

INTRODUCTION

Adaptations and Reproductions

We seem to accept that certain things can be reproduced – furniture for example. “Genuine reproduction Georgian” we might see in a shop, and we will accept the fact of this reproduction. We buy posters of paintings from High Street shops, often having no chance of seeing the original. Indeed, the original might seem a disappointment after having lived with the reproduction for a few years.

It seems inevitable that when a film director makes a film whose source is a novel or a play, critics instantly make a comparison with the original, commenting on what has been left out or changed. What should be asked, however, is why have certain things been left out, why have changes been made and do these alterations to the original “text” actually interfere with our understanding of both the original and the new “text”, the film.

Task One

Try to arrive at definitions of the two words “adaptation” and “reproduction”. How does each relate to the idea of an “original”?

When you have done this, let’s complicate matters by putting in two other words ideas “based on” and a “replica”. How do these fit into this pattern?

You might also like to consider what we mean by the word “original”.

The “original” “A Passage to India”

“A Passage to India” is over 300 pages long. To read it would take at least two days. David Lean’s film lasts 163 minutes. Something has happened in the transposition from print to moving image. Let us first consider what we understand by the “original” “A Passage to India”. Is it the story or is it something else?

Task Two

Try writing two pieces on “A Passage to India”. In the first, complete this plot analysis in about 200 words.

“Mrs. Moore and Adela Quested go to India. Adela is to marry Ronnie...”

In the second piece try to say what ideas “A Passage to India” is trying to convey, not its plot, what happens, but, if you like, its “meaning”.

If you have thought carefully about the second exercise, then you will have come up with two different aspects of "A Passage to India". One is its surface meaning, its plot, the other is its second layer, what the novel suggests to us. Which of the two do you think is closest to the film? Of the two pieces that you have written, which has been changed the least in the translation from novel to film?

In the paragraph above we have used the word translation, in the sense of from one language to another. If language is looked on as conveying meanings, then the moving image certainly communicates in a different way to the written word. Although the plots of the two texts (book and film) might be similar, the narrative codes, the way in which meanings are layered onto the plot whilst coming under similar headings, certainly appear in different ways.

We can say that the following codes exist in both texts – characters, context, imagery, settings, point of view. In the novel, a voice exists which is not part of the plot. An example of this is in the opening chapters of the first two sections – "Mosque" and "Caves". Who is speaking here? What effect does it have on the reader, in the sense that we are being guided to certain views and attitudes? This involves us with what is happening, with what the various characters think and feel. How do we become "involved" in the film? Are we, the viewers, turned into that "voice", guided by the camera and ultimately, by the director?

Look at the image below. Aziz has been arrested and put in jail for the supposed rape. Where are we, the viewers, placed by the camera? How does the way that the camera is positioned make any difference to the way that we understand the shot? Try to imagine this shot without the bars. Would it make any difference to our understanding? The camera could be placed inside the cell, looking out. If this had happened, we would be put in the position of Aziz. Why do you think that the director chose not to do this?



VIEWPOINTS

Task Three

- a) Take a scene from the novel. By drawing a dozen rough sketches show how you, as a film director, would shoot this scene.
- b) Using the same scene, re-write the passage from the point of view of one of the characters involved in the scene. You will probably have to give this character thoughts and opinions which do not exist in the text but which come from your own understanding of the novel. (This passage should all be in the “I” form.)

The Bicycle Ride - “But it wasn’t in the novel”.



Should a film director “invent” scenes which do not exist in the original text? In order to answer this question one should try to say what effect the director is trying to achieve. Whilst Adela’s bicycle ride is not in the “plot” of the original, the ideas that it conveys might well be in the narrative, within that layering which communicates ideas.

In small groups try to decide what ideas this sequence gives us about Adela and whether these ideas fit into what you already thought about the character of Adela. Then find the parts of the novel that give you these ideas and decide whether it would have been possible to have filmed these sections.

The British India, the Media

Over the years, a large number of films have been produced which are set in India- "Gandhi" "Heat & Dust", "The Jewel In The Crown", "Staying On", "The Far Pavilions" (the last three shown on TV.). Of these, only the first was not an adaptation from a novel. Why is it that India should so fascinate novelists and filmmakers? Possible reasons could be the country itself, or the culture, or a reassessment of the British role in India.

One question which recurs again and again about E.M. Forster's "A Passage to India" is whether it is a political novel. How does it portray the relationship between the British and the Indians? How does it show the differences between Hindu and Moslem, differences which, when India was finally granted independence, caused bitter rifts within the country.

One further question to ask is whether the film highlights the political aspects. Try to list any incidents in the film where you think that there is an overt reference to politics. Do the same with the novel. Has the stress been altered between the two?

Following on from this you could consider whether Forster was actually interested in the politics of India or whether his concerns lay elsewhere. Public or private; which of the two Anglo-Indian relationships do you think interested him most, or are the two indivisible? Also important is where Forster's sympathies lie. Are they with Aziz, Adela? Are the English portrayed in a bad light? How does Fielding fit in, both to the plot and the overall ideas of the novel?

The Marabar Caves

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of "A Passage to India" has always been what happened in the Marabar Caves. The question then tends to concern itself with the "rape" of Adela. Did Aziz or didn't he? Although this is an important question from the point of view of the plot, for an overall understanding of the novel/film what is more important is what happens to Adela and Mrs. Moore in the caves. What is key is their reaction to the echo, to the "bou-oum" of the caves, for from this Adela's confusion and Mrs. Moore's lethargy and nihilism overwhelm them. What they could previously control suddenly erupts and confronts them. They have met the "real" India and all that it stands for.

