

Mrs Rumbold was our class teacher in class five. She was heavy-set, probably in her mid-50s or mid-40s. In the eyes of a 12-year-old, everyone after 20 seems the same age. She had a really white handkerchief which hung smartly from her brown belt. We would enter class chatting away in high-pitched voices, but as soon as we saw Rumbold Teacher at the desk doing her work, our chatter would reduce to mumbles and whispers. We quietly left our school bags at our desks and lined up outside the class for inspection. Mrs Rumbold sat at the teacher's desk checking our class work while we put our school suitcases in place. Sometimes she would look up from her stack of exercise books and look blankly at a girl over the rim of her glasses. The look had nothing to do with the girl. A pall of silence would fall between them, teacher and student. The thought crossing Mrs Rumbold's mind was probably nothing of importance. Maybe she was musing over the hot stew she had had last evening for supper that burnt her tongue, but the girl would freeze into a statue for a good while.

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Mrs Rumbold wore shifts with a thin belt. The shifts were usually of a colourful floral print. "Clack, clack, clack," she would walk in her brown court shoes with black heels. To me, she was a disapproving Major General—"Attention! Stand at ease. Quick march, left, right, left, right."

Before we started the assembly in the auditorium, we had to line up in front of the class for inspection—inspection of our nails, our shoes, our school uniform, and our hair. I never scored above a B+ under Rumbold Teacher's eagle-eyed scrutiny. For some reason, she started checking from the back of the line. As she got closer, I would get a whiff of her Chinchilla perfume and hear the "clack, clack" of the Major General's shoes grow louder. I could tell she disapproved from the wagging of her forefinger, her eyes getting bigger, and her nostrils aflame.

My shoes were never shiny. I wanted to scream, "It is not possible to have spotless shoes, Teacher, when about eight of us are going from Dhanmondi to Bailey Road in an Austin Mini." Amma sat in the front with my younger sister by her side. My four cousins and I would be behind them, all jam-packed in the backseat. Abba would be driving, smoking away, and swearing every time the car rode over potholes. Throughout the journey, we, the children, were chirpy. We routinely chanted the names of the Government Quarters as we passed them—"Nashiman, Niharika, Orunima, Shagorika"—in unison, or "E-S-S-O, Esso Esso," also in a chorus, as we passed the petrol station. The two five-year-olds in the car spelled out the names of every shop and every word on the billboards. We were a happy group of children if you looked at our faces. But below, the five

pairs of legs were very cautious. We were constantly trying to keep them from being stepped on. Once in a while, there would even be a tussle among them, when someone overstepped their boundary.

Rumbold inspected each student from head to toe. As her eyes scanned me, her sight would sometimes stop at the school uniform and almost invariably at the shoes. Then we had to step out of the line as a measure of punishment for not being up to the mark. Amma made two tight braids, with the ends tied in white or black ironed ribbon. Every week the nails were cut with a sharp blade. Rumbold Teacher didn't have anything to say about that.

As the inspections rolled on, she asked some very harsh questions. My friend Kismat once replied back in no unclear terms that her parents simply could not "afford" to get her uniform made when she was reprimanded for her school dress, which was so shabby that the blue colour had almost turned to white. At least one-fourth of the students in the class had faded or dirty uniforms except for the daughters of company wallahs whose uniforms were bright

SCHOOL IN THE YEARS GONE BY



SARA ZAKER

blue, and shoes perfect with snow-white socks. But for girls from the struggling middle class such as us, we never had the nerve of Kismat. To say our parents could not afford new clothes for us was the equivalent of putting them down. But Kismat was unusual in many ways, unlike her, I could not speak back and say the overcrowded Austin Mini was not a place where shoes stayed shiny. Gosh!

I was petrified of Mrs Rumbold. I even said a little prayer each night before I went to sleep. I would say three times under my breath: "Allah, please make sure that Rumbold Teacher is not angry with me. Ameen."

I hoped and dreamed that one day she would not halt by my side to disapprove of the state I was in, but give a nod of approval and sail past smilingly.

