

Queer and Adaptation Theory: Literature to Film in *The Color Purple*, *The Hours*, and *Brokeback Mountain*

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Abstract: *This article examines the dynamic interface between literary works and their film adaptations through the lens of various critical theories, with a significant focus on queer theory. It explores how adaptations preserve the thematic essence of the source texts while adding unique audio-visual elements that enhance the storytelling experience. Additionally, the paper discusses the historical resistance to film adaptations within literary circles, highlighting the bias against perceived technological intrusion into the purity of literary creativity. The broader implications of queer theory in analyzing both literature and film are elaborated upon, particularly in terms of depicting and normalizing homosexuality against a backdrop of heteronormative dominance. This exploration underscores the adaptation process as not merely a translation of text but as an enriching dialogue between the original and the adapted forms, challenging and extending the narrative and thematic boundaries of the source materials.*

Keywords: Literary adaptations, queer theory, film criticism, thematic preservation, heteronormative dominance.

1. Introduction

The Queer Theory of Criticism: Navigating Against the Current of Heteronormative Discourse

The body of literary criticism has been widely developed over the course of the recent centuries, and it became the accommodation to various field classifications. Each variation inspects a literary work through certain aspects that are maneuvered by the author's consciousness or the dominant hegemony's manifestation. Whether the aspects of a work are intent or inadvertent, they can be examined through various theories of criticism, e.g. modernist, Marxist, postcolonial, and queer theory. Using every one of them the same time might not be applicable due to the text's characterization, e.g. the queer theory is exclusively used under thematic factors such as atypical sexual orientation. A type of literary criticism as queer theory would, without a doubt, be applied through the depiction of uncommon sexual intercourse or at least homosexual affection. However, a main objective of an analysis within the radius of queer theory is to bring forth the tension between the defying LGBT doctrine and the dominant heteronormative supremacy:

Perhaps the most radical aspect of queer politics was its claim not only to transcend the homo/hetero boundary but to do so in such a way as to challenge the sexual regulation and repression of heterosexual desire, above all female desire. Queer politics, it was claimed, had a lot to teach those accustomed to the narrow confines of 'male' and 'female' heterosexual roles in relationships. (Dunphy 138)

Overall, the Queer theory of criticism seeks not only to justify unorthodox intimate relationships but also advocates for a general normalization of them in all sectors, accordingly, Queer theory stands with the minority category of atypical sexual orientations. Following the emergence of Queer studies in the early nineties, the word "queer" formed a new connotation. Concerning that, "queer has developed a

meaning that goes beyond its use as inclusive categorization. as a noun, the word can be used to refer to a word contained in the marginalized group - a queer. Often there is a political ideology or intention when using that word, which is partly based on the decision to counter discrimination" (Ritesh 92). Currently, Queer studies mainly stand against discrimination of the heteronormative hegemony to the extent that the terminology of the word "queer" has grown to be tightly associated with defiance and resistance. Before the formation of the Queer studies, one can only assume that its emergence was inevitable. The long-lived marginalization of homosexual individuals and the growth of contemporary human rights organizations called for a greater resistance that stretched to academia in humanities. Accordingly, critical views and portrayals of homosexuality in literature became increasingly frequent. For homosexuality to be portrayed in literature, one could only expect it to be also portrayed in film industry through adapting a literary word of. Generally, the adaptations preserve the main points of its literary work, thus, the core themes and the evident intention of the author are wholesomely transferred in an audio-visual mode. Thusly, if the atypical sexual affection is salient for the text, it will be present in its adaptation. Furthermore, the nature of queer theory focuses on characters' interaction and attributes in addition to related implications in the text, and those factors are straightforwardly applicable in a film. The upcoming sections will contain an analysis through the queer lens of the adaptations.

Gradual Demonstration of Adaptation Theory and Criticism

The emergence of cinema happened to be adjoined with complicated notions about modern creativity. Accordingly, the literary norm of the high culture judged the film industry with unfair favouritism towards literature. Literary creativeness was known to be characterized by individuality, however, the uprising fabrication of cinema was highly dependent on collectivism and technology which was thought to be harmful to the raw sublimity of literature. This demonization can demonstrate how

criticized adaptations were, and they were considered a lesser and vulgar version of the original form of the plot as various penmen supposed "According to Cartmell, Corrigan, and Whelehan, certain critics (e.g., William Hunter) and novelists (e.g., Virginia Woolf) thought films were geared to the "lowest possible denominator" and watching them made "savages" of the viewers" (Slethaug 16). The basal nature of the film structure is unable to lay hold of modernist literature characteristics as Martin Halliwell notes:

The commercial enterprise involved in film making and film's tendency toward "seamless worlds, linear narratives, a stable hierarchy of characters, humanist ideology, and tidy resolutions" went against the view of great artists as isolated and not-for-profit geniuses and the modernist repertory of "unreliable narrators, psychologically complex characters, fragmented perceptions, and mythical allusions. (17)

The mechanisms that a film constitutes of cannot be directed for such changeovers. Therefore, they are customized to focus on thematic elements through acting, pictorial features through visuals, and dialogic utterances in auditory expertise. Nevertheless, adaptation is also considered as a revolutionary form of transcending literature, and in its defense, Linda Hutcheon claims:

Despite the argument implicit in Spike Jonze's latest film, *Adaptation*, every age can justly claim to be an age of adaptation. The desire to transfer a story from one medium or one genre to another is neither new nor rare in Western culture. It is in fact so common that we might suspect that it is somehow the inclination of the human imagination - and, despite the dismissive tone of some critics, not necessarily a secondary or derivative act. After all, most of Shakespeare's plays were adapted from other literary or historical works, and that does not seem to have damaged the Bard's reputation as an inventor. (Hutcheon 108-109)

Hutcheon argues that adaptation has always existed without harming the creativity of primordial forms of art. Art's rejection of modern technology brought doom to the emergence of film industry and adaptation, however, such severe critique is unreasonable and biased to some extent. Authors used to associate the negativity of technology to art which is overlooking the innovative and revolutionary aspects of it, and they have sought limitations within the film industry while overlooking the limitations in literature. Within her work *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon forms a subversive definition of adaptation:

We find a story we like and then do variations on it through adaptation. But because each adaptation must also stand on its own, separate from the palimpsestic pleasures of doubled experience, it does not lose its Benjaminian aura. It is not a copy in any mode of reproduction, mechanical or otherwise. It is repetition but without replication, bringing together the comfort of ritual and

recognition with the delight of surprise and novelty. As adaptation, it involves both memory and change, persistence and variation. (173)

Hutcheon's main argument is to maintain a pattern of adaptation to encourage it and make it a form of entertainment for individuals who seek a new delight of their favorite book. Thanks to Hutcheon's effort to support the evolution of adaptation, we can see the adaptation of fantastic genres and their detailed and high graphical adaptation, eg. *Lord of the Rings*. Alternatively, Slethaug's postmodernist adaptation theory states structured criteria for comparative analysis between the original material and its adaptation. Concerning that, this comparison is solely for analytical purposes rather than criticism. Through further additions, a traditional model of juxtaposing a book with its adaptation can be manifested in fundamental and manageable examinations, and the outcome would label the conversion as "traditional adaptation", "free adaptation", or "a faithful literal interpretation with authorial integrity". Nonetheless, this modernist pattern forms a strict biased judgment that neglects the main intentions of the film industry which are revolved around novelty and entertainment out of any preserved restrictions.

However, Slethaug enhanced the position of adaptations due to the nature of her postmodern interpretation. It rejects originality by relating texts to cultural factors. Therefore, the duo of the book and its film is seen to form a coherent unified entity. Overall, adaptations are falling under a novel type of examination that is unbiased, and it shows extra necessary artistic additions that the movie can provide for a delightful experience such as added supplements, surplus values, plot compression, segments composition. In later sections, a brief analytic differentiation will be applied on the three works and their adaptation through the traditional and postmodern method.

The adaptations analysis through the lens of queer theory of criticism

The core thematic elements of the three books were respectfully preserved after their audio-visual transition. Therefore, the desired theme for this investigation, which is homosexuality, is present in all of the films. The movie, *The Hours*, depicts various moments of intimacy between characters from the same gender, e.g. Virginia lustfully kissed her sister Vanessa before their partition (*The Hours* 1:06:40). Woolf's mental state spurred her to neglect any social restriction about the consequences of such deed, and the jeopardy of it can be seen through Vanessa's reaction to that. In another scene, Laura and Kitty shared kissed (00:39:45), and Kitty's response to Laura's mention about their intimacy was "did I mind what?" (00:40:32). Kitty does not acknowledge what has happened, and this particular interaction depicts how demonized homosexuality was in the late forties. The scenes in the nineties about Clarissa Vaughan express a less restricted conveyance of gay relationships, e.g. Clarissa and Sally or Louis and Richard. However, there is an embedded condemnation about homosexual intercourse that is manifested in Richard's illness. It seems that there is a heteronormative discourse that attacks such sexual orientation by portraying a disease commonly transmitted

through gay intercourses. Showing the lethality of AIDS through a gay character might be a denunciation, but overall, the implications that are chronologically ordered in the three settings shows the evolution of homosexual normalization. To sum up, it is safe to deduce that there is constant tension between the two discourses of sexuality.

The *Color Purple*'s main intentions are focused on sexual abuse and racial conflict, however, one can perceive glimpses about homosexual indications, e.g. Cecile's fascination by Shug's picture, and her mesmerized reaction when she first met her (*The Color Purple* 00:49:30). Furthermore, both Cecile and Shug Avery shared moments of sexual intimacy (1:17:30). Shug's persona is vulgar yet sensitive, thus, Shug's affection towards Cecile can be justified by the combination of such attributes. Therefore, Shug's intentions are likely to be excluded from any sexual intentions. The audience is aware of Cecile's abuse as it is repeatedly present throughout the film, e.g. her stepfather's sexual affair with her, Albert ignoring her in a critical state (00:10:00), and his verbal, physical, and sexual abuse. Cecile's gender identity was fully developed when she first suffered from rape, and her pedophilic abusive marriage severely damaged her. She generated misandry towards men due to the extensive abuse, and this can be seen in the last time lapse of the movie when she remained unmarried after years of independence from a male figure. Cecile's affection towards Shug and her misandry are sufficient evidence to assume her atypical sexual orientation.

