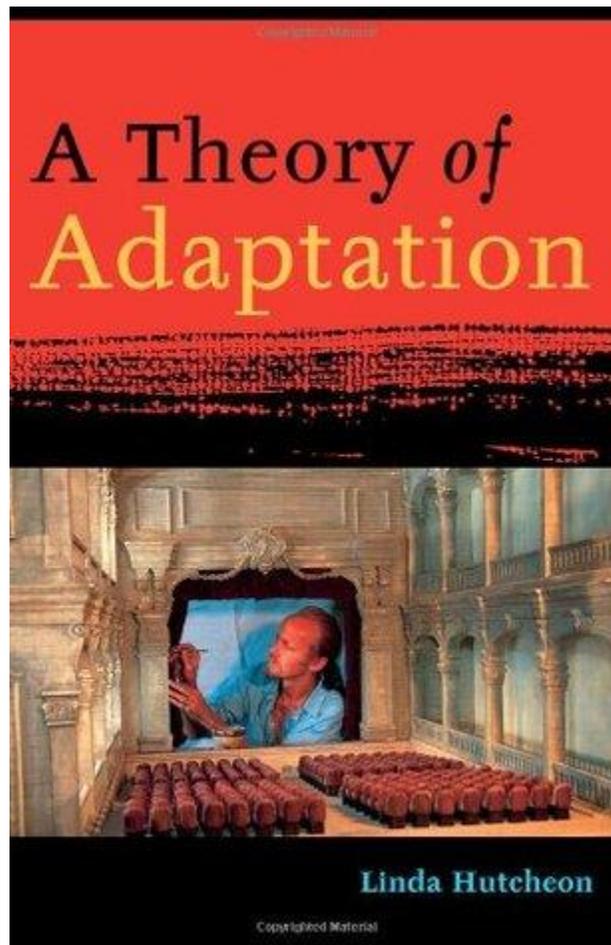


**Who is the Sun-King in Adaptations?
A Contextual Study of Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation***

J. Jaya Parveen, M.A., M.Phil., PGCTE, (Ph.D.)

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Introduction

In *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), Linda Hutcheon talks about the *What? Who? Why? How? Where? When?* of adaptations. She tries to analyse adaptations both as ‘process’ and

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J. Jaya Parveen, M.A., M.Phil.

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‘product’. She goes beyond film adaptations and discusses operas, comics, theme parks, videogame adaptations, etc.

Telling Mode

Linda Hutcheon (2006) discusses, in detail, the three modes of engagement. She exclaims that the three modes are arguably ‘immersive’, in various degrees and in various ways. In the *telling mode* (e.g., oral or written narrative), audience’s involvement starts in the domain of imagination, which is governed by the directing words of the text. It is free without the limits of the visual or aural. Reading can be paused at any point; words can be re-read or skipped at any moment. One can hold and feel the books. He/she can check what has been read already and what remains to be read, anytime while reading (23).

Performance Mode

The *showing mode* or *performance mode* (e.g., film and stage adaptations) tells us that language is not the only way to narrate stories or express meanings. Visual and gestural representations are rich in complex associations. Music offers aural ‘equivalents’ for characters’ emotions and provokes affective responses in the audience. Sound enhances, reinforces, or even contradicts visual and verbal aspects. Audiences are caught in an unrelenting, forward-driving story. They are moved from imagination to the domain of direct perception, with its mixture of broad focus and minute details. However, dramatization cannot parallel the complicated verbal play of poetry or the impeccable combination of description, narration, and explanation in a narrative (23).

Participatory Mode

The *participatory mode* (e.g., videogames) involves the audience ‘physically and kinesthetically’. The way readers interpret a text, play, or movie is not passive, but active ‘imaginatively, cognitively, and emotionally’. In the participatory mode, the audiences are not only active ‘imaginatively, cognitively, and emotionally’, but also active ‘physically and kinesthetically’ with the story and its imaginary world (23).

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J. Jaya Parveen, M.A., M.Phil.

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Clichés related to the three modes of engagement

Thomas Leitch discusses the twelve fallacies in contemporary adaptation theory in his 2003 article. Linda Hutcheon tries to lash out a few clichés related to the three modes of engagement in her 2006 article:

Cliché #1: *Only the telling mode (especially prose fiction) has the flexibility to render both intimacy and distance in point of view.*

Stam (2005) argues that camera angle, focal length, music, *mise-en-scène*, performance, costume, etc. can convey ‘point of view’ in a multitrack medium (39).

Highly developed dialogues, verbal and non-verbal cues, character descriptions, and story narration signify ‘third person point of view’ in movies. Voice-over, off-camera voice, soliloquy, or aside can be used to signify ‘first person point of view’. Long, medium, and close-up shots, angles, and reverses can show intimacy and distance in point of view (Hutcheon 64).

One can find so many examples for this in Indian cinema. ‘Rashomon’ effect (telling the same story in different point of view) is used in the movie *Virumaandi* which is an adaptation of the movie *The Life of David Gale*. Voice-over is used in the movie *Nanban* which is an adaptation of Chetan Bhagat’s *Five Point Someone*, signifying ‘first person point of view’.

Cliché #2: *Interiority is the terrain of the telling mode; exteriority is best handled by showing and especially by interactive modes.*

Telling Mode

In the telling mode, elaborate interior monologues, long descriptions about states of mind, characters’ deeper thoughts, etc. signify ‘interiority’ which are difficult to represent visually in performance. However, sound and *avant-garde* film devices can be used to signal interiority in the movies (Hutcheon 58).

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Films reveal the characters' thoughts or feelings through voice-over or music. These 'show' the characters thinking, feeling sad/happy, experiencing sorrow/joy, etc. through odd camera angles, unusual lighting, slow motion, sequences repeated/reversed, etc.

Hutcheon also remarks, "External appearances are made to mirror inner truths. Visual and aural correlatives for interior events can be created. Film has at its command many techniques that verbal texts do not have" (58).

The top angle, long shot, and the close-up 'crying scene' used by Mani Ratnam in the style of Kurosawa in the 'Godfatheresque' *Nayagan* reveals the sorrow of a father who has lost his son 'more powerfully' than any verbal text.

Cliché #3: *The showing and interacting modes have only one tense: the present; the mode of telling alone can show relations among past, present, and future.*

In narration, the narrator's voice stands between the characters immersed in time and the reader. In contrast, cinema's quickness makes flashbacks and flash-forwards possible and more effective; performance tropes combine and interrelate past, present, and future... Words such as 'meanwhile', 'elsewhere', and 'later' in literature find their equivalent in the filmic dissolve, as one image fades in as another fades out and time merges with space in a more immediate way than is possible with words (Hutcheon 63-64).

An example for this can be seen in the introductory scene of Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (which is an adaptation of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*) where aural memory dissolves into a full-blown flashback of the General's past.

Cliché #4: *Only telling (in language) can do justice to elements such as ambiguity, irony, symbols, metaphors, silences, and absences; these remain "untranslatable" in the showing or interacting modes.*

If symbols and metaphors are to be realized in a showing mode in performance media, they could simply be spoken by a character or else they must be physically materialized in an iconic

form or translated into equivalents. Absences and silences in prose narratives almost invariably get made into presences in performance media (Hutcheon 70).

The soundtrack in Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* is used not only to suggest 'interiority' but also to reinforce 'ambiguity' in Kurtz's character. In the movie, the 'symbols' (river, darkness, madness, etc.) are visually portrayed, providing more depth in meanings. 'Silence' is best portrayed by no conversation and no music, and 'absence' is signified by the mystic music towards the end of the movie *Apocalypse Now*.

After discussing the clichés related to the three modes of engagement, Hutcheon remarks: "Each mode, like each medium, has its own specificity. In other words, no one mode is inherently good at doing one thing and not another; but each has at its disposal different means of expression - media and genres - and so can aim at and achieve certain things better than others" (24).

