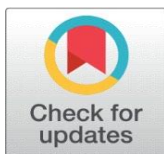
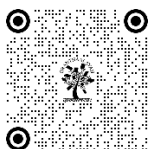


LITERARY TEXTS AND FILM STUDIES: THE CONTRADICTION IN ADAPTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to find the connection between literary texts and film studies. There is a connection between literary texts and films since the emergence of cinema. Many texts are converted into movies and some movies are converted into literary texts. When these two forms are converted there are chances of elimination and editions. There is always a contradiction in adaptation. The written narrative must not be considered as a measure of quality of film as it is a totally different artistic creation. Films and literary texts must be considered as independent artistic creations. In process of adaptations, high Fidelity leads to better outcomes.

Keywords: Adaptation, Contradiction, Fidelity, Literary Texts

1. INTRODUCTION

The contradiction in adaptation of literary texts to films is the challenge of being faithful to the original but also unfaithful as film is a different artistic creation. Literary texts and films share a history of connections with close bonds and parallel routes, eras, unite genres, countries and formats, demanding literary and cinematic analysis, ideological issues and considerations.

Linda Hutcheon defines adaptation in her book as, “an adaptation’s double nature does not mean, however, that proximity or fidelity to the adapted text should be the criterion of judgement of the focus of analysis.” A film can be thoroughly different from the book from which it was adapted and still can be a worthy film creation or many times even a worthy adaptation. She rightly pointed one of the chief problems for most of the filmmakers are that “usually adaptations, especially from long novels, mean that the adaptor’s job is one of subtraction or contradictions; which can be called “a surgical art.”

When filmmakers are adapting the literary text, they have to cut source material, eliminate secondary characters, plot and scenes and in some cases they may make drastic editions, create new plots and characters.

As Hutcheon says, “adaptation is repetition but repetition without replication...The act of adaptation always involves both (re-) interpretation and then (re-) creation”.(8)

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If a film maker followed the book exactly, scene for scene, it is still impossible to translate the book exactly. Here, the narration part becomes visually inserted into the scenes, and in doing it, the voice of the narrator could be lost or changed. Adaptation of literary texts into film began just after the development of film.

Later on, the advent of talkies and huge need for content in the early days of film making continued to drive adaptation. These talking pictures helped in enabling more natural use of dialogue from literary texts. During, studio system, more films were made in less production time than typical. For making many contract employees busy and to keep film industry going, more content was required. Literary texts were a good source of this rapid content.

2. THE CONTRADICTION IN ADAPTATIONS

As the adaptation of literary texts embarked, the aesthetic debate about adaptation also started. One of the major studies from the U.S. to evaluate the inert-relative process between literature and film, specifically the novel and the film was George Bluestone's *Novels Into Film* in which he says,

"The successful screen writer in an adaptation must understand the limitations of film medium and make a serious adjustment to a set of different and other conflicting conventions, conventions that have historically distinguished literature from the autonomous entities; the adaptation must link these "conflicting conventions". (1)

As per this, an adaptation is a kind of raw material which restates the theme for film. Here the main incidents, characters and thematic points become ancestor qualities for the film. He also says that the adapter becomes a real writer, not just a translator of another's work.

A great Bollywood example of this concept of adaptation is "**Maqbool**" (2003), directed by Vishal Bhardwaj. The film is an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, but it creatively reinterprets the play by setting it in the Mumbai underworld.

While the main incidents, characters, and thematic points from *Macbeth*—such as ambition, guilt, and fate—are preserved, Bhardwaj turns these into the ancestor qualities for his film. The central characters like Maqbool (Macbeth) and Abbaji (King Duncan) are transformed into mafia dons and gangsters, reflecting the power struggles and moral dilemmas of the criminal underworld in India. The adaptation goes beyond simple translation, as Bhardwaj infuses the narrative with local flavor, culture, and a fresh narrative, making it an original piece of cinematic art.

