

**KING KONG
– THE ADAPTATION OF THE LOST WORLD**

Szerző:

Mező Lilla Dóra
Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem

Lektorok:

Simó Ferenc Zoltán (Dr. Jur.)
Debreceni Egyetem

Kelemen Lajos (PhD)
Okoskocka Kft.

Szerző e-mail címe:
dori.mezo1@gmail.com

...és további két anonim lektor

Absztrakt

KING KONG – AZ ELVESZETT VILÁG ADAPTÁCIÓJA

Az első King Kong (1933) film és az elődje az Elveszett világ (1925) egyaránt kiérdemelték a helyüket a mozi történetében, mivel úttörői voltak a filmkészítés különböző aspektusainak, valamint kikövezték az utat a szörny filmek számára. A következőkben össze fogjuk hasonlítani a két filmet, hogy megtudjuk, vajon a nagy Kong története eredeti-e, vagy csak az ősének egy tovább fejlesztett másolata.

Kulcsszavak: cselekmény, karakterek, kompozíció, hang, Kong, dinoszauruszok

Diszciplína: médiatudomány

Abstract

The first King Kong (1933) movie and its predecessor The Lost World (1925) both earned a well-deserved place in the history of cinema as they were pioneers in different aspects of filmmaking and they also paved the way for monster movies. In the following, we will compare the two movies to find out whether the story of the great Kong is an original one or it's just a developed copy of its ancestor.

Keywords: plot, characters, composition, sound, Kong, dinosaurs

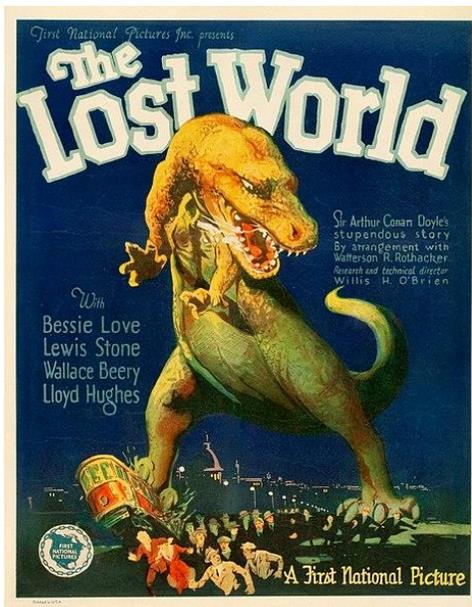
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Harry O' Hoyt's movie, *The Lost World* (1925), originated from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's novel from 1912 with the same title. Conan Doyle's idea was to create a simple adventure story that follows the literary traditions (Hoppenstand, 1999).

The movie adaptation of the novel surpassed any expectations and took it to a different level (Figure 1). „Through the pioneering special effects of Willis O'Brien, this silent film would lay the foundation for a wave of monster movies – most notably O'Brien's career-defining work, *King Kong*” (Hunt, 2019).

Figure 1: Theatrical release poster of *The Lost World* (1925). Author: unknown. Source: Net1



In the following, we will examine in how many ways the first *King Kong* movie (Figure 2) relied on that foundation and try to prove how *King Kong* adapted the story of *The Last World* movie by analyzing the two films through different film making aspects.

Figure 2: A scan of the original publicity poster for *King Kong* (1933). Author: unknown. Source: Net2



Our Thesis: The film *King Kong* (1933) adapted the narrative of *The Lost World* (1925) and tells the same developed story.

Plot

King Kong and *The Last World* both tell a chronological objective story about a prehistoric beast who is captured, dragged to a big city, and escaped there. As both movies are built up around the same theme we can observe a lot of similarities and some differences in the storylines. In figures 3 and 4 we can observe the plot constructions of the two films.

As we can see in the plot development of the films that there is a logical relation between one event and another. The films have a classical plot development and it should be highlighted how similar the two plot construction are, as it shows how *King Kong* adapted the narrative. If we observe the main pinches and plot points of the figures we can see that there's only a bit of difference in Plot Point 2, but even there the transportation of the *Brontosaurus* happens minutes later in *The Last World* too. In Pinch 3 we also have to remark the importance of the role of a monkey as both *King Kong* and the *Ape-Man* pulled up the rope or rope ladder to prevent the escaping.

Some other examples for the similarities: during the plot of both films there's a moment when the beasts attack the humans and the camera shows a little child who just sits in their way until the mother saves him in the last moments.

Also, both female lead characters have some kind of connection with the beast. The difference that while in *The Last World* Paula only has a connection because his father is stuck there with them, in *King Kong* the relationship of Beauty and the Beast is in the focus.

