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Priyanka Kumari

Research Scholar

Uni. Dept. of English

L. N. Mithila Univ. Darbhanga

Bihar, India

Dr. Pratibha Gupta

Professor, Uni. Dept. of English

L. N. Mithila Univ. Darbhanga

Bihar, India

kumari.priyankaa19@gmail.com

Fantasy in Asimov's Fictional World: Across Media

Abstract

Fantasy is the most attention seeker genre whether it is used in literature or film. Fantasy generically englobe four basic categories: horror, science fiction, fairy tales and a certain type of adventure (journeys to improbable places and meetings with implausible 'creatures', such as Planet of the Apes etc. Film and literature are interrelated at various levels. The narrative is one of them. Filmic narrative and literary narrative both have the potential to communicate the message with full potential but with a difference. Therefore, the popularity of fantasy literature and film needs to be examined. The two media: Literary fantasy and film fantasy will be examined with emphasis on the ways they signify things in a fantasy story. Discussion on literary fantasy will show how the audience is enabled by the author to cooperate in the imagination of fantasy's world, whereas examining film fantasy,

the focus will be on how film works visually as a medium to convey fantasy story by enriching viewers' capacity for imagining and experiencing fantasy's world.

This paper will search out the features of fantasy (in science fiction) that creates such attraction in readers and in viewers alike. It also discusses the affect fantasy evoke from the person who reads or watches it and how does fantasy differ in its effects when conveyed through the written word versus filmed images.

Keywords: fantasy, literature, film, imagination, signifier, narrative

Introduction

It has been considered that literature influences cinema. This may be rational since literature has already been there far before the invention of cinema. Critics very often compare cinematographic work to literature. They assess the degree to which a movie is faithful to the particular text. However, many authors establish a forward and backward influence. It has been believed that cinema has the ability to translate deep and abstract ideas and thoughts to the screen as brilliantly as literature does. Brito (2006) observes "In an interdisciplinary era, it is profitable to see literature's verbleness from the perspective of cinema and the movie's iconicity from the perspective of literature". Filmmakers are inspired by novels and in turn, novels tend to be increasingly inspired by cinema. There is a mutual influence because the chief common factor is narrative and story-telling. The paper attempts to shed light on the dynamic and mutual relation that ties literature to cinema. Joseph Conrad, in the preface of his novel "The nigger of the Narcissus" emphasizes the fact that what a writer is trying to achieve in his writing is, to make the reader hear, to feel before to make them see by the power of the written words. The ambition of a novelist is not profusely different from the ambition of a film director. Griffith declared the same idea of encouraging

people to see through the medium of cinema. The perception may not be the same but the idea of seeing is shared. Whether the shared experience is a mental or a visual perception. The reader, as well as the viewer, is exposed to stimuli which makes them perceive, interpret and assimilate things according to their own reasoning and background. This parallelism predicts a mutual influence between the two media.

Development of Visual Art

Literature in itself is an art form. Carefully chosen words paint visuals upon the page of the theatre of the mind. This has often inspired visually oriented artists to create tangible objects based on these mental images. This creative wealth has continued to inspire modern filmmakers, who now have the technology to help bring these pages to life. Literature associated with the visual arts in ancient Greece, writers could see their words brought to life through Greek tragedies that were performed during 6th century B.C. But everyone was not pleased with this particular art form. The philosopher Plato considered life as an imitation of true reality and derided art as an imitation of an imitation. He considered it as emotional manipulation. Aristotle responded to this by writing the work "Poetics." This book becomes a virtual "bible" for many subsequent writers who sought to bring their words to life, either on the page or the stage.

Renaissance literature and visual art had used the Bible. Because the Bible is full of interesting, flawed characters and dynamic universal themes, most notably the battle of good versus evil. Bible has inspired visual arts for many centuries. Particularly it put significant influences on art. This era began in 14th century Italy and spanned over hundreds of years. This rebirth of visual art explored themes based on antiquity most notably from the Bible. The paintings and sculptures of artists like Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo have endured interpretations of the text from bible. Later on, literature transformed as Visual Art.

Several genres of literature were specifically written for visual purposes. Writers like Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Neil Simon and many others perfected their literary works with the intention to serve primarily as a blueprint for visual media.

As technology progressed, Moving Pictures flourished and filmmakers were able to take the written word fully realized through visuals, movement, sound, and special effects. One of the most favoured form of literary art taken to the movies. It may be an original screenplay such as "Night Fall" or "Annie Hall." Some original screenplays, such as "Star Wars," spawned an entire generation of books based on the world and characters created by George Lucas. Other classic movies were adapted from existing pieces of literature, like "Gone With The Wind," "The Wizard of Oz," "To Kill a Mockingbird" and "The Lord of the Rings."

The relationship between literature and film

In the twentieth century, there are two dominant ways of experiencing fiction available to us: the visual forms of film and the prose forms of novel. Many literary masterpieces have been represented through films. Victor Fleming's *Gone with the Wind* (1939), Ann Lee's *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), Joe Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), Asimov's *Night Fall* (1990) are all based on novels. Many people agree with the opinion that films could hardly defeat the novels in telling the same story. This is mainly due to the fact that it is the novel that introduces the story to the readers first. Therefore, whatever the author writes in a story occupies the readers' mind intimately and become the only "correct" way of telling a particular story. The differences between novels and films by their very basic nature decide that these two different forms of media will never create the same effect on readers or viewers mind while presenting the story.

Visual Image vs. Verbal Sign

The philosopher C. S. Peirce used the terms sign and icon to explain the relationship between two things. One object can represent another. The term sign refers to the arbitrary relationship between two things, the object itself and its representation as concept, for example, a word “ship” can be a sign of a ship; also, a picture of a ship can be an icon of the ship which shows a less arbitrary relationship between the two. Obviously, a picture of a flower is much closer to a flower than the word “flower” (Monaco, 1981). As mediums of representation, the film is made of icons, while prose is made of signs (Montgomery, 1992, p. 193). In other words, the images in the film have a more direct and immediate relationship to what it describes, while the words seldom do. In addition to that, the sound used in the film greatly enhance the audiences’ understanding. Therefore, it is true that the film’s grasp of reality can seem much more direct and easily intelligible. On one hand, these features, like (background sound, colour scheme, position of characters, angle etc.) of the film make it easier to understood than that of the novel. However, on the other hand, it fails to describe something which is abstract in nature, more specifically, people’s inner world.

Fantasy in two media

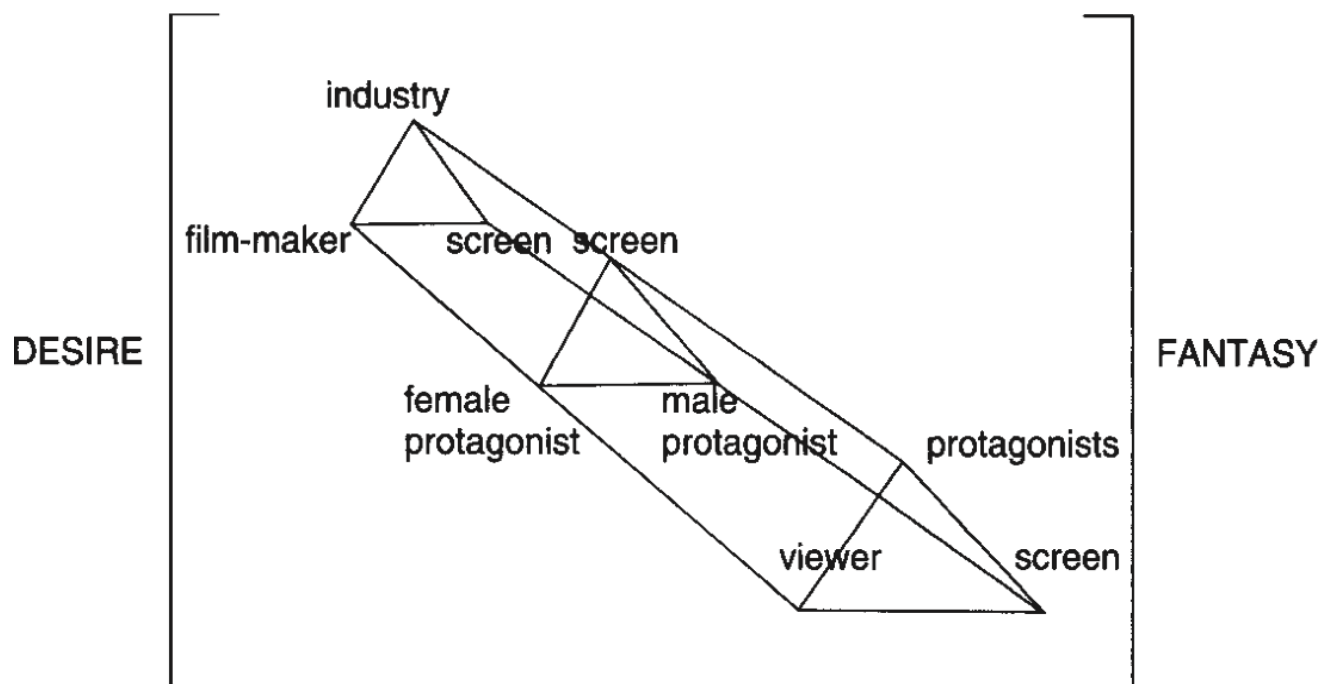
Generically fantasy encompasses four basic categories: horror, science fiction, fairy tales and a certain type of adventure movie like; journeys to improbable places and meetings with implausible ‘creatures’, such as Planet of the Apes. Fantasy narratives are about areas ‘we don’t really know about’ therefore, areas we do not see as real. In reality, fantasy is the expression of our unconscious. These literature/films readily reflect areas that are most repressed or suppressed such as, the realms of our unconscious and the world of our dreams. It is also true that these films with other genres, act metonymically as enunciators of the dominant ideology and social myths. Mainstream Hollywood / Bollywood cinema’s great

subject is not sexual identity but heterosexuality and more precisely the family. When this dream is threatened, the 'threat' must be removed.

Fantasy films touch upon the fantasy genre enjoying with fantastic themes. Usually, it incorporates mythology, magic, supernatural events or exotic fantasy worlds of folktales. The genre is considered as a form of speculative fiction alongside science fiction and horror fiction. Although the genres do overlap. Fantasy films very often have an element of magic, myth, wonder, escapism, and extraordinary events. Until the 1980s, Fantasy films were relatively few and far between. Due to high-tech filmmaking techniques and increased audience interest caused the genre to bloom.

Fantasy in films

Harry Potter, Marvel's Avengers, Dark Knight, Disney's Frozen, Pirates of the Caribbean, Asimov's Night Fall and The Lord of the Rings (All Time Box Office World Wide Grosses, 2015) are some of the popular fantasy films, which enjoyed a great reputation. In fact, Fantasy is inextricably linked with desire. According to Lacan, desire is located in the Imaginary that is, the unconscious. Fantasy, then, is the conscious articulation of desire, through either images or stories. It is, the *mise-en-scène* of desire. In this context, the film puts desire up on the screen. The film industry is the industry of desire, Hollywood / Bollywood is the dream factory. But the film is not just film, it is also a nexus of text relations which function as fantasy structures enunciating unconscious desire. Film-text relations can best be described as a series of overlaying triangles of equal importance that are enclosed within the desire/fantasy parameter – as the diagram illustrates.



There is no single set or level of fantasy, as there is no single desire. Each triangle in the diagram generates a set of fantasies that are both interrelated and yet distinct from each other. The fantasy created by the film-maker is in relation to but distinct from the fantasy perceived by the spectator as the constituted subject. Constituting subject the spectator creates yet another fantasy. The fantasy structures are multiple, spectator identification is equally multiplicitous. For example, by Isaac Asimov's short story and film "Night Fall" tries to explore the unknown and inexperienced events of the universe and its effect on the people. This fantasy breaks up the notion of darkness on an unknown planet Lagas. Since they are living on a planet which has many suns and are used to perpetual light and cannot imagine life without it. They cannot imagine any planet, which has only one sun and darkness. Beenay's comment:

There's the catch that life would be impossible on such a planet. It wouldn't get enough heat and light, and if rotated there would be total Darkness half of each dayyou

couldn't expect life which is fundamentally dependent of light - to develop under such extreme conditions of light - deprivation.” p.187

suggests their anxiety over the issue of total darkness. It made everyone anxious and an unknown fear filled them with panic. In fact, it is partly a metaphor or deconstruction of religion. Clearly, Isaac was trying to say that:

The environment creates the man, And the environment breaks the man. We are simply products of our environment. Whether we want to admit it or not.

One could read it instead as a realistic portrayal of a particular culture and its embattlement against the uncomprehending event. The film becomes appropriated, uncultured as a ‘cult film’ of the spectator’s life (as he fantasies it). Finally, given the multiplicity of identificatory positions, the spectator can identify with both cultists and scientists, thus satisfying his desires to experience unknown things of the universe. Since fantasy is the *mise-en-scène* of desire and desire is located in the unconscious. It follows in cinema, by creating images that we as spectators wish to look at and calls upon the structures of our own unconscious. The cinematic apparatus functions in this respect to position us as voyeurs to our own fantasies. Storytelling is creating fantasies that emerge from our unconscious desires and fears. Cinema narratives relay these fantasies before our eyes, the fear of abandonment and desire for fulfillment of life.

Isaac Asimov’s “Night Fall” has been considered to explore this set of fantastic *mise-en-scènes*. Asimov took up civilization to whom the appearance of stars would be a rare phenomenon. The planet Lagash has perpetual light, with no night time. So stars are not known to them. Even astronomical science has not reached that point where they were able to

look beyond the suns, to which their planet is surrounded. The concept of darkness is unknown to them. For them, it was a mysterious and frightening concept. In this film the elements of fantasy, presented through apprehension about the total eclipse of all suns at once, leaving their world in total darkness. This eclipse frightens them as archaeological studies made them aware that this type of eclipse repeated every two thousand years, ending with hysteria and devastation of the civilization. Their fear has been shown through a long tunnel, which causes many deaths just because of fear for darkness.

As the time of eclipse nearing, scientists, religious cults, news channels, reporters, all predict the event and try to save civilization in their own way. In fact "Night Fall" is a psychological thriller. Scientists try to work on ignorance zealotry and madness caused due to darkness as well as fear for the unknown. On the one hand, religious cult considers it as a punishment of God by extinguishing suns and plunging People of Kalgosh into total darkness. They predict that everyone will go mad and the sky will be filled with something that is called stars, which is an instrument of God, that will shoot fire and set everything ablaze. Whereas Scientists focus on reasoning to escape the calamity.

In the film, characters retained from the story were Aton, astronomer, and leader of the city, and Sor, leader of the Believers (called the Cultists in the story). Mayersberg, in film, has created the female character of Roa, who was once married to Aton but left him to become one of Sor's disciples. Mayersberg said that the two men (Aton and Sor) represent "the relationship between science and religion as a means of explaining the world. As for the Day of Judgment, he put a question before viewers, "do you believe the religious views or do you subscribe to the scientific view that it's nothing more than an eclipse and is a part of the movement in the universe?" Even the amount of suns was reduced from six in the story to three. Mayersberg used strings and elastic bands and crystal swords, instead of hardware and lasers, The intention was to make it realistic and people who lived on the planet could find

that might exist or could be built. He wanted to omit the present totally, and work on merging the past and future.

Mayersberg further says:

"Nightfall was, for me, about a slate of mind, not about a sequence of events," "I tried to present that in terms of the characters' lives and the way in which a film is constructed, which is not so much in dialogue as an image".

His intention in making the film was to suggest about ways one can approach a life crisis. He implies what one can do. Do they go mad or become rational or cowardly, throw reason to the winds? He raises the question Do they try to figure it out or should they will suddenly become religious? This is a story where there's a sort of nervous breakdown in the society where these people live, and how they cope with it.

The two media: Film and Literature cater to the taste and sensitivity of the persons, who seek pleasure, entertainment from these. Taste and perceptions vary widely from person to person, who is involved. Literature needs a basic qualification to appreciate the subtle nuances. It records the difference between the styles of different authors, handling of different subjects and a properly cultured aptitude for exploring the vast treasure house available to readers. The Films are only a visual treat at its best, or at the other extreme end, satisfies the baser instincts of human beings, readily available even for the most illiterate person. Not that literature is an unmixed medium, without having its own lurid side as well, but the scope is limited in the sense, that only a well-read person can approach it. Much of the literature has been turned into a veritable mine of enjoyment when the same is presented through the visual medium of a Film. There are much more negativity and downright depravity in the films than in the realm of Literature. Both are either a boon or a bane in the modern world. It depends upon the person, who is seeking either knowledge or entertainment from the film.

Literature can, at times, have a fascinating connection with the film. Film and literature, both are written to leave an impact on the audience. However, movies and books play different roles. Each one has different strong points. Books give better characterization, stronger revelations, and inner conflict, whereas movies are able to create a better mood with music and visual effects. It should always be better to read the book first because it is good to “sharpen” one’s imagination more rather than being told what to think. On the whole, we may consider literature and films as a powerful teaching resource throughout an individual's development.

Conclusion

The paper discusses the dynamic relationship between literature and cinema. It demonstrates that the two art expressions, be it any form of the genre: fantasy, detective, or thriller, have convergences and divergences. The production of cinema has brought new dimensions to portray the essence of literature. Various considerations as well as new techniques and approaches to the literary text makes it more enjoyable and life like presentation. Films have been greatly influenced by literature. Adaptations of classics for cinema and serials confirm the fact that novels have widely inspired film-makers. Classics provide cinema with ready-made, pre-tested material, especially successful classics. Cinema is now considered as a visual and aural narrative. Adapting a novel is thus translating words into a succession of moving pictures, telling a story in an interesting way. Both cinema and novels have the narrative in common, though stories may be told differently. Fantasy narratives similarly, use those techniques for successful presentation of ideas. Several novelists adopted cinema aesthetic and techniques in their narrative. The traditional perception of time and space changed due to cinematic methods. The linearity is no longer essential. Time progression is not the same as in previous movies and flashbacks are

integrated. Even Space is fractionated. Now the pace is rapid and even the language used has changed. Filmmakers are inspired by literature and tend to translate books, especially classics or best-sellers into the screen.

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