

CONTEMP-ADAPT: Adaptation of Modern English Plays for Contemporary Media

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Received: 03 Jun 2026; Received in revised form: 30 Jun 2026; Accepted: 04 Jul 2026; Available online: 09 Jul 2026

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Abstract— *The present study investigates the ways in which social dramas in modern Britain have framed social identity in drama and how such framings are transformed in the medium of film. It examines George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion and John Osborne's Look Back in Anger and their film adaptations: Pygmalion (1938) directed by Anthony Asquith and Leslie Howard, and Look Back in Anger (1959) directed by Tony Richardson. The study adopts the Conceptual Framework of Intermedial Adaptation Transformation. It examines five layers of connection, i.e., original dramatic text, social identity construction, narrative and intermedial transformation, audience reception, and contemporary cultural relevance. The study presents a qualitative textual, visual and scene-based analysis. It determines that the process of building Pygmalion's identity is one of accent, class mobility, linguistic education, gender self-fashioning and/or public recognition, which are manifested in a visible and audible form in the film adaptation. Look Back in Anger builds identity on the basis of masculine anger, domestic entrapment, class resentment, and post-war alienation; on the other hand, Richardson's adaptation adds wider social realism to enclose the stage realism. The study states that adaptation is not a mere reproduction of drama texts but a reorganization of social meanings in the space of cinema, camera motion, close view, cutting, sound, costume and performance. The present study contributes to the field of adaptation studies through the demonstration of modification as a "cultural rejuvenation" that makes dramatic identities visible, affective, and socially resonate across media.*



Keywords— *intermedial adaptation, Look Back in Anger, modern British drama, Pygmalion, stage-to-screen transformation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The ability to adapt a play from the stage to the screen is gaining momentum as a critical concern in literary and theatre and film studies today. The process of stage-to-screen adaptation has become a special issue in modern literary, theatre and film studies due to the assumption that the meaning of a play is stable and consistent whether it is performed in the theatre or made into a film. Fidelity has been stressed in earlier adaptations criticism; if an

adaptation is close to the source text, it is favored. Later scholarship, however, sees the mechanism of adaptation as a creative, dialogic, intermedial activity and process of re-authoring text across media, cultural contexts and audience formations (Leitch, 2025; Wyver, 2021). This transition of the play to a performative system, which is influenced by voice, gesture, embodiment, space, rhythm and the presence of people/watchers, is particularly significant for drama (Ingham, 2016; Miroshnychenko, 2024). In film

adaptations, where the source material is a dramatic text, meaning is remediated using different aspects of filmmaking, such as camera movement, editing, sound, lighting, costume, close-up, performance style, and the new viewing position (Fedorenko & Sulima, 2023; Mensah, 2025).

This study focuses on two modern British social plays: George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* and John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, the film adaptations of which serve as a useful starting point for the study of social identity across the media. The pairing was intentionally targeted. The plays vary in style, in time, and in the nature of their drama. However, all share the question and concern with how identity is socially visible (or not) in class, language, gender, performance, and in recognition. In the play *Pygmalion*, the theme of identity can be learned, emulated and publicly acknowledged by accent, manner, clothing, or social interaction. Shaw foregrounds phonetics as a social force in his preface and begs to differ with any of us who would have thought that Eliza Doolittle's transformation was impossible or uncommon, and makes language central to the mobility from one class to another and the classification of the speaker from one class to another (Shaw, 1912/2025). Conversely, *Look Back in Anger* is built around the concepts of post-war alienation, male anger, class resentment, domestication and emotional aggression. Sierz (2008) stresses the importance of Osborne's play for post-war British theatre, and links it to the Kitchen-Sink Drama movement, the Angry Young Man, the Royal Court and the evolution of new writing in Britain.

The two plays thus provide a different, but complementary, image of Britishness. In *Pygmalion*, Eliza's change takes place not due to a natural difference in character, but because a difference in character has been rehearsed socially and publicly recognized. As a flower girl, she was transformed into a socially acceptable speaker, inviting readers to question the artificiality of class boundaries and suggesting questions about gendered agency, discipline and dependence. Jimmy Porter's identity is forged out of frustration - not mobility - in *Look Back in Anger*. He is read but unread, he speaks, he does not listen, he works, he does not act, he is aware of political issues, he fails to take any action. The Porters' one-room flat in Osborne's writing is a pressure space in which class resentment, gender tension and emotional violence all come to a head.

The medium of film adaptation can provide a lens for an examination of these violent constructions of identity. Lesley Hiller (Eliza Doolittle) and Leslie Howard (Higgins) are both cast as David Lean edited 1938's *Pygmalion*, directed by Anthony Asquith and Leslie

Howard, who also helped write the screenplay, according to Criterion. However, the opening tracking shot, the swift comic timing and the precise cuts and close-ups of upper-class reactions prevent the film from falling into the trap of being a filmed play. Richardson's *Look Back in Anger* (1959) does another one. The program notes for the BFI indicate that all of its more than significant cuts of the first scene of the play, the inclusion of Ma Tanner, the movement of the camera and the close-ups, all make for a 'social realism' of the screen rather than the domestic realism of Osborne.

The key issue that this study seeks to address is the lack of analysis of adaptation in terms of fidelity, or extensive generalization of modernization. However, these strategies are not enough in the modern social drama of Britain, where meaning is created by the interaction of speech, social class codes, gendered behavior, the "home" environment, emotional performance, film technique, and the audience. Reception-oriented scholarship also indicates that meaning is not only created with the structure of the texts, but also by the interpretation of the audience, the positioning of the affect and the culture of the audience (Hill, 2018; Schröder, 2018). So, for this study, the theoretical approach of the Conceptual Framework of Intermedial Adaptation Transformation is adopted to study five layers, namely Original Dramatic Text, Social Identity Construction, Narrative and Intermedial Transformation, Audience Reception and Contemporary Cultural Relevance.

The study, therefore, focuses on the social identity constructions in the original works (*Pygmalion* and *Look Back in Anger*) and shifts the focus to the film adaptations created by the authors, concentrating on the strategies that are used in these film versions. It is important for readers that it constitutes a way of cultural renewal, not so much a mere transference or illustration through text and image, but a re-dissemination of dramatic identities that is affective and transcultural.

1.1 Research Objectives

- To examine how *Pygmalion* and *Look Back in Anger* construct social identity through class, language, gender, character interaction, dramatic conflict, and social setting.
- To analyze how selected adaptations transform narrative structure, character dynamics, visual form, dialogue, setting, and thematic meaning in the two plays.
- To investigate how adaptations reshape audience reception, interpretive engagement, and contemporary

cultural relevance in relation to modern British social drama

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Adaptation studies have forsaken the notion that adaptations should be judged primarily in terms of fidelity to the source text. With this shift in scholarship, adaptation is now considered to be a creative, interpretative and intermedial process whereby texts are reworked between media, time periods and audience formats (Mensah, 2025; Wyver, 2021). This change is significant in the context of drama as it is a written literary text, but also a performative success, as it is defined by voice, gesture, embodiment, space, rhythm and spectatorship. The meaning of a play is reorganized in silhouette, sound, cutting, costume, lighting, visual framing and style when a play is transferred from the theatre to the screen. Therefore, adaptation can no longer be considered as a process of reproduction, but a process of reinterpretation (Fedorenko & Sulima, 2023; Ingham, 2016; Miroshnychenko, 2024).

In this transformation, the question of intermediality is of particular interest, since it helps to understand the changing meaning of theatre when the conventions of theatre come into contact with those of cinema, digital and multimedia culture. Theatricality relies on live actors, focused space, direct dialogue, continuous performance, and the allocation of characters through editing and close-up in film. Film can extend space, break down time, emphasize facial expression, and direct the attention of the audience through editing and close-ups. At the same time, theatricality relies on the actors' live performance, concentrated space, direct dialogue, and continuous performance, and allocates the characters through editing and close-up. Dramatic meanings of the present day are created by a combination of text and image, sound, platform and participation of spectators, i.e. how studies on digital theatre, cyber-theatre, zoom theatre and intermedial performance indicate (Boiko et al., 2023; Cojanu, 2025; Grynshyna et al., 2022). Such viewpoints enabled the present research to focus on the process of adaptation as a multi-layered process, including adaptation of the narrative, adaptation of the media technique, adaptation of the audience reception, and adaptation of the contemporary culture relevance.

In this wider context, *Pygmalion* and *Look Back in Anger* provide a coherent, comparative basis as both are types of social drama in modern British literature, both focus on social identity as a class, a language, and a gender. Both are concentrated on the performance of social identity. They exhibit the role of identity, however, in different ways. *Pygmalion* is about identity being what can

be molded from the outside; it can be transformed by speech, etiquette, dress and socialization, while *Look Back in Anger* is about identity being an unfulfilled state brought by post-war disillusionment, class resentment, domesticity and emotional aggression. It, therefore, helps to compare them since both plays look at the social construction of identity, and their adaptations illustrate the reinterpretation of identity in screen and media forms.

There are several interpretations that have considered Shaw's *Pygmalion* as a study of language, class mobility, and social performance. The version that was uploaded has the date 1912, first published and 2025, reprinted by Global Grey, and with the preface and Acts I–V as the text. In the preface, Shaw highlights phonetics as a social issue and makes pronunciation a social judgment. Speech in *Pygmalion* is then not only a linguistic characteristic; it is a class sign which is recognized, controlled, and contested as identity. Eliza Doolittle's progression demonstrates the artificial nature of class divisions, and how her journey from flower girl to respectable speaker is reliant upon accent, manners, dress, body control and performance in front of others. That such a change is not only possible but not uncommon bolsters Shaw's act of dialogue within the play to shore up its social point that class identity can be learned and performed, not necessarily naturally fixed.

Pygmalion is particularly useful in adaptation studies as the screen media allows the viewer/audience to see and hear Eliza transform by changing her costume, posture, facial expression, spatial position and voice/vocal style. The linguistic drama can be translated into a visual and acoustic analysis of class identity by means of a film adaptation. Autonomy and gender also play a major role in the play. Eventually, the show focuses on Eliza's self-realization and self-responsibility, while Higgins seems to be mastering Eliza's change. In Shaw's sequel, the romantic notion that Eliza is bound to marry Higgins is rejected, and instead, she is shown more and more on the road toward becoming autonomous. The agency of Eliza may then be reinforced or undermined depending on the adaptation, how this adaptation portrays Eliza's final stance and how she is presented to Higgins and how she acts independently.

Look Back in Anger is a new kind of modern British social drama. Osborne's play contrasts with *Pygmalion*, which is about class mobility in terms of language, in dramatizing the emotional failure of post-war social mobility. Sierz (2008) regards *Look Back in Anger* as the most important post-war British play and places it in the context of the rise of the Angry Young Man label and Kitchen-Sink Drama. The house theories and domestic imagery of the play, such as the satchels for ironing and

the small flat, came to symbolize the burden of domestic work, emotional stress and social frustration on the part of women. Thus, the casebook on Taylor also exemplifies the relevance of the play to the reception history as it gathers together early reviews, Osborne's writing, critical studies, foreign reviews and later views. These materials reveal that the meaning of the play was not created solely as a result of the play's dramatic form, but also in response to disagreement among critics, recognition by the audience and debate within a cultural context.

Look Back in Anger is a play that is dominated thematically by class resentment, masculine frustration, intimidation at home and emotional violence. Jimmy Porter's rage is intrapersonal, interpersonal, verbal, theatrical and performative. The questions about Jimmy's contradictory nature, psychological depth, and protests and cruelties have been raised many times, as Sierz (2008) points out. This description of Jimmy's rhetorical power and his role as a voice of discontent also has significance in the discussion in preparation for the upcoming research on why it is that, in some instances, this voice has been effective. Jimmy's rhetorical power and the fact that he is a speaker for discontent are also important in the discussion, even though he is a morally ambiguous character, in view of the preparation of the coming research on the question of why, in some instances, this voice has proved effective. This is significant when analyzing Jimmy's anger, whether it is on stage or screen, as it is different. When experienced on stage, it is verbal pressure; when experienced on screen, it can be intensified through close-up, editing, sound, space, an interior, and the social nature of the world (society) on screen.

In general, the literature indicates that the novels *Pygmalion* and *Look Back in Anger* would be good candidates for an intermedial adaptation examination as they are all performance-based, social identity-based, and audience recognition-based. In *Pygmalion*, the foreground concerns class mobility, speech, gender and self-fashioning, while in *Look Back in Anger*, the foreground concerns anger, class frustration, domestic realism, and post-war disillusionment. Exploring their adaptations allows them to look into the way modern British drama has shifted from being performed on the stage to being transmitted through screen-based media, in which the voice, space, body, image and response of the audience are reconfigured. The concept, which views adaptation as a process that must be studied as a layered phenomenon of original dramatic text, the transformation of a narrative, the transformation of an intermedia, the reception of the text and the relevance to contemporary culture, is therefore supported by this literature review.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study uses a qualitative comparative research design to analyze the creation and evolution of social identity in modern British social drama by using intermedial adaptation. It is appropriate to use the qualitative design because the study is not related to the process of measurement, but related to aspects of the meaning of the text, the role of actors in the performance, the form of the text, the response of the audience and cultural interpretation. The research is not statistically related to or quantitative in audience response. Rather, it is about the transformation of dramatic meanings in the changes of the presentation: from the stage to the screen and the screen to the media.

The methodology that the study adopts is a two-case comparative. The choices of George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* and John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* are made because they are both modern British social dramas, and they both focus on social identity in terms of class, language, gender, power, performance and social conflict. This does not mean to compare the same plot, nor the same historical period. Instead, it is on their common interest in the social construction of identity and the alterations to the audience's experience of identity that result from adaptation.

3.2 Conceptual Framework

The study is based on the Conceptual Framework of Intermedial Adaptation Transformation in Modern British Social Drama. Adaptation is outlined as a multi-layered process in which dramatic texts gradually evolve from the context of the stage to screen and media contexts in the framework. It is composed of five interrelated elements: original dramatic text, construction of social identity, transformation of the narrative and intermediality, audience reception and contemporary cultural relevance.

Original dramatic text is the first aspect, the source play (themes, characters, dialogue, dramatic conflict, stage conditions, social context). The second part, social identity construction, explores how social identity is shaped in the plays via accent, class mobility, anger, class frustration, gendered selfhood and social performance. The third component, narrative and intermedial transformation, examines the changes that are affected in the source texts by the movement of the camera from stage to screen, a framing of the image, the use of sound, costume, gesture, close-up and editing, space, and performance style to give selected adaptations. The fourth component, audience reception, accounts for the process of adaptation affecting the reception of the audience, by making them sympathetic, uncomfortable, classically aware, gender

wise, feel emotionally or critically involved. Modern relevance to culture is the last element, which explores the re-elaboration of new meanings in the adapted works regarding class mobility, social alienation, gender agency, and modern British identity.

The framework is suitable for the current study as both the selected plays are strongly reliant on the language, performance, social space and audiences' recognition. In *Pygmalion*, it permits analyzing the dynamics of the transformation of accent and class mobility into visual and acoustic screen performance. In *Look Back in Anger*, it helps to analyze how anger, domestic realism, frustration and disillusionment because of the war are transformed in film or media representation.



Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework of Intermedial Adaptation Transformation in Modern British Social Drama

3.3 Case Selection

The study uses purposive case selection. *Pygmalion* and *Look Back in Anger* were chosen as two significant events in modern British social drama, and they have good comparative material in relation to class, language, adaptation, identity, and gender analysis.

Pygmalion was chosen because it brings to the fore the phonetics, the accent, the mobility of (social) class, the gendered nature of the performance and the social change. It focuses on speech/social identity as its central dramatic conflict. The case of Eliza Doolittle is an obvious example of adapting the concept of class identity by learning it, performing it, and visualizing it.

Look Back in Anger was chosen for its association with post-war British social drama and class resentment, with elements of emotional aggression, domestic realism, masculine frustration, and the figure of

the Angry Young Man. The limited domestic space and the silence and rhetoric of Jimmy Porter make for good material in the analysis of the transformation of anger and social frustration in screen realism.

The two plays will enable a comparison between two approaches to social identity formation: one through the transformation of language and the other through feelings of class frustration, emotional alienation, and conflict.

3.4 Data Sources and Materials

The study is based on three kinds of qualitative data: textual, adaptation and secondary critical data.

The textual data are the original texts of the drama works *Pygmalion* and *Look Back in Anger*. *Look Back in Anger* is analyzed using the complete text (including preface and acts I–V) and supporting critical sources. A full edition of *Look Back in Anger* should be used for final act-level textual analysis so as to achieve full coverage of Acts I–III.

The adaptation data are composed of two screen/media adaptations of the plays selected. The film adaptation by Asquith and Howard (1938) is the preferred version of *Pygmalion*. *Look Back in Anger* is best presented as a version of the play, Tony Richardson's 1959 film version. The adaptations are appropriate as they are examples of how the theatrical language, class identity, theatrical space and performance are transformed through the screen and can be analyzed.

Secondary critical data also encompasses the concepts of adaptation theory, intermediality scholarship and reception theory, critical books, production histories and reviews. They can be utilized to provide the context for the plays, to aid in their interpretation and to reinforce analysis of audience reception and cultural relevance.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection is done in a document-based and media-based manner. Firstly, the original dramatic texts are analyzed for their main ideas, character relationships, language use, conflicts, conditions for staging and the social markers. The elements of accent, class mobility, Eliza's change, Higgins' authority and gendered performance, and social recognition are highlighted in *Pygmalion*. *Look Back in Anger* delegates focus on Jimmy Porter's anger, Alison's inability to speak, being trapped at home, feeling angry at her class, feeling angry about her gender, and feeling disillusioned by the post-war years.

Second, selected adaptations will be observed using a scene-based approach. The analysis centers on three key scenes from each adaptation: an opening scene. This scene contains a transformation or a conflict (usually

a mid-adaptation scene) and the ending or resolution scene. The technique will maintain focus on the study while simultaneously making a systematic comparison between the Dramatic Text and its adaptation.

Thirdly, secondary critical sources are considered for interpretation. The background information relates to that of adaptation studies, intermediality, reception, British social drama, Shaw's linguistic drama and Osborne's post-war theatrical environment.

3.6 Data Analysis Procedure

Comparative thematic analysis and intermedial interpretation are used in the study. The analysis is presented in terms of the five components of the conceptual framework.

In part one, the original dramatic text is examined, and the different plays' primary social issues are outlined. This encompasses the plot, dialogue, character relations, dramatic space and social conflict.

Secondly, the social identity construction is explored. In *Pygmalion*, the accent, class mobility, linguistic performance, gendered transformation and Eliza's autonomy are the areas of analysis. The analysis of *Look Back in Anger* will be under the headings of: Class Frustration, Anger, Masculinity, Domesticity, Alison's role and Social Alienation.

Thirdly, narrative and intermedial transformation are analyzed by comparing the original plays with some of the adaptations. At this stage, the focus is on what is remembered, adapted, added to, taken out and changed. It also explores how the film or media techniques can transform the dramatic material, including close-up, camera movement, sound, costume, editing, lighting, setting and visual framing.

Fourth, there are reception cues in the adaptations which are interpreted as audience reception. The study is not based on a survey or interview method, but instead, reception is analyzed by how adaptations evoke viewers' emotions and critical viewpoint. This means empathy for Eliza, a sense of malaise at Jimmy's anger, an awareness of class codes, an understanding of gender relations and participation in social conflict.

Fifth, contemporary cultural relevance is explored by considering how the adaptations restage the meaning of the plays as they are presented to today's audiences. This involves a study of class mobility, social alienation, gender agency, emotional conflict and modern British identity.

Manual coding allows for a qualitative approach to the interpretation of textual, visual (including the images of video and the actions in the performance), and interpretative data. It is therefore the appropriate method

for this study, which does not involve large-scale numerical data. The two plays are coded in the same way as each other, using the coding categories based on the conceptual framework.

3.7 Analytical Matrix

TABLE 1. Framework-Based Analytical Matrix for Examining Social Identity and Intermedial Transformation in *Pygmalion* and *Look Back in Anger*

Framework Component	<i>Pygmalion</i>	<i>Look Back in Anger</i>
Original Dramatic Text	Language, accent, class mobility, Eliza's transformation, Higgins's authority	Class resentment, domestic realism, Jimmy's anger, Alison's silence, post-war frustration
Social Identity Construction	Accent, manners, costume, gendered self-fashioning, class performance	Anger, masculinity, class frustration, emotional aggression, and domestic confinement
Narrative and Intermedial Transformation	Stage dialogue becomes a visual and acoustic class performance through voice, costume, gesture, and setting.	Stage realism becomes screen realism through close-up, cramped interiors, sound, editing, and social atmosphere.
Audience Reception	Sympathy for Eliza, recognition of class mobility, and interpretation of female agency	Emotional discomfort, critical engagement with anger, class resentment, and gender tension
Contemporary Cultural Relevance	Language politics, class mobility, gender autonomy, social performance	Youth anger, alienation, masculine crisis, domestic tension, social disillusionment

IV. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Overview of the Primary Analytical Corpus

These findings were the result of a comparative study of two contemporary British social dramas: George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* and John Osborne's *Look Back in*

Anger, which focused on the stage-to-screen transfers of both. The analysis process was carried out based on the revised conceptual framework of the study, namely the original dramatic text, the process of social identity construction, the transformation of narrative and intermediality, the process of receiving the audience and the relevance of the culture in the present. This is the updated analytical corpus that is given in Table 1. The two original dramatic works and the two chosen film versions are included in the table as the two primary strands of evidence, as these are contained in the body of evidence. The use of critical guides, program notes, reviews and film-context sources were limited to interpreting and contextualizing the film.

TABLE 2. Primary Analytical Corpus of the Study

Case	Original Dramatic Text	Selected Film Adaptation	Main Analytical Focus
Case 1	George Bernard Shaw's <i>Pygmalion</i>	<i>Pygmalion</i> (1938), directed by Anthony Asquith and Leslie Howard	Language, accent, class mobility, gendered transformation, and cinematic class performance
Case 2	John Osborne's <i>Look Back in Anger</i>	<i>Look Back in Anger</i> (1959), directed by Tony Richardson	Class resentment, domestic realism, masculine anger, gender conflict, and screen social realism

Both plays were suitable cases for consideration of the social identity of a modern British drama, but by different social and dramatic logics. *Pygmalion* created their identity through voice, accent, training, class performance and gendering the self. *Look Back in Anger* was about anger, imprisonment, class resentment, frustrations of men and disillusionment after the war. The films were also appropriate, in that each illustrated a transformation of the dramatic meaning when it was taken from the stage to the movies. According to Criterion, the film was directed by Anthony Asquith and Leslie Howard, edited by David Lean, and scripted by Shaw himself, and is a 1938 black and white British film. On the BFI program notes, the film with a running time of 99 minutes is identified as the film adaptation of Oscar-winning *Look Back in Anger*, written by Nigel Kneale, with Osborne providing the additional dialogue.

4.2 Social Identity in the Original Dramatic Texts

The first significant discovery was that both original plays performed on social identity; it was judged to be an unstable entity. Social identity was strongly produced in *Pygmalion* through language. In Shaw's preface, the use of phonetics as a socially powerful field was highlighted, and it was stated that making a flower girl into a speaker was "neither impossible nor uncommon." It was not just a means of communication, but a marker for a class and a means of inclusion/exclusion, correction and social repositioning. It was therefore not Eliza Doolittle's identity which was presented as fixed. That she could transform from flower girl to a respectable speaker demonstrated the potential to learn, rehearse and perform class identity.

This social logic was clearly set in the text to be read in a dramatic form, with the scene of Covent Garden. Higgins defined phonetics as the science of speech and said that he could tell where a person was from in social class and accent. He also boasted that at an ambassador's garden party, he could make Eliza sound like a duchess by his pronunciation and acting. Eliza's wish to be a "lady in a flower shop" only reinforced the fact that she had a real social vision with a social goal: to be employed, respected, and to have a voice, a public commentary. So, the original play focused on identity as something that is socially constructed that can be altered, but only in a disciplinarian, externally valid manner.

The concept of social identity was conceived in quite a different dramatic context in the case of *Look Back in Anger*. It was revealed in Osborne's complete text that the play was played out over the course of a single day in the one-room flat of the Porters in the Midlands, it is broken up into five scenes i.e. Act I, Act II Scene 1, Act II Scene 2, Act III Scene 1, and Act III Scene 2. This was a crucial element to the play's identity politics. The domestic atmosphere of the flat was the source of much frustration for Jimmy Porter, silence for Alison, mediation for Cliff and intervention for Helena. The connection of identity with movement across class spaces, as in *Pygmalion*, was replaced here by a combination of identity and entrapment, as in *Look Back in Anger*.

Jimmy was a man of opposing extremes. Struggling for education, he was stifled socially; he was eloquent but unforgiving; he was aware of politics but unkind in person. The opening stage directions of the play characterized him as sincere, malicious, tender, cruel, and she was "tied to the ironing board, visualizing her tied to domestic labor and the capacity for emotional endurance". This contrast demonstrated that the social identity was shaped and forged both in words and in spaces at *Look Back in Anger*. Although there was silence, there was too much action in

the room from Alison, as well as from Jimmy's speech. What this finding is: Here, Osborne's play was not just a depiction of anger, it was a social performance of anger, which relied on gendered power, class resentment and domestic pressure.

4.3 Narrative and Intermedial Transformation in *Pygmalion*

The second major finding was that the 1938 *Pygmalion* had made Shaw's play a study of class performance in language. The film kept the heart of Higgins' project with Eliza, but added pace, cuts, style, expression, scene settings and contrasts to the play's dramatic world with the use of camera, editing, costume, facial expression, social contexts, and visual contrasts. The Indiana University piece about the film is about the fact that Asquith and Howard did not make a "still" play on film. Instead, they opened with their first track shot, the energy of London and made it a movie and not the show-stopper that it could have been.

An important reason for the film's opening in Covent Garden was the change of the original play's linguistic class conflict into its social geography in the film. Eliza's accent was indicative of her social status in the play. Other elements of the film that helped shape her class were the rain, the actions of the crowd, her dress, the position of her body, the basket she carried, the location of the street and how she protectively guards herself against the threat. The camera transformed Higgins' oratory aptitude of listening and note taking into a disciplined work by his body, as he visually classified bodies as observers listening to their voices. This solidified the concept of 'social identity', a concept that was not only verbal, but also visual.

The laboratory/training scenes further developed this transformation. The original text's Eliza, who is transformed, mainly has her pronunciation and social speech changed. In the movie, it was a process which was seen and felt in the body. Eliza's voice, stance, attire, expression and poise were slowly rearranged. The film thus set up a new phase of social remaking of the film, in the process making phonetic training a larger cinematic process. This had significance for the gender analysis of the study, as men now taught Eliza's body and speech. Higgins' prestige was as much visual, spatial, as well as intellectual, and institutional.

In the social test scene that Mrs. Higgins performed, she could see the falsity of her transformations. Eliza's speech was more acceptable, but there were disconcerting aspects of her conversation, social drive, and level of directness in her emotions, all of which did not meet the expectations of the upper classes. It highlights the

need for proper speech by employing reaction shots and comic timing in the film. It was especially the work of David Lean as a crucial editor. The Indiana University article points to the use of close-ups of upper-class reactions, suggesting that this would not have been seen by an ill-seated theatre-going audience, but was seen in the cinema. So, the film became a "social judgment" process that the viewer could observe: society was watching Eliza.

The embassy or ball expansion was the most impressive instance of intermedial expansion. The stage play could feature Eliza's triumph in the upper echelons of the world. However, it was made real in the film through costumes, lighting, music, formal interior, stairs, parkour choreography of other groups, and the choreography of the characters' motion. So, Eliza underwent her metamorphosis and thus made her display. This success, however, was put on hold by the postball crisis. Eliza was socially readable, but insecure. The film thus did not evoke Shaw's critique that more fundamental, namely, transformation produces social recognition, but it does not necessarily produce autonomy.

4.4 Narrative and Intermedial Transformation in *Look Back in Anger*

The third major finding was that *Look Back in Anger* (Richardson, 1959) brought Osborne's stage realism to a wider screen realism. The original play was centered around the Porters' one-room flat, but the film was successful in expanding the drama into the Jazz Clubs, streets, markets, movement around, and social scenes. This was the first time that the audience saw a different side of Jimmy, the reclaimed man. As an actor, he was most often seen in a "domestic pressure chamber" when he was called upon to talk. In the screen, he changed to a restless body that moves in the field of a broader post-war world.

This is clearly supported in the BFI program notes. They say that the film drastically shortened the first scene of the play, and it was not until the actors were in little non-verbal scenes that they were introduced to Jimmy (i.e. in the jazz club, as he returned home), as he went to bed with Alison, and as he got up the next morning. It was noteworthy because it was a first before Jimmy had become a domestic whacko. The film, therefore, moved away from the use of language as a means of explaining things and focused more towards the characterization through the medium of pictorial presentation.

The flat scenes are still in the foreground, but the film's use of cinematic technique puts the emphasis on them. The BFI remarks how Richardson's camera was in movement in the flat scenes, and how he tracked, panned and turned camera tracks created a sense of unease and chaos. This was an important transformation in the media.

The stage flat set the pressure by its physical cover, the film flat set the pressure by its mobility of the camera, its framing of the scene, its close-up of the lines, and its rhythm of the visuals. Cinema did not make the room any less claustrophobic. The camera, rather, became more unstable and even more intrusive as it had feelings.

Other moments of the play, such as the market and the sweet-stall scenes, broadened the social implications of the play. The film opened the action up with more of the characters' society being revealed with the spinoffs of the jazz club, doctor's surgery, street, market and Mrs. Tanner's funeral. The addition was significant as it was no longer only a private marriage but also a social environment that was linked to Jimmy's anger. The film put him in the world of work, the public trade and the movement in the post-war urban landscape. Consequently, his anger was not only as a personality, but also as a social symptom.

Reception of gender was a major focus in the Alison, Helena, Jimmy scenes. In the play, the use of Jimmy's language may distract the audience's attention. The film reentered the attention on Alison's face, Helena's judgment and the emotional impact of Jimmy's aggression. The BFI notes highlight Richardson's expressive use of close-ups, particularly in the way she has shown Alison in the middle of Jimmy and Helena. The BFI notes stress Richardson's "expressive" use of close-ups, particularly in the manner in which she has used the close-ups with Alison caught between Jimmy and Helena. This affected the way that the audience received the message. Not only did viewers have to hear Jimmy's words, but they also had to witness the damage that he caused.

The ending scene of the return was left in an emotional ambivalence in the play. Osborne's book included the bears and squirrels' fantasy, which is a reprise of Alison's return, which had led to the revival in the previous book. This was not about ending the social and emotional violence of the marriage, but was a way to escape temporarily. Of course, this ambivalence was conveyed through the film's sensory intimacy, its void of words and sounds, and the emotional devastation. It was not just a question of making it easier to play with the adaptation. It was meant to be tender and fragile because it was about reconciliation.

4.5 Comparative Findings Across the Two Adaptations

TABLE 3. Comparative Findings Based on the Conceptual Framework

Framework Component	<i>Pygmalion</i>	<i>Look Back in Anger</i>	Comparative Interpretation
Original Dramatic Text	Class identity was constructed through accent, phonetics, manners, and social recognition.	Social identity was constructed through anger, domestic confinement, class resentment, and gendered silence.	Both plays treated identity as performative rather than natural.
Social Identity Construction	Eliza's identity was reshaped through speech training, dress, posture, and public performance.	Jimmy's identity was shaped through rhetoric, frustration, masculine insecurity, and class displacement.	Identity was trainable in <i>Pygmalion</i> but trapped in <i>Look Back in Anger</i> .
Narrative Transformation	The film expanded Eliza's movement from street identity to social performance.	The film expanded Jimmy's world from the flat into public and working-class spaces.	Both films expanded stage action, but toward different meanings.
Intermedial Transformation	Tracking shots, comic editing, close-ups, costume, and social spectacle visualized class mobility.	Moving camera, close-ups, black-and-white realism, jazz, and location expansion visualized	Cinema made social pressure visible through bodies, spaces, and faces.

		emotional unrest.		(1938)	and Eliza’s arrival	discipline and gendered transformation.
Audience Reception	Viewers were positioned to sympathize with Eliza’s vulnerability and emerging agency.	Viewers were positioned uneasily between Jimmy’s charisma and Alison’s suffering.	Film redirected attention from dominant speech toward emotional consequence .	<i>Pygmalion</i> (1938)	Mrs. Higgins’s social test	Reveals the limits of pronunciation alone and uses reaction shots to show social judgment.
Contemporary Relevance	The adaptation renewed issues of accent discrimination, class mobility, education, and female agency.	The adaptation renewed issues of alienation, masculinity, domestic toxicity, and class frustration.	Both adaptations remained relevant because they reactivated unresolved social conflicts.	<i>Pygmalion</i> (1938)	Embassy/ball sequence	Converts reported social success into cinematic spectacle.
				<i>Pygmalion</i> (1938)	Post-ball crisis and final confrontation	Highlights Eliza’s emotional displacement and struggle for agency.
				<i>Look Back in Anger</i> (1959)	Opening jazz/public performance	Reframes Jimmy as a performer and social body before the domestic conflict begins.
The comparison shows that both films used the cinema in different but equally significant ways. <i>Pygmalion</i> expanded and ascended from street to laboratory, from laboratory to drawing room and from drawing room to a classy social display. One of its film-sequencing rationalities was that of actualizing, training, and socially recognizing. <i>Look Back in Anger</i> was also going to expand and was going to go away, but it was not going to go towards liberation. The jazz club, market, street, and public spaces were not the locations where Jimmy found his freedom from his confinement, but rather they demonstrated that his frustration was greater than just being in the flat. In <i>Pygmalion</i>, it was expanded space which facilitated class mobility, and in <i>Look Back in Anger</i>, it was expanded space which identified the broader social dimensions of alienation.				<i>Look Back in Anger</i> (1959)	Flat scene with Jimmy, Alison, and Cliff	Preserves domestic realism, verbal aggression, and gendered labor.
				<i>Look Back in Anger</i> (1959)	Market/sweet-stall scenes	Expands the play into working-class public space and screens social realism.
				<i>Look Back in Anger</i> (1959)	Alison–Helena–Jimmy conflict	Makes gender conflict and emotional damage visible through close-up and framing.
				<i>Look Back in Anger</i> (1959)	Final Alison return	Preserves emotional ambiguity while intensifying visual intimacy.

4.6 Scene-Based Evidence from the Film Adaptations

TABLE 4. Key Film Scenes Selected for Analysis

Film	Scene/Approximate Segment	Analytical Function
<i>Pygmalion</i> (1938)	Covent Garden opening	Establishes accent, class visibility, public space, and Eliza’s original social position.
<i>Pygmalion</i>	Higgins’s laboratory	Shows language training as a social

4.7 Audience Reception and Contemporary Cultural Relevance

The fourth major finding was that both adaptations altered the audience reception in terms of the allocation of sympathy and attention. In *Pygmalion*, the movie brought

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out more visually and emotionally expressive aspects of Eliza. However, the audience saw her not only transform, but see her shame, discipline, discomfort, elegance, anger and final resistance. In fact, the use of the close-up/ social reaction shots moved from Higgins' intellectual experiment to Eliza's actual life. This resulted in a more balanced reading than one that is based on a dialogue-only interpretation.

Look Back in Anger made it difficult to accept Jimmy. Richard Burton brought charisma and intensity to the role of Jimmy, but he was also exposed to his cruelty by the camera. Given the extreme fact that the original first scene has been cut, the BFI review noted that viewers might not have yet gotten the word from the film regarding what is going on with Jimmy, so it would be hard for them to call him boorish. This is significant as it illustrates the capacity of adaptation for altering moral alignment. The viewer might yet have sympathy for Jimmy's social frustration, but it is harder to keep from feeling the pain of Alison in this film.

