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From Drama to Film: An Analysis

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Abstract:

Film adaptation is the transformation of a piece of literature to a film. The transformation brings some creative and artistic changes that make the adapted version more interesting and fascinating, and sometimes more relevant and thought-provoking. These changes observe new motives, narrative techniques and audiences' expectations. The exercise of addition, alteration, and experimentation in the original piece also play a vital role in adaptation to bring some refinements in the adapted version.

The present paper takes some plays and their adapted versions of films to observe the artistic changes that a film-makes does for transformation. Apart from this, the attempt is also to analyse the narratives techniques, methods and approaches used for the process of transformation from drama to film.

Keywords: Adaptation, Transformation, Play, Drama, Narrative.

Both Drama and film are forms of visual arts of storytelling, and are performance-based media. Despite being performative art forms, both share considerable differences in respect of performing situations and techniques. A play is all about performance and enactment. The actors involved play their parts on the stage and enact accordingly that is why drama is considered to "staged art". Aristotle finds drama an imitation of action as a drama is recreation and reproduction of reality on stage. (*Poetics*) The actors create an illusion of real action to ensure credibility of action, and consequently, the audience perceive the action of the stage to be real. The performance also includes dialogues, monologues, and aside-along acting. The actors communicate with other actors through dialogues, and monologues and aside reveal the actors's inner thoughts, like what they think or do. Like drama, the film is also a performing art and, it does have actors, and dialogues and story. But both the media differ in the narrative techniques, methods, and visual pleasure.

Both drama and film have different modes of storytelling. The history of drama is very ancient, whereas the film is a recently emerged medium of narratives, not older than 150 years, but since the beginning of cinema, it has been dependent on literature to produce successful and mature stories as cinema takes literature as a treasure of great stories. Since the beginning of cinema to the present time, films have been made on many literary works and it is the same all over the globe including regional cinema. The storyline of film includes short stories, novels, epics, autobiographies, and plays of all the ages including the origins of human beings. The present paper focuses on drama and its transformation into a film. The main objective of this paper is to discuss the problems that a filmmaker faces and the technological issues he has to deal with in the process of the transformation. Apart from this, the paper also looks into the similarities and dissimilarities of both media in context to narratives and other visual techniques.

Shifting or turning a work of art completely or picking up an idea or a part of it into another medium is called 'adaptation'. Adaptation (in science) means that when an organism moves to a new place or a medium, necessary structural and behavioural modification has to be made for survival. For Linda Hutcheon, adaptation is "to adjust, to alter, to make suitable" (4). In art forms, it is a transformation of an art piece into another. The work of art is cut, enlarged, or modified according to the limits and characteristics of the target medium.

The dictionary defines a movie as "a recording of moving images that tells a story and that people watch on a screen or television". (Merriam-Webster). This definition marks a big difference between drama and film as a film can be 'recorded' but the drama is not recorded. The drama is a live performance, in which characters perform on stage in the presence of the audience, so in drama, the actors have to perform being more conscious about their roles because things once done cannot be undone. Contrary to live performance, a film is a recording-based art, so if an actor makes any mistake while performing or the acting is not up to mark as it is expected, it can be repeated to the desired results. So, the first considerable difference between the both is that one performance is live (drama) and the other is utilizing media. Another important difference is of the location of audiences in both media. The audience is always present in drama performance whereas the film does not have the audience at the time of performance. It would be right to say about the film that at the time of performance the audience is absent and when it is shown on the screen the performers are absent. The stability of the stage also makes a huge difference. The stage is fixed in drama performance,

so neither the performers nor the audience can go beyond the limits of the stage. So, the story in drama has to be presented within the limited scope of the stage, yet in a film production, the portability of the camera marks a great difference in the end product of drama into a film as the camera can shoot at different locations. Along with this, the nature of both drama and film media casts a great difference as a drama emphasizes telling a story whereas a film aims at showing.

Looking at these differences in the context of adaptation, when a film is made on a drama, the film reaches the audience in different product an appeal and affects them differently. The drama is a live performance, the actors of the drama have to perform continuously in the same shift from the beginning to the end in real-time, but the film is shot in front of experts rather than the audience like the director, cinematographer, acting director and other members of the production. And the film not being live performance provides different features to the film such as a scene can be filmed at different times as per the requirement and convenience, which results in a more refined story on a technical basis if the drama is converted into a film.

In adaptation, the adapted product is also different from the drama because of the distance between stage and audience. Small objects and facial expressions are out of reach of the audience sitting in the last row of the theatre, so to express emotions and feelings in dramatic performance the actors have to make extra efforts. But the camera eliminates the distance between the audience and performers. For example, a person identifies a person recalling the bruise on his face, in drama performance, it is difficult to express to the person sitting at the very end, what made the person recognize, so the dramatist has to convey it through some other techniques or the most probable alternative, dialogue. To suppose, in a play, the character falsely claims about the cleanliness of the floor and neatness of his room, the camera in film can take a close-up shot to expose the dirt on the floor and the dirty clothes stuffed in the corner. The camera, in the film, takes the audience close to the object and can focus on the object, more important at that time. Forman clears that camera “eliminate the constancy of distance between the performer and spectator” and directors move cameras, use different camera angles and change distances to make it impressive. (Forman 17). Robert Hodge also explains it as “in the Globe and Whitehall theatres spectators were positioned by their social and economic status in stratified theatres. The television camera constructs a range of positions which all viewers share” In addition, the camera can show objects from different angles, whereas in the drama there is only one angle. Talking about the death of King Lear in

