CONCERNS AND CHALLENGES OF ADAPTING A CREATIVE WORK

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an outline of the process of adapting a creative literary work (i.e., books, films, works of art, etc.) concentrating on various concerns and challenges of fetching two distinctive types of media and people from different disciplines together to create a successful adaptation. While the nature of adaptation is to transit, the process to accomplish that transition is complex. This research paper discusses the media involved, some of the significant individuals involved in the process (and their expectations of the end product), and other factors upon which the success or failure of an adaptation depends. Three main areas are examined to include how the skill and choices made by the adapter can impact the original work and the adaptation (both positively and negatively), how creative visions can mesh or clash, and whether some literary works should not be altered from their original form. This research study includes copious articles on the Internet, E-resources, Library resources, television series, web series, books, films, as well as personal observations of the subject matter. This research paper can assist a potential adapter or creator of a work in making informed decisions about the feasibility of undertaking an adaptation project. Further in-depth study should be conducted prior to beginning any project of adaptation, since while some of the concerns and challenges are evident and concrete, others are subjective in nature.

Keywords: *animation, adaptation, computer-generated graphics, creative work, production*

BACKGROUND

The literary works produced by various authors take different forms (such as manuscripts, designs, art, songs, etc.). These forms are determined by the visions and idea that the creators have. In legal terms, these creative works are known as "intellectual property," since they are the end-products of human creativity which is prevented by law; and others cannot copy them literary. (*Oxford Dictionary*, *n.d.*). Considering the objectives of this study, the term "work," shall mainly be used to describe the intellectual property created by authors, writers, artists, and others as

noted herein. The new trend in the canon of literary world is to adapt the work from one medium to another medium: be it translation from one language to another language or from one medium to another medium. However, it is often the case that the person who is adapting a new production from an existing work can have a different vision or intentions behind their production than those of the work's original author. When the creator's original work comes in to public domain and when it is, thereafter, adapted, people promote a work with their praise and support, or shame it with ridicule and criticism. In some cases, a work may end up strutting a thin line down and become a controversy; it may generate a lot of attention: this kind of attention is generally negative. Others will also try to weigh the quality of a work against another to compare similarities and inspirations, or see what ideas worked in it versus what didn't. Since people's impressions of a work can be determined by how it is portrayed, the concerns and challenges involved in the process are predominantly focused in this paper. The word an "adaptation" means something (a movie, book, play [artwork], etc.) that is transformed so that it can be presented in another form or to make fit (as for a new use) by modification (*Merriam-Webster, Adaptation, n.d.*). Thus, a work is literally made to adapt to a new medium. Adaptation requires human input to actually enforce the changes: in that process, sometimes, an element that worked well in one medium, i.e. exposition in a book describing a character's mood or thoughts, may not work for another i.e. in the film, showing the viewer how characters react instead of telling them how as not to dull their interest. However, this is only an external look at what it means to adapt something. Adapting a work can be far more complicated than how we look at the practice from afar. One must look closer to notice that those who undertake adaptations often come across complications which tax their capacities to develop a good or great end product. I see the first challenge as the amount of change and the type(s) of modification which are needed or being performed on the "original" work.

While discussing about adaptation, the foremost thing that should be considered is the purpose behind its production. For several reasons that adaptations are made: the first is financial gain; often, money is at the forefront of one's motivation to adapt a work. While money can sometimes be viewed as a problematic influence, it has its uses in the adaptive process, while other times, money can create the motivation for someone to perform an adaptation to the best of their ability. Though many people who adapt works will do so for artistic reasons, they usually require funding to get their projects moving along. If an adaptation were to fail, it may not result in receiving enough money to compensate for what was spent on adapting the initial work, and can have a lasting effect on the careers and reputations of those involved. In contrast, a successful adaptation can lead to significant profits, benefit the futures of the stakeholders of an adapted work, and allow an access to the resources to create further adaptations, as well as generate funds to improve methods and technology used in previous works. The other reason why adaptations are made is to bring the original work get more exposure and reach to a broader audience. An adaptation transposes the work in the different form i.e., book to film, play to film, two-dimensional art to three-dimensional art, etc. In the case of written words, the adaptation can give "life" to the characters, give greater definition to the setting or locale of the story. With nonfiction works, an adaptation facilitates the audience to be transported and make them experience periods of history, get acquainted with historical figures, and gain in depth understanding of events, situations, and cultures. While adapting one form into another, different senses are brought on the stage. An article

from *Masterpiece Theater* Learning Resources, states that "the major difference between books and film is that visual images stimulate our perceptions directly, while written words can do the same indirectly. Reading the word 'table' requires a kind of mental 'translation' that viewing a picture of a table. Film is a more sensory experience, as color, sound, movement are involved, than reading…" (*Masterpiece Theater n.d.*) This would also be true in the case of a dramas, where on-stage actors are watched and observed. Just because different senses are being stimulated does not automatically guarantee the success of an adaptation. The audience have their own prejudices and expectations. Though watching/hearing/ touching a character sounds fancy, if that character doesn't fit the audiences' expectations or needs, or the senses are over-stimulated to the point of detracting from what is being watched/experienced, the adaptation can easily fail (both critically and financially).

Apart from monetary gain, another component in the adaptation of work is a creator of that work. The term "temperamental artist" does not only translate the world of art, but also the scriptwriters, authors, filmmakers, and playwrights. In the process of adapting a work, people from different background, disciplines, and their vested interests in the work proposed for adaptation are brought together in the collaborative process. The success and the failure of the adapted work depends on how well all the people involved work together.

FOCUSED INVESTIGATION

This research paper has focused on the following objectives:

- When one form is being adapted into another, how does the adapter (and the new creator of the adapted work, who is actively involved in the process) capture the spirit of the work without getting bogged down in the minor details?
- In the process of adaptation, what is involved in balancing the author/creator's vision with that of the screenplay writer and the director - the adapters?
- Are there concerns which can preclude or negate a work from being adapted?

This paper is examining the concerns and challenges involving the uniqueness of both the media involved. The written literary texts such as books, dramas, short stories, plays etc. all lend themselves to being adapted. However, it does not necessarily mean they should be transformed from their original form only because they are capable of being adapted. In the process of adaptation - creating something new and unique, something original and unique can forever be destroyed. The focus will be understanding those concerns and challenges the adaptor faces.

This study is conducted by compiling some of the lesser known concerns and challenges involved in the process of adaptation, which has enabled to provide informed decisions about whether to undertake an adaptation project.

EXAMINATINIG THE PROCESS OF ADAPTATION

While the nature of adaptation is to transform, there is a complex process in undertaking that transition. The process of adaptation can be like a metamorphosis – mighty alteration in characters, settings, appearances, or circumstances. (*Merriam-Webster, n.d.*) With that as a given premise, one of the most important considerations is whether or not at the end of the process, the work will basically be unchanged, be enhanced, or so drastically altered that it is entirely unrecognizable. The analogical example is - allowing a caterpillar to continue being a caterpillar, transforming a caterpillar into a butterfly, or changing a butterfly back into a caterpillar).

The success or failure of an adaptation depends on the multitude of people involved in this collaborative process. The expectations of the final results vary with the people involved in the process. It is an apparent assumption that there should be mutual understanding among all the parties involved. This probably is the most difficult portion of the adaptation process and it influences majorly on the success or a failure of the project.

The following research examination offers the outcomes gleaned from various studies and related observations in the context of the objectives identified above.

Examining Objective 1: When one form is being adapted into another, how does the adapter (and the new creator of the adapted work, who is actively involved in the process) capture the spirit of the work without getting bogged down in the minor details?

Noam Kroll, in his blog *Premium Beat,* (*2014*), discusses what to cut and what to keep during adaptation of a written text into a film. He notes that one of the greatest criticisms an adaptation is about fidelity of an adaptation towards the book. He states that while adapting a novel, other first step is to select the central characters, then the next is to revisit the novel and integrate the key plot, scenes and settings into the adaptation. He further adds that new material might also be required to be added: be it some new characters or plot points that have never been in the original novel. This may also lead to alternate endings which may or may not be accepted by the fans. He stresses that a screenplay doesn't have room for some of the most enjoyable aspects of a novel: novel runs into pages, while script has limitation of completing the whole story in couple of hours. (*Kroll 2014*). Further, how to define the parameters of the adaptive process from the perspective of the various parties involved is the second objective.

Technology: There are numerous technologies available to assist in the adaptive process. Not only does the technology enhance the potential of the adapter, it also aids, in some cases hinders, the process of adaptation. Among these innovative moviemaking techniques, Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI) is being widely utilized to the enhancement of the end product being created.

Stephen Romney, in his article *Weekly Reel* (*2012***), discusses the pros and cons of CGI versus the pros and cons of practical special effects.

Commencing with the pros of CGI: CGI technology is capable of realistic effect, such as a character flying through the air or fantasy characters, can be created more economically graphically on a compute instead of using on-set special effects. (*Romney 2012***);** whereas the cons of CGI is that its effects can be problematic and when done incorrectly can break the illusion of the entire film. (*Romney 2012***).** If CGI is used inadequately, it may appear quiet unbelievable and more animated for viewers to take the film or the scene seriously. In its primitive years, when CGI was just emerging as an entertainment technology, its capabilities were quite limited. While with the advancement of the time, there is a noticeable jump in the quality of graphics and animation used for computer-rendered objects. For example, the computer-generated Hulk from the 2003 movie *Hulk* versus the computer-generated version of the Hulk that appeared in *The Avengers* in 2008 film series. (*Marshall 2013*).

Moving ahead, while talking about pros of Practical Visual Effects Pros: Simple tricks, such as forced perspective and stop-motion can be done in-camera and on set; they can be adjusted for lighting, framing, and depth effects. With the visual effects, more creative shots are possible. (*Romney 2012*) However, the cons of Practical Visual Effects are: these effects are prone to technical problems; they require more careful attention; and they can delay a production, thus impacting the financial consequences. As cited in the blog of Austin Community College by Sara Farr (*n.d.*), the animation costs usually on a "per finished second" basis and can range from $250-$500 per second (referred from by AnimationAndEffects.com) An animated movie, such as *A Bug's Life* or *Tarzan* may cost approx. $7,000-$8,000 per second range, while *The Simpsons* runs in the $500 per second range. It should, further, be noted that many of these films are adaptations which also use CGI wholly or in part. Looking at the process of defining the spirit of the original work and adapting it from the perspective of the various parties involved is further examined in the second objective.

Examining Objective 2: In the process of adaptation, what is involved in balancing the author/creator's vision with that of the screenplay writer and the director - the adapters?

As previously discussed, there are several motivations behind adaptation i.e., financial gain, exposing the work to a greater audience, etc. There are also some intangible factors such as why the work was originally created, why the adapter(s) or the original author(s) felt the work would lend itself to adaptation, and whether an audience would accept the work in a different form.

1. Expectations of an Adaptation:

The Author's Perspective: During the panel discussion at Sundance Film Festival, 2014, Benjamin Wood spoke about the challenges of adapting books for film, he explains the struggles of Kathryn Stockett, author of *The Help*, in getting her book published and ultimately made into a movie of the same name. Ms. Stockett is quoted as saying, "I had to find a filmmaker that understood Mississippi, for all its baggage and its beauty…" (*Wood 2014*). She was involved in the collaborative process of the film and had to work with the adaptors by paring down the characters and plots within the story. The article quotes her as saying, "Just rip them [the characters/plots] out. Throw them away and create a clean, open space for the voices whose story you want to tell." (*Wood 2014*). However, all authors are not so accommodating.

In opinion of Ike Oden (*2013*), as stated in an article for *Styleblazer*, author Stephen King has stated that while director Stanley Kubrick's film *The Shining* is a dazzling work stylistically, it failed as an adaptation of his novel. Mr. King was unhappy with Mr. Kubrick's downplaying of the film's haunted house plot which also made the character of Jack Torrance less likeable and removed the character's transformation from frustrated writer to psychopath. Mr. King also cited Mr. Kubrick's direction as "dreadfully unsettling." (*Oden 2013 & IMDb Poll n.d.*).

Author Dirk Pitt was so disappointed with the film made of his action novel *Sahara* that he sued the producers of the film over what they did to his final script. The producers countersued claiming his remarks and suit caused the film to do so poorly financially. (*Oden 2013 & IMDb Poll n.d.*)

According to the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) Poll (*n.d.*), while adaptations of *Mary Poppins*, *The Shining*, and *Sahara* are noted as being detested by their authors, here are few more book to film adaptations:

- *Forrest Gump*: the author Winston Groom felt, the filmic version was too child-friendly and left out key plot points.
- *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*: this adaptation had a title change from the original book by Roald Dahl in order to promote a chocolate bar. Mr. Dahl also was unhappy with Gene Wilder's choice for the lead role and with his performance, as well as with several plot alterations.
- *A Farewell to Arms* (1932): the original writer Ernest Hemmingway felt cheated with the ending of the book as well as the sense of wartime he wanted to portray; as movie portrayed it with different perspective than the original creator's mindset.
- *The NeverEnding Story*: the writer Michel Ende felt differed so significantly from his book, that he wanted the film to stop entirely or have the different title; he also declined to have his name under credit section.
- The author of *Field of Dreams*, William P. Kinsella (*n.d.*), is quoted as saying, "Most writers are unhappy with film adaptations of their work, and rightly so. '*Field of Dreams* [the film],' though caught the spirit and essence of 'Shoeless Joe' while making the necessary changes to make the work more visual."

The Adapter's Perspective: In opinion of John Marlow (*n.d.*), a novelist, screenplay writer, producer, and adaptation specialist, "In the literary world, the cost-per-page for the writer remains the same, whether (your) characters are playing checkers or blowing up a planet. However, this is different in case of movie, where shooting two characters playing checkers might cost $200,000, and filming a major action sequence could run $10 million. If the story seems prohibitively expensive to film, it will not become a movie unless someone very powerful pushes the project very hard."

According to him, "Studios divide the movie going public into four large segments, or quadrants: younger - older male, younger - older female. The greater the number of quadrants your project appeals to, the better. Four-quadrant appeal is the primary reason for the huge success of animated films—and of *Avatar* and *Titanic*, by far the two biggest grossing films of all time." (*Marlow n.d.*). He further mentions that a book is meant to be read and enjoyed for what it is; while the screenplay aims to roll a film in the viewer's head quiet vividly so that the spectator gets ready to pay money to watch the same on the big screen. (*Marlow n.d.*).

Further, Mr. Marlow points out that books raise questions screenplays don't: "Will this work onscreen? How do we squeeze four hundred pages into two hours? Can we tell this story in three acts, streamline the plot, [and] strengthen character arcs? If we buy the rights, who do we hire for the adaptation? How much is that going to cost? And, at the end of all that—will this be a movie?" (*Marlow n.d.*)

The screenplay writer Michael Hastings quotes in an article from *Masterpiece Theater* (*n.d.*), "Film is visual brevity…If the novel is a poem, the film is a telegram. The article also notes that Mr. Costanzo quotes George Bluestone, one of the pioneers of the theories on filmic adaptations who calls the filmmaker is an independent artist - "…not a translator for an established author, but a new author in his own right." There is much debate if a literal translation of a book can be a "betrayal" of the original work and whether the adapter should impart their vision of the story. (*Masterpiece Theater n.d.*) The article, further, summaries the three main reasons that a screenwriter would make major changes in adapting a literary work to film: 1) to alter and accommodate the new medium, 2) to highlight new themes, and 3) to transform the original story interesting or more contemporary. Further, the major difference between books and film is also stated in the article, i.e. the visual images stimulate our perceptions directly, while written words can do this indirectly. Film is a more sensory experience compared to reading…" (*Masterpiece Theater n.d.*). Another difference between an adaptation and a novel is time constrains. While a novel is no time bound, a film usually is held to about two hours. Additionally, a novel is controlled by one author, but a film is usually controlled by a collaborative effort of several people. The article also notes that a novel allows the reader more freedom than viewing a film, since through imagination, the reader can interact with the plot and characters, while the film presents what the image should be. (*Masterpiece Theater n.d.*) Moreover, a huge factor that decides whether an adaptation of a book to another medium will be successful is the choice of cast of characters. The audience have their own opinions, choices and expectations; and if the selected celebrity doesn't fit in that role as

expected, the adaptation will fail. Another point which is important to be discussed is that sometimes the choice actor/actress can actually make an enhancement to the original character by their interpretation and delivery of a particular scene; this can improve upon the original story.

