In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Media Adaptations of Children's Literature: The Brave New Genre

John Daniel Stahl (bio)
The special demand which we as literary critics tend to make of media adaptations of literary works is that they be "faithful" to the originals, at least in spirit and in mood if not in detail. The phrase frequently used is "scrupulously faithful." It is certainly painful for someone who agrees with Elizabeth Segal that "The Little House" books by Laura Ingalls Wilder are valuable as an honest assessment of pioneer life to read the following:  

'Fast-Food' Enterprise Disrupts Prairie Peace. 8 p.m. *Little House on the Prairie*. A fast-talking salesman convinces Mrs. Oleson she can become rich by converting her family restaurant into a 'fast-food' franchise, but when her success threatens to wreck the home life of Charles Ingalls and Nels Oleson, they set out to ruin business at the new eatery.

*(The Hartford Courant, Monday, December 7, 1981, D9).*

The TV series, "remotely" based on Wilder, as Segel suggests, violates the spirit of the original in various ways, not least through the gender roles portrayed and by the infusion of a form of competition characteristic of contemporary urban society, not of the 19th-century American frontier. The television industry has remade an American children's classic in its own image. Also lost in the process are the lucid beauty and the accuracy of observation so characteristic of Wilder's writing. It is easy for us as literary critics to decry these depredations which accompany the adaptation of a work of children's literature to the media.

But there is another special demand which we ought to make equally of media adaptations of literary works for children, and which ought in fact to take precedence when we have to choose between the two criteria. This demand is that the adaptation employ the artistic
character and potential of its medium as fully as possible. This means that we must judge adaptations as integral artistic expressions: a children's film as film, a children's television show as television, a children's sound recording as sound recording, not just (or perhaps not at all) as a mutant offspring of literature. The filmstrip is an example of a medium in which the desire to adapt literary works for children has trampled down respect for the artistic potentialities of the medium. Probably the filmstrip is too limited a medium to become a "legitimate art form" as film has, but it does demand and benefit from the kind of close critical attention which Ethel Heins gave it in her survey of the waste-land of filmstrip adaptations of the children's stories and poems.  

It should be self-evident that thorough, intelligent assessment of film and other media as art requires knowledge of and respect for the medium involved. Film and television criticism, the basis of "visual literacy," assumes knowledge of the visual media, an expertise in which many literary critics, myself among them, are deficient. Here is a case where the much-vaunted interdisciplinary approach is not only desirable but necessary. As critics of children's literature in the media, we need greater familiarity with the intrinsic characteristics and possibilities of the media themselves.

The term "visual literacy," the stated goal of many interdisciplinary language arts teaching efforts, is itself something of an anachronism. It is potentially misleading because it carries over to the discussion of other media the implication that critical appreciation of works in these media consists of a form of reading, only transposed to a new, "visual" realm. I don't have a satisfactory term to substitute for "visual literacy" yet, and certainly a "literate" approach can accomplish a great deal. But something more is possible and ultimately required.

Filmmakers and other media artists with sensitivity and respect for the literary texts they are working with, as well as children's book authors whose works have been adapted to an audio-visual medium, emphasize repeatedly how intrinsically different that medium is from the literary work. Each has its own forms and requirements. Morton Schindel...
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if not in detail. The phrase frequently used is "spectacularly faithful." It is certainly justified for someone who agrees with Elizabeth Berger. "The Little House" books by Laura Ingalls Wilder are available as an audio cassette on pleasant life to read the following 1

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