Similarly, Bhardwaj's other adaptations of Shakespeare's works, "**Omkara**" (based on *Othello*) and "**Haider**" (based on *Hamlet*), also follow this model of adaptation where the director becomes a real writer rather than just a translator.

When one thinks of adaptation, fidelity cannot be denied. In his essay named *Defence of Mixed Cinema*, Bazin argues that fidelity is a virtue and that adaptation should be regarded as a form of translation from one language to another. "A good adaptation is the essence of the letter and the spirit. The filmmaker is a deliberate craftsman who possesses all the powers of invention for creating a new different structure which will be parallel to the original." (138)

A Bollywood film that perfectly aligns with this idea of a "good adaptation" is "**Devdas**" (2002), directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali. The movie is based on Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's 1917 novel *Devdas*, but Bhansali doesn't just replicate the story—he creates a visually grand, emotionally rich, and highly conventionalized new structure that runs parallel to the original novel.

Bhansali captures the essence of the novel's tragic love story and emotional depth (the "letter and spirit"), but he amplifies the visual storytelling with stunning cinematography, elaborate sets, and powerful performances. He also expands certain characters, such as Paro and Chandramukhi, giving them more agency and emotional complexity than in the original text. His deliberate craftsmanship as a filmmaker transforms *Devdas* into an operatic, larger-than-life narrative that echoes the themes of love, loss, and societal norms, while creating something new and distinctly cinematic.

The film is a prime example of how an adaptation can retain the soul of the original work but also flourish as an inventive, standalone masterpiece.

Adaptation is interwoven by selective exposition and insight, fidelity is a meaningless label in this process. Film is a question of building a secondary work with the novel as its foundation. Film is never comparable to the novel nor worthy of it. It is totally new aesthetic creation in real sense, multiplied by the cinema. According to Bazin, the novel is a stimulus and the adapter is an interpreter. His writings on the interrelations between the novel and the film also explicitly refer to a fidelity to the spirit of text as a primary aesthetic design of the adaptation. He believes that a successful film adaptation is neither a replication nor a substitute; it is a re-experiencing in another medium.

Many film theorists are of the opinion that film adaptation necessitates changes. Lester Asheim in his Ph.D. dissertation writes,

“Essentially, this is a stylistic change which substitutes a pictorial style for the literary style of the novel. It alters the manner of storytelling but need not alter the matter.”(11)

A Bollywood film that exemplifies this idea of a "stylistic change" where the manner of storytelling is altered but the core matter remains intact is "**Lootera**" (2013), directed by Vikramaditya Motwane.

Lootera is loosely based on O. Henry's short story *The Last Leaf*. The film transforms the literary narrative into a more visual, cinematic experience, emphasizing pictorial storytelling through stunning cinematography, detailed period settings, and subtle performances. The melancholic and introspective tone of the original story remains, but the film conveys emotions and themes like love, sacrifice, and redemption through rich visual metaphors and artistic framing.

The film captures the essence of the original story's spirit, but the change in style—from literary to visual—makes it a highly sensory and atmospheric experience. The storytelling is minimalistic and relies heavily on mood, music, and visuals, demonstrating how a novel's themes can be communicated effectively through a different artistic medium without changing the core "matter" of the story.

He also says about the film's frequent alteration of the source that such manipulation, if not immoral is at least grossly dishonest. "The audience that knows only the film and not the book is presented with a falsified interpretation which leaves no clues that would permit it to reconstruct the original truth." (Asheim59)

Bluestone believes that a filmmaker is not simply a translator but a new author. In film criticism, it becomes easy for critics to recognize how a poor film has destroyed a superior novel. It is rarely recognized that such destruction is inevitable. The film adaptation is mostly seen as a failed form by many critics.

A Bollywood film that fits the perspective of Bluestone—that a filmmaker is a new author rather than just a translator—and one that faced criticism for not living up to its source material is "**Fitoor**" (2016), directed by Abhishek Kapoor.

Fitoor is an adaptation of Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, but many critics and viewers felt that the film failed to capture the depth and complexity of the original novel. The film was praised for its visual beauty and poetic style but criticized for not translating the novel's intricate character development and thematic richness into a cohesive narrative on screen. However, from Bluestone's point of view, the filmmaker here isn't simply translating Dickens' work but reimagining it through a new lens, with the Kashmiri backdrop, modern-day sensibilities, and Bollywood aesthetics.

While *Fitoor* may not have satisfied everyone in terms of faithfully adapting *Great Expectations*, it is a clear example of a filmmaker attempting to be a "new author" by giving the original story with a fresh narrative structure, even if the result was considered a flawed adaptation by traditional standards. This fits Bluestone's belief that some degree of destruction or divergence from the original is inevitable.

The Italian "New wave" film director once suggested that the ultimate literary adaptation could be a close up on a book with pages turned at regular intervals. This provides a faithful interpretation of the novel for the experience of viewing a film fundamentally different from that of reading a novel.

A Bollywood film that engages with the idea that the experience of watching a film is fundamentally different from reading a novel is "**Dhobi Ghat**" (2010), directed by Kiran Rao.

While *Dhobi Ghat* isn't a direct literary adaptation, it plays with the cinematic form in a way that mirrors the idea of how storytelling in film differs from that in novels. The film tells the interconnected stories of four characters living in Mumbai, using different cinematic techniques, such as video diaries and handheld camera footage, to contrast how personal narratives unfold in visual form versus literary form.

This approach resonates with the Italian "New Wave" director's suggestion. In *Dhobi Ghat*, instead of focusing on the written word, the narrative is fragmented and impressionistic, with visuals, moods, and silences playing key roles in telling the story. It doesn't rely on conventional storytelling or long dialogues but uses the city of Mumbai as a living, breathing character, much like how a book might evoke a setting through detailed descriptions. The film, like turning pages in a book, reveals new layers and emotions with each scene but remains a distinctly cinematic experience that couldn't be replicated in written form.

The film highlights the unique power of cinema to tell a story visually, in a way that acknowledges the differences between film and literature as distinct artistic experiences.

Dudley Andrew discusses the field of adaptation studies in terms of semiotics. Andrew in his book *Concepts in Film Theory* talks about three modes of relation between the film and text: borrowing, intersection and fidelity of transformation.

2.1. BORROWING

Andrew argues that “in the history of the arts, surely ‘borrowing’ is the most frequent mode of adaptation. Here the artist employs, more or less extensively, the material, idea, or form of an earlier, generally successful text” (98).

A Bollywood film that perfectly exemplifies Andrew’s notion of “borrowing” as a mode of adaptation is “**Om Shanti Om**” (2007), directed by Farah Khan.

Om Shanti Om extensively borrows material, ideas, and forms from both Bollywood’s own cinematic history and the trope of reincarnation, which has been a staple in Indian cinema. The film is Meta homage to Bollywood, borrowing elements from numerous classic films, genres, and iconic moments. It taps into familiar Bollywood themes such as love, revenge, reincarnation, and melodrama, drawing from earlier successful texts—both films and popular narrative forms.

Farah Khan blends these borrowed elements into a new, vibrant story that celebrates Bollywood’s golden era while creating something fresh and entertaining. The film’s references to earlier movies, its incorporation of well-known Bollywood clichés, and the deliberate use of nostalgia show how the “borrowing” mode of adaptation can be used to creatively reinterpret existing material.

By borrowing extensively from Bollywood’s past, *Om Shanti Om* becomes a cinematic tribute, where the earlier successful texts influence the new narrative while allowing the filmmaker to craft a unique story.

