

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A STUDY OF THE FILM ADAPTATION ENTITLED *THE SCARLET LETTER* BY ROLAND JOFFE IN LITERARY CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

Art evokes aesthetic delights. It becomes an expression of art maker's temperament. Literature and its film adaptation are distinctive forms of art. Film adaptation inherits certain things of literature like any art inherits the things of another art. Any form of art is beautiful and most appealing to human mind. It has its own charm, merit and shortcomings also. Literature and its film adaptation are forms of art like painting, sculpture, music, singing and dancing. Novel is regarded as the most realistic and applauded form of literature. The popular social, moral or political stories have been largely considered for film adaptation in Hollywood and Bollywood. Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* is most famous book in the history of American Literature. It has been adapted into film by fourteen cinema people. Among them, the film adaptation entitled *The Scarlet Letter* made by Roland Joffe has been in great name and fame. There are similarities as well as variable between Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and its film adaptation of the same title by Joffe even though one is based on another. The film maker desires to inherit certain things from the source book but some variables are essential to fulfill the demand of the film media and the psyche of contemporary viewers. The film maker contributes the story in new moral and advanced technique. The story existed in film adaptation to be based on novel is appealing and refreshing with the help of appropriate technical resources. It aims to obtain handsome financial output to the film maker. The present paper has pointed out the similar points of the novel entitled *The Scarlet Letter* to be reflected in its film adaptation. It is desirable and inevitable to transmit certain things of the novel into its film adaptation.

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INTRODUCTION

Like literature, film adaptation is also a form of art even though film adaptation is fully based on its source book i.e. literature. Both forms of art have a power to evoke aesthetic delights. Any art is the expression of the temperament of the art maker. One art inherits the potentials of another art. Similarly, film adaptation inherits the story of its source book to contribute it in different perspective. As film adaptation inherits the story of the novel, it is similar in certain things to its source book. The film maker not only imitates the story of the novel but also adds or deletes something in the story. The film maker attempts to remain faithful to the film media, the psyche of the contemporary viewers of the age and creator's own view points. Even though, the story of the film adaptation is based on the story of the novel, it seems different in many respects. Reading a novel is an individual activity of the reader while viewing the film adaptation is a group activity of the audience.

The readers of novel are the people of literate class while the viewers of the film adaptation are both type of people- literate as well as illiterate class. Writing a novel is also an individual activity while making a film is a team activity of different people. The creator of novel is a writer as well as reader at the time writing a novel while the creator of film adaptation is a writer, artist and audience also at the time of film making. Film adaptation is an art as well as a business. The film maker makes the story more real and interesting with the help of appropriate technological resources. Literature provides delights to its readers through imagination while film adaptation provides delights to its audiences through visualization. Film adaptation proves to be an easy, effective and fast understanding medium. It has a tremendous capacity to encompass the people of different taste. It attempts to satisfy the taste of almost all types of audiences. Its ultimate aim is to accumulate more and financial output. Novel is an earlier and more popular form of literature in compare to drama and poetry. The popular social or moral or political story has been largely considered for film adaptation in Hollywood and Bollywood. It is estimated that one third of the film in all over the world has been based on novel. The film adaptation of literature has become the most common and accepted practice.

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Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* is considered as 'the most wonderful and unique work of art'. It is considered as "the great book ever written in the Northern Hemisphere". The worldwide popularity of the novel caught the attention of the fourteen film makers for film adaptation and Joffe's film adaptation of the novel of the same title made its name and fame in all over the world. The literary properties in the film adaptation are like characterization, plot, setting, symbol, point of view and tone. The artistic properties include in the film adaptation are like dancing, singing, music and acting. The technical properties include in film adaptations are like lighting, designing, editing, camera movement and sound. Although film adaptation is based on its source book, it is different to its source book in the way of presentation and the people of the concern. Novel instigates reader's imagination while film adaptation instigates audience's visualization. The people in their accurate thoughts and psyche are presented in the novel by the writer's power of imagination while they are presented in the film by the power of director's visualization. The people of the novel have contributed with keeping an eye on the literate community while the people of the film are contributed with the consideration of both literate and illiterate community. Although novel and its film adaptation are separate and distinctive forms of art, their relation is intimate and inseparable. Both novel and its film adaptation exist similar story but in different perspective. Such different perspective makes the story of the film adaptation new, innovative and creative. The story of the film adaptation seems new only with the appropriate application of the film maker's creative, artistic and technical skills in fusion state. The novel is the text and its context is the film. The film and the novel do have similarities as the film is an adaptation of the novel. The twenty four chapters of the novel are captured in the novel. For censorship reasons, for the convenience of the box office formulas of a romantic love story and a western adventure film, some deviations have been made and there are quite a few departures from the text. The fidelity or truthfulness to the original text is expected when the novel is being adapted as a film. There are a number of core episodes which bring out the similarities between the film and its original text- the novel. In the case of the novel *The Scarlet Letter* and its film adaptation, such similar features are distinctly remarkable.

The film adaptation entitled *The Scarlet Letter* by Roland Joffe in literary context

Plot: The story of the novel and of the film adaptation is much similar. It is told by Pearl. In the starting the red Indians, the natives of the province seem to carry dead body of a beast for cremation. After having the ceremony, they turn to make a severe attack on the English man, Rogger Chillingworth and his fellow passengers while they are coming in America. Another scene is that a boat looks sailing towards the coast and the camera men makes focus on Hester Prynne, the heroine of the film. She arrives in America with a group of settlers by boat to settle in the colonies, in the New World, Massachusetts before her husband. The puritan minded local dignitaries disapprove Hester's coming alone and are more shocked when she informs them that she will be living alone until her husband arrives. The local wives are immediately threatened by Hester's beauty. They are also shocked at the Hester's unorthodox behavior. The community already is fearful at Hester's independent nature. Hester is also shocked at the serious and strict locals of the place. She is carried away in

carriage with Brewster, an Englishman who attempts to seduce her. She escapes herself from the clutches of the man. Then she appears in the auction of slaves where she purchased a slave girl named Mituba. Hester stays with Mituba. In another scene, Hester looks in rowing seeds in the garden. In the time, she is appealed by an attractive red bird. She follows the bird and enters into a deep forest. She seems happy and romantic to observe the beautiful birds, animals and fruits of the forest. All of sudden her attention is caught by the strokes of swimmer on water. She looks in peer at the swimmer's nudity. The small children arrive there to take her away. After reaching in the garden, she is scolded to cross the banned province. One day, as Hester drives her cart into town for Sabbath service, a wheel of her wagon is caught in the mud. The horse attempts to wear as Hester begs him to go forward while pushing it. At the time, a stranger rides up behind her, introducing himself as Arther Dimmsdale. He attempts to push the wheel out, while attempting to allow the horse to move forward. When the attempt goes in vain, Arther gives Hester his horse and he rides the mare. They both gallop into town and go away in opposite direction. After returning home, Hester looks to take naked bath in deep memory of the last scene of Dimmsdale swimming. At the time Mituba observes Hester through peeping into hole. In another scene, Dimmsdale presents a sermon while Hester observes him passionately. She is surprised to see the man who just rescued her in the forest. After the sermon, Hester is formally introduced to Dimmsdale. They feel attraction towards each other. But when Arther finds out that Hester is married, he tries to dismiss his feelings for her. In another scene the red Indian translator introduces Hester to Arther and vice versa. The scene changes into Hester's searching book in the library where she encounters Dimmsdale. Like lovers, they take a several visits of each other. In the mean time, Dimmsdale brings a news that the ship of Hester's husband has been attacked by Indians and everyone is presumed dead. Arther brings Hester a wig found at the site of attack with the name tag *Prynne, Roger R.* Instead of mourning over her husband's death, she flings herself into the arms of the priest. The red bird appears whenever the passion instigates. The lovers come together for physical union.

The scene shifts into Roger's pitiable condition. When he is captured, he participates in the red Indian ritual of picking up the carcass of a gutted deer, putting it on his head and dancing around in a circle. Roger behaves like a mad man. Hester goes to meet the witches even though she is not allowed. Hibbins plays a good role to support Hester from time to time. In the mean time, Hester is ordered to face the investigation of the ministers of the church. In the court, someone mentions that Hester is seen to omit and her pregnancy is discovered. She is asked to tell the name of father of the child growing up in her stomach. She refuses to disclose her lover's identity. She also refuses Dimmesdale to open mouth in regard of their secret love. It brings repentness on Dimmesdale part. At the time Pearl makes her comment over the miserable and helpless condition of her parents. In acute sense of repentance, Arthur goes in secluded place and penance himself by scrubbing his palms on the trunk of tree until bleeding them. Another scene of acute pregnant pains of Hester takes place in the course of time. Hibbins takes all care and support Hester much. The baby is born in jail. Hester is released to nourish the baby but she is forced to wear *A* symbol on her frock at the breast. Whenever she goes out in public, she is considered a sinner or

adulteress. Her troubles mount up when her long last husband arrives. He starts to take revenge against Hester and her co sinner. He tortures her all the time. He starts to punish the lovers on psyche level. He murders another man by mistake considering him Dimmesdale. The witches are also punished in helping Hester. In the last scene, Mituba seems to be eaten up the chit of love of the lovers in front of Roger. Such action leads her towards her miserable murder. In the course of time, when Roger knows the dangers from all sides for him, he commits suicide. In next scene, Arthur Dimmsdale mounts up the scaffold to confess his sin in the deep sense of repentance. At the time the local natives attack on English man and they allow the lovers to escape with little Pearl. When the lovers triumphantly go ahead in a wagon Hester tosses the letter *A* into the dirt and the film ends in optimistic note.

Characterization

The Scarlet Letter the novel presents four major characters such as- Hester, Arthur, Roger and Pearl but in the film the three characters are brought in the centre on which the focus its placed and they are- Hester Prynne, Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale and Dr. Roger Chillingworth who represent the usual eternal triangle of love- the husband- Dr. Roger Prynne-Chillingworth, the lover, Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale and the beloved, Hester Prynne. Hester Prynne is already a married woman and her husband is Dr. Roger Prynne. He sends her in advance to Boston in America before he joins her there. It is reported that he was killed and his remnant is handed over to Hester who considers now that her husband Roger is no more alive. Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale and Hester Prynne are presented as the priest and the parishioner from the very beginning of the novel. How did they love, how it originated, how it developed, how it was consummated and how Hester became pregnant and how she delivered a girl child is not at all explained in the novel *The Scarlet Letter*. She is branded a sinner and the embroidered scarlet letter *A* is permanently placed on the bodice of her gown. The novel begins with this scene after *The Custom House* section which introduces the place and gives an autobiographical account in it. In the film, this part is deleted and the love affair is presented blooming after a little red bird leads Hester in the presence of Arthur who is swimming naked in the stream. A few chance meetings bring them together. Their love flourishes and is consummated in Hester's cottage watched from the peep hole by her dumb slave girl, Mituba.

Then comes the scaffold scene from which the film more or less follows the action of the novel in a rather faithful manner. The relationship among Arthur, Roger and Hester is presented in the film which means that these three characters alone are given prominence in the film. The film director has concentrated on three or four characters only as a result of the star system in *Hollywood*. The problems of star casting need to be taken into consideration Demi Moore as Hester Prynne enacts the role with all passion and concentration. Her histrionic talent is fully used and displayed by them. Demi Moore (Hester Prynne), Gary Oldman (Arthur) and Robert Duvall (Roger) in *The Scarlet Letter* are the most prominently presented characters as the star- cast demands the same. The number of prominent characters in limited to three or four characters in the film though in the novel, there is many characters. In the case of the novel *The Scarlet Letter*, some of the deviations are the absence of characters or animals. such as

Mituba, Brewster, Goody Gotwick, mule, red bird, horse, mare and others. Hester's community services are explained elaborately in the novel but not so in the film. Chillingworth commits suicide in the film but in the novel it is mentioned that he died after the death of Arthur. The character of Pearl, the beautiful daughter is offered in a similar manner in both the adaptations- the narrative and the visual. She is open – hearted, frank in speech, playful in her behavior and sometimes mischievously caustic in her comments. Everybody in the novel and the film is fascinated by her beauty and her playfulness. The similar characterization and presentation of Pearl in the novel and the film is remarkable. Hester Prynne's purity of conduct and nobility of outlook, Arthur Dimmesdale's hesitation in making a confession, the villainous nature of her husband, Dr. Roger Chillingworth and Pearl's innocence are the main features of the novel and also of film *The Scarlet Letter*. A close similarity exists in this respect in both the adaptations. The inward turmoil in the characters' psyche is not unfolded in the film but is elaborated in the novel. The sexual union, pregnant pains, Arthur's swimming naked are not found in the novel but are remarkably presented in the film. The roles of the senior priest, the Governor are shown to be similar in the novel and the film. The witch declaration made by Roger Chillingworth is similar in both the novel and the film.

SETTING: The social and material setting of the novel and its film adaptation is similar. The scene of Massachusetts, its colonies, church and scaffold as well as the stern puritans who stick up to social code and conduct are much similar in both novel and its film adaptation. The chorus used in the novel is of the five women who comment on the action, on the character of Hester, the adulteress. Their comments indicate that the punishment accorded to Hester is not adequate and it is very mild. Their comments in the film are a faithful reproduction of the original text. There are certain events in the novel which are presented as scenes in the film. The criterion of fidelity is applied to the forest scene, the Scaffold scenes, the leech and his patient, the priest and the parishioner and it is found that these scenes are similar and almost identical. The story- line is followed scrupulously in the film as it has emerged in the novel.

Symbol: There are two scaffold scenes- one in which Hester is holding a three month old infant in her arms and faces the indignity of being given to her the badge of adultery with the letter *A* embroidered in *The Scarlet Letter*. The mark of sin and shame is on her gown both in the novel and the film almost from the beginning to the end. There are many symbols such as the letter *A*, the needlework, the costumes which are similar in the film and the novel.

Point of view: The point of view of Roland Joffe behind contributing the film adaptation *The Scarlet Letter* is according to suit the film media and the mindset of contemporary society. The story of adulteress, Hester Prynne in the film adaptation is contributed by Roland Joffe in democratic and delightful way. It suits the free and democratic minded people of modern society. The love story of a married woman, Hester Prynne and a priest, Arthur Dimmesdale in the film adaptation of *The Scarlet Letter* celebrates the victory of their true love at the end of the story.

Tone: The tone of the film adaptation *The Scarlet Letter* is positive and delightful. It is tragic for bad people but delightful for the true lovers.

Conclusion

The present study is a collection of the literary properties to be reflected in film adaptation entitled *The Scarlet Letter* which is based on Hawthorne's popular novel of the same title. The novel and its film adaptation are just like the two sides of the same coin. Novel and its film adaptation are separate and distinctive forms of arts still they have certain similarities or commonalities. Even though, film adaptation is a product of creator's artistic and technical devices, it proves to be a reflection of literary properties. The literary elements and devices reflected in the film adaptation entitled *The Scarlet Letter* are plot, characterization, setting, symbol, point of view and tone. The story of the novel is already known to its readers and it is easy and interesting to them to know the same and known story in different perspective and media. It is also interesting experience of the audience to observe the appropriate conversion of the story in order to suit the mindset of contemporary society. The audience facilitates to understand the alterations in the original story only to make it appealing for financial benefit. The popular social, moral and political story has been generally adapted into film or different forms art.

Recommendation

As film adaptation appeals to eyes and ears at a time, it proves to be an effective and fast understanding media. It is recommended that the popular moral, social and historical stories of classic literature require to convert into film adaptation. Film adaptation evokes aesthetic delights in easy and quick manner.

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