



Novel- A Continuum Genre Encompassing a Wide Spectrum of Adaptations and Appropriations: A Study

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ABSTRACT: There is no consensus as to what constitutes a novel because the genre evades any specific definition as the content as well as its form/style is so varied and dynamic that the term can not be contracted to a single line or an easily comprehensible definition. Those who say that novels are in prose, are proved wrong because there are novels in poetry as well like *Eugene Onegin* by Alexander Pushkin and Elizebeth Barret Browning's *Aurora Leigh* and Vikram Seth 's *The Golden Gate* to name a few. Those who believe that novels should have characters as its essential part are baffled to find many novels without them like novels of Samuel Becket. Therefore most of the critics believe that there are no essential elements of a novel as novels are not written according to particular criteria or in a fixed frame However, at present most of the scholars agree with Mikhail Bakhtin who believes that novel is a form of writing that parodies any literary form that stands still long enough to be identifiable.

While defining or writing the novel, the use of intertextuality, pastiche, allusions, homages, quotations and borrowings exert influence consciously or unconsciously on both of the tasks. Thus for a student of literature tracing the relationship between the source text and the new creative yet adaptive work instils a deep sense of pleasure—literary and intellectual.

This study is an attempt of tracing the conjunctions and mapping kinship among literary forms and how appropriation and adaptations exert influence on literary writings primarily on Novel as Novel serves as facilitating example of adaptation and appropriation, with general conventions and methods within the field.

Keywords: Continuum, Genre, Adaptation, Novels, Consensus, Dynamic, Borrowings, Stylistic, Spectrum, Appropriation, Conventions, Essentials, Intertextuality.

I. INTRODUCTION

From the apparently simple adaptation of a text into a new literary work, to the more complex appropriation of style or meaning, it is arguable that all texts are somehow connected to a network of existing texts and art forms.

Adaptation and appropriation explores:

- Definitions and practices of adaptation and appropriation
- The cultural and aesthetic politics behind the impulse to adapt diverse ways in which literature adapt, revise and reimagine other works of art
- The impact of some theoretical movements on adaptation and appropriation,
- The adaptations across time and across cultures of specific canonical texts, but also of literary archetypes such as myth or fairy tale.

(Julie Sanders and John Drakakis book[1])

Appropriation: In art adaptation is the use of pre-existing objects or images with little or no transformation applied to them. The new work recontextualizes whatever it borrows to create the new work. It reflects the

overproduction of reproductions, remaking, re-enactments, recreations, revisionings, reconstructing, etc. by copying, imitating, repeating, quoting, simulating, and adapting pre-existing names, concepts and forms.

Adaptation: The process by which one narrative form or medium is converted into another, for example a novel to film, a play to novel, or a classical poem to graphic novel. Adaptation theory has recently sought to develop its purpose and methodology beyond the straightforward identification of how close a retelling might be to the original. When we talk about adaptation and appropriation and their being always operational in novel writing we have to describe a more sustained relationship between the specific texts and we need to have the knowledge of at least two texts or works simultaneously. It is pertinent to mention that almost all the novels are built around a web of citations, epigraphs and cross-references. It remains true that response to canonical works lie at the heart of much adaptive writing thus leading us to read intertextually. There is no doubt that many writers have proven to be prime and productive sites of engagement and spawned adaptive writing especially in the form of novels. (J.sanders)[2]. Various other genres have exerted the influence on novels. If we take Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Great Expectations* we find larger invoking of Shakespeare by Dickens. Meanwhile in *Night At The Circus* Angela Carter (postmodern novelist) has derived imaginatively the energy and aesthetics from Shakespeare and her *Wise Children* (1991) provides response to Shakespeare's plays and cultural history of his adaptations.

II. DISCUSSION

It is natural that a discussion on novel as an inherently adaptive genre will cover the touch-stone work like Jean Rhys (Dominica born British writer) *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) written as a prequel and response to Charlotte Brontë's noted novel *Jane Eyre* (1847), describing the background to the marriage that Jane learns about after going to work for Mr. Rochester. It is the story of Antoinette Cosway, a Creole heiress, from the time of her youth in Jamaica, to her unhappy marriage to a certain English gentleman—he is never named by the author. He renames her to a prosaic Bertha, declares her mad, and requires her to relocate to England. (wiki)[3]. Caught in an oppressive patriarchal society in which she fully belongs neither to the Europeans nor the Jamaicans, Antoinette Cosway is Rhys' version of Brontë's devilish "mad woman in the attic." (J.Su)[4]. "Since the late 20th century, critics have considered *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a postcolonial response to *Jane Eyre*. Rhys uses multiple voices (Antoinette, Rochester, and Grace Poole) to tell the story, and deeply intertwines her novel's plot with that of *Jane Eyre*. In addition, Rhys makes a postcolonial argument when she ties Antoinette's husband's eventual rejection of Antoinette to her Creole heritage (a rejection shown to be critical to Antoinette's descent into madness). (Gilbert, Gubar [5]. Rhys mobilized a response to the cultural and racial policies of *Jane Eyre*—rewriting from an informed position.

Rhys strategy has been adapted and adopted by other novelists like Sena Jeter Naslund in his novel *Ahab's Wife or The Star Gazer*. In the bestselling *Ahab's Wife*, for instance, Stacey D'Erasmus suggests "Naslund has taken less than a paragraph's worth of references to the captain's young wife from Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* and fashioned from this slender rib not only a woman but an entire world. That world is a looking-glass version of Melville's fictional seafaring one, ruled by compassion as the other is by obsession, with a heroine who is as much a believer in social justice as the famous hero is in vengeance".

William Shakespeare—a rich source of fictional reworkings provides base to Marina Warner's *Indigo*. It is a modernized and altered retelling of William Shakespeare's, *The Tempest*. Within the novel, Warner appropriates Shakespeare's original plot and characters to fit a dual reality, spanning the 17th and 20th Centuries, and the colonial sphere of the Caribbean alongside post-colonial London. She expands certain characters, for example, Sycorax, Shakespeare's dark witch, is given her own identity as indigo maker and village sage. The colonialist realities of 'discovery' and the conquering of 'new' lands are played out in the novel's first section. Finally, the characters of Miranda and Caliban (recreated as Dulé and George/Shaka) are unified in a shared acknowledgement of past colonial wrongs. Her novel has kinship with other novelists who adapted *The Tempest* into novels like *Prospero On The Island* (1971) by Audrey Thomas and *The Diviners* (1974) by Margaret Laurence (Both Canadian writers). The popular Australian writer Peter Carey has exploited the strategy. Her novel *Jack Maggs* (1997) is a reworking of the Charles Dickens novel *Great Expectations*. The story centres on Jack Maggs (the equivalent of Magwitch) and his quest to meet his 'son' Henry Phipps (the equivalent of Pip), who has mysteriously disappeared, having closed up his house and dismissed his household (Wiki) [6]. Maggs becomes involved as a servant in the household of Phipps's neighbour, Percy Buckle, as he attempts to wait out Phipps or find him in the streets of London. He eventually cuts a deal with the young and broke up-and-coming novelist Tobias Oates (a thinly disguised Charles

Dickens) that he hopes will lead him to Phipps. Oates, however, has other plans, as he finds in Maggs a character from whom to draw much needed inspiration for a forthcoming novel which he desperately needs to produce.

The superlative literary achievement of Daniel Defoe's, *Robinson Crusoe* generated a numerous adaptations, appropriations, retellings and responses both in prose and alternate genres. One notable example is *Foe*, a 1986 novel by South African –born, Nobel laureate J. M. Coetzee. Woven around the existing plot of *Robinson Crusoe*, it is written from the perspective of Susan Barton, a castaway who landed on the same island inhabited by "Cruso" and Friday as their adventures were already underway. Like *Robinson Crusoe*, it is a frame story, unfolded as Barton's narrative while in England attempting to convince the writer Daniel Foe to help transform her tale into popular fiction. Focused primarily on themes of language and power, Michael Turner's *Friday Or the Other Island* (1967) is another retelling of *Robinson Crusoe*. Coetzee's pragmatic version of Crusoe island is a deliberate response to the eroticized spaces and soils of Tourneur's setting, demonstrating the impact of adaptation on other adaptation. Derek Attridge *et al* believe that works like *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe* ultimately reinforce the canon of English literature in writing back to canonical master texts.

Though canonical base texts have fed creative energies to create adaptational novels which possess their own literary charm and merit, it is not simply the case of novels being adapted or adapting themselves but the novel itself is adapting from other forms and genres.