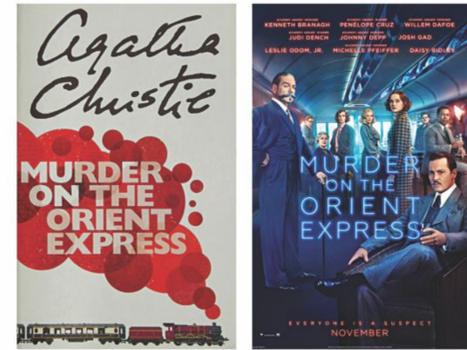
Alas, that day never came.

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ENTERTAINMENT

It is often said that the book is better than the movie, and it is certainly not every day that a movie improves on the novel that inspired it, or that a masterpiece like *Rashōmon* springs out of the mind of Ryūnosuke Akutagawa and into the hands of Akira Kurosawa to mould into the vivid piece of storytelling and cinematic brilliance that it is. With filmmakers determined to take a shot at breathing new life into literary greats, here are six exciting on-screen adaptations you don't want to miss this fall.

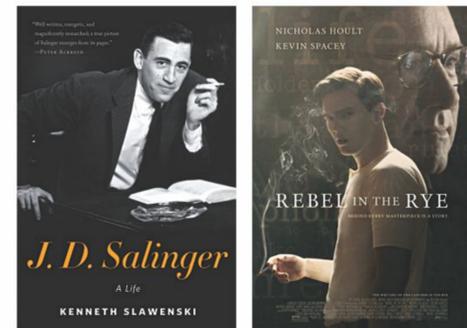


Murder on the Orient Express

In the dead of night, the Simplon-Orient Express is stopped in its track by a snowdrift in the middle of Vinkovci, Croatia. Come morning, the millionaire Samuel Edward Ratchett is found dead in his compartment. Detective extraordinaire Hercule Poirot, also on the train, must find the murderer among the passengers before the killer can strike again.

This November, seasoned Shakespearean thespian Kenneth Branagh takes on the role of actor and director in the new cinematic reproduction of Agatha Christie's 1934 eponymous murder mystery. Branagh will have to live up to the impressive moustachioedness of the previous Poirot, played by David Suchet in the television series that spanned over two decades, as well the hype left by BBC One's skilful adaptation of Christie's *And Then There Were None* in 2015. A star-studded cast, consisting of Johnny Depp, Michelle Pfeiffer, Penélope Cruz, Dame Judi Dench, Willem Dafoe, and Daisy Ridley of *Star Wars* fame, join him on the Orient Express as it travels from Constantinople to Paris. As Christie fans will know, the beloved detective (played by Branagh with a new moustache) will be faced with an ethical dilemma as he tries to solve the case of the night-time murder on the luxury convoy.

Out November 10



Rebel in the Rye

As private as he was popular, J D Salinger remained shrouded in mystery in American literary history throughout most of his life. In 2010, the enigmatic author of *The Catcher in the Rye* became the subject of Kenneth Slawenski's biography, *J D Salinger: A Life*. Brimming with rich details collected from interviews,

correspondence, and public records, Slawenski took an unprecedented look inside Salinger's world—from his privileged youth and time serving in World War II, to his encounters with literary luminaries and rise to fame (which would later speed up his retreat into the hills of New Hampshire).

Directed by Danny Strong (who you might remember for his cameos as Paul in *Grey's Anatomy* and Trey in *Mad Men*), *Rebel in the Rye* brings to the silver screen Salinger's unforgettable story as told by Slawenski. With

TELEVISION FOR THE BIBLIOPHILE

6 on-screen adaptations we're excited to see this season

AMIYA HALDER

Nicholas Hoult from cult favourite *Skins* in the role of the title character and Kevin Spacey as his mentor Whit Burnett, this is one biopic no lover of literature would want to miss.

Out September 8



It

In mundane, small-town Maine, seven teenagers stumble upon 'It'—a phantasmagorical monster that feeds on the nightmares of its victims to disguise itself when hunting prey. This guise often appears in the form of the quintessential spook-film freak—the murderous clown Pennywise—in order to attract its preferred prey—little children.

Bringing to life Stephen King's well-loved, chilling tale of terror is second-time Argentine director Andy Muschietti. With the screenplay safe in the hands of the masterful Cary Fukunaga (director of the first season of *True Detective*), horror-novel buffs can be sure to expect only the worthiest rendition of King's psychological tour de force that tore down the façade of small-town charm. Fans of actor extraordinaire Stellan Skarsgård will be excited to know his youngest son Bill Skarsgård has is filling in the jumbo-sized shoes of Pennywise. With his son Alexander playing a two-faced, psychopathic socialite in *Big Little Lies* and Gustaf an outlandishly talented screwball in *Vikings* respectively, high hopes are pinned on Skarsgård's youngest.

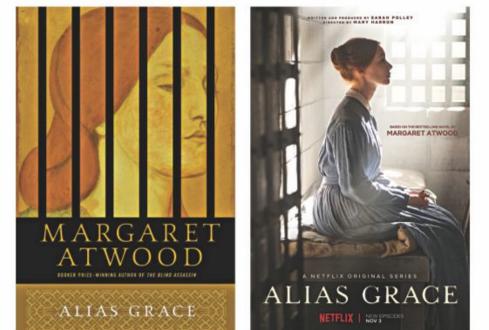
Out September 8

Strike

With TV miniseries *Strike*, JK Rowling enters a new stratum of literary stardom, joining Jane Austen as one of the few British authors to have all of their novels adapted for the screen. The first two books of the Cormoran Strike series (*The Cuckoo's Calling* and *The Silkworm*), written under Rowling's nom de plume Richard Galbraith, have been adapted for the first season, while *Career of Evil* is slated for a later instalment.

Tom Burke from *The Hour* and *State of Play* plays Cormoran Strike, the tragic detective-hero with "a grumpy, philistine act" and a lugubrious past, while Holliday Grainger, the infamous Lucrezia Borgia of *The Borgias*, fills in the role of the bright, slightly square, but overall well-adjusted sidekick-foil character (a Watson meets Scully sort of deal). One holds high expectations of detective fiction as of late, and the unabashed smattering of breaking and entering and usual suspects may position the show as only subpar cerebral, but what *Strike* lacks for in suspense and drama, it makes up for with superb pace, grit, humour, and well, Britishness.

Since August 27



Alias Grace

In 1843 Canada, a housemaid, Grace Marks, is convicted of murdering her employer and his housekeeper-mistress. Some believe Grace is innocent, and she herself claims to have no memory of the killings. The Methodist church decides to employ an alienist to unravel the mystery in hopes of obtaining her release. Margaret Atwood fictionalises this account in the 470-page whopper *Alias Grace*, her second novel to be televised in 2017.

Recent TV adaptations, Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* included, show that the move from page to screen doesn't have to disappoint, which shoehorned movie reproductions often tend to. While straight, faithful adaptations are a rarity if the plan is for a longer dramatisation, the six-episode miniseries may stick closer to the text than its Emmy-winning predecessor.

Out September 25

Mr Mercedes

Stephen King and his clowns are certainly having a moment. In *Mr Mercedes*, one of at least five on-screen adaptations of King's this year, a man in a clown mask drives a stolen Mercedes into a line at a job fair, gruesomely killing eight people, and then disappearing without a trace. When retiree detective Bill Hodges, played by Brendan Gleeson, receives a letter from the killer, the ex-cop decides to take up the unsolved case instead of handing it over to the police. Hodges must catch the killer in a deeply sinister race against time to avert his own death that might cost the lives of others.

Will 2017 be the year of brilliant mentalists, murders, and mysteries? With veteran actor Brendan Gleeson, *Harry Potter's* much-loved Mad Eye Moody, confronting Harry Treadaway, the romantic drug-addled Victor Frankenstein of *Penny Dreadful*, in *Mr Mercedes*, we certainly hope so.

Since August 9