The Audience's Perspective: In her blog, Nadine Rodriguezn, for Florida International University Student Media - FIUSM, comments that "…Hollywood has made a habit of turning cherished and loved novels into blockbuster films, disregarding the fan's opinions on the action." (*Rodriguez n.d.*) . While talking about the negative aspects of adaptation, she further mentions that though the big screen gives a life to the dead words and characters of a novel, a face for readers to familiarize, the switch over to a different type of media leaves irreversible damage at times." (*Rodriguez n.d.*). She also cites the original *X-Men* movie as an example where comic book admirers were disappointed by the lack of character development and plot. However, subsequent films were able to focus in areas where the first film did not go, indicating that the lack of development in one does not necessarily make a film bad, if it is viewed as part of a bigger saga. Some films which are weaker as standalone works can be supplemented by new installments. However, the *Marvel* series incorporated several past films into a gigantic storyline spanning several movies over many years by showing how several heroes originated in their own feature films, then tying them all together into one large continuity when they came together to form the Avengers, and still allowing for more films with the heroes on their own. For example, the *Iron Man* series starts off independent from *The Avengers* films but later becomes part of a larger continuity, yet continues onward with elements of *The Avengers* in play during more stories featuring Tony Stark as the central protagonist. (*Marvel Entertainment, 2008 & 2012*)

Moving ahead, while dealing with projects involving historical events and persons, and/or real locations, the continuity and accuracy of the end product can also greatly impact the perception of audience and ultimately the success or failure of the adaptation. In an article in *People*, Pick No. 10, *Killing Jesus,* a drama based on the book by Bill O'Reilly and Martin Duguard, it is focused that the story covers the geopolitics of Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion. It is interesting that the editor makes the comment: "However, on another contemporaneous note, it is jarring to hear a disciple use "impact" as a verb.

Examining Objective 3: Are there concerns which can preclude or negate a work from being adapted?

Good and Bad Adaptations: It is highly subjective to consider an adaptation a success or a failure – a "good" one or a "bad" one. The overwhelming critical and popular opinion and satisfaction expressed by an original author of the work may determine which label was applicable to an adaptation. *Fight Club*, *Clockwork Orange*, *Trainspotting, No Country for Old Men*, and *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* are among the best adaptations. Matt Singer (*2013*), a movie critic gave the following list as his best and the worst picks for book-to-film adaptations. According to him the best film adaptations were: *Jaws, Fight Club,* and *The Shining*. He says that these films delivered an entertaining experience and story; however, he also pointed that Stephen King did not feel the movie *The Shining* was a proper or successful adaptation of his book. His picks for unsuccessful book-to-film adaptations

were: *The Cat in the Hat, The Scarlet Letter* (1995 adaptation), and *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. He stated that the latter was a bland, boring comedy, there was too much sex and modernizing of *The Scarlet Letter*, and *The Cat in the Hat* was overdone. (*Singer 2013*)

The Moral and Ethical Dilemma of Deciding to Adapt a Creative Work: Though it may be reasonable to adapt something if it is faithful to the original creation, is it wise to do anything that could alter it? If an artist considers their work fine just the way it is, or designed it in a particular way to fulfill a vision, an adaptation may not be advisable. If someone else has customized a work to fit it to *their* vision, it can derail from what made the work special in its original form. To know that a work has been modified from the original can seem like it was twisted, and tainted the way someone looks at the original because there is now a warped version which exists, or even trample the positive values contained within the original work because someone did not agree with it. A person may be inspired to advance a work.

To take an admired work and cheapen it with parody or satire, use it to promote as an advertisement, or to take a political stance, or to trigger a controversy with potentially offensive material - all of these decisions are dangerous for the sake of a work. Sadly, some people do not feel the need for a moral obligation to protect a creator's vision if their version can fetch them financial benefits and if a creator is no longer alive, the rights which protected their work from unsolicited changes may be trampled upon by opportunistic businessmen. Some of the examples are added as Appendix A.

