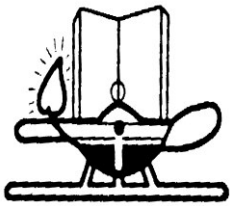

"TRAVELING STORIES":

RE-WRITING SELECTED CLASSIC NOVELS THROUGH THEIR TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY SCREEN ADAPTATIONS

A thesis submitted by

Sherry Henien Isaac

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Under the supervision of

Professor Mustafa Riad Mahmoud

Department of English Language and Literature

Faculty of Arts

Ain Shams University

Dr. Iman Ezz-El-Din Ismail

Department of Drama

Faculty of Arts

Ain Shams University

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Preface

Novels have always been a prolific source for cinema and television. Classic novels in particular have been repeatedly adapted into films and TV programs over the years. However, as time goes on, and as they are harshly criticized, adaptations of the same old stories remain popular. In fact, novel-to-screen adaptations take different shapes in different ages. The changes in the socio-cultural environment as well as the changes in the technological developments in cinema and television constantly alter the way in which novels are adapted to the screen and the way in which audiences experience them. This thesis examines an adaptation into the medium of television and another into that of cinema. By analyzing these two adaptations in detail, it seeks to offer a deeper understanding of the relationship between a screen adaptation and the novel it adapts and to illuminate the nature of screen adaptations of classic novels in the twenty-first century.

The first chapter offers an overview of the various significant approaches to adaptation studies from the beginnings of the twentieth century to the present moment. It explains the complications that have resulted from the privileging of novels over films and TV programs based on them. It outlines several attempts to offer alternative ways to understand, analyze, and evaluate novel-to-screen adaptations. It then expounds Linda Hutcheon's approach to adaptation studies as explained in her book *A Theory of Adaptation*. Finally, it shows how this approach could be used to avoid the drawbacks of the previous approaches.

The second and third chapters apply Hutcheon's "Theory of Adaptation" to *North and South* (2004) and *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) respectively. They answer the basic questions that Hutcheon proposes to analyze the selected adaptations in relation to the novels they adapt as well as to their medium, genre, adapters, audience, time, and place. Finally, the conclusion discusses

the findings and limitations of this study and explains how Hutcheon's theory of "traveling stories" can be a useful tool to analyze twenty-first century screen adaptations of classic novels.

Chapter 1

"To Thine Own Thing Be True"

> "Literary adaptations are their own things – inspired by, based on an adapted text but something different, something other."
>
> – Linda Hutcheon ("In Defence," para. 25)

On December 16, 1969, the *Columbia Daily Spectator* published an advertisement for Tony Richardson's *Hamlet* (1969), a film adaptation of Shakespeare's play with the same name. The advertisement featured the tagline "To Thine Own Thing Be True" (2), adapted from Polonius's famous line in Shakespeare's play: "This above all: To thine own self be true" (1.3.78). In the original play, Polonius's line was a piece of advice to his son to avoid any foolish actions that would not be for his own best interest later. On the other hand, the adapted line in the advertisement – boldly replacing "thine own self" with "thine own thing" – was part of a strategy to market the film as a modern version of the play. This tagline was quoted by *New York Times* reviewer Roger Greenspun on December 22, 1969, in a harsh review of the film for not being very modern (n. pag.). It then became a very popular line for many years among young people who have neither seen the ad nor the film, and who used the line to express living up to one's own standards rather than to society's.

Then in 2007, the same line was quoted again by adaptation scholar Thomas Leitch who, unlike Greenspun, considered the film a truly modernized version of the play and described the tagline as "a modish phrase that instantly and predictably became the most dated feature of the film's release" (*Film Adaptation and Its Discontents* 100). The interesting journey of this line: from an Elizabethan play, through an advertisement, into the twenty-first century popular

culture, then into a published book, and finally to this academic dissertation, is quite similar to the long and complicated journey of transformation that a literary work goes through in the process of adaptation.

1.1. The Overwhelming Persistence of Fidelity

The story of film adaptations of literary works can be traced as far back as the1900s (Corrigan 17); that is, at the very beginnings of the film industry. Moreover, the early stages of development of the classical films that we know now can be traced back to the 1920s and 1930s (19) and adapting novels, especially classic novels, to the screen has been a very popular practice since then. Nonetheless, the field of adaptation studies was not given much focus in those early years and for a very long time, the only approach that was employed in the criticism of screen adaptations was the "fidelity" approach. Adaptations were viewed as visual versions of their "source novels" and their success was judged in terms of how "faithful" they were to those novels. Not only spectators, but many literary authors, film critics and filmmakers alike regarded the written novel as a glorified work of art and argued that the role of a successful screen adaptation was to "capture the spirit" of this novel and transfer it to the filmic or televisual medium. Consequently, the criticized adaptations have almost always been found lacking in comparison to their great "source novels."

Fidelity criticism can be traced back to 1926 when Virginia Woolf attacked the adaptation of novels into films in her essay "The Movies and Reality," writing: "So we lurch and lumber through the most famous novels of the world. So we spell them out in words of one syllable written, too, in the scrawl of an illiterate schoolboy" (qtd. in Hutcheon *A Theory of Adaptation* 77). Furthermore, this vein of degrading fidelity criticism continued to face film critic James Agee in the mid-1940s (McFarlane, *Novel to Film* 8). "However, voices such as

Agee's, querulously insisting that the cinema make its own art and to hell with tasteful allegiance, have generally cried in the wilderness" (8).

As old as it is, however, the issue of fidelity is far from over. Unfortunately, complaints about its persistence seem to pervade almost all the critical works in the history of adaptation studies: from the oldest works on adaptation at the early beginnings of cinema in the twentieth century, up to the most recent ones in the twenty-first century. Most adaptation scholars agree that the field of adaptation studies first acquired special attention in the early 1950s, particularly with the publication of George Bluestone's seminal book *Novels into Film: The Metamorphosis of Fiction into Cinema* (first published in 1957). This book challenged the notion of fidelity with its study and praise of novel adaptations to the screen rather than favoring the texts they adapted over them (Lev 335). Many years later, in 1996, Brian McFarlane published another major work in adaptation studies, *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*, in which he started out by explaining why fidelity was not an adequate criterion for evaluating and judging film adaptations of novels.

Similarly, in 2000 adaptation scholars Heidi Kaye and Imelda Whelehan regretted that "In the realm of adaptations of classic literary texts the invisible rules of the game assume textual 'fidelity' (despite the obstacles to this outlined by McFarlane)" (4-5). Also in 2000 Brian McFarlane himself published an article entitled "It Wasn't Like That in the Book," trying to provide logical explanations as to why a book can never be like its "source text". In 2002, Sarah Cardwell called for viewing adaptations from new perspectives, arguing that "the traditional comparative model of adaptation" which views the adaptation as a "version" and the text as an "original" is a flawed model that makes an adaptation "inescapably linked directly back to the original source" (*Adaptation Revisited* 19) and, therefore, leads adaptation studies nowhere but

back to comparisons between source and text, mostly leading to fidelity-based evaluations. In 2003, when renowned adaptation scholar Thomas M. Leitch first published his essay, "Where Are We Going, Where Have We Been?", he admitted that "adaptation studies" is "in crisis" because "The field's focus on film adaptations' fidelity or freedom vis-à-vis their canonical literary source texts ... has maintained such a stranglehold on adaptation studies" since Bluestone's age, in spite of the many attempts to break free from it (330).

Then in the introduction to the cardinal book, *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (first published in 2004), Robert Stam made his oft-cited statement describing the effect of fidelity criticism on adaptation studies:

> The conventional language of adaptation criticism has often been profoundly moralistic, rich in terms that imply that the cinema has somehow done a disservice to literature. Terms like "infidelity," "betrayal," "deformation," "violation," "bastardization," "vulgarization," and "desecration" proliferate in adaptation discourse, each word carrying its specific charge of opprobrium. "Infidelity" carries overtones of Victorian prudishness; "betrayal" evokes ethical perfidy; "bastardization" connotes illegitimacy; "deformation" implies aesthetic disgust and monstrosity; "violation" calls to mind sexual violence; "vulgarization" conjures up class degradation; and "desecration" intimates religious sacrilege and blasphemy. (3)

In 2007, we still find an article entitled "The Persistence of Fidelity: Adaptation Theory Today" (Connor n. pag.). Even in 2013, Jorgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik and Eirik Frisvold Hanssen gave the introduction to their new book, *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*, the interesting title "There and Back Again" and declared that the question of fidelity is still one of their interests.

If the issue of fidelity has bothered so many critics since the 1920s, one has to wonder, why then does it still exist at the beginning of so many new essays, books, or dissertations about adaptation? This is because pointing out that fidelity was not fair in judging adaptations was not enough to displace it from the discussions of many spectators, film reviewers, and critics and free the field of adaptation studies from its powerful grip. Adaptation scholars who have sought to undercut the authority of fidelity criticism were faced with two major needs. The first is the need to provide logical explanations of the major contradictions inherent in the fidelity discourse, which make it inadequate as a basis for analyzing adaptations. The second, and more important, is to provide audiences, reviewers, and critics with a plausible and adequate alternative approach to understanding, analyzing, comparing, and evaluating adaptations of literary works fairly. Since the early 1950s and up to the present date, there have been many studies that aim at fulfilling these two needs.

1.2. Medium-Specificity

A very early example of these studies is in Bluestone's book *Novels into Film*. For Bluestone, the major drawback of fidelity criticism was its insistence that a good adaptation must be as "faithful," as possible to the novel, which was practically impossible and which, in turn, led to the constant subordination of film adaptations to their source novels. Bluestone asserted that novel and film belonged to different media, thus his approach to adaptation studies later came to be known as the "medium specificity approach". His argument was that while novel belongs to the verbal medium, film belongs to the visual one and, therefore, a film (or television) adaptation cannot, and should not, be expected to be an exact equivalent to its source novel. "Changes are *inevitable* the moment one abandons the linguistic for the visual medium" (Bluestone 6). Furthermore, he argued that because they were so different, the adaptation and the novel cannot

be evaluated in relation to one another; in other words, they cannot be placed in a hierarchy in which one of them is seen as better or more sophisticated than the other. According to him, "It is as fruitless to say that film A is better or worse than novel B as it is to pronounce Wright's Johnson Wax Building better or worse than Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. In the last analysis, each is autonomous" (5-6). Thus, from Bluestone's point of view, comparing a screen adaptation and the novel it adapts is a fruitless, let alone impossible, task. Instead, an adaptation should be analyzed as a new and wholly autonomous work of art.

Nevertheless, in the same book Bluestone analyzes six film adaptations in relation to their source novels. For this task, he proposes a new methodology. Sarah Cardwell explains Bluestone's methodology as follows:

> 'The method calls for viewing the film with a shooting script at hand. During the viewing, notations of any final changes in the editing were entered on the script. After the script had become an accurate account of the movie's final print, it was then superimposed on the novel'. All differences between the two written texts were then noted in the source novel, with the following result: 'Before each critical evaluation, I was able to hold before me an accurate and reasonably objective record of how the film differed from its novel.' (*Adaptation Revisited* 47)

Bluestone's approach has two major drawbacks: first, his own methodology of analysis undermines his medium-specific approach to screen adaptations. "How can one reconcile his strongly expressed belief in medium specificity," Cardwell wonders, "with his apparent belief that one can offer an 'accurate account' and 'reasonably objective record' of a film through the *written word* (in the shape of a modified shooting script)?" (*Adaptation Revisited* 47). Hence,

Bluestone's analysis of specific adaptations dismisses his very argument that comparing an adaptation with its source novel is impossible.

Second, Bluestone's assertion that it is impossible to transfer elements from the verbal medium of the novel to the visual medium of film is undermined by the very existence of the film adaptations that he studies. As Dudley Andrew argues in 1984, Bluestone takes "pleasure in scrutinizing this practice even while ultimately condemning it to the realm of the impossible" (101). In other words, the mere fact that there are screen adaptations of written novels proves that some elements are transferrable across the different media. Therefore, although Bluestone's medium-specific approach to the study of adaptations pointed out the inadequacy of fidelity in analyzing adaptations, it has failed to provide an adequate alternative to analyze them.

1.3. Comparative Approach

The 1970s witnessed the beginning of another series of studies that sought to expose the fidelity discourse and replace it with a new approach to adaptation studies, an approach which Cardwell later calls "the comparative approach," and whose popularity continued till the 1990s (*Adaptation Revisited* 51). Among these studies are Peary and Shatzkin's *The Classic American Novel and the Movies* (1977), Klein and Parker's *The English Novel and the Movies* (1981) and Aycock and Schoenece's *Film and Literature* (1988), but perhaps the most systematic and well-developed comparative method of analysis was advocated by Brian McFarlane's highly influential book, *Novel to Film*.

According to McFarlane, there are three major problems with the fidelity approach. The first problem is that it is impossible for an adaptation to be "faithful" to the source text. The problem here lies in the vagueness of the very notion of fidelity. If an adaptation were required to

be faithful to the "letter" of the source novel, it would not probably be a successful adaptation, and if it were required to be faithful to the "essence" or "spirit" of the novel, this would be even more difficult because "essence" and "spirit" are only vague expressions that actually refer to a personal interpretation or reading of the literary work, which a film adaptation is not likely to offer, simply because it offers the filmmaker's own interpretation or reading instead (8-9). In short, it would be impossible for an adaptation to be "faithful" to the novel because it lends itself not to one fixed meaning, but to many different interpretations or readings of which a film adaptation can offer only one (8-9).

The second problem which McFarlane points out is that the fidelity approach does not take into consideration the audiences that have not encountered the literary text. The third problem, he argues, is that fidelity criticism is a limiting and restricting perspective to view a film from, while "intertextuality" is a wider and more accurate one. According to him, the "intertextuality" of an adaptation includes many contexts. One context is the influence of the novel from which it is adapted. Other contexts are "non-literary, non-novelistic influences at work on any film, whether or not it is based on a novel" (21). These contexts include the "conditions within the film industry" – such as the influence of stars, studios, directors, genres, or cinematic conventions – and "the prevailing cultural and social climate at the time of the film's making" – such as the influences of "the exigencies of wartime or changing sexual mores" (21-22). According to him, these contexts are important influences on the adaptation that fidelity criticism overlooks.

Having proved the impotence of the fidelity approach, McFarlane proposes an alternative approach which consists in comparing adaptations with their source texts. McFarlane does not call for comparison in order to judge the studied adaptations hierarchically as "better" or "worse"