

From Text to Technology: Evolution of Literature Teaching

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Abstract: *The absence of technology in classrooms reduces the opportunity of visual learning which is deemed to be crucial for the students in a rapidly growing globalized world. Visual media can be a very effective means of getting and retaining attention of the students. Literature, in its textual form, is necessary since the words are the sources of interpretation and critical analysis but if the students only go through textual materials it often becomes a tedious effort and as a result they lose both attention and interest. This paper aims to show how technology (screen adaptation) can make learning easier, entertaining, and effective for learners. Therefore, creating a bridge between texts and visual media is something that is, literally, a demand of the present time. It is also a good idea strategically since adaptations of different texts offer diverse contexts and backgrounds. To showcase the aforementioned effects of technology two widely taught texts of Shakespeare, The Tempest and Macbeth are chosen as the primary texts for this paper. The texts and the adaptations will show how a comparative analysis of texts and their adaptations is more effective in developing a sound understanding and critical analysis of the texts. Moreover, the use of adaptation will trigger a creative response in the learners' minds and lessen their heavy reliance on class lectures and other secondary sources. This paper will accommodate the concept of "tiered text," which refers to a series of interconnected materials, through which different transitions or even shift in the basic structure of the narrative can be seen.*

Keywords: *text, technology, adaptations, comparative analysis, creative learner.*

I

"Plays are not meant to be read, they are meant to be performed" – probably every student in their Introduction to Drama course has heard the above dialogue from their course teachers. However, it is an undeniable fact that plays do contain aesthetic values which makes them fit for reading as well. As students of an Introduction to Drama course start their classes, it becomes imperative for them to visualize the scenes of the play. But students who are just starting to study literature, particularly plays, may find it difficult to visualize. This paper aims to provide visual aids to students which are not only going to make the process of visualizing easy but at the same time make learning entertaining and effective. This paper goes back to the basics of plays or dramas. As mentioned before, plays are meant to be performed, not read. It would also not be completely wrong to say that technology has taken the

performing of plays one step further with cinematic adaptations. According to Monaco, “films are a lot more like books, now (and books are about to become more cinematic)” (14).

It will be more than a cliché to say that Shakespeare is one of the most brilliant and greatest playwrights of world literature. Moreover, themes and concerns of Shakespearean plays are still very relevant irrespective of age and culture. However, the archaic language and unfamiliar customs make reading and decoding Shakespeare quite difficult for the students who are just beginning to study literature. This is where cinematic adaptations come into play. Adaptations can make study of Shakespeare or any other classic text easy and entertaining because, firstly, as films need to fit into a time frame, adaptations only present the key elements of a play. This statement may give rise to two questions, Firstly, when performed, plays rarely take longer time than films, so why do adaptations? An answer to this question could be that films are sometimes shorter than a stage performance and also due to technological advancements films can portray the “reality” of the text in a more accurate form than the most elaborately designed stage. Therefore, films will instigate vivid imagination. Secondly, the word key can be problematic as the interpretation of the word key is relative and varies from person to person. To lessen this dilemma Wagner provides us with three different taxonomies of adaptations, depending on the perception or view from which the film is narrated. These three categories are:

transpositions – a novel directly given on screen; commentary – where an original work is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect; and analogy – that shifts the action of the fiction forward in time or otherwise changes its essential context; analogy goes further than shifting a scene or playing with the end, and must transplant the whole scenario so that little of the original is identifiable. (Whelehan 8)

As mentioned in the abstract, the primary texts for this paper are *Macbeth* and its screen adaptation *Maqbool* (dir. Vishal Bhardwaj) and *The Tempest* and its screen adaptation *Forbidden Planet*. The screen adaptation of *The Tempest* is a commentary and *Maqbool* is an analogy of *Macbeth*. Texts from two different languages, cultures, and genres are chosen to showcase that Shakespeare is relevant in every age and culture. Therefore, this gives our learners a purpose to study Shakespeare because students sometimes may feel a lack of motivation as they do not identify with the contexts of Shakespearean plays and language of Shakespearean plays remain a problem area too. Moreover, different categories of adaptations will also make learners aware of different taxonomies of adaptations and their respective characteristics, and the effects different adaptations create. The question as to why this paper is using a Hindi commercial film as a primary text may be raised. It is because Bangladesh is facing “threats” of cultural imperialism from India or more accurately, Hindi. The reasons for selecting this particular film are two. Firstly, even though we are talking about cultural and linguistic imperialism, it cannot be denied that Indian culture has more similarity to Bangladeshi culture than British culture. So, this film will lessen the effects of “culture shock.” Secondly, as *Maqbool* is an analogy for *Macbeth* it will make the students bound to think critically as there is almost no similarity with the original text itself. In this context, Whelehan’s comment is of much importance “it is fascinating to study the effects that the period in which a text is adapted has upon the representation of that text” (14).

II

It might be argued that issues like Prospero’s ambition, Caliban as “white man’s burden” and analyzing Miranda’s character from a feminist perspective could be much simpler to explain to students if adaptations of *The Tempest*, such as *Forbidden Planet*, are used as classroom material. There are at least half a dozen studies which indicate that *Forbidden Planet* can be a modernized version of *The Tempest* in the context of the twentieth century. William Shakespeare’s version was considered as his last masterpiece and the film was just a starter to show that a scientific adaptation of the legendary Shakespeare’s play is possible. *Forbidden Planet* is one of the famous films that has been produced after World War II and the protocol it shows through its storyline does not only resemble the negativity of science, curiosity, and ambition but also foregrounds WWII. The film was a great hit from the date it was released. It touched millions of war victims’ hearts. Furthermore, it was a time when Great Britain lost its two hundred-year regime over the Indian sub-continent. *Forbidden Planet* gained much interest among directors in making films which depict colonization and the power of the ruling class. So, to study Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, a student of literature, theater or even cultural studies might feel more interested if *Forbidden Planet*

is used in the classroom as a visual aid along with the text. Not only *Forbidden Planet* but also *Prospero's Book* (dir. Peter Greenway), *The Tempest* (dir. Derek Jarman) can create a positive learning scenario in any classroom.

As mentioned earlier, Geoffrey Wagner proposed three possible routes of adaptation and while describing commentary adaptation, he says that it happens when an original is taken and it would have a purpose on the screen with a minimum of apparent inference. Wilcox has portrayed the characters purposefully in such a manner that it maintains a thematic coherence with *The Tempest*. Therefore, he showed planet Altair IV as Prospero's island, Doctor Morbius as Prospero, his daughter Altira as Miranda, Commander Adams equivalent to Ferdinand, his mechanical servant Robby as Ariel, post-Freudian monster of Id as Caliban and the cook can be recognized as the character of Stephano. There are great numbers of elements in the film that are taken directly from the play but some of them are significantly transformed by Wilcox. For example, supernatural power has been eliminated by science and knowledge. Also, Caliban's character has been transformed into Morbius' Id which, actually, is created by Morbius himself. It has been said that any technology, when sufficiently advanced, is indistinguishable from magic and it is the place where Wilcox actually altered Shakespeare's *The Tempest* into a commentary as *Forbidden Planet*. It is, however, important to know that the technological invention is irrelevant for the purpose of the film, which is to entertain and side by side teach a lesson about human nature to control elements but it fails to control the Id in him. The fact that the monster is a part of Doctor Morbius can be compared with what Prospero says about Caliban in *The Tempest* "this thing of Darkness I/Acknowledge Mine" (V.i.202). It has destroyed the traditional image of a magician to reveal a darker side of Doctor Morbius' character. Morbius and his monster of Id are a representation of what could have happened if Caliban's conspiracy had succeeded and Prospero's magical power had been destroyed.

Another important character from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is missing in *Forbidden Planet*, and that is Gonzalo. But Gonzalo describes a utopian world which can actually be the planet Altair IV. So *Forbidden Planet* becomes a commentary of *The Tempest*, an alternative *Tempest*, made pregnant with longings, desires, and fears of the time it was produced. Therefore, reading *The Tempest* from a theoretical perspective or as a postcolonial text might not be easy for students but taking its different adaptations can excite the classroom a bit. More or less, the historical context might also be important because it may give students the idea of the alterations in the film. Here the issue is not only "cultural shock" for the students but also the screen adaptations and the range of different meanings might give the students some ideas to interpret as well. They might also make more connections with *Forbidden Planet* than *The Tempest* because of its connection with technology and science itself. For them a story of a king, a princess, a "deformed" slave and revenge have a fictional idea only but to connect with it the acculturated instinct of *Forbidden Planet* might get closer to reality: a reality of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* becoming a possibility in the real world.

As mentioned earlier, *Forbidden Planet*'s successors succeeded later on with a similar pattern of starting and ending. For example, *Interstellar* and *Oblivion* were two box office hits of Hollywood and luckily, students of age groups liked them. So, to make Shakespeare easy to understand and capture the scenario using its wide range of film adaptations within the classroom environment will be far more fascinating than reading an archaic language for our students.

III

Turning now to *Maqbool*, an analogy of *Macbeth*, we notice a lot of similarities between them. In spite of that, not only because *Maqbool* has been truly indigenized (or Indianized with some classic Bollywood elements as songs and dance sequences) but also because *Maqbool* actually changes one of the most important themes of *Macbeth*, unchecked ambition for power or lust for power into an unchecked ambition to attain love, which, essentially, makes *Maqbool* a love story. However, the two stories that are literally set in different ages and cultures portray an almost similar feudalistic setting. *Maqbool* in a Bangladeshi classroom will be effective for a few reasons: firstly, our learners' knowledge of Indian culture and its close similarity with Bangladeshi culture will reduce the effects of "culture shock." Secondly, the concept of regicide might be easier to understand by students as *Maqbool* gives the idea of a more domestic setting and Jahangir Khan could not be more unlike Duncan. Finally, by using the ideas of "tiered texts," various extension activities can be done in the classroom not only to give the students a better understanding of *Macbeth* itself but also to ignite the creative-critical thinking of the students. For example,

Nimmi's (Lady Macbeth) character can be analyzed not only as an instigator of Maqbool's crime but also as a victim of patriarchal society.

Through extension activity concepts like stereotyping can also be made clear which will not be possible only with the text of *Macbeth*. One example of this can be provided through the depiction of the Mumbai underworld of *Maqbool*. The people operating the underworld are predominantly Muslims. Thus, Bhardwaj is not only catering to the demands of the audience but stereotyping the Muslim community as "mafia." And Jahangir Khan is "God to the minority" (*Maqbool*) thus drawing an analogy between Duncan and Jahangir Khan which will later help students understand the concept of regicide.

Maqbool's ending, however, shows its infidelity to its original source *Macbeth*. The ending of *Maqbool* reinstates the fact that the film is basically a love story as the insane Nimmi (Lady Macbeth) realizes her end has come and she fails to understand the workings of fate and repeatedly asks Maqbool "our love was sacred, wasn't it?" (*Maqbool*) as "What can't be transferred by incident might be translated in to image" (Monaco 54). Proving Monaco correct, Maqbool does not need to say "Life is but a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon stage, and then is heard no more; it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing" (*Macbeth* 203-204). His facial expressions are enough to let the audience know of his heartache at the loss of his beloved, Nimmi. Bhardwaj also puts a "typical" Bollywood twist at the end. Maqbool and Nimmi's child is adopted by Jahangir Khan's daughter and son-in-law, thus keeping Maqbool's legacy alive. So, the ending will raise a lot more questions and will help the students activate and use their creative-critical mind. This, in turn, will ensure a better understanding of the text.

IV

According to Mondal,

Moving pictures in the silent era and moving pictures with recorded sounds after 1927 could be used to tell stories, describe events, imitate human actions, explore problems and urge reforms. It is not therefore surprising that such uses of the liveliest art of the twentieth century would provoke speculative comparisons with that other major human system for telling, describing, imitating, exposing and urging-verbal language. (4)

This explains the interrelation of fiction and films, and also why classic texts are getting adapted. As adaptations have already become the "trend," this paper argues that using the adaptations in the classroom will not only make learning easier, entertaining and effective but will also help our students become independent learners and trigger their creative critical thinking.

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