

FROM LITERARY TO VISUAL: EXPLORING FIDELITY AND CREATIVE FREEDOM IN THE GUIDE AND THE WHITE TIGER

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INTRODUCTION:

Oxford Dictionary defines fidelity as the quality of being loyal to somebody/something ("Fidelity," Oxford Learner's Dictionaries). Film Adaptation is a process of transferring the textual content into audio-visual content and in the field of translation and adaptation, the question of fidelity is always in contention. According to Hutcheon, the love for adaptation is not new in Western culture and despite criticism, it is not considered a secondary or derivative act (Hutcheon, 2004). Since the beginning of filmmaking, filmmakers have looked out for literature for the stories. Short stories, plays, poems, novels as well as non-fictional works have been used as the sources of the stories for the films. Transferring the textual content into an audio-visual form of the film has been challenging on many accounts. The language of literature and the language of film have similarities and differences. Like the translation of the literary text, film adaptation faces the challenges of differences in language, culture, and context. The perfect translation is unattainable and so is the perfect adaptation. The challenge of converting words into images is bigger than the challenge of converting words in one language into another. However, the biggest challenge is the interpretation of the text. Due to the fluidity of the meaning no single meaning of the text can be derived. Mendie and Udofia while analyzing Derrida's contribution to the study of meaning of text reiterate the central idea of Derrida about the chaotic nature of language and the fluidity of meaning (Mendie and Udofia, 2020 p. 43). The uncertainty of meaning becomes a big hindrance in translation as well as adaptation while transforming the source material from one into another medium.

Adaptations are very popular among the audience and achieve great success as the films benefit from the popularity of books. According to a report by Forbes published in 2019, the box office success rate of adaptation is higher than films based on original screenplay. At the same time, the report adds that movies boost the sales of the source

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books (Rowe, 2018). However, the problem of fidelity of the films to the source material has always been a moot point among film and literary circles.

In the beginning, many literary scholars and critics lamented the adaptations stating that it ruins both art forms. The question of fidelity to the source of the story was long debated in scholarly circles (Cartmell and Whelehan, 2007). A well-known quote about translation is often attributed to Yevgeny Yevtushenko "Translation is like a woman. If it is beautiful, it is not faithful. If it is faithful, it is most certainly not beautiful" (Yevtushenko). It means that if the translator tries to be faithful to the source language text (SLT) the target language text (TLT) cannot be good. Similarly, it was argued that the filmmakers cannot reproduce the story as it is in its source text.

On the contrary, there were views that the original story should be shown in the film as it is otherwise it corrupts the originality of the story (Cartmell, 2007). Some films are faithful representations of the source, and some could be merely inspired by the original story and loosely translated. When the film tries to be faithful it is limited by certain constraints as it is not easy to bring the body and soul of one medium into another quite different medium.

Both works of art have different mediums of expression. The medium of literature is text which is a single-track medium and the medium of film, on the other hand, has multiple tracks. It involves pictures, sound, actors, visual effects, text etc. Due to this difference, the presentation of the story changes drastically. The challenges of expressing in both the media are different. Complete fidelity is impossible as the film is more complex and has various ways of expression than a literary text. Unlike a literary text, film is an amalgamation of arts, science, and commerce. Film adaptations have to consider various aspects like plot, theme, character, style, tone, etc. while adapting a literary text. Cultural differences, time constraints, audience expectations, and creative choices are a few challenges faced by the adapters. In the words of Hutcheon, the filmmaker may have to condense the plot, omit much psychological analysis, some characters, and events and change the style of narration (Hutcheon, 2004). The director may omit non-essential events and add new elements to suit the narration. All these aspects determine the production of the film.

Literature Review:

Ritu Mohan, in her PhD thesis, observes that David Lean is a faithful adapter who directed *The Great Expectations*- one of the best faithful adaptations of Dickens (Mohan). Several directors did not adhere to the originality of the text and left out their impression in the films resulting in a new creative work of art. Vishal Bharadwaj, a celebrated director from India has adapted *Macbeth* as *Maqbool* and *Othello* as *Omkara*. He has deviated from the storyline as well as molded the story into an Indian milieu (Mohan, 2015).

Film and literary critics have held diverse views about fidelity and adaptation throughout the years. Some critics, especially literary critics like Woolf, Faulkner, and Salinger had adverse views on adaptations (Cartmell and Whelehan, 2007). Virginia Woolf believed that films should have their own stories and not be adapted from literary texts and corrupt the story. According to Woolf "cinema fell upon its prey (novels) with rapacity". She thought that "the alliance is unnatural" (Woolf, 1926). Critics, particularly literary, considered literary texts sacrosanct. They thought adaptation was an impossible task. Some were puritanical and wanted a faithful representation of the text to the exactitude. They considered the literary texts perfect and the adapted film an imperfect version of it. To quote Linda Hutcheon, "Whether it be in the form of a videogame or a musical, an adaptation is likely to be greeted as minor and subsidiary and certainly never as good as the "original."" The adapted work is considered inferior to the original work regardless of its magnificence or success. Linda Hutcheon in her work "Adaptation Theory" challenges this very notion of the superiority of the "original" medium (Hutcheon, 2006, preface). On the other hand, some critics believed films could be creative and free to betray the source. Though, this change in thought came after several years of scholarly debates.

