Flowers For Algernon – Comparing And Contrasting Essay, Research Paper

Many popular novels are often converted into television movies. The brilliant fiction novel, Flowers for Algernon written by Daniel Keyes, was developed into a dramatic television film. Flowers for Algernon is about a mentally retarded man who is given the opportunity to become intelligent through the advancements of medical science. This emotionally touching novel was adapted to television so it could appeal to a wider, more general audience. Although the novel and film are similar in terms of plot and theme, they are different in terms of characters.

The plot of both the novel and film version of Flowers for Algernon share common similarities. They both feature a retarded middle-aged man, Charlie Gordon, who receives an operation to heighten his intelligence. Charlie?s IQ eventually surpasses human normalcy to reveal that the experiment did prove successful. In both the film and novel, Charlie became even more intelligent than the professors who worked with him. In the film, Dr. Strauss was embarrassed to reveal that Charlie was smarter than him. That played a milestone event in Charlie?s identification of himself. Slowly his intelligence began to decrease and he eventually returned to his original state of mind. Throughout the story, Charlie encountered many different emotions that he had never experienced before because he didn?t have the common knowledge to understand them. The episode when he was at the nightclub with his co-workers gave him the opportunity to experience betrayal and anger. ?I never knew before that Joe and Frank and the others liked to have me around just to make fun of me? (Keyes 30). The plot for both versions also carefully depicted Charlie?s psychological traumas that he suffered after his operation. These outbursts were often caused by romantic anxiety and the painful memories he would recall. Whenever Charlie got intimate with Alice he would tend to get extremely nervous or have a hallucination, causing him to ruin the moment. ?I dropped a fork, and when I tried to retrieve it, I knocked over a glass of water and spilled it on her dress? (56). One of Charlie?s most painful memories was the one about the locket incident. Both versions did a great job of emphasizing this particular moment. ?His clothes are torn, his nose is bleeding and one of his teeth is broken? (38). These flashbacks occurred many times in the novel yet the film brought the moment to life and helped to connect the viewer to Charlie?s emotions. It is evident to see that the plots of both the film and novel have their similarities.

The theme for the film and novel of Flowers for Algernon was intolerance. Intolerance can be defined as a lack of tolerance for a person. Throughout the novel, Charlie was mistreated by people who did not give him the patience he needed. Charlie was shown a great deal of intolerance when the workers at the bakery turned against him. He had always been a dedicated, hard worker at the bakery and Mr. Donner fired him because the other men felt inferior towards him. ?All of a sudden you?re a big shot, a know-it-all, a brain? (74). ?You got a nerve? (74). Charlie soon realized that getting smarter worsened his life and changed his original beliefs. At first he thought if he became smarter he would have more friends but eventually he realized how cruel and unjust society could be. Charlie was also rejected by his mother Rose. When Charlie was a child, she would often scold him, yet he never knew any better. She was a bitter woman who wanted Charlie to leave when he was just a little boy.

?Do you think this is easy? Why are you making it harder for me? All these years everyone telling me he should be put away. Well, they were right. Put him away. Maybe at the Home with his own kind he?ll have something. I don?t know what?s right or wrong anymore? (119).

In the film it was more evident of how painful these memories were because of Charlie?s expressions and emotions. The similar theme of intolerance was displayed throughout Charlie?s life.

The film and novel of Flowers for Algernon showed a noticeable difference in characters. The film did not feature Fay or Norma. Although their characters were not present, their distinct and unique characteristics were evident among the other cast members. Fay Lillman was a very important character in the novel because she was responsible for exploring Charlie?s innocence through sexuality. She opened up Charlie?s wild side to the reader and caught our attention with her crazy and kinky traits. Charlie even commented on her sanity when he first met her, ?You?re a nut? (125). One night she managed to get Charlie alone and she seduced him. ?She slipped her arms around me, waiting for me to do something? (133-134). The character of Fay was removed because the viewer would probably pay attention to Fay?s sexuality instead of the real meaning behind the story. Although she was exempted from the film, a portion of her personality was in the woman at the bar in the movie. Norma, Charlie?s sister, was another important character who wasn?t featured in the film. She was part of the reason why Charlie was sent away. As a child she hated Charlie because he would constantly ruin things for her, like the ?A-Paper? incident. ?Not you. You don?t tell. It?s my mark, and I?m going to tell? (81). She always felt like Charlie was a nuisance as well ?He?s like a baby? (81). In the film, Rose wasn?t as senile as the novel portrayed her. She seemed to have Norma?s sense of compassion from the novel which made her character rather puzzling. In conclusion, there was a difference of characters in the film.

Although the novel and film are similar in terms of plot and theme, they are different in terms of characters. Charlie?s emotions and personal trials were a large part of both plots because the whole story is about his personal maturation and experiences. Intolerance was an important issue in the life of Charlie Gordon because it was hard for him to be accepted anywhere else but the bakery. Although some of the original characters were removed from the film, their personalities were incorporated into that of another character.