

# Narratives Across Media: Cultural and Structural Transformations in Literary Adaptations for Screen

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## Abstract

This study offers a comparative narratological analysis of three canonical literary texts and their respective screen adaptations: *A Suitable Boy* by Vikram Seth (1993) and its BBC television adaptation (2020), *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë (1847) and its 2009 film version, and William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1606) reimagined as *Maqbool* (2004) by Vishal Bhardwaj. Drawing on classical narratology (Genette), transmedial narratology (Ryan, Wolf), and adaptation theory (Hutcheon, Stam), the study explores how narrative structures, focalization, character functions, and thematic concerns are transformed in the shift from print to screen. Through close reading and scene-by-scene comparative analysis, this study reveals both the compression and restructuring of plot and the shift from complex narratorial focalization to cinematic focalization strategies. While *A Suitable Boy* retains the socio-political texture of post-Partition India in a streamlined romantic narrative, *Wuthering Heights* sacrifices its Gothic layering and narrative complexity in favor of a linear romantic tragedy. *Maqbool*, by contrast, serves as a culturally situated reworking of *Macbeth*, replacing its metaphysical fatalism with a psychological, emotionally driven narrative rooted in the Mumbai underworld. The study finds that adaptation is not merely an act of translation, but a form of cultural and narrative negotiation shaped by medium-specific affordances, ideological repositioning, and local context. These adaptations highlight the dynamic interplay between narrative form, audience reception, and cultural meaning, contributing to evolving theories of transmedial storytelling. This research advances the understanding of adaptation as a multidimensional dialogue across media, genres, and cultures, with pedagogical and theoretical implications for literary, film, and cultural studies

**Keywords:** Narrative Theory, Adaptation Studies, Transmedial Narratology, Film Adaptation, Comparative Analysis, Intermediality, Cultural Translation, Literary Cinema

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## Introduction

**N**arratives are foundational to human culture, traversing languages, histories, and media forms. From oral storytelling traditions to the printed novel and the cinematic screen, the impulse to represent experience through structured narratives remains a central mode of meaning-making. Over the past few decades, scholars in narratology and media studies have increasingly turned their attention to how stories evolve across platforms, particularly in the context of film adaptations of literary works (Ryan, 2004; Hutcheon, 2006). This cross-disciplinary engagement has revealed that adaptation is not merely a matter of textual fidelity but involves a complex negotiation of form, ideology, and medium-specