

Adaptation-Repetition without Replication

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Abstract

An adaptation is an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works. The process of adaptation gives birth to a product which is also called adaptation (as an adapted work). A comparison between the original work and its adaptation is inappropriate when the product alone is considered. An adaptation is another original work of art developed from a known source. The originality depends upon the adaptation's affiliation towards the new medium. This paper studies novels and films as parts of different media and the adaptations from the former to the latter as medium specific, original works of art. It also discusses how the genres vary in terms of production, perception and target audience. The paper reminds of the importance of treating an adaptation as adaptation and searching within the genre for its originality.

Keywords: Adaptation, medium specificity, novel, film, text, screen.

Introduction

'Adaptation' is addressed with a doubled definition wherein it is considered both as a product and a process to direct its broader and multiple dimensions of adaptation. The product is always a creative reinterpretation that originates through decoding and transcoding. The source is decoded by the adaptor in his intellectual realm before transcoding into a new medium as an original work, another source. Transaction of medium is the key in re-interpreting the adapted text as the aesthetics and the stylistics of both the media dissent. The failure to understand the principal differences in the aesthetics of the source medium and the target medium has driven the critics of one medium to define the artists of the other. Virginia Woolf's "parasite analogy" on film's dependence over literature is an extension of the above argument. The question of fidelity is pointless when the medium of adaptation is different. Michael Alexander enables adaptations as inherently "palimpsests" due to the fate of an adaptation to be haunted by the original work. Linda Hutcheon, in her work "A Theory of adaptation", particularizes 'adaptation' as below :

- An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works
- A creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging

- An extended inter textual engagement with the adapted work

Therefore, an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing. (Hutcheon, 08)

When Hutcheon's 'second' and 'secondary' are pertaining to the work as an original and palimpsestic entity, Gerard Genette's remark on adaptation as "second degree" reminds of the nature of the new work as it declares its overt relationship to another work. Here, Genette opens a supplementary branch of adaptation studies as comparative. In addition, adaptations have an elitist appeal in relation to the classical adaptations. Shakespearean plays *Hamlet* and *Othello* have multiple adaptations across media, language and academics. Audience are attracted by the popularity of the original texts and conduct a critical study of the text and its adaptation. Such practices in the academic and educational circles enrich the aspirants and provide better guiding to the text as well as the adaptation. In schools, colleges and universities, the screen adaptations of classics find an important space as they provide visual sensation of the text. Though there is an abridgeable gap between a play and a film, the on screen adaptations can serve a raw material to the learners. It is similar to the illustrated versions of classical texts that are produced solely for the children.

Digitalization in arts has permitted adaptations from any medium to any other medium. Earlier, it was the traditional arts that were transcoded with greater inclination towards classics. Today, even cinematic interpretations of video games are common, though they eye at the monetary benefits, in exceptional cases. Yet, the most common and successful (though success is subjective) transcodings appear in the cinematic transpositions of literature, novels in particular. They pose the strongest challenges in the Academy Awards. According to Time's report on the results of the daily varieties poll among 200 men and women from the film industry who had been working for more than twenty five years, *Birth of a Nation* was elected as the best silent film and *Gone with the Wind* was the best all time film. Both the movies were originally novels and *Gone with the Wind* was an interesting convergence of commercial and artistic interests. John Ellis points out that the Hollywood films of the Classical period derived their major sources from popular novels. This work is an attempt to study adaptations by setting distinct standards for both the media, novel and film, laying stress on the process of adaptation.

Medium Specificity

When the transposition occurs across the medium, it is natural to call forth the debate on formal specificity of the arts and this will lead inevitably to media specificity. Robert Stam reminds of the superiority of literature over any adaptation due to its seniority, especially when it comes to films. He suggests it to be the result of Iconophobia (a suspicion of the novel) and logophilia (love of the word as sacred). Virginia Woolf's denunciation of adaptations as "parasites" is to be reconsidered here. Rather than Iconophobia, it is logophobia that governs the critic. While highlighting the power of the figure of speech, she argues that visual is only one among the thousands of a poet's suggestion through images. Language is essentially a character in the novel. The limitations of a language are the four

limitations of the novel too. A.A Mendilow observes the limitations of language and argues that it cannot convey non-verbal experiences; the successive and linear nature prohibits from expressing simultaneous experiences. He adds that reality remains unexpressed apart from its illusions. Yet, novel is more complex due to its longer history and refined materials. Film assimilates photography, music, dialogue and dance and is indispensably protean, so is novel. It assimilates essays, letters, memoirs, histories and manifestoes. In his seminal work on novel – film adaptation, “Novels into film”, George Bluestone denies the allegations on adaptations and defends,

What is common to all these assumptions is the lack of awareness that mutations are probable the moment one goes from a given set of fluid, but relatively homogeneous conventions to another; that changes are inevitable the moment one abandons the linguistic for the visual medium. Finally, it is insufficiently recognized that the end products of novel and film represent different aesthetic genera. (Bluestone, 05)

