

CRITIC: PLOT IN THE FILM *IT ENDS WITH US*

Librilianti Kurnia Yuki, Siti Gina Mutmainnah

Fakultas Sastra, unpi@ac.id

(Universitas Putra Indonesia, hajahyuki@gmail.com, mybeautifuljourney21@gmail.com)

ABSTRACT

This study examines the Justin Baldoni-directed movie *It Ends with Us*, which is based on Colleen Hoover's best-selling book. The study is to investigate how the novel's plot structure, as adapted for the film, affects viewers' comprehension and emotional reaction. In order to assess the main distinctions between the two versions, the study separates the narrative into exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and tragedy using Gustav Freytag's Pyramid Plot theory (1896). Repeated readings and viewings of the book and movie are part of this descriptive qualitative study, which is further supported by data from audience channels like YouTube and IMDb. The results show that although the film does a good job of introducing the lead character, Lily Bloom, and capturing the intensity of her emotions through visuals, it drastically cuts out important plot points like Lily's relationship with her father, her introspective journal entries to Ellen, and the impact of her mother. The audience's understanding of the novel's key themes—generational trauma, spousal abuse, and emotional healing—is diminished by these omissions. By emphasizing the value of emotional context and narrative depth in preserving thematic integrity across media, the study adds to the conversation about film adaptation.

Key Words: Adaptations, Critic, Characters, Film, Plot.

Introduction

It Ends with Us is a movie directed by Justin Baldoni and stars Blake Lively as Lily Bloom. Released on August 9, 2024. The movie is an adaptation of the bestselling book (*The New York Times Best Sellers*, 2022) of the same name by Colleen Hoover. The novel raises the theme of domestic violence. As an adaptation, the film certainly faces challenges in translating the complex storyline into a more limited duration. The research focuses on how the plot of the movie is constructed, how the conflict develops, and whether the plot is able to convey the meaning as expected from the original novel. The purpose of this research is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the plot in the movie, as well as how the structure of the storyline affects the audience's understanding and emotional response to the themes.

The novel follows the life journey of Lily Bloom, a young woman full of passion and ambition. After growing up in an abusive home, Lily has decided to make her life better in Boston. There, she met Ryle Kincaid, a handsome, ambitious and charismatic neurosurgeon. Their relationship bloomed into a deep love, despite Ryle's principle of not getting into serious relationships. However, over time, the dark side of Ryle's personality began to emerge, forcing Lily to face a reality that reminded her of her past trauma. During the conflict, Lily met with

Atlas Corrigan, her first love, who is full of memories. Atlas's presence provides solace and rekindles long-pent-up emotions.

This study will use “Pyramid Plot” theory by (Freytag, 1896) to analyze the plot structure of the film version. Freytag divides the plot into five main parts: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and catastrophe or resolution. These five phases show how conflict and tension develop in the story, starting from the introduction of the background to the end of the story. The analysis will show how the plot of the movie is built using this framework. It will also show whether there are significant differences compared to the structure in the novel version.

In the context of film studies, there have been several previous studies that discuss the adaptation of novels to films, such as (Ainila Elva et al., 2023). They explained about the ecranisation of the little women novel into a film adaptation using descriptive qualitative methods and using Eneste's theory in studying ecranisation. They found discovered plots with several reductions, additions, and modifications. Modifications and reductions occur during the exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and conclusion. The similarity between this study and the researcher's study is that both discuss the adaptation, but the differences are the theories and focus of the study used in these two.

The next previous research entitled *An Ecranisation Study of Novel The Kite Runner and its Film Adaptation* written by (Rahajeng & Khissoga, 2023). She found that only discovers two processes—the reduction and the changes of variety—out of the three potential ecranisation processes, which include the reduction, addition (extension), and changes processes. The plots and events have been cut, and this is reflected in the lessened emphasis on Amir's fight to get Sohrab to the US. The decrease also occurs in the way the characters are portrayed and characterized in the movie. Among the modifications are the alteration of Hassan's rape scene in the movie and the shift in the story's narrative point of view. The similarity between this article and the researcher's study is that both discuss ecranisation from novels into films. However, the focus of the study and the theory are the difference between the two.

Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method following the theory stated (David Creswell, 2023)

“A descriptive method in qualitative research is an approach to analysis where the researcher stays close to the data, uses limited frameworks and interpretation for explaining the data, and catalogues the information into themes.”

To accomplish this, the researcher reads the novel *It Ends With Us* regularly and the film version several times to find and comprehend the plot differences between the two. Besides that, the author also collected data from IMDb and YouTube to analyse audience responses in more

depth regarding the changes that occurred in the novel and film. The data gathered during this procedure will be examined and reported in detail in the form of a narrative. In addition to improving the theoretical framework and supporting the study, the researcher conducted a literature review by reading scientific publications and books on the research topic. This methodology is meant to provide an in-depth examination of the differences between the novel and its film version.