Unfortunately, there is no truly right answer or easy solution to this dilemma. Each situation is as unique as the creative work itself, and must be carefully examined in multiple areas before undertaking the process of adaptation.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has examined several concerns and challenges involved in the process of adaptation. Multiple research data sources have been taken into consideration including Internet and on-line resources, Library resources, books, television, OTT, movies - big screen as well as DVD), along with personal observation. This study has considered and complied some of the lesser known concerns and challenges involved in the adaptation process, it has expanded the knowledge base to enable me to make informed decisions about whether to undertake an adaptation project: whether it is to adapt someone else's work or in allowing my own creation to be adapted.

Throughout the creative works listed here, there is one recurring concern-- identifying if the adaptations were produced in a respectable manner. The research done about these works has known that the adapter of a work should honor the beloved qualities of an original work, yet it is **n**ot essentially mistaken for the adapter to make the alterations. If a creator of the original work is equally involved, they might have preferences as to what direction an adaptor takes with the work, but the adaptor could very well have different ideas for the new version of the work.

Thus if a creator and adaptor can reach a compromise and strike a healthy balance between the old and the new to create an even more unique work.

Perhaps, the most important factor in the process of adaptation is finding the "right" mixture of all the elements involved in bringing together different types of media and persons from different disciplines. It doesn't need to become a wild and daunting effort to make an adaptation. While criticism can be constructive in adapting something, if a creator, adaptor, or audience becomes too concerned with searching for flaws, they risk getting to point where they overlook the true merits of a work. Yet, it is also not a good idea to pretend a work is flawless if it contains a serious fault of some kind.

Casting the right actors is integral to an adaptation, too, as it is a tricky process to find the best portrayals that fit what both producers, directors, and the viewing audience are looking for and wish to get out of a performance.

There are also ideal times to produce a work. For instance, when someone has a vision for a film that exceeds the limitations of technology or budget, waiting to adapt it may be a smarter choice.

Special effects continue to improve and become more versatile, so there can be a drastic difference between the special effects quality used in a work produced in 2005 versus one produced in 2015.

A film that has been given additional time and effort after waiting for a bigger budget to become available is equally helpful. The timing of a work is also important, as it may be more practical to schedule the production when resources are more abundant.

There are even circumstances where a work, such as a comic book becomes popular and gets a television adaption into a cartoon or anime. (*Wikipedia November 2015*), while at the same time, the original comic continues to be produced. In that respect, the source material can also be a resource for planning.

The most important concerns with adapting a work are ethical and legal rights to adapt something. A creator of a work deserves to be given credit and respect for what they have done in making an original work, and they have the right to defend and protect their work from potential misuse.

While one of the main reasons that adaptations are made is for purposes of financial gain, that should not necessarily be the only motivation of the people involved, due to the risk of compromising not only the unique work, but also the quality of the adaptation being created. Furthermore, a work should be presented delicately if it is going to challenge a sensitive issue to avoid conflict with groups who would not sit still if they felt threatened, confronted, or slandered.

In conclusion, this research has revealed that the process of adapting a creative work is in itself a creative work, and a touchy process. Some of the concerns and challenges found in bringing a work to fruition are concrete, while others are subjective in nature. What factors may affect one work's adaptation may not apply for another work. Finding a balance between the two is perhaps the greatest challenge of all in order to make informed decisions about whether to undertake an adaptation project.

No matter what happens when a work gets created or adapted, it is key for us to remember that it begins by taking someone's ideas and bringing them to life, and whatever life those ideas have is exclusively up to those who played a part in their development and adaptation. For the sake of the creators and the other collaborators, we should strive to give every good idea a brilliant life.

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APPENDIX A

Artwork Which Should Not Have Been Adapted

The following are examples of adaptations of artwork which probably should not have been done and which the artist probably would have hated.

Original Work: *The Mona Lisa* by Leonardo DaVinci *(Google Web images, n.d.)*