In both stories, there's an item (a map or a diary) that triggers the leader of the crew to go on a mission. The goal of that mentioned leader is to find a legendary creature in which others don't believe that exists and prove their rights. Both leaders' goal expands to rescue either Ann or Paula's father, but in the end, they don't forget about their primary goal. This rescue mission makes both stories a human interest story, which in the case of *The Lost World* is important for the foundation of the mission.

In the plot, we can observe they omit how the beasts were transported to the big city. But while in *The Lost World* they tell us how they plan to do it, in *King Kong* we can just guess and accept that during the transportation there wasn't any complication. In *King Kong*, the building of the raft is also offscreen but mentioned in dialog how they will do it. Another action outside-camera is how Denham hides and survives Kong in the midpoint.

None of the movies tells us why and/or how the dinosaurs are still alive. But meanwhile, in *The Lost World*, the presence of the dinosaurs are comprehensible and crucial, in the film *King Kong* they raise some questions.

Figure 3: The plot of *The Lost World* (source: Author)

| The Lost World (1925) | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|---|--|---|
| Act I: Set-up | | Act II: Confrontation | | Act III: Resolution | | | | |
| <p>Professor Challenger claims that the dinosaurs are still alive.</p> <p>Malone arrives to create a report even though reporters are exiled from the event, but Sir John Roxton helps him to get in.</p> | <p>New Situation</p> <p>Malone climbs into Challenger's house through the window. He needs to get in that group, because of his fiancé.</p> <p>Challenger and Malone fight.</p> | <p>Progress</p> <p>Roxton confesses his feelings to Paula.</p> <p>On the road, there are several wild animals in the jungle.</p> <p>They build a camp at the bottom of the plateau.</p> <p>Paula tells how his father made a bridge from a tree.</p> <p>The skeptical part of the group still doesn't believe in dinosaurs.</p> | <p>Complications & Higher Stakes</p> <p>Paula and the crew see the fight of an Allosaurus and Trachodon.</p> <p>Allosaurus was stopped by a group of Triceratops.</p> <p>Paula has difficulties getting through the bridge but she manages.</p> | <p>Final Push</p> <p>Malone confesses his love to Paula.</p> <p>Allosaurus pushes a Brontosaurus into the deep.</p> <p>Volcano erupts.</p> <p>They escape thanks to Austin's and Zambo's rope ladder (monkey ladder)</p> <p>Brontosaurus fell into the water from the Tower Bridge and swim away.</p> | <p>Pinch 1: Opportunity</p> <p>Challenger organizes a team to get proofs (Prof. Summerlee – the skeptic, Roxton – the expeditor and hunter, -> Malone tries but got chased away)</p> | <p>Pinch 2</p> <p>An Ape-Man attacks them with a rock which made them look up and see a Pteranodon, the first dinosaur in the movie.</p> | <p>Pinch 3</p> <p>Allosaurus attacks the crew. Malone throws a torch into his mouth, and it leaves.</p> | <p>Pinch 4: Climax</p> <p>The fiancé of Malone got married while he was away so Malone and Paula can be together. Roxton accepts their decision.</p> |
| | | | | <p>Malone tried to find a safe place for the crew and got attacked by the Ape-Man. Roxton shoots it but doesn't kill it.</p> <p>Different kind of dinosaurs fights several times (including Zambo's rope ladder (monkey Tyrannosaurus too))</p> <p>The crew finds a cave. Challenger builds a catapult.</p> | | <p>Plot point 1: Change of Plans</p> <p>We get to know the story of Paula's father thanks to his diary. The expedition becomes a rescue mission (founded by the journal as it's a human interest story).</p> | <p>Plot point 2: Major Set-back</p> <p>Roxton founds the bones of Paula's dad.</p> | |
| | | | | | | <p>Midpoint: Point of No return</p> <p>The Brontosaurus pushes the bridge into the deep -> they are stuck in the plateau.</p> | | |

The main problem with King Kong is, that while in *The Lost World* the crew goes to the plateau to find dinosaurs, the crew of King Kong goes to Skull Island to find Kong. There's no mention of dinosaurs before in the plot to prepare the audience for it. Even when we saw the first Stegosaur they only comment on it that it's „Something from the dinosaur family...a prehistoric beast” (Cooper and Schoedsack, 1933). We can understand that their main focus was to rescue Ann, but seeing a living dinosaur is not an everyday moment. In New York when they show off King Kong in the Broadway event, they also only talk about Kong without the mentions of dinosaurs. We can interpret that they would have talked about the dinosaurs if Kong didn't escape, but that we can never know.

The problems with dinosaurs in King Kong is not only disturbing, because we never get an explanation to them or a correct reaction from the crew to their presence, but because they got a big presence in the ups and downs of the story. Both King Kong and *The Lost World* are built up around dinosaurs' fights. The plot of *The Lost World* is basically constructed by the stop motion special effects of Willis O'Brien as almost the whole movie is about dinosaurs fighting each other and the humans in most cases just passively around watching it. King Kong has to fight dinosaurs too, but even if it's a big part of the film, the storyline here is more complex. Maybe

that's the reason that they paid more attention in *The Lost World* to be historically correct: „A Brontosaurus – feeding merely on leaves. Perfectly harmless – unless it happens to step on us” (Hoyt, 1925). While in King Kong we can see the same kind of herbivorous dinosaur attacking the rescue crew in a raft and trying to eat them. Also, Kong fights with a Plesiosaur which moves and acts unnaturally like a snake which creates the question of why didn't they just use a giant snake?

Naturally, the plot construction of *The Lost World* raises some questions too for example with the eruption of the volcano. The audience didn't see that volcano before and when it erupts it didn't cause much damage and that storyline minutes later fade away totally.

Meanwhile, the two films have lots in common there is a big difference in the closure. Although both creatures fell from one of the cities' biggest tourist attractions (Empire State Building, Tower Bridge), in *The Lost World* the Brontosaurus swim away which in a way a happy ending because he won't terrorize London anymore, but the people accept that Professor Challenger was right. In the meantime, it's disturbing because we don't know where it swam. Kong, on the contrary, dies which gives perfect closure for his character but doesn't make us think about what happens after. Some other main differences: In *The Lost World* they can't rescue the father, meanwhile in

King Kong Ann was rescued both times. Also in *The Lost World*, we don't see the dinosaurs killing people (we know that Paula's father is dead but they only show his bones), meanwhile, Kong kills a lot of people in front of the camera.

Because of these differences and problems (e.g. with the dinosaurs) the plot of *The Lost World* could have been more well-constructed than the plot of *King Kong* if only the dinosaur fights didn't take the focus away from the narrative. In conclusion, there might be some differences and/or additional storylines, because of what the two films are not totally the same, but in the question of the main plot points/pinches of the narrative construction, they share the same ideas which make them tell the same story in a way.

Characters

King Kong and *The Lost World* are using the same character types:

- lead beast: Kong, Brontosaurus
- group leader, believer (others think they are crazy): Carl Denham, Professor Challenger
- passive female lead: Ann Darrow, Paula White. Although it's mentionable that while Paula is mostly a passive character too she does more things than Ann. For example: when there was a possibility of escaping she took it on her own. Meanwhile, Ann could escape for example during the fights of Kong and the Tyrannosaur as

it wasn't that big jump off from the tree but she stayed and fell anyway. Even when Driscoll saves her she doesn't climb down on the rope on her own just clings on John and let him rescue her.

- the male lead who at the beginning for different reasons don't want the girl, but in the end fall in love with the female lead and marry her: John Driscoll, Edward Dunn Malone
- the characters who believe the leader from the beginning: Captain Englehorn, Sir John Roxton
- the sceptics: Theatrical agent, Professor Summerlee
- a foreigner character: the naval officer who peeled potatoes, Zambo
- monkey with some human qualities: Kong, Ape-Man
- dinosaurs in general (who fights a lot): Brontosaurus, Tyrannosaur, and Pteranodon can be found in both films

The creators try to make the characters realistic, but due to the technical possibilities of that time they didn't really succeed especially in the case of the prehistoric creatures, but also in the case of the human characters. Ann accepts a job offer even without questioning where are they sailing or how long, which is quite unrealistic. But considering the technical possibilities, they made a good job of making everything as realistic as they could.

Considering the focus of the story King Kong focuses on one main beast, while *The Lost World* focuses on dinosaurs in general. In *King Kong*, we can also observe that there is a change in character as he doesn't kill the Beauty, but mentionable that we only know this is a change from the discussions of the other characters and don't see his acts before it. All these attributes mentioned before shows that King Kong not only adapted the plot/narrative but the characters too.

The composition of the movie

The similarities of the two movies not only shows in the plot construction or the characters, but we can find them in the composition of the films. For example, we can take a look at the camera angles. Both films usually take shots from eye level, but if they show big crowds they usually take a high angle (like when *Challenger* gives speeches or when the citizens are fleeing in both films). When *Professor Challenger* talks to the crowd in the second meeting or *Kong* looks down to the city from the Empire State Building both take high angles and make us the feeling that we looking down with them.

Adding to the camera angles, the frame in *The Lost World* never moves, while in *King Kong* (even as in most of the time the frame stays in one place) on occasions it starts moving. Like when the crew walks in the jungle they sometimes use

dolly shots to trek their movement better. Or in the first scene of *Broadway*, we can see a crane shot.

Continuity editing describes both films but we can observe that they break the 180-degree rule. *King Kong* breaks it when they are escaping from the Brontosaurus and shows us shots where they are running in one direction than to the other. While in *The Last World Professor Challenger* breaks it when he walks into the office to get his phone call about the escaping of the Brontosaurus. We have to also highlight that as we can see the breaking of the 180-degree rule in both cases is connected to a Brontosaurus.