Results

Eksposition

The beginning of a story, known as the exposition, serves to introduce the setting, characters, and main situation. The exposition aims to provide a clear context to the audience before the story enters the main conflict. (Freytag, 1896) states that the introduction in a drama must explain the place and time of the action, the nationality, and the life relationships of the main character. The exposition needs to describe the story's environment briefly yet profoundly. Additionally, according to the research by (Debora & Zulkarnain, 2021), exposition plays an important role in introducing the core of the story to the audience. In this way, the audience gains a general understanding of the main topic that will be discussed.

In *It Ends with Us* movie, the introduction of the main character, Lily Bloom, is presented quite clearly and emotionally, allowing the audience to immediately understand the background and complexity of the main character. From the very beginning, the movie presents Lily as a strong yet emotionally fragile figure, who holds the scars of her past but remains optimistic towards the future. Early scenes showing Lily brooding on the rooftop, writing a journal, and talking about her father show the traumatic experiences that shaped her personality. This portrayal is touching and vivid, making the audience engage with Lily's feelings from the very beginning.

Aesthetic cinematography is a component that supports the clarity of Lily's character. Lily is able to convey her emotions without speaking much by using soft lighting, warm colors, and close shots. The camera peers directly into Lily's personal life, making the audience not only watch the story, but also feel it.

In addition, the movie closely resembles the description in the novel of Lily's flower shop. Everything inside the shop, from the color of the wall paint to the arrangement of flowers, to the elegant and comfortable design ideas, reflects Lily's creative and sensitive personality. The success of this visual adaptation not only meets the expectations of the novel's devoted readers, but also enhances the atmosphere in the film and confirms Lily's characterization as a bold woman pursuing her dreams.

The scene where Lily and Ryle meet at the bar is one of the plot developments that enhances the dynamics of their relationship. The novel starts their closeness with conversations and brief encounters, while the movie adds humorous scenes like this to accelerate their relationship to naturally develop. Besides being an emotional transition to a deeper closeness in their relationship, this hangout moment shows the simple and spontaneous side of their relationship. The storyline becomes more fleshed out because of these additions, allowing the audience to understand how Lily and Ryle's relationship develops from an initial attraction to a more complex emotional bond.

Overall, the strong script, expressive cinematography, accurate visualization of the setting, and the addition of scenes that support the plot make Lily's introduction in the film successful. With the combination of all these aspects, we can see the real Lily, who is soulful, realistic, and easy to love..

Despite the fact that the movie *It Ends with Us* succeeds in portraying the main character well, some important aspects of Lily's background, especially her relationship with her father, feel less understood. The relationship depicted in the novel shapes the way Lily sees love, violence, and personal relationships. However, the movie doesn't really delve into the deep emotions and trauma in the relationship, only touching on it through brief monologues and flashbacks. As a result, viewers who have not read the novel may not fully understand how Lily's childhood experiences impact her decisions and fears.

The interpretation of Lily's character, which is supposed to be complex and layered, is also affected by this small exploration. Readers are given the opportunity to learn about Lily's inner wounds through various memories of her childhood, which include her father's abuse of her mother. These stories are not just background; they are also an important component that explains why Lily is both cautious and vulnerable in her relationship with Ryle. However, the movie does not seem to show this inner conflict thoroughly, so the decisions Lily makes in the story feel less based on her past experiences.

In addition, it is unfortunate that scenes featuring content from *Ellen's Diary* were cut. These diary passages are crucial in the novel as they serve as a bridge between Lily's past and present. Lily writes to Ellen DeGeneres about her experiences with Atlas, her first love, and how she escaped the brutal home circumstances. This diary provides deep emotional context and shows how Atlas became a symbol of safety and genuine affection for Lily. In the movie version, these elements are only briefly touched upon, making Lily and Atlas' relationship less emotionally powerful, especially for viewers who have only read the novel.

The movie loses the most important emotional part of the novel by not doing a deep exploration of Lily's relationship with her father and omitting most of the diary narrative. Lily's

inner journey as a survivor of violence becomes less pronounced in the absence of these two components. However, the novel's strength lies in Lily's efforts to stop the cycle of violence that originated from previous generations—a message that feels less resonant in the movie adaptation.

The audience responds emotionally to the movie due to the reduction of important elements of Lily's background, such as the traumatic relationship with her father and the lack of investigation into Ellen Diary. Moviegoers may not truly feel the emotional burden Lily bears if they do not have a strong understanding of her past wounds. This reduces the intensity of sympathy that should have increased as Lily and Ryle's conflict developed. Lily's decision to leave Ryle feels abrupt or illogical to some viewers because they are not provided with enough deep emotional context to fully understand her motivations.