King Lear's adapted version, Robert Hodge writes "his lips are close to Cordelia's, and camera moves in very close indeed to both ... then the camera moves away ... then moving back and up, positioning the viewer high above the scene." (Hodge 60)

The film is a technology based medium of expression and the technology provides a lot of conveniences while telling a story such as a film to have the facility to change the scene quick and frequent according to the need of narrative, opposite to it, the scenes in drama cannot be changed at that speed and frequency because a change in scenes, changes stage setting, decoration and other elements too which is a tough and time-consuming task in ongoing performance and too many changes may cause boredom in the audience, therefore, the dramatist has to cast the narrative in such a way that there is less possibility of a scene change. This lack of drama confines the view and approach of the audience to several locations as in *The Birthday Party* Meg calls out Petey for breakfast, the audience can't see Meg until she appears on the hatch, and the audience can't access the up-stair room of Stanley, while the filmmaker is independent in switching of scenes which necessarily affect the narrative and would mark a difference in the end product as the film version of *The Birthday Party*, shows Meg in the kitchen and take the viewers up-stair. Similarly, in Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like a Man*, Viswas reports on stage that Ratna is crying in the kitchen and Jairaj and Lata run in the kitchen, but in the film, the camera takes the audience to the kitchen behind Jairaj and Lata.

There are often, two types of action in a drama, one that takes place on stage, which the audience can see and another, that cannot be shown because of stage constraints such as a very small scene and action, a natural event, or something that happens simultaneous and parallel to the main plot. As in *The Playboy of Western World*, Shawn tells Pegeen about Christy "I couldn't see him at all; but I heard him groaning out, and breaking his heart. It should have been a young man from his words speaking." Telling about Christy and Christie's actual suffering in the ditch are two different actions taking place at the same time. Such events and actions are reported on the stage because the fact is that only one event can be performed on stage at a time. The technology which enables the switching of scenes, in a film, provides the ability to run parallel scenes. In the film, the two scenes of Christy in ditch and the conversation between Shawn and Pegeen in shebeen can be portrayed on the screen through parallel running scenes.

The camera portability and facility of editing also enable the facility of switching the narrative in flashback and flashforward. Comparing a drama, a film can bear much frequent switching of scenes into past and present and the film has the facility to instantly begin the

scene of past and future in the next scene without any pauses amongst scenes. This flair is also an advantage in the film medium, as it relies on recording, so filming scenes at different times and locations, combining them, and presenting them in a sequence is much easier than the art of drama, as the stage is very limited and fixed, the performance is live, and many other reasons.

An important difference between drama and film is that a drama entirely does a lot of telling where a movie does show. Gary Goldstein said “movies are about showing not telling very often because you have the ability to show lot of things without having to explain lot of things.” (“Writing A Stage Play” 01.25- 01.50) So while adapting a play into a film, the adapter primarily shows visually whatever is in the play. As is discussed above the off-stage actions and events which are only reported on the stage are subject to visualization in the film. Along with it the play doesn’t have much location as Aristotle says that a play should ensure ‘Unity of Place’. Usually, the stability of the stage restricts dramatist from using multiple locations but when it comes to the film medium, a film can integrate multiple locations in a narrative as it is said wherever the camera goes, it takes the audience along. So, when a drama is adapted into a film, the story is liberated from the bondage of location and firmness. As adaptation of *The Birthday Party*, 1968 version, opens, introducing the seaside resort to the audience, then the street lights turn off and the street is deserted. Then the location changes, and there is a visual of Petey and then the camera enters through the door and shows Meg, kitchen, and sitting room. Contrary to the film, in the play, the events do not leave the sitting room and the whole action takes place there. Kenneth Portnoy, termed this liberation ‘opening up’ (Portnoy 115). the term articulates that while adapting, the setting and location of a play are widened and broken up into multiple locations. Richard Krevolin’s statement seems to confirm Gary Goldstein, when *In How to Adapt Anything into A Screenplay*, Richard Krevolin concludes that ‘You can, owing to the constraints of the stage, sometimes TELL INSTEAD OF SHOW! But you can never do this in screenwriting. As a film writer, you must always expand the story, always make it big enough to fill the screen’ (Krevolin, 69). The term ‘opening up’ refers to the expansion of events location and visuals as it can show the events through visuals while in play the most often things are told.

In the paper, the limitation and characteristics of the media are discussed which affects the product in adaptation. A final and most prevailing aspect of adaptation is that adaptation is art in itself and it provides it adapter freedom of addition, alteration, and experimentation. The character, dialogues, and subplots, and events can be deleted and added, because, in Bluestone’s words, in adaptation, the source work is merely taken for ‘raw-material. (90) And in

adaptation, the adapter has his viewpoint and adapt in his way to make the audience cheer as Alfred Hitchcock, inscribes not to care about the subject matter and others but “care about the pieces of film and the photography and the soundtrack and all of the technical ingredients that made the audience scream. ... feel it's tremendously satisfying for us to be able to use the cinematic art to achieve something of a mass emotion.” (Truffaut 121) Apart from this, the adaptor makes necessary changes keeping in mind the needs of the market, and the budget and time period. This is how a piece of art particularly a drama is adapted into a film keeping the need, techniques and narratives in mind, and also audience’s expectations. These creative changes bring some more artistic greatness to the original piece of art.

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