A shot of the two films usually takes 8 seconds, but it can go up 16 seconds in some longer ones in general. During dialogs in *King Kong* there's a pattern in which they usually show all the discussing characters, then only one of them, but for the answer to that they show all of them again. Only when the dialogue doesn't stop there will be shot/reverse-shot on the main talking persons, then the group. In *The Lost World* usually, all the characters are shown always and it's rare to take a shot of only one person in discussions.

Mainly the two films use medium shots in the scenes with only people. They start using long shots in the sequences with *Kong* and/or dinosaurs. The distance from *Kong* changes when they use close-ups on his face to show how terrifying he is.

In the movies, space is always crowded. The only few exceptions when they are not crowded are in some of the establishing shots for example of the sea. In *The Lost World*, the people are usually in the foreground and the dinosaurs are mostly in the background/middle part of this space. Meanwhile, in *King Kong*, the people are in the foreground too but not always as they use the depth of the space more to their advantage.

As these films were made in 1933 and 1925 they use some old continuity techniques naturally. Before a new big sequence, there's always a fade in/out to create logical transitions from one time or place to another (Corrigan and Corrigan, 2014). In *King Kong*, scenes also tend to blend into each other.

In these examples, we can see that there are some compositional differences between the two films, mostly because of the appearance of the new film techniques which weren't available at the time of *The Lost World*, but in the most important composition aspects, they are the same.

Sound

The use of sound is an interesting perspective of the analysis of the movies as *The Lost World* is a silent movie while *King Kong* was made with sound. This aspect does not show the adaptation of *The Last World* as we say in our thesis more proves how *King Kong* developed it (partly thanks to the technical in-

novations of the time). The analysis of the sound is also important as *King Kong* changed the film music forever. "For the first time, a sound film was accompanied by an original non-diegetic score that paralleled, supported and enhanced the narrative, pioneering the techniques and principles that have governed film scoring ever since" (Allen, 2014).

In *The Last World*, we can observe that they played classical music more just as background noise to not sit in total silence and not to enforce the happenings of the story. Also, it doesn't have a meaning if there is a silence between two music, because it usually just a short pause between two songs. For example, the Brontosaur ramping in London during a sweet melody which isn't put there to make a bigger contrast and convert focus on the rampage, just a part of the melody which doesn't fit the scene. Or it's the same phenome with the dinosaur fights.

Meanwhile, in *King Kong*, the sound enforces the narrative. That does not only mean the special motifs like Kong's roar that identifies the character, but also in the cases where the music is only background noise the rhythm and the sound of the music are fitting the scenes and have an important part in creating the ambiance. For example, they play sinister music when they arrive at Skull Island or before we see Kong for the first time. During the bride ceremony of the tribe with Ann the rhythm of the music

accelerate which fits the fast rhythm of the narrative of the sequence as well. It slows down when they close the gate behind Ann as it stigmatizes her fate, then accelerates again when the tribe climbs up to the wall to see the Beast. It suddenly stops so we can have full focus on what the tribal leader of the ceremony says. He speaks in a foreign language but we can realize that we will finally meet Kong. Then after the first gong, the silence makes us more excited and makes the scene more terrifying for Ann and the audience as she doesn't know what to expect just that something horrible. The second gong starts sinister music again and we hear Kong's fearful roar for the first time before seeing him. At last, he enters the scene too so we can finally connect that roar to the lookalike.

This example shows exactly how the rhythm and the sounds become such an active part of the movies with sound compared to the silent ones. It also shows that thanks to this technological evolution the presentation of the narrative developed too.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our thesis: The film King Kong (1933) adapted the narrative of The Lost World (1925) and tells the same developed story – was correct. It shows in the similarity of the main pinches and plot points of the plot construction, of the use of the same character types, and the composition. We also proved how King

Kong developed this adapted story as it created a more complex storyline, started to move the frame and using the depth of the space, also pioneering with the sound. These developments partly can be thanked the evolutions of the film making with time. We can also suspect that the big similarity can be partly because they worked both with the genial stop-motion animation pioneer Willis O'Brien. In the end, both films are very important historically and to see them with nowadays eyes can enable us to appreciate more the technical effort and creativity put into these films. They also give the foundation not only to monster movies but to several remakes. Counting in the ones we are talking about in this essay recently there are 12 King Kong movies (live actions, animations, with other characters like Kong vs. Godzilla included) also there are the two Jurassic trilogies (Jurassic Park and Jurassic World) which originated from The Lost World (1925). In the animation movie Up (2009) the plateau is very similar to the one in The Lost World which can be a contribution to the old movie too, etc.

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