2.2. INTERSECTION

In intersecting, according to Andrew, “the uniqueness of the original text is preserved to such an extent that it is intentionally left unassimilated in adaptation. The cinema, as a separate mechanism, records its confrontation with an ultimately intransigent text.” (99). Andrew uses the metaphor of a flashlight that illuminates a chandelier—the adaptation places the form of the ‘original’ (i.e., the chandelier) in another medium (a shadow on the wall, the odd sparkling but indistinctness of the fully illuminated chandelier, etc). He notes, “All such works fear or refuse to adapt. Instead, they present the otherness and distinctiveness of the original text, initiating a dialectical interplay between the aesthetic forms of one period with the cinematic forms of our own period.

A Bollywood film that reflects Andrew’s idea of “intersecting” in adaptation, where the original text’s uniqueness is preserved but placed in a different medium, is “**Haider**” (2014), directed by Vishal Bhardwaj.

Haider is an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, but rather than assimilating the original into a seamless narrative, the film intentionally leaves parts of *Hamlet* “unassimilated.” The movie doesn’t directly copy Shakespeare’s play but intersects with it, preserving the essence of the original—its themes of revenge, madness, and betrayal—while placing it in the context of the Kashmir conflict in the 1990s.

The “flashlight” metaphor works perfectly for *Haider*: while the political and social upheavals of Kashmir create a unique cinematic narrative, the shadow of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* looms large, with its characters, key themes, and structure subtly present. The soliloquies, the existential musings, and even iconic scenes (like the graveyard scene) are interpreted in new ways but remain connected to their origins. This is similar to Andrew’s description of adaptation as illuminating the chandelier—the original text—without fully merging into the adaptation.

Thus, *Haider* allows the viewer to experience both Shakespeare’s original form and Bhardwaj’s distinct cinematic reimagining, resulting in a film where the confrontation between the original text and its new medium remains in tension.

2.3. FIDELITY OF TRANSFORMATION

Andrew argues that “the most frequent and most tiresome discussion of adaptation (and of film and literature relations as well) concerns fidelity and transformation” (100). As Leitch and other contemporary adaptation theorists note (and try to change), much adaptation praxis, if not theory, continues to emphasize fidelity.”

A Bollywood film that aligns with Andrew's critique of the "fidelity" debate in adaptation and moves beyond strict adherence to the source material is **"3 Idiots"** (2009), directed by Rajkumar Hirani.

3 Idiots is loosely based on ChetanBhagat's novel *Five Point Someone*, but it doesn't prioritize fidelity to the book's plot or characters. Instead, it takes the core themes—such as the pressure of academic success, the flaws in the Indian education system, and the journey of self-discovery—and transforms them into a more cinematic and emotionally resonant narrative. The film introduces new characters, plot twists, and dramatic moments not present in the novel, making it a clear example of adaptation where transformation takes precedence over strict fidelity.

The success of *3 Idiots* shows how adaptations can thrive by emphasizing creative reinterpretation rather than being chained to the idea of faithfully translating every element of the source material. The film reimagines Bhagat's original work in a way that is distinctly cinematic, moving beyond the novel's scope and capturing a wider range of emotions, humor, and social critique, while still preserving the essence of the themes discussed in the book.

This approach reflects the shift in contemporary adaptation theory, as argued by Leitch and other theorists, where transformation and reimagining are celebrated over fidelity to the source.

After outlining these modes of adaptation, Andrew tackles some of the central contentions of adaptation studies (in his day): "It is at this point [of fidelity in transformation] that the specificity of these two signifying systems [literature and cinema] is at stake. Generally film is found to work from perception toward signification, from external facts to interior motivations and consequences, from the givenness of a world to the meaning of a story cut out of that world. Literary fiction works oppositely. It begins with signs (graphemes and words) building to propositions which attempt to develop perception. As a product of human language it naturally treats human motivation and values, seeking to throw them out onto the external world, elaborating a world out of a story." (101)

Joseph Conrad puts in this way, "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel-it is, before all, to make you see." (83).

There is a strong semantic resemblance between novel and film where they both join and depart. The phrase "to make you see" assumes an affective relationship between the audience and creative artist. The novelist and director meet here in common purpose. Between the perception of the visual image and the conceptual mental image lies the basic difference between these two media.

Because film and novel are both natural, in this regard that aesthetic judgements are based on total entity including both thematic and formal accord. We may find that differences in theme and form are inseparable from differences in media.

Lester Asheim's more comprehensive survey indicates that of 5807 releases by major studios between 1935 and 1945, 976 that is 17.2 percent were derived from novels. (Asheim)

The industry's own appraisal of its work shows a strong and steady preference for films derived from novels, the specific films which persistently rate among top quality productions.

These statements are based on specific assumptions that set apart the mutation process of adapting a book into a film. These assumptions include remarks like "the movie remains faithful to the essence of the book," "essential sections were excluded, but the film is still entertaining," and "we are indebted that they changed the ending."

These standard judgements assume, among other things, a separable content which may be detached and reproduced as the snapshot reproduces a kitten; that incidents and characters in fiction are interchangeable with incidents and characters in the film. Deviations are permissible for such defined reasons- necessity of length or of visualization perhaps- but that the extent of the deviation will vary directly with the respect one has for the original. Taking liberties does not necessarily harm the quality of the film, whatever one may think of the novel, but such liberties are somehow a trick which must be concealed from the public.

A second difficulty arise as we shall also see in the film, aesthetic awareness is constantly driven back to epistemology. Since the manipulation of visual stimuli in the film and verbal manipulation in the novel both presuppose a spectator, attention is constantly forced to move between subject and object. Arnheim in his book said,

"It is one of the author's fundamental principles that art is just as little apart of material life as anything else in the world; and the only way to understand art is to start from the simplest forms of sensory- psychological impression and to regard visual and auditory art as sublime forms of seeing and hearing." (11)

Edwin Muir, toward the end of his study, *The Structure of the Novel*, finds that in trying to ascertain reasons for particular limitations in the novel he was driven “at least to the limitations of our vision of the world. We see things in terms of Time, Space, and Casualty...”(113-114.)

We may also expect to cope with similar problems in a comparative study of the two media.

3. CONTRASTS IN MEDIA

The first ever story-telling film, *Great Train Robbery* was created by Edwin S. Porter in 1903. Since then an opinion was formed by many that the film is inherently a form of literature. However it is not exactly true, while both film and literature share the goal of portraying specific situations with evolving plots and well-defined characters and settings, they achieve this objective through entirely clear-cut means. In the case of film, concrete situations, plot developments, characterizations, emotions, and philosophical ideas are conveyed using a series of vivid visual images projected onto a screen in a darkened room before an audience. The characteristic form and rhythm of the film are achieved through the process of editing, providing a unique experience for the viewers through sight and sound. On the other hand, literature relies solely on words as its medium. Writers carefully craft sentences and phrases to evoke maximum literary impact, stimulating the thoughts and emotions of their readers in a different yet equally powerful way.

3.1. THE FILM: RAW MATERIALS

It is based on the optical principle known as persistence of vision that a series of separable images, run behind the apertures, would create the illusion of constant motion. The principle has remained as it was starting from the flashcards of the nickelodeon to the splendor of the widescreen.

“We sit in darkness in theatre much of the time, so our eye fills in the gaps. First and foremost we must remember that the camera does not see things in the same way as the human eye. The brain before your eye selects the points of emphasis in the scene before you. You can look at a crowd and see nothing but one umbrella; you can look at an empty field and see millions of separate blades of grass..... Not so the camera. The lens soullessly records only sensitized piece of celluloid simply the amount of light of differing values that passes through it. No amount of thinking on the part of the cameraman will achieve any other emphasis. Out of a wide landscape it will not pick out that certain tree. You, as a person, have got to interfere, to place the camera in such a way that the picture it records will somehow give the emphasis you require.”(Basil Wright, 38-39)

We are brought to the heart of the creative film process with Pudovkin’s observation that the marked difference between the natural event and its appearance on the screen is exactly “what make the film an art.” *The Grapes of Wrath* is the best example to prove it.