The first seminal work on adaptation studies is *Novels into Films: The Metamorphosis of Fiction into Cinema* by George Bluestone published in 1957. The book presents a detailed analysis of techniques of adaptation detailing the limitations and potential of film adaptation. Bluestone supports the idea of being faithful to the original work of literature in adaptation. However, he was open to the little changes required to adapt to the new medium on condition that the filmmaker catches the essence of the original work (Bluestone, 1956).

Robert Stam, in his article "Beyond Fidelity: The Dealogic's of Adaptation" (2000) discusses how one must look beyond moralistic lenses to analyse an adaptation. He states that an audience that has already relished literary text watches the film with the same expectations, and they get disappointed when the film fails to capture the literary source faithfully. He argues that the notion of fidelity itself is problematic for several reasons and asserts that adaptation is automatically different due to differences of medium of expression. The reader's interpretation of the novel's text is subjective as he can imagine the meaning of abstract words like beauty. On the other hand, in film, there is little scope for such a thing as the audience is 'shown' the beauty in person on the screen. This kind of difference makes films different from novels automatically. He further explains that due to "the shift from a single-track, uniquely verbal medium such as novel" ...to a multitrack medium such as film' literal fidelity is not possible and not desirable. He brings out an important question to the discussion by asking what aspect the fidelity should be shown (Stam, 2000). Whether fidelity to be shown to the plot, character descriptions, and author's

intentions, to the narrator, to the author, or the style or artistic devices is a big and difficult question to resolve. The article explores several aspects of the adaptations and concludes that rather than focusing on the idea of fidelity, the adaptation study should focus on dialogic responses. As mentioned in the introduction, the writer wants the scholars to go beyond the moralistic approach and adopt specific strategies for adaptation study.

In the introduction to *A Companion to Literature, Film and Adaptation*, Deborah Cartmell (2012) criticizes the idea of fidelity in adaptation. The early studies on literature and film have emphasized the faithful representations of literary masterpieces. Some scholars, like Virginia Woolf, have decried the idea of bringing pages onto the screen while scholars like André Bazin had a good opinion about adaptations. Cartmell further discusses the influence of literature and film on each other and adds that though adaptations started from a very early stage, till George Bluestone in 1957, there was very little study on the subject. Later studies have seen adaptations as the liberator of the text from its confined territory of author and readers hence she considers adaptation as an art form of democracy (Cartmell, 2012).

Antan Chatterjee, in his article "The Adaptation of Shakespeare in Indian Film" critically examines the various scholarly views on adaptation and opines that for an adapted film it is not required to maintain fidelity to the source. The author supports his argument with 'poetic freedom' taken by Shakespeare himself while writing the plays. Summarizing the history of adaptation in a nutshell since the beginning of the film art he adds further that like Western filmmakers, Indian filmmakers have also relied on the adaptation of literary text since the beginning of filmmaking. He explains how Vishal Bhardwaj molds the story of Hamlet and roots his Haider in the backdrop of human rights violations in Kashmir. Like Alfred Hitchcock, Bharadwaj takes the core concept from the Shakespearean play but also uses creative freedom to suit modern times and Indian audiences (Chatterjee, 2022). The writer advises the viewers to look at the adapted film in a new light rather than focusing on the fidelity criticism.

Theoretical Framework:

This research employs Linda Hutcheon's concept of fidelity in adaptation to examine the literary texts taken for the case study. The paper also uses her concept of the inadequacy of fidelity aspect as a parameter to evaluate an adaptation. Hutcheon stressed that adaptation is not merely a blind copy of the source material but it is a reinterpretation of the text in a new medium suitable to the new medium's format (Hutcheon, 2006).

Research Method:

The study conducts a comparative analysis of literary text and their adaptations with a specific focus on *The Guide* by R K Narayan and *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga. The

paper explores narrative structure, themes, and stylistic elements to understand how film adaptations handle the intricacies of fidelity and narrate in a creative manner suitable for the new medium and wider audience.

Case Studies:

The issue of fidelity can be studied in the context of *The Guide* by R K Narayan and *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga. Normally, the reader of a novel is a niche audience, on the other hand, the audience for a film is general and large in number. Since the reception of the film is an important aspect, the filmmakers have to consider various aspects. *The Guide*, directed by Vijay Anand, is an adaptation of the novel *The Guide* by R K Narayan. Anand had to modify the important elements of the narrative to cater to the broader audience. The novel focuses on the spiritual journey of the protagonist; however, the film highlights dramatic and romantic aspects. Expectedly, this shift in the narrative sparked debates amongst film scholars, and the issue of fidelity became the centre point of the debate. However, the cinema tried to keep the essence of Raju's philosophical journey and introspective themes of the novel which was a nuanced challenge. The novel portrays the internal conflict of the protagonist Raju using narrative techniques like interior monologue in the novel.

Similarly, *The White Tiger* which was adapted into a film by Ramin Bahrani portrays Adiga's satire of socio-economic inequalities, corruption, and moral degradation in contemporary India. The film retained the essence of the novel however, it simplified the plotline and characterization to enable smooth pacing of the film. The voice-over technique used in the film helps keep the scathing satire of the novel intact. Adiga's portrayal of insights of Balram and key observations are highlighted through voice-over. The film uses musical score, and engaging visuals to show the rise of the protagonist which seems to be celebratory. On the other hand, the novel explains the same in a critical tone. The film simplifies the dark psychological and ethical implications of the novel to bring dramatic effect.

These case studies show the filmmakers' attempts to strike a balance between faithfulness to the source material with the artistic demands of film. Both mediums have different ways of storytelling but the essence remains the same. In the adaptation of *The Guide*, Vijay Anand emphasizes visual aspects in the narrative to enhance story-telling but changes the philosophical depth of the story. Cinema requires to focus more on the visual representation of these internal emotions. In the film, Raju, the protagonist is shown meditating and conversing with villagers in contrast to the inner musings in the novel. Though this technique helps to transform the text into cinematic form, it undermines the philosophical depth of the text. This process aligns with Linda Hutcheon's concept of

adaptation as transformation and not merely a copy of the text. In the novel, the character of Rosie is portrayed as a bold character who defies the traditional norms of Indian society at the time. In contrast, the film had to consider the Indian audience and change the persona of Rosie who is more docile and has suicidal tendencies in the film. As Trisha Gupta writes, "The book's Rosie is full of plans; ...But Vijay Anand's film, keenly aware of his conservative audience, turns his Rosie into a bundle of nerves who tries three times to commit suicide..." (Premchand, 2019, 17). The names of the characters and the setting are changed to cater to the Hindi audience. The extramarital affair is shown with subtlety, Rosie is portrayed as a damsel in distress. Unlike the novel, the film does not have an ambiguous ending. The songs added in the film add softness to the character Raju and help in the acceptance of the character by the audience. The film focuses more on dramatization as it helps in catering to the audience. By taking such creative liberties, the director Vijay Anand did not adhere to the source text. Thus, the film adaptation remains faithful to a surface-level narrative but fails to grasp a deep philosophical level. Many readers who have read the novel, may not receive the film positively. In fact, the author, R K Narayan himself was unhappy with the filmmakers (Premchand, 2019, 15).

The film adaptation has time constraints due to which the content of the novel has to be condensed. It compels the filmmaker to summarize intricate internal thoughts and background stories and employ pertinent audio-visual equivalents. Balram's internal monologues play a significant role in the narration of the novel- *The White Tiger*. The themes like servitude, poverty, and socio-economic inequalities are key points running in the mind of the protagonist, BalramHalwai. The film transforms these philosophical musings of Balram into concise but impactful scenes. Linda Hutcheon's concept of recreation is evident here, as the film uses visuals, dialogues, and music to depict Balram's internal monologue. Balram's facial expressions reveal reflections about servitude while observing his employee's interactions. The film uses imagery and symbolism, metaphors to compress the backstory of his family and village. The confinements of the family system are depicted through the metaphor of the rooster coop. The reception of a novel by the reader calls for the reader's imagination to bring characters, actions, settings, etc., to life. On the contrary, the film depicts these aspects in concrete form using audio-visual aspects. The mise-en-scene in the film depicts the luxurious house of Ashok, the employer Balram, and juxtaposes it with the squalor of the driver's living area in the basement of the building. RaminBahrani tries to maintain Adiga's themes at the core with stylistic innovations using cinematic techniques. The multi-layered interpretations that a reader can derive from the novel are lost in the film's explicit portrayal of the contrasting city and village life which makes it easy for broader audience interpretations.

CONCLUSION:

The analysis of the scholarly articles and the case studies show that the critical opinions regarding the question of fidelity in film adaptation have changed over time from rigid to flexible. The concept of fidelity is a complex issue that deals with the audience expectations, creative choices of the filmmaker, constraints of time, interpretation of the source material, understanding cultural differences, translation of the text, etc. The literary critics, in the early years of film history, lamented that the filmmakers defiled the sanctity of the originality of the text. Postmodernism literary theories challenge the concept of fixed meaning hence the perspective of the originality of the text has changed. With the growing popularity and development of the film and with the arrival of new literary and film theories the views have changed, and fidelity does not remain a problem in adaptation anymore.

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