As mentioned earlier, the syntax in print and on screen vary massively. Words have the power of boundless imagination. Writer writes in the mind of a reader and opens umpteen ways of imagination. But the level of imagination that a visual provides is limited in itself. In fact, it is not imagination, but perception. A visual provides the details and is, therefore, shutting down the windows of imagination. You cannot open the imaginative realms of the spectator through a visual. This makes a filmmaker’s job lot more challenging as he cannot leave anything to the audience’s imagination. He is bound to produce visuals that satisfy their perceptions. The level of perception varies from person to person and is an outcome of the background and the lived in experiences of the audience. Even though it is the same for a writer, he has the freedom to rebuild a reader’s imagination. Along with the discussion on imaginative and perceptive realms of the reader and the viewer, it is worth noting that there exists a wide gap between the both. The readers of a novel are homogeneous in nature to an extent. They select a book and read in solace. The interference of public and other unwanted elements are ciphered here. On the other side, a film is watched in groups, often in a public space. There are lots of elements that come in between the maker and the viewer. The audience in a movie hall are heterogeneous in nature too. They may vary in gender, age, culture and linguistic background. The filmmaker is bound to cater to all these categories and the product must be acceptable to everyone. In addition, they come to watch a movie with prior knowledge and interests. The legal censorship is another concern for him. Even when the film makers are bound by the concerns of acceptance in terms of morality, the censors are furthermore adamant to cut-off the soul of the movie without any surgical precision. The necessity of a censorship is accepted widely, yet, the ruthlessness in compulsory editing has to be controlled in order to free the filmmakers which will, in turn, help them to produce artistically solid works.

A novel, as mentioned earlier is produced and enjoyed in solitude. A writer’s imaginative realm has almost direct interaction with that of the reader’s. It is more important that the writer keeps in mind that he is writing for a single person who reads it in solitude. There are many reader-writer personal relationships built by this rapport also. This provides

the novelist with the freedom to write more explicitly without covering. He need not be careful about the age, gender or background of the reader as he can convince the latter with his words. But, a filmmaker has to appeal to the heterogeneous audience who is in a group, which is again a heterogeneous community. The audience in a cinema hall may be in different psychological states. The lack of rapport between the both affects the perception of the audience and a conflict arises between the viewer and the maker. When an experienced novelist targets the reader in solitude, his counterpart in film targets the audience in collection. There are several other critics who are bold enough to defend such claims. Micheal Orme reflects E. Arnot Robinson's protest against De Miller's butchering of "Four Frightened People". Orme says,

"You cannot transpose any one character from page to screen and hope to present him entirely as the novelist created his or as the novelist's public knew him...who can really recall having seen a screen performance which really truly portrayed his favourite character as he knew it?" (Bluestone, 23)

The economic aspects of filming are in close relationship with the length of the movie, the number of characters and its appeal to the heterogeneous audience. Though the duration of the movie does not affect its post-production in the digital era of filming, the production cost increases unmercifully. Porter. H. Abbott calls this objective of subtraction or contraction of characters and plot as 'a surgical art' in *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*.

Adaptation as Adaptation

The discussion on adaptation is incomplete if it set wide the audience. When a novel is considered, it is written by an author, quite often in isolation and enjoyed by a reader, again in solitariness. The words alone play the trick in their communication. The novelist has the privilege of talking to his perceiver through his work without the intervention of a third body (if at all the editor is absent). We had discussed the freedom enjoyed by a writer earlier as we spoke about the restraints of a filmmaker. In the personal conversation, the writer defines his own space, if he understands the reader very well. The better understanding about the reader helps the writer to build a harmony among them which in turn would result in intruding into the psychological domain of the reader. The relationship that is built with the target audience is important in any art form. The novelist essentially has to leave his signature in the minds of his readers in order to establish himself in the literary sphere. The proficiency in a language alone will not make a good writer. He has to appeal to the senses and emotions of the reader with the understanding that the senses and emotions are controlled by his brain that thinks and works logically. To break the rationality of a reader, the author need to create an aura of mysticism in his work. But when this reader walks into a movie hall, he expects the magic box of words to open before him / her. Most frequently, the reader comes out of the movie hall disappointed. The reason for the discontent is the incapacity of the film to meet the artistic standards of the book or the novel from which the movie was made. This loss of soul of the story is the result of a misconception that the movie is a translation of the novel. Such readers claim that the success of the movie was not to be awarded to the director but it was worth enough to praise the novelist. The statistics show that when an adaptation was made to screen from text, not only the movie gained popularity profits, but also the text.