One cannot miss the existence of an atypical relationship in the film, *Brokeback Mountain*. The plot revolves around the struggle of two gay male characters to maintain their relationship in Southern America. The story is mainly set in the countryside in which the main characters first discovered their new orientation while shepherding in the mountains. The film depicts the tension between homosexuality and heteronormativity, and this tension is manifested in the owner's rejection for Jack's job proposal (*Brokeback Mountain* 00:46:00). Knowing that the owner discovered their relationship, his decision was influenced by that. The owner's look (00:34:30) represents society's distaste towards their relationship. The threat magnitude of the public's discovery of such matter develops unease and paranoia (1:36:45). Ennis was forced by his father to see a tortured dead man to realize the fate of such sin (1:11:30). The scene portrays how demonized homosexuality was in the countryside's sixties. Experiencing the brutality of such image at a young age would have generated an absolute rejection of homosexuality; however, Ennis defiantly pursued his instincts to engage in a gay relationship. This scene foreshadows the tragic death of Jack (1:53:00) as he was brutally murdered by homophobic individuals in the countryside. The official reason for Jack's death was from a tire explosion which was manipulated, and this implies that the attackers were ordered from a higher authority since there was neither a proper investigation on the crime nor an accusation for the culprits. In this sense, the authority represents the heteronormative hegemony, and Jack represent LGBT oppressed minority.

A brief analytic juxtaposition between the books and their adaptations

After the change of originality's perception as T.S. Eliot noted "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone" (Eliot 27), the biased judgements are overlooked to glorify the adjustments of a literary work to fit for an audio-visual product. Therefore, the examination should not condemn but indicate the artistic additions in the adaptations since an artistic work is indebted to "knowledge of the past and the immediate cultural context." (Slethaug 13). A notion of decentered meaning has emerged to unify the meaning of the dichotomy novel/film. Accordingly, in the upcoming paragraphs elements such as surplus value, added supplements, plot compression, segments manipulation will be mentioned under the light of *The Color Purple*, *The Hours*, and *Brokeback Mountain*.

Plot compression and segments manipulation are inevitable when it comes to making an adaptation, therefore, in *The Color Purple*, various parts were completely removed due to durational and artistic reasons. For instance, Squeak's rape from the jail warden and Cecile's insomnia because her bad advice to Harpo are removed from the film due to their insignificance. Artistic transitions that were not possible for an epistolary novel to execute were put in film (*The Color Purple* 00:39:40). Other elements such as Shug's singing (1:02:50) that were reworked in a more specified manner. Overall, every adjustment or added surplus enforced the message that the book conveyed. Subjectively speaking, the descriptions of misery and struggle were superiorly depicted within the movie.

The order of the chapters that keep repeatedly folding then unfolding in *The Hours* was changed to meet a possible adaptation. The sections Mrs. Brown, Dalloway, and Woolf became more stable in the film and were rendered into long scenes. Those kinds of manipulations were valid to create a transition between the scenes, and some other changes were forced to maintain an acceptable duration for the movie, e.g. Clarissa noticed a famous actor, later on, she has a flashback about her romance with Richard, also, she invites Walter Hardy to the party. Those elements were removed from the plot. Similarly to the *Color Purple*, those adjustments are typical and necessary for a book/movie transition.

"*Ennis Del Mar wakes before five... leaves a temporary silence*". This whole italicized section in the first page of the short story is removed since it is overloaded with crucial information. Thusly, the producer forcefully neglected it to maintain suspense. The source text is a short story, therefore, every possible plot element was included in the adaptation, and rather, the film is more detailed than the source text since storyline is sentimental and romantic.

2. Conclusion

Story telling in literature existed for millenniums, and it still remains the main source material for the majority of narratives. Written text was and is absolutely the core of storytelling which makes novels and short stories the reference of the majority of screenplay; furthermore, not

every written text has its adaptation due the novelty of audiovisual technology. Literature remains a venerated medium of art and expression, and through its archaic existence, it became a mean for religion and ancient philosophy. Nonetheless, an evaluative comparison between literature and film industry should remain out of the question unless for the sake of academic scrutiny. The analytic comparison between a novel and its audiovisual adaptation makes an academically righteous scrutiny if maintained in an objective radius. One has to accept the artistic addition of the adaptation to the work itself rather than focusing on the exclusive elements of literature that are not applicable in an audiovisual version. For the sake of exploring the novel and adaptation dichotomy, one has to consider a regulated criterion of comparison, and Slethaug's postmodernist adaptation manual pinpoints the elements which we can compare in both versions of a work to furtherly indicate the faithfulness of an adaptation to its original written version. Overall, a contemporary and flexible attitude toward adaptation would bring forth the delight of the addition that the film provides. Without a doubt, anyone would appreciate an adaptation of a favorite novel that was published decades ago. We can conclude that "to be second is not to be secondary or inferior; likewise, to be first is not to be originary or authoritative" (Hutcheon XV)

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