Literature Vs Literary Adaptations

Literature is an art of time whereas painting is an art of space. Performance on stage or screen manages to be both (Lessing 35). Films are very special as they combine bodies, voices, music, dance, props, and costume, combining sequential photography, visuals in painting, phonetic sound, background noise, décor of architecture, and the performance of theatre (Stam 61). Additions in adaptations may range from stylistic and ethical materials to inserting new characters or increasing suspense (Hutcheon 37). Sometimes it is simply a reduction of scope: of length, of accretion of detail, or of commentary (Peary and Shatzkin 2-8).

Adaptations move from the 'telling to the showing mode', usually 'from print to performance'. Performance medium does not have an easy time transcoding print texts. Speaking practically about converting the print text into performance mode, Director Mani Ratnam says that 'the scenes are only written in a room, in a table, in a computer'. "In cinema, you reinvent what is on the paper. It is not duplication; it is not conversion in its direct sense. It is reinventing in a completely different language. Too many variables..." He accepts that techniques are not so easily applicable when actual people are put there, with lights, camera, and entire ambience set, and the actors who are delivering (*bfi.org.uk*).

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J. Jaya Parveen, M.A., M.Phil.

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Both stage and screen adaptations use 'indexical and iconic signs' like people, places, and objects while literature uses 'symbolic and conventional signs' (Giddings et al 6). Adaptations - be it a play, musical, film, or an opera - create a visual and aural world physically displayed on the stage, reproduced from 'verbal and notational signs on the page' (Hutcheon 39).

In the process of adaptation, there occurs 'a certain amount of re-accentuation and refocusing of themes, characters, and plot'. In adaptation studies, the emphasis is usually on the visual, on the move 'from imagination to actual ocular perception'. But the aural is just as important as the visual. Films constitute spoken words along with 'separate soundtracks that permit elements like voice-overs, music, and noise to intermingle' (40).

Role of Music - The Aural Effect

Music plays a significant role in literary adaptations. Sounds can be used to 'connect inner and outer states in a less explicit way than camera associations' in films (Hutcheon 41). Coppola declares that long ago as young filmmakers they consider sound as their special friend as it does the least 50% of the work sharing with pictures. Sound is infinitely cheaper than picture, so they have put big efforts in sound capability, giving tremendous production value to the films. This has come to be known as the San Francisco approach (*Meyersound.com*).

As 'aural effect' is significant, radio-play adaptations focus only on primary characters and simplify the story and time-line. The words in the novel are moved around, re-contextualized, and read by different voices. These modifications permit 'the aural version to give a sense of the novel's linguistic texture, associative range, and narrative rhythm'. Music and sound effects are added to the verbal text to assist the imagination of the listeners, enabling them to enter an aural world of fantasy (Hutcheon 41). In ballet adaptations, 'the moving body replaces the operatic voice as the primary conveyer of both meaning and emotion through music' (42).

Specialty of Avant-garde

Avant-garde films offer devices that have been exploited in the transfer of poetic texts to the screen (e.g., D.W. Griffith's silent film *Pippa Passes*). When poetry is adapted into

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photographic montage or animation, story elements and even their metaphoric language are translated into evocative visual images (44).

Indigenization

Adapters often ‘indigenize’ stories to suit the local culture. The contexts of creation and reception are material, public, and economic as much as they are cultural, personal, and aesthetic. Major shifts in a story’s context - for example, a national setting or time period - can change radically how the transposed story is interpreted, ideologically, and literally. In shifting cultures or shifting languages, adaptations make changes that bring out the larger contexts of reception and production (28).

Who is the Actual Adapter?

Hutcheon (2006) states that there are arguments over exactly who of the many artists involved in the complicated process of adaptation should be called the actual adapter(s) (81). Corliss (1974) questions whether the often-under-rated screenwriter who creatively adapts a film’s plot, characters, dialogue, and theme ‘the major adapter’ (542). Hutcheon doubts whether the director, actors, music composers, costume and set designers, choreographers, and cinematographers who have long discussions with the crew and read the movie script or storyboard along with the adapted text to involve themselves fully in the adaptation process become ‘conscious adapters’ (81).

