

## INTRODUCTION

'The Rainbow' is Ken Russell's adaptation of D.H. Lawrence's novel, which charts the lives of three generations of the Brangwen family.

Russell however, has chosen to concentrate on the last section of Lawrence's story: the story of Ursula.

Set at the turn of the century, in the north of England, his film follows her quest for independence and awakening sexuality.



### NOVEL INTO FILM

Inspiration for films comes from many different sources. A writer might use personal experience, or might use a news story as inspiration. But often films rely on other art forms, adapting plays and novels; film is often a 'second hand' medium.

Recent films based on either a play or novel include 'Henry V', 'The Rachel Papers', 'Empire of the Sun', and 'Shirley Valentine'. Can you think of any more?

So, adapting a novel into a film is not unusual. However many adaptations have been received very coldly, and directors have been accused of distorting or even ruining the original novel. Perhaps the main problem is that books are written to be read and films are designed to be seen. They are two individual styles, each with their own subtleties.

'The Rainbow' is an interesting example of an adaptation; Ken Russell has taken the radical step of losing two-thirds of D.H. Lawrence's text. The novel is not a momentous adventure story but a gentle look at the "little world" of a Nottinghamshire farm, and the Brangwen family who live there. Ken Russell has cut the tale of the first two generations of the family, omitting the background information to Ursula's story.

What would the film have been like if the earlier sections had been included? Given this brief description of the novel, would the whole story have been suitable for a film? How would the film have been altered if it had all been included?

## TASK

You are on the promotional team for 'The Rainbow'. You are trying to 'sell' the new, shorter version of the story to potential distributors.

You have met some opposition from a couple of people who are real D. H. Lawrence enthusiasts. They are disturbed by the cuts to the story.

It is up to you to persuade them that the film works! What arguments can you use to persuade them that the cuts work, that the film stands on its own and that, if anything, it adds to our understanding of D.H. Lawrence.

You will be given a document in which you should write down your main reasons. The producer of the film wishes to get people thinking and will circulate the sheet before the next meeting.

## THE NARRATIVE

Throughout movie history films have struggled to be unique

This shouldn't be too difficult; in theory there is an endless variety of possible storylines. But when we break films down, we soon discover the common threads that link so many narratives together

For example, how many films have you seen where a central character has their life changed by some external force - an adventure, an emotion, a disaster perhaps? Think about the films currently on release - how many of them fit this structure?

We can break down the cliché even further: first the EXPOSITION, where the scene is set; then the introduction of the elements that lead to CONFLICT; then the CLIMAX at the peak of the CONFLICT, followed by some form of RESOLUTION.

Does 'The Rainbow' fit the same pattern? (Don't forget that CONFLICT is a very general word and could apply to the characters that Ursula meets, the dilemmas she faces and the ideas that challenge her).

Try filling in the next chart. In the boxes write out what happens to Ursula at each stage in the film.

### NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

URSULA AT THE START (How she is portrayed at the beginning).	
FACTORS AFFECTING HER LIFE (Her decision making/involvement with other characters/ambitions).	
MAIN CONFLICTS (Her emotional crisis/ambitions at stake etc).	
CLIMAX (when everything reaches a peak)	
RESOLUTIONS (Outcome of problems).	
FINAL IMAGE OF URSULA (How she's portrayed at the end).	

Clearly, the original story has been styled to be more manageable. Do you think it is a good compromise to sacrifice the subtlety and depth of a novel for the sake of compactness?

This is an important factor when it comes to adaptations of texts.

Can you think of any other problems likely to face a screenwriter/director/producer involved in adapting a play or novel for the cinema? An interesting starting point might be the advantages! disadvantages of dealing with a book people already feel strongly about.

## THE RAINBOW AS A SOCIAL DOCUMENT

When 'The Rainbow' was first printed in 1915 it was banned. Today such an action seems extreme - although it is not unknown, it is rare to see books causing a national stir.

In making the film Russell hasn't diluted the issues that outraged the Edwardians.

As well as revealing Edwardian attitudes and standards of behaviour, the film has been constructed to give a broader sense of the 'nitty gritty' of everyday life. We are given insight into the following, for example:

EDUCATION

THE CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

INDUSTRY

INFANT/CHILD CARE

PASTIMES

RELIGION AND THE CHURCH FASHION

TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION

FASHION



The range of issues is broad! In order to appreciate the extent to which the film makers researched and reconstructed Lawrence's England these topics need to be explored in further detail.

## TASK

Draw a chart in which to record your observations from the film. You should aim to produce a clear breakdown of what we learn about each topic at the turn of the century. Share your ideas in pairs, before filling in the boxes.

When completed, fill in the second half of the chart on the sheet with the same topic headings but with the main heading '1989'. This time describe how things have changed today.

Again, discuss each of the points before writing them up.

Compare your findings: in which categories do you notice (a) the greatest changes and (b) the least?

Did you find the film less accessible or enjoyable because of its historical setting?

Do you think a film has to be contemporary to be relevant? Think about some of the popular films that have used a historical setting - 'Dangerous Liaisons', 'The Mission', 'Erik The Viking' to name a few.

As well as adding to the overall image we have of England in 1915, some of the topics listed in the chart also feature as major THEMES in the film.

## THEMES AND ISSUES

These include:

- Marriage and the family unit
- Women as housewives and mothers
- The role of the working woman
- The role of the church and religion
- War and militarism
- Sexual relationships

Issues are not clear cut: no two characters share the same view of these topics. Take Marriage and the family unit' for example:



"Marriage is... well it's, it's what we're made for..."

"For a man to be a man, it takes a woman. And for a woman to be a woman, it takes a man."

This is how Will Brangwen sums up his view about marriage. To him there is no alternative; marriage is something that society depends on, and what every man and woman needs. Yet his opinion is balanced by other people's. What do the following think?



URSULA



WINIFRED



ANNA BRANGWEN



ANTON



KEN RUSSELL (Is it possible to tell what he thinks? Has he given the film a personal stamp?)

WORKING WOMEN is another important theme presented in an ambiguous way. This debate is mainly seen through the eyes of Will and Ursula, who feel very differently about the matter. (Ursula being influenced by Winifred's progressive ideas).

What are Will's reasons for NOT allowing Ursula to teach? On the other hand, why is Ursula so persistent about having "some other kind of life?"

List each of their reasons below:

URSULA	WILL



## TASK

The year is 1915 and a public debate on the theme of 'Sexual Relationships' is due to take place in a local hall.

The meeting has been called in response to a local 'scandal' surrounding a young, unmarried school teacher who has become pregnant, and been given the sack.

Everyone in the village is going to the meeting to air their views on the subject.

A couple of people will have to take on individual roles - a chairperson is needed, perhaps with a small committee as a back-up team.

Other people who might be present are: someone from the church, the girl and/or her family, the headteacher who employed her.

When roles have been allocated and points of views worked out, the debate can begin.

But remember - it is 1915 and you will have to bear in mind what actress Glenda Jackson (Anna Brangwen) said about attitudes at that time:

"The examination of the sexual and sensual side of human nature was not within the public domain, whereas nowadays they're inundated with it."

## WHAT THE PAPERS SAY

Most national papers carry reviews of new films.

However, the angle adopted and the style in which they are written varies; after all, reviews should be pitched according to the interest of the paper's readers.

For example, The Guardian and Independent pride themselves on their serious approach to the arts, and tend to carry weighty articles in keeping with their editorial style. In contrast, the less earnest tabloid press usually carry a lighter review, often full of sexual innuendo.

What does this suggest about the delivery of news and information that readers of these paper are wanting? Which papers are read by people who want a detailed analysis of the news? Which papers carry a minimal amount of 'real' news, and a higher percentage of stories based on the lives of famous people?

The following are snippets from reviews of Ken Russell's last film 'The Lair Of The White Worm'. What aspects have they picked up on? How have they 'pitched' the review (think about style, humour etc)?

"There are moments in the cinema when one thinks one has nodded off and woken up in a lunatic asylum. In fact, it is a Ken Russell film, The Lair Of The White Worm is. less a 'classic chiller' than a damp squid..."

policeman is cross-eyed, the special effects are glued together along the dotted lines and the script is certifiable." THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

"Risk-taking director Ken Russell has put his tongue too firmly in his cheek with this horror spoof. The result is that the tongue gets in the way of communicating the joke to us; it's a mumble.

It also contains acting so wooden you can smell the sawdust. An exception to that is Amanda Donohoe as vampire Lady Sylvia Marsh... Her seductions are a wind-up that never lets us down. Snake-bite has never seemed so attractive in a conceit that is, for once, beyond our Ken."  
THE MAIL ON SUNDAY

"Actress Amanda Donohoe looks just as sexy with her clothes on ... though she's set to go topless again. She causes mens' hearts to miss a beat when she pops slinkily out of a basket as a cobra woman in her latest film, Lair Of The White Worm... She says of her role as lady Sylvia Marsh in the new Ken Russell film: "Lady Sylvia is the ultimate embodiment of evil -as well as being sexy and very, very naughty. It was great fun in the cobra woman scene. Lady Sylvia is a snappy little dresser." DAILY EXPRESS

"Updated from Bram Stoker's tale of vampirism in the heart of England, The Lair Of The White Worm is the third and, one hopes, last slab of high Gothic horror directed by Ken Russell, who takes himself wholly seriously and is ill at ease with the tongue in cheek and fang in neck. It conveys the impression of a makeweight movie, tossed off quickly and without conviction and 'stars' Sammi Davis, Hugh Grant, and Amanda Donohoe." THE INDEPENDENT

## TASK

Using the press cuttings above as guidelines, try writing two reviews for 'The Rainbow'.

One should be written in the tabloid genre, and the other in the style of the 'quality' review. (But which quality review? Notice the difference in tone between The Daily Telegraph and The Independent in their review of Lair Of The White Worm. Are there differences between The Express and The Mail as well?).

You will need to have a clear idea of what YOU feel about the film: how sympathetic you thought it was; the success of direction, and which aspects of the film you wish to highlight.

Remember that you will need to be selective... and that you are writing for two quite specific audiences.

You should limit yourself to 200 words for each review.