more complex plots. Words were introduced when technological development

made the introduction of synchronized sound possible. Undoubtedly, silent films are still a valid form of narrative art, a good example of this is *The Artist* (2011) by Michel Hazanavicius or *Blancanieves (Snow White)* (2012) by Pablo Berger. In any case, silent or sound film, how many words are they equivalent to? The answer is often as many as those in a book, since screenplays are frequently adaptations of drama plays, short stories or novels. The content of any of these films is normally condensed within a timeframe of an hour and a half or two hours, with different degrees of faithfulness to the work they are based on. In fact, certain nuances of the literary work might become either lost or dealt with more superficially in the film adaptation. On the other hand, given the characteristics of cinema, many aspects are more efficiently narrated thanks to temporal concision and the support provided by image and setting. On the other hand, films do not tend to be completely faithful to the works on which they are based, since elements are removed or added as needs require. Taking these considerations into account, conversations such as the following...

- "Have you read *The Constant Gardener*?"

- "Yes, I've watched the film"

...which are indeed possible, make no sense. Film and literature should not be mutually excluding, but mutually complementary. Cinema shows and literature describes.

The article *Novel to Film Adaptation Analysis: A New Educational Approach to Dermatology Education*, published in this issue of the *Journal of Medicine and Movies*, approaches cinema and literature as comple-

mentary to medical training. It is focused on dermatology training, a medical speciality where observation is essential and where the saying "*a picture is worth a thousand words*" can indeed be stated as true.

References

1. Wagner, Jr. Novel to Film Adaptation Analysis: A New Educational Approach to Dermatology Education. Rev Med Cine [Internet]. 2012; 8(4): 131-132. Available from: <http://revistamedicinacine.usal.es/index.php/es/vol8/num4>