Aziz's imprisonment, the rift between him and Fielding, Mrs. Moore's death all stem from this confrontation with the "real" India.

In the film, as in the novel, the Marabar Caves are established from the outset, yet no-one is quite sure why they should be so famous. Flashbacks interrupt the trial scene, flashbacks which might point to what happened to Adela in the cave, to what her experience in the cave might have been and therefore why the accusation against Aziz arises.

You might also consider where the accusation against Aziz comes from. Is it Adela or is it the British as a group?

“A Passage to India” - Narrative Chart

We hope that in using the chart on the next page you will be able to trace the development of the characters and to see the effects on each of the events in the Marabar Caves.

We have provided a format, all you have to do is to provide the ideas. On the left hand side of the chart the five major characters are listed. Next to each, write down four or five ideas, descriptions which would explain their characters at the opening of the story (basically in part 1, Mosque).

Following on from this, there are two images of the “friendships” which form Mrs. Moore and Aziz, Fielding and Aziz. Again write down ideas about these. For each image on the chart which stands for a particular aspect of the narrative, write down any key ideas.

At the end, try to describe how the characters have changed, both in themselves and in their relationships with the other characters.

The chart is divided into the three sections of the novel, Mosque, Caves, Temple. Try to explain why it should be divided into these three parts and what is the overall character! tone of each part.

MOSQUE

CAVES



TEMPLE

RECONCILIATIONS



Novel into Film

Having looked in detail at the film/novel "A Passage to India", it might now be worthwhile considering the reasons why such a film would be made.

Some of the issues arising could be summed up as follows:

1. A large number of films find their source in a novel or play. The original texts are not always considered "great literature", as in the case of "A Passage to India". Why do you think that this is so? What would attract film makers/cinema goers to a film or script that comes from a novel?
2. A combination of the film director, David Lean, with a novel/film such as "A Passage to India" obviously had an attraction to the financiers of the film. What could the attractions have been? What other attractions, apart from the novel and the director, could be seen in the package of the film, i.e. in the various components of the film (actors, settings etc.)?
3. If we say that David Lean is a successful director and that "A Passage to India" is a work of literature, how do you think that these labels of "successful" and "literature" are arrived at in relation to the two? What makes them applicable to the director and the novel? And who applies them? Is it you; the cinema goer/ novel reader or someone else?

Further Work

1. "Lying alongside "A Passage to India" is another story, far more political, far more controversial". Do you agree with this statement, in relation to the film and/or the novel? How could Forster/Lean have shown things differently?
2. Describe the ways in which your viewing of the film either helped or hindered your understanding of the novel.
3. Try to write a piece which argues whether a film of a novel might persuade a viewer to go out and read the novel after having seen a film or whether it might have the opposite effect.
4. Write an imaginary dialogue between David Lean and E.M. Forster in which they discuss their own versions of "A Passage to India". One thing you might like to stress is the treatment of the third section of the novel, "Temple". Don't forget, though, that Lean is a filmmaker, Forster a novelist.

David Lean - Film Director

David Lean's film career spans nearly sixty years. In 1927, at the age of nineteen, he entered the film industry as a tea boy at Gaumont British, rising to become a clapper boy and messenger and subsequently being promoted to cutting room assistant, assistant cameraman and assistant director. By 1930 he had become chief editor of Gaumont British News and worked for newsreel companies until 1935 when he began to edit feature films. Productions that he worked on include "Pygmalion" (1938), "Major Barbara" (1941) and "One of our Aircraft is Missing" (1941).

In 1942 he moved into directing films, working on "In Which We Serve" with Noel Coward. Perhaps Lean's most famous film of this period is "Brief Encounter" (1945) a romantic story starring Trevor Howard and Celia Johnson. There followed two adaptations from novels by Charles Dickens - "Great Expectations" (1946) and "Oliver Twist" (1948). Films, including "Hobson's Choice" and "The Sound Barrier", followed on a regular basis until 1957 when Lean won his first personal Oscar[®]™ for "Bridge on the River Kwai", a classic war story starring Alec Guinness, Jack Hawkins and William Holden which also won an Oscar for best picture. His next film, "Lawrence of Arabia" (1962) won the same accolades and launched two relatively unknown actors to stardom - Peter O'Toole and Omar Sharif. "Dr. Zhivago" released in 1965 was a huge commercial success, but marked the end of Lean's regular film making. Since then only "Ryan's Daughter" (1970) and "A Passage to India" (1985) have appeared.

Since 1946, David Lean and his films have been nominated in forty five categories in the Oscar awards and, prior to the 1985 Oscar ceremonies, have been awarded a total of 26 actual Oscars.

Looking at David Lean's career in films, two things are striking. Firstly, although he has directed or co-directed eighteen films, most of these were completed prior to 1955. In the last thirty years he has made only five films, including "A Passage to India". Secondly, the majority of his films have been adaptations from novels or plays.

Whilst it might seem unusual for a director to make only five films in thirty years, the production values and the scale of these films have both been large to say the least. "Bridge on the River Kwai", "Lawrence of Arabia", "Doctor Zhivago", "Ryan's Daughter" and "A Passage to India" have all been big budget movies, involving large costs, distant locations and period recreations. Lean, opting for international settings, has achieved international fame. Both "Bridge on the River Kwai" and "Lawrence of Arabia" won him Oscars whilst "Doctor Zhivago" is still one of the all time box office hits. Acclaim has therefore come from both film makers and from audiences.

Even though his recent films have large casts, they are concerned with the personal relationships of a small group of characters and the ways in which the major events forming in the backdrop impinge on the lives of these characters. So, in "A Passage to India", we see the drama of Adela Quested and Dr. Aziz unravel against the background of Indian nationalism and racial prejudice.

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