3.2. THE GRAPES OF WRATH:

“Since the people who control the movies will not go a step of the way to give the script writer a chance to do a serious script, the novelist seems, consciously or unconsciously, to be going part of the way to meet the producers. John Steinbeck, in *The Grapes of the Wrath*, has certainly learned from the films- and not only from the documentary pictures of Pare Lorentz, but from the sentimental symbolism of Hollywood. The result was that *The Grapes of the Wrath* went on screen as easily as if it had been written in the studios, and was probably the only serious story on record that seemed equally effective as a film and as a book.”(Edmund Wilson, 61).

It is also regarded as one of the best adaptations by many film theorists and historians.

4. NOVELS AND FILMS: A LIMITED INQUIRY

Early in his seminal book, *Novels into Film*, George Bluestone argues that the novel –film comparison is essentially pointless because “between the percept of the visual image and the concept of the mental image lies the root difference between the two media.”(1)

It simply means that films are primarily seen or perceived whereas novels are read or conceived, both are mainly different ways of presenting a story or narrating a tale. We can say that filmed adaptation of a novel becomes a different thing in the same sense that a historical painting becomes a different thing from the historical event it illustrates. It is as fruitless to say that film A is better or worse than novel B as it is to compare an oak tree with a banyan tree.

Just as movie star deserts herself to put on some press agent's more alluring fictional person, the hero of a story sets out from his landscape for the same land of romance by stepping there from their real life. The actors seem to have to come to the words of their novels like a visitor to town.....and later they are reader bound.

Literary characters are often thought as to be one of us but they have come to the words of their novels. The theories of character are not insane or absurd in the way emblematic theories are; they are more insane or absurd in a way.

The final major hindrance to compare films and novels is the question of voice or author in the respective media. In a novel, the thinking voice and the point of view remains a final teller's tale: the novelist. As a reader, we hear the voice of the novelist throughout the works.

An issue of Critical Inquiry for example, contains two pieces of interests, Bruce Morrisette's article "Post Modern Generative Fiction: Novel and Film, pointedly "does not aim to investigate film-novel relationship per se, although the fact that the two genres now share certain generative procedures may be further evidence that fiction in print and on film lie to a great extent in a unified field not only of diegesis but also of structure." (253).

Robert Carringer concludes his essay, "Citizen Kane, The Great Gatsby, and some Conventions of American Narrative," by noting that,

"Genuinely American narratives, in whatever medium or period, take shape along certain lines common to them all. There is a whole body of noteworthy criticism devoted to illustrating and substantiating these themes in American Literary narratives but practically no consideration of the possibility that they may also extend to narratives in the new visual facts of the twentieth century. Yet in at least one instance, there are remarkably extensive structural and conceptual parallels between masterworks in two mediums. It may turn out that the Great Gatsby/ Citizen Kane relationship is just a special case, or it may turn out that there are general patterns of this sort to be uncovered in American films. In any case, it is something that ought to be considered." (325).

Both these critics are concerned with similar determinations found in authors and film makers, and they prudently avoid any direct comparisons of a given novel to its filmed counterpart. They also made very clear that there are inherent differences between the facts of artistic life of these two ways of creating or telling a story.

The assumption that filmmakers have a clear and understandable obligation to a novel is ill-founded for such position does violence to the possibilities of the two forms and in the process creates more questions than it answers.

5. CONCLUSION

One can say that there is always a scope for fidelity while literary texts are adapted to films. We can consider that eliminations and editions are required as two different artistic forms are being dealt with. Fuzellier, in one of his early studies (1953) identified two central facets in adaptation as Concentration (the maximum of events in the minimum of time) and increase (Appreciation of certain aspects, such as character, episodes, temporal or spatial facets) cannot be denied in any adaptation. Instead of comparison, these two different artistic forms would be enjoyed in their own way.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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