Stuart Craig is popular as the art designer of the movies *The Elephant Man*, *Gandhi*, *The English Patient*, and *Harry Potter* series. He remarks that the script writer “J.K. Rowling has a very descriptive style, layer upon layer of detail. My first meeting with her, she made a map for me of Hogwarts and Hogsmeade. It showed the position of the station, the dark forest, the gates, Hogsmeade village and that became invaluable, and it was the ultimate authority” (Halligan, 2012).

Sound designer Walter Murch talks about the adaptation *Apocalypse Now* by Francis Ford Coppola: “There was a lot of discussion between George [Lucas, the original director] and me,

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and between us and John Milius, who was writing the script, that what made Vietnam different and unique was that it was the helicopter war” (Murch, 2014). Irfan Khan who has acted as adult Pi in Ang Lee’s movie *Life of Pi* adapted from Yann Martel’s *Life of Pi* declares that after his role in the film is confirmed, he read the novel again and again just to make the shoes of the character his own (*backstage.com*).

Actors are the biggest assets to adaptations. They can interpret through gesture, tone, of voice, or facial expression the incarnating characters in ways the initial creator never envisaged (Cunningham 1). Mani Ratnam shares the same view while talking about Kamal Haasan’s performance in ‘Godfatheresque’ *Nayagan*:

It’s not that in *Nayakan* I was going out of the way and doing something extraordinary. It’s just that it’s such a pleasure when there’s an actor who delivers more than you can imagine. It takes a weight off your shoulders, because you no longer have to carry the scene by yourself. I realized that I didn’t have to stage a scene to prop up the actor. It was enough if the camera caught him. He brings credibility to the lines and makes it so effortless. He adds to the entire picture (2012).

Who is the Sun King in Adaptations?

The Director is often considered to be the Sun-King in the movie world. Success of the intellectually fine-tuned literary adaptations with richly textured cinematography does not lie only with the Director, but with the Merchant Ivory collaboration that include the ‘triumvirate’ (Ismail, Ivory, and Ruth) along with the brilliant performances of some of the world’s finest actors (Madhur Jaffrey, Aparna Sen, Shashi Kapoor, Jennifer Kendal, Maggie Smith, Hugh Grant, Rupert Graves, Anthony Hopkins, and Emma Thompson).

Kamal Haasan is more than a Director in his movie adaptations. Apart from being an actor, he works as the associate director, dance assistant, choreographer, and make-up artist in some of his movies. Mani Ratnam, in an interview, recollects how Kamal Haasan came up with lots of ideas to improve the script, did a bit of the make-up for the other actors in the film, and provided

medical-aid to the crew at crucial moments during the filming of the ‘Godfatheresque’ *Nayagan* (Ratnam 2012).

Though Sundar. C. is credited as the Director of the film *Anbe Sivam* which is a loose adaptation of John Hughes’ *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles*, the movie carries the stamp-mark of actor Kamal Haasan’s talent as screenplay writer who creates a cocktail of serious social, political, and religious themes in main-stream movies.

Kamal Haasan who has adapted several Hollywood movies into wonderful Tamil movie scripts declares: “Screenplay is literature for me”. He conducts story-discussions with veteran writers, professors, and experts from various fields. He pens down screenplay script for most of his movies which are adapted from Hollywood blockbusters. Two Malayalam translations of his Tamil screenplays *Mahanadhi* and *Hey! Ram!* were released during the ‘World Book Fair’ in Thiruvananthapuram (Rangarajan, 2007). He remarks: “I want my screenwriting to be respected as literature because I truly believe that as a versatile medium, it demands that respect” (Vettath, 2013).

Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* is an adaptation of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* travels to the Congo basin to bring Kurtz, a corrupt coloniser, back to Europe; Willard in *Apocalypse Now* goes on a military mission during Vietnam War to kill Kurtz, a fellow soldier. Marlow becomes Willard, Russian trader parallels the Photojournalist, and the helmsman is similar to the Chief in the movie. Character Kurtz who is present in both the works utters the words “Horror! Horror!” before death.

Heart of Darkness brings out the evils of colonisation while *Apocalypse Now* focuses on the horrors of war. The symbols ‘river’, ‘darkness’, and ‘madness’ are prevalent in both the works. Coppola, as an *auteur*, has used the plot, characters, and symbols from the source text, but has produced a completely new work in his own unique style. *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now* are now appreciated independent of each other, and both have achieved the status of ‘classical work of art’ in their respective fields.

Akira Kurosawa's Japanese *Macbeth*, Baz Luhrmann's Australian *Romeo and Juliet*, Gulzar's Bollywoodian *Comedy of Errors* are popular examples for how the adapters as *auteurs* have transformed the Shakespeare plays into blockbuster movies with regional colour and flavour.

Vishal Bhardwaj's *Maqbool* is the desi *Macbeth*. Jain (2004) comments that the bard's more accessible play hasn't got too lost in its (film) translation. Director-writer-composer has transposed Macbeth to the Mumbai mafia. Shakespeare is cloaked in guns, gangsters and street lingo. The result is a haunting operatic tragedy (Chopra, 2004).

Vishal Bhardwaj's *Omkaara* is a Bollywoodian "*Othello* that crackles with a heady indigenous native flavour drawn from the wild hinterlands of Uttar Pradesh where rogues and thugs write the rules of politics with the bullet and the bandook. The plot is quintessential Shakespeare. The treatment is absolutely original. From the rustic flavour of the dialogues to the folksy lyricism of the music, the raunchy dance numbers, the mofussil setting and the riveting climax: *Omkaara* is a well-garnished, aesthetically appeasing platter of stylish Bollywood at its creative best" (*The Times of India*).

Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider* is an absolutely delightful and lyrical adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* that takes some liberties, for Kashmir's sake. The director is in glorious form as he churns out the best of his Shakespeare trilogy, which is also an unflinching look at the recent political history of Kashmir that bred many Haiders thirsting for revenge against the brothers of their fathers based on a ghost version of history. *Haider* is a truly rewarding cinematic experience" (Kamath 2014).

"Serious and seriously entertaining, Vishal Bhardwaj's trilogy marries Shakespeare to contemporary Indian reality as artfully as it weds a heightened realism to Bollywood showmanship." Vishal Bhardwaj's *7 Khoon Maaf* is an adaptation of Ruskin Bond's *Susanna's Seven Husbands*. "The meandering black widow tale has plenty of art, too" (Saltz 2011). Vishal Bhardwaj uses the source texts only as 'pretexts' that provide plot, characters, and themes and produce radically new works of art.

Due to financial, technical, and political issues involved in the movie production process, the adapted movie may be very far from both the screenplay and the adapted text in focus and emphasis. “There is an increasing distance from the adapted novel as the process moves from the writing of the screenplay to the actual shooting (when the designers, actors, cinematographer, and director move in) and then to the editing when sound and music are added and the entire work as a whole is given shape. The script itself is often changed through interaction with the director and the actors, not to mention the editor” (Hutcheon 83).

Goldman has won Academy Awards for his screenplays *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and *All the President’s Men*. He has adapted his novels *Marathon Man* and *The Princess Bride* into movies. Hutcheon asserts that an adapted movie is not a singular entity but the studio’s adaptation of the editor’s adaptation of the director’s adaptation of the actors’ adaptation of the screenwriter’s adaptation of a novel that might itself be an adaptation of narrative or generic conventions (83).

After discussing who the actual adapters are in a movie adaptation, Hutcheon remarks: “In a film, the director and the screenwriter share the primary task of adaptation. The other artists involved may be inspired by the adapted text, but their responsibility is more to the screenplay and thus to the film as an autonomous work of art” (85).

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 **18:2 February 2018**

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