Margarat Farrand Thorp reports that when David Copperfield appeared on local screens, the demand for the book was so great that the Cleveland Public Library ordered 132 new copies; that the film premier of The Good Earth boosted sales of that book to 3,000 per week; and that more copies of Wuthering Heights have been sold since the novel was screened than in all the previous ninety-two years of its existence. Jerry Wald confirms this pattern by pointing out, more precisely, that after the film's appearance, the Pocket Book edition of Wuthering Heights sold 7,00,000 copies; various editions of Pride and Prejudice reached third of a million copies; and sales for Lost Horizon reached 4,00,000. (Bluestone, 04)

Resuming the deliberation on the diverse audience, it is now the turn of the filmy audience. Every artistic production takes birth in solitariness. But this specific genre is growing up in collectivity. After the pre-production, as it enters into the production stage, a movie is a collective venture of the technicians and the supporting staff. Every participant makes his/her own effort truthfully to bring the best product on the screen. When it comes on the screen it is conversing with the massive audience. This curtails the artist's license to adhere to his sense and taste of filmmaking. A kind of surveillance is thus imposed on the director apart from the legal censorship. But before laying stress on the censorship, let us think about the conventional and stereotyped psyche of the audience. When the 'mass' accepts a movie from a certain genre, the predators (whose sole motive is financial benefit) in the industry overwork on it, following the same formula of the successful film. When audience does not show the discretion to avoid typecasting and stereotyping, the kind of the film is accepted as a norm to judge the rest. Originality is definite and primary in arts and literature. In his observations on the originality of adaptations, Jose K Manuel says,

An adaptation becomes original when an impression developed in the imagination of an individual is transcended into a literary or artistic medium in free state. Search debates regarding the individuality of the work routine in the process of transformation. When an idea developed in the intellect of an artist re-modelled by another, it is accused of losing the originality. It is unfair to restrain somebody from presenting an adaptation while accepting the fundamental nature of other works. It is more important to know how the source is reborn. (Manuel, 80)

In addition to the independent nature of the adaptation, the audience's attitude towards the work is equally important. One must look into the extent to which the source is transcoded. As far as creativity is considered, the writer's imagination and the narrative technique are of greater importance. When a screenplay is crafted from a novel, the filming techniques and visual symbols are on the focus. Here, there is no question of how far the writer has transformed. The individuality of the adaptation is closely related to the basic traits of the medium to which it is adapted. A novel's syntax does not fit into the film's aesthetics.

While treating adaptation as original, it is vital to look into it as an adaptation also. Accepting the uniqueness of an adaptation will lead to the better knowledge of the work. Any form of art is acknowledged only when it is in joint with an unprejudiced mind. A viewer,

either a common public or an expert, need to be free of all the bigotries of the earth to taste art to its fullest. Such defaming comments on an adaptation come out of the prejudices in a critic's mind when he or she compares the source with the reinterpreted work. This happens in every transcoding. When a movie is adapted to another (remake) or is made into an animated version, the viewers make sure that both go hand-in-hand. The reviewers and audience go into further details like if the director has made similar films earlier or if the actor has been following any preoccupied patterns. It is even more important to have knowledge of the genres from which the source is derived and to which it is transformed. The media literacy is crucial in understanding the worth of an adaptation and its originality. In novel to film adaptations, the degree of variance is much greater as both the media are produced and perceived under separate environments. The differences, as discussed earlier, are not possible to be levelled. In fact, bridging the both is not the genuine methodology of adaptation.

Conclusion

Art is an assimilation of imagination and sensuality. Every form of art is distinct and every work is unique. Plato observes that art is removed from reality and reality is itself removed from the ideal. But Aristotle favours the representation of human life through arts. Like a glass of water that takes the shape of the container, arts represent life in its shape and form. Different media represent art in divergent forms. Yet they converge at some point where the true admirer perceives it. A poetic representation of love is different from its painting. It varies immensely as it transforms into a novel, a play and a movie. Though the basic element is love, it is expressed vividly across these genres. The space offered to a poet is not the same for a painter, a novelist, a playwright or a filmmaker. What looks sensual in literature may be obscene in performance or on screen. This variation occurs according to the mode of appeal and medium of perception. The audience to whom the work is targeted is another matter of consideration. A poet or a novelist and any other writer (except a playwright and a screenwriter) is offered greater freedom due to minimized censorship and investment. They appeal to the imaginative realm and not to the visual perception. Moreover, it satisfies the strong recommendation that an art is to be enjoyed in solitariness to experience it at the best. Film has invariably emerged as an institutionalized medium that has the ability to appeal to masses around the world despite the geographical and linguistic borders. As communication flourished, film industry is privileged to serve to wider audience across the globe. It is more competitive for regional film industries to meet the standards of the audience who is exposed to the world cinema. In an adaptation, a novel is retold and interacts with a new audience. It is neither a parody nor a translation, but a transformation across the medium. When a novel is transformed to a film, the transposition of the work is across a medium which is bound by limits of language, limited audience and individual creation and a medium limited by moving images, collective audience and industrial production. It is, therefore, definite to produce an original and authentic work that meets the aesthetic attributes of film.

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