Because Lily's trauma is not well explored, the main themes of the story—intergenerational trauma and the effects of domestic violence—are less prominent in the movie version. The novel's themes are built up gradually but consistently through stories about Lily's childhood, her thoughts on her parents' relationship, and how it affects her choices now. However, since some of those elements are not present in the movie, the delivery of the theme becomes more unclear. The audience may be more interested in the romance of Lily and Ryle or Lily and Atlas, but they cannot understand the deep moral message of how violence can be carried unconsciously from one generation to the next.

Rising Action

A series of events that create tension and lead to the escalation of conflict (Freytag, 1896) shows the importance of rising action, demonstrating how conflict and character develop. In *Technique of the Drama*, Gustav Freytag explains in detail how a story develops through the rising action stage. After the story begins, the action starts to unfold, and the main characters are introduced in a way that reveals who they truly are, what their goals are, and what underlying conflicts exist. At this stage, the mood, passions, and conflicts become increasingly clear, encouraging the audience to become interested and emotionally invested in the story.

In Rising Action, the strength of the movie lies in its ability to create emotional tension through the dynamics that occur in Lily and Ryle's relationship. The audience is invited to witness Lily's inner struggle that makes her emotionally attached to Ryle, even though Ryle's behavior shows signs of danger. When Atlas appears as Lily's past love, he adds to the emotional complexity as he not only becomes a representation of the unfinished past, but also offers another option for Lily. In addition, Atlas' presence strengthens Lily's inner conflict, who must choose between false comfort or the courage to face the past for a better future.

Impact on Audience Understanding and Emotional Response: The audience begins to realize Lily's internal conflict and becomes involved in her emotional dilemma in this section. The movie effectively enhances the audience's understanding of the dynamics of violence in relationships, especially how violence can unfold through covert emotional manipulation rather than being directly visible. Viewers are taught that seemingly beautiful love does not always mean healthy and safe.

But the movie has some weaknesses in the Rising Action section. Due to the many important cut scenes, Ryle's efforts to win Lily's heart are not told thoroughly. For example, the scene where Ryle has to knock on 29 doors to find Lily's apartment is only briefly mentioned or not told thoroughly, making the audience miss the emotional moments that should have shown Ryle's struggle. In addition, Lily and Atlas' relationship is not developed enough-their interactions seem rushed and have no room for natural growth, even though this relationship is crucial to emphasize the theme of true love versus dangerous relationships. This lack of deepening makes it difficult for the audience to understand the strong emotional bond between Lily and Atlas, and also makes the final choice Lily has to make less important to them.

Climax

Freytag explains the climax as the core of a drama's structure, the peak point where everything built up in the rising action reaches a strong and decisive outcome. The climax is the most intense moment, where the tension built up earlier finds its emotional and dramatic release. This usually occurs in a major scene, surrounded by smaller connecting scenes of the rising action before and the falling action that follows. At this stage, the writer uses all their beauty and dramatic skill to make this climax the standout centerpiece of their work.

In climax, the strength of Film and Its Impact on audience Understanding and Emotional Response: The depiction of violent scenes in *It Ends With Us* is compelling, making it feel natural and emotional. The convincing acting of the lead actors, especially in their expressions of fear and trauma, makes the audience feel powerful and empathize with Lily's plight. In addition, the soft yet profound background music makes the audience more emotionally involved.

Movie Weaknesses and Their Impact on Audience Comprehension and Emotional Response: Despite having strong visuals, the story is lacking, especially in character building. The audience does not understand the psychological aspects of Ryle as his background as an abuser is not explained. As a result, Ryle seems like a one-dimensional antagonist, which allows the strife in their relationship to be simpler. In addition, Lily's internal conflicts are not depicted visually or emotionally well enough. Deleted reflective scenes, such as the letters Lily wrote to Ellen in the novel, led to a lack of exploration of her thought processes and inner struggles.

Overall Impact on Audience Understanding and Emotional Response: The weakness affects the audience's understanding of the characters' emotional journeys. Although the audience can see firsthand the violence Lily is subjected to, Lily's decision-making process becomes unconvincing if there is no inner context and background of the other characters. The audience may perceive Lily as forgiving too easily. However, this forgiveness process is very complex and emotional in the novel. Therefore, although the movie has the ability to make people feel empathy, it fails to thoroughly convey the psychological aspects of the characters, which ultimately affects how the audience understands the topics of trauma, love, and the courage to stop the cycle of violence.

Falling Action

According to (Freytag, 1896) describes the Force of the Final Suspense, or what can be called the falling action, is a key element in drama that provides a moment of hope before the story reaches its tragic end. This is a small tension, where the audience might think that the hero can still avoid their bad fate. This hope must arise organically from the actions and motivations of the character, without feeling forced or altering the carefully constructed direction of the story.

When Lily considers her future and the safety of her child, it is one of the main strengths of the falling action section of *It Ends with Us*. This process of reflection is portrayed with emotion and sincerity, showcasing the inner struggle of a woman who must choose between love, past trauma, and the protection of her child. Lily is depicted as making the decision to stay away from Ryle because of the lessons she learned from her past, especially from her mother-father relationship.

This process of reflection is powerful because it shows the evolution of a strong character and is relevant to the real situation of many women trapped in the cycle of domestic violence. Lily's decision gives the audience a message of resilience and strength. This greatly influences the audience's understanding and emotional response, especially those who have experienced or are close to the issue of domestic violence. Viewers often feel empathy, emotional strength and appreciation for Lily's courage. They also learn about the reasons for Lily's decisions and the limits of love and protection towards oneself and the next generation.

However, the movie also has its weaknesses. One of them is that the role of Lily's mother is not discussed enough in the story. However, in the novel version, the mother figure greatly influences the way Lily sees relationships and helps her avoid the same cycle of violence. In the movie, Lily's mother is not present in some important scenes, making the reasons for Lily's decisions less clear and missing the emotional aspects that would have made her decisions more important.

In addition, it seemed that Lily's healing process was too quick and lacked depth. The supposedly complex emotional transformation seemed too simple, making some viewers feel that the movie did not show a realistic recovery process, which could reduce the emotional impact and the audience's bond to Lily's character.

Chatastrophe

According to (Freytag, 1896), catastrophe in drama, which refers to the closing action that resolves the story, is known in ancient Greek tradition as exodus. In a catastrophe, the suffering of the main character is resolved with a grand act that demonstrates the hero's destruction or death. If the hero's struggle is very profound and their goal is very noble, then their downfall will become more logical and touching to the audience. The writer must ensure that this downfall is not only based on empathy or tenderness but must appear as a logical consequence of the struggles the character has gone through.

Strength In the chatastrophe section of *It Ends with Us*, the main character, Lily Bloom, stands firm and chooses not to give Ryle full access to their daughter, Emerson. This decision shows a significant character transformation-from being a woman who was trapped in an abusive relationship to a mother who dares to protect her child from possible danger.

Lily's decision conveys a powerful message to the audience that letting go of a loved one for safety and mental health is the highest form of love. Viewers experience a deep emotional reaction because of this moment, especially for those who have gone through similar experiences or understand the dynamics of dangerous relationships. Not only did they cry, but they also marveled at Lily's inner strength.

However, the catastrophe part of the movie also has a weakness, which is how the emotional process that drives Lily to make a decision feels simplistic. The transition from internal conflict to the final decision feels rather quick and is not thoroughly discussed in the movie. The audience is not given the opportunity to understand all aspects of Lily's trauma, moral considerations, and internal conflicts that may have occurred before she decided to let Ryle go.

This simplification may make some viewers feel that Lily's decision is rushed or not emotional enough. This limitation on emotional exploration may make the audience feel less empathetic, especially for those who are looking for a more complex and real narrative about trauma and recovery.

Conclusion

The film *It Ends with Us* effectively introduces Lily Bloom and creates emotional tension through characterization, strong cinematography and some plotting on the novel adaptation. However, the

audience's understanding of Lily's inner conflict is weakened by the omission of important background information, such as her relationship with her father, Ellen's diary, her mother's role and the underdeveloped emotional depth of supporting characters. The main themes of the story—trauma, domestic violence, and healing—are obscured by these restrictions, which reduce the emotional resonance and impact of some of Lily's choices.

Bibliography

Ainila Elva, K., Dwi Saptanto, D., & Ngudi Waluyo, U. (2023). Ecranization of Narrative Elements: Plot and Characterization Novel to Film *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott. *The Virtual International Conference on Economics, Law and Humanities*, 2, 46.

David Creswell, J. (2023). *Research Design* (Sixth). SAGE Publications.

Debra, A., & Zulkarnain, A. (2021). *Proceeding The use of Freytag's Pyramid Structure to Adapt "Positive Body Image" Book into a Motion Graphic Structure*. <https://writers.com/freytags-pyramid>

Freytag, G. (1896). *Technique of the Drama* (Second). Scholarly Press.

Rahajeng, & Khissoga, H. (2023). An Ecranisation Study of Novel *The Kite Runner* and its Film Adaptation. *Journal of English Language, Literature, and Teachin*, 54–60. <https://doi.org/10.32528/ellite.v8i1.8461>

The New York Times Best Sellers. (2022, January). <https://www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers/>.