Both adaptations have social identity as their constant concern, and it is this concern which has made them relevant to the modern era. The relevance of Pygmalion is that it was, and it is still relevant, as accent, language, education, class mobility and the self-fashioning of class, gender are still shaping social opportunity. Its focus on style, stance, enunciation and approbation of the elite is as topical as the image of social performance and respectability to this day. Look Back in Anger has not become obsolete because feelings of alienation are well known in the culture, as are feelings of insecurity about being male, being aggressive towards one's wife and partner, and being frustrated by class. Look Back in Anger is an important play in the center of "the British post-war theatre" and can be seen as having influenced the British theatre, film, as well as being a part of public consciousness of the generation that emerged after the Second World War, says Sierz (2008).

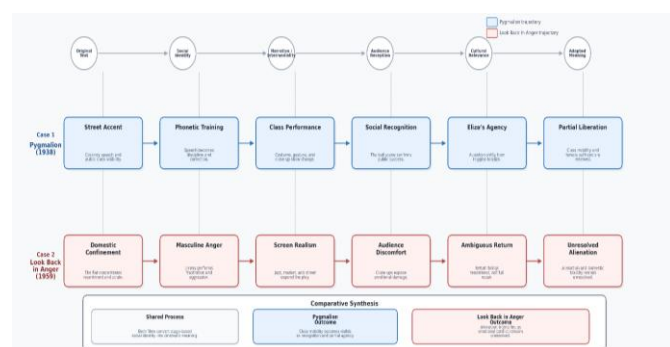


Fig. 2. Comparative Trajectory of Stage-to-Screen Social Identity Transformation

This figure illustrates that the two adaptations were based on a similar overall adaptation trend from dramatic text to screen form and led to different interpretations. Pygmalion began to change, be recognized and begin to take some agency. Look Back in Anger took a step towards exposure, discomfort, and unresolved alienation. The figure counteracts this central thesis about the intermedial adaptation of the plays into cinema, for the latter did not merely adapt but restructured social identity's experience for the audience.

4.8 Summary of Findings

The results illustrate that Pygmalion and Look Back in Anger are good examples of cases for the study of intermedial adaptation in contemporary British social drama. Both plays performed social identity as a construct, but the method of social identity construction was different in both plays. Pygmalion was all about self-fashioning as a man, accent, social mobility and class training. Look Back in Anger built identity out of class resentment, confinement at home, and the anger and violence of men.

These dramatic personae were changed via film. Pygmalion, a product of adherence to the shooting style of tracking shots, editing, close-ups, costume, social settings, and visual comedy, transformed Shaw's language-based drama into a cinematic performance of class mobility. Look Back in Anger turned Osborne's house stage realism into British screen social realism by employing a number of spatial consequences, the movement of the camera, close-ups, black-and-white realism and jazz performance as well as public social space.

The main comparative finding would be that the materiality of the social identity was increased through cinema. The dialogue, the live performance and the dramatic space were crucial in both plays on stage. Identities were on display on the screen as faces, bodies, interiors, streets, costumes, sound, editing, and camera movement. The adaptations were not simply the updating of the plays or faithful reproductions, then. They redefined their social meanings in the formal aspects of film. This validates the conceptual framework of the study and that intermedial adaptation involves cultural, visual, performative and interpretative processes of transformation.

4.9 Discussion

The results of this study show that the adaptation between the stage and the screen for modern British social drama has to be regarded as a process of intermedial re-configuration, and not as a transfer of the characteristics and essence of the original medium to the adopted one. The adaptation of Pygmalion and Look Back in Anger illustrates that films do not simply reproduce the dramatic

content of the original; in film, the social, visual, spatial and affective conditions that shape the creation of dramatic meaning are reorganized. This has grown from a fidelity-based assessment of adaptation to a more dynamic and flexible conceptualization of adaptation as a creative process and dialogue between writer and director, as well as between creator and audience and across the various media involved (Fedorenko & Sulima, 2023; Ingham, 2016; Mensah, 2025). The contribution of the present study is one that focuses on the idea of adaptation as a process, but also as a way in which social identity is made 'new,' visible, legible and contestable.

The social construction of identity in *Pygmalion* happens in terms of accent, phonetic discipline, class performance and by “gendering” oneself. In Shaw's play, the concept of class is not a fixed fact, but a social rule that can be learnt and imitated, and even publicly acknowledged (Shaw, 1912/2025). In the 1938 film version, the logic is further heightened by transcoding Eliza Doolittle's journey from essentially being a language shift to a visual/auditory performance. Cinema is a product of costume, posture, facial expression, space movement, social choreography and close-up, all of which contribute to the making of the class identity. The importance of a Shaw-scripted film, directed by Anthony Asquith, Leslie Howard and edited by David Lean, becomes clear as Criterion confirms it, and the slow-motion tracking shots, comedic pacing, editing, and close-ups of their reactions make it impossible to describe the film as being a filmed play. What is important about this change is that cinema is an artwork that makes visible what can only be theorized on the stage--namely, that class identity is a repetition of signs of speech, body, space, and recognition.

Whereas, *Look Back in Anger* forms social identity via frustration, masculine anger, domestic pressure and the class displacement of the post-war era. While playing, Osborne isolates Jimmy Porter, Alison and Cliff in a one-room flat, where speech is used, and is seen as a sign of social injury (Osborne, 1957/2015). While Richardson's play has been set in the context of Kitchen-Sink Drama and the Angry Young Man as analyzed by Sierz (2008), the present study continues this conversation by demonstrating that Richardson's 1959 film, *Adaptation*, adapts theatrical anger to cinematic social realism. The BFI program notes are particularly significant in that they accurately capture the cutting out of the play's opening scene, the introduction of Ma Tanner and how the moving camera and close-ups are used in the flat scenes (BFI, 2026). These changes are not just a stage play that opens up, they are also a movement of Jimmy's anger to a broader visual frame of jazz clubs, markets, the street and

public locomotion. The movie thus turns the domestic claustrophobia into social alienation.

The novelty of the study becomes most evident when it is brought into juxtaposition with the look back in anger of *Pygmalion* and *Look Back in Anger*. These plays are seldom studied together, since they are set at different times, have different styles, and have different moods. This study demonstrates, however, that there is a social production of identity, and both texts are focused on this. Eliza is made socially legible by accent correction and class performance, while Jimmy is made socially legible by resentment, rhetoric, and the use of emotional aggression. Eliza is made socially legible by accent correction and class performance, Jimmy by resentment, rhetoric and emotional aggression. The result of such a comparison is a helpful conceptual contrast: *Pygmalion* is about a transformable identity that is socially mobile. At the same time, *Look Back in Anger* is about a trapped, displaced and effectively unstable identity. The juxtaposition highlights two opposing and interconnected social identity strands: recognition and mobility, and alienation and emotional entrapment, which makes for a novel contribution to twenty-first-century concepts and studies of British drama.

The study also adds from a methodical perspective due to its Conceptual Framework of Intermedial Adaptation Transformation. The framework is organized via an approach of original dramatic text, social identity construction, narrative and intermedial transformation, audience reception, and the current cultural importance of the text, instead of attempting to list what is similar and different between the two texts, equating adaptation with a pair of equations. Rather, it enables adaptation to be broken down into an iterative interpretation process. Spatial movement in *Pygmalion* maps a cinematic journey from the Covent Garden to the laboratory, drawing room and ball, representing a map of class aspiration. Movement between flat and public space in *Look Back in Anger* does not lead to liberation; it brings about the continuum of social frustration from the domestic space to the public space. All of this contrasts with an adaptation that opens up space for the stage, which, in the context of the source text, can have different effects on the ideology through which it is adapted.

The results also indicate that film adaptation alters the audience's morality. In *Pygmalion*, the first glance of the film captures the audience's interest in the power of intelligence as Higgins' intellectual dominance dominates the scene, only to place it in the shadows as the film draws Eliza's attention to her vulnerability, labor, and agency. *Look Back in Anger* features close-ups and reaction shots that help to prevent Jimmy's language from

completely overshadowing the audience's reaction and meaning of Alison's silence and suffering. Spectatorship in adaptation, however, is reimagined as viewers are not just asked to hear dominant speech but are asked to consider the corporeal and affective impact of dominant speech. It is the intermedial contribution of the study that is the most important. Cinema is not just a movie about drama, it is also a transfer of attention, sympathy and judgment.

In general, the results of the study indicate that the process of translating a stage text onto screen has the ability to revitalize the cultural life of the drama by reactivating social conflicts, which have not been resolved. The results of the study as a whole indicate that the act of translating a stage text onto screen has the capacity to reactivate social conflicts which remain unresolved in the image of the film. The importance of *Pygmalion* is that accent, education, class mobility, and women's subjectivity continue to dictate social opportunities. *Look Back in Anger* is therefore still relevant because the social experiences of males, because of masculine insecurity, alienation, domestic toxicity and class frustration are still similar today. As a result, the adaptations are not just about the modernization of the plays, but also about bringing into sight the ongoing social tensions that are present in the plays. Culturally, intermedial adaptation is a process of renewal as it turns dramatic texts into new and different visual, emotional and interpretive experiences.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study examined *Pygmalion* and *Look Back in Anger* as works of drama and as selected film adaptations in order to examine the construction of social identity in the original works and how the selected film adaptations change the construction of social identity through intermedial strategies. The analysis revealed similarities that the two plays share, both of which were of modern British social drama, though they differed with respect to the trajectory of their identity. The *Pygmalion* approach proposes that identity is socially constructed as performative, context-bound, class-coded, and reliant on his/her public behavior. In contrast, *Look Back in Anger* makes identity appear to be class resentful, socially frustrated, emotionally unstable, and experiencing aloneness and rejection in the face of the post-war world.

The study revealed that film adaptation was not just a reproduction of the Dramatic Texts. Instead, the meanings of the film were transformed by the movement of its camera, close-up, editing, sound, costume, and acting style, as well as spatial expansion. In *Pygmalion*, modernization of class mobility could be made visible through Eliza's change of appearance as well as audible,

through the transformations of her voice and intonation. *Look Back in Anger* extended domestic realism into the screen, social realism to make more tangible on screen the emotions of Jimmy's anger and the sufferings of Alison. The study thus also helps with the studies on adaptation, as it demonstrates that intermedial adaptation is an act of cultural renewal that, in this manner, the dramatic text gains new significance in terms of visual, emotional and social meaning in the different media.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors acknowledge the publicly accessible textual, audiovisual, and critical materials used for analytical purposes in this study, including the selected dramatic texts and film adaptations of *Pygmalion* and *Look Back in Anger*. The authors also acknowledge the film-context materials, program notes, and critical sources consulted to support the analysis of stage-to-screen adaptation, intermedial transformation, and modern British social drama.

FUNDING

No funding was received for the preparation of this research.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting the findings of this study consist of publicly accessible dramatic texts, film adaptations, film-context materials, program notes, and secondary critical sources used for qualitative textual, visual, and intermedial analysis. The primary materials analyzed in this study include George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, the 1938 film adaptation of *Pygmalion* directed by Anthony Asquith and Leslie Howard, and the 1959 film adaptation of *Look Back in Anger* directed by Tony Richardson. No new empirical dataset involving human participants was generated. The analytical categories, scene-based observations, and interpretive findings are presented within the manuscript.

AI USE DISCLOSURE

The present study did not use any AI tool during the writing of the manuscript.

PERMISSIONS STATEMENT

No copyrighted film stills, images, or third-party visual materials are reproduced in the manuscript. The figures included in the article are original conceptual and analytical figures created for this study. If any copyrighted visual materials are added before submission, written permission from the relevant rights holder will be obtained and supplied to the journal where required.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

This study did not involve human participants, interviews, surveys, experiments, or personal data. It is based on textual, audiovisual, and secondary critical materials used for humanities-based qualitative analysis. Therefore, formal ethical approval was not required.

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