Novelists have spared neither short stories nor poetry as far as the strategy of adaptation and appropriation is concerned. Texts from medieval and early modern period have been productive sites of literary engagement for novelists. Jane Smiley's novel *Ten Days In The Hills* (2007) relocates Boccaccio's storey collection *The Decameron*. British Indian writer Ranadas Gupta's novel first novel *Tokyo Cancelled* (Harper Collins, 2005), is billed as a modern-day *Canterbury Tales*, (wiki)[7]. It is about thirteen passengers stuck overnight in an airport who tell thirteen stories from different cities in the world, stories that resemble contemporary fairy tales, mythic and surreal. The tales add up to a broad exploration of 21st-century forms of life, which includes billionaires, film stars, migrant labourers, illegal immigrants and sailors.

Interestingly, various postmodern novelists have adapted real lives or available biographies into fiction, eg, Henry James by David Lodge in his *Author Author*. Almost every student of English literature knows that *Great Fire Of London* (1982) by Peter Ackroyd is "a cross referential story based on a fictional film of Dickens' *Little Dorrit*" (R. Carter, *et al* p506) [8]. There are close connections between Graham Swifts novel *Last Orders* with classic novel of American Modernism *As I Lay Dying* by W. Faulkner Swift's plot and style are influenced by Faulkner 's. Swift declared that it was an Homage to Faulkner's book but there were various differences and Swift's novel has additional intertextuality with *The Canterbury Tales*. Note that David Lodge's novel *British Museum Is Falling Down* (1965) is pastiche of works by Joyce, Kafka and W. Woolf.

In contemporary fiction we have a good number of novels in which we can trace the blurred presence and glimpses of other works such as *The Tempest* in *The Magnus* by John Fowls and in Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, The Sea* (1978). Zadie Smith labelled her novel *On Beauty* as contemporary reworking of *Howard End* by E. M Forester. Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) with its invocation of both Homer 's epic and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* the contextual relationship remains crucial to a full understanding of many Joyce's operating themes such as relationship between fathers and sons and the idea of both spiritual and material.

Adaptation novels serve as a means of tracking the theoretical and cultural preoccupation of a given moment and period. These novels also reflects the pressing concerns of their own time by updating and relocating their source text for 'proximization' (*G. Gennet's Term*). (Linda) [9]. The novel of Smiley (American) *A Thousand Acres* (1991) contains a sustained response to Shakespeare's *King Lear* from a feminist perspective featuring a female narrator Ginny based on Goneril from the play. The novel is a modernized retelling of Shakespeare 's play.(wiki)[10]. There are many similarities between *King Lear* and *A Thousand Acres*, including both plot details and character development. For example, some of the names of the main characters in the novel are reminiscent of their Shakespearean counterparts. *i.e.* Larry is Lear, Ginny is Goneril, Rose is Regan, and Caroline is Cordelia. The role of the Cooks' neighbours, Harold Clark and his sons Loren and Jess, also rework the importance of Gloucester, Edgar and Edmund in *King Lear*. The novel maintains major themes present in play, namely: gender roles, appearances vs. reality, generational conflict, hierarchical structures (the Great chain of being), madness, and the powerful force of nature.

Furthermore, myths and fairy tales perform the function of the base text on adaptational novel. Angela Carter's (Magic Realist) novel *The Magic Toyshop* ascribe greater agency to conventional /passive or acted upon heroines of fairy tale narrative the self-consciously engage with literary archetypes.

III. CONCLUSION

Before a conclusion is drawn, expectedly, this short survey raises larger theoretical questions because issues of pastiche and plagiarism naturally accrue around a topic such as adaptation. Should we judge such adaptational novels as product based on the concept of mimesis and imitation or a product of plagiarism? T.S Eliot says that imitation and response is actually a key to higher creativity (Trad. and Indv. Talent,1919 [11] and the following statements is equally true:

It is often difficult to identify the fine line separating literary adaptation from plagiarism. Even laws attempting to define the boundaries between creative writing and sheer imitation do not provide clear criteria of evaluation for derivative works (Joseph Gibaldi:2003,p 66[12].

It may be that adaptation, as rewriting, is part of a natural and unavoidable process of evolution. M. Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Imagination* describes at length this phenomenon and defines the novel as a developing genre encompassing a wide spectrum of stylistic adaptations. Literature is no longer seen as a fragmented composition of successive genres as defined by formalists, but as a continuum involving the constant renewal of literary styles. By constantly readapting works into a new forms or new modes, novelists ensure the survival of what would be otherwise forgotten literature while adapting narrative strategies like response, "re-visioning", rewriting, retelling, and refashioning which could be the proof of the potential of the novel to continue to position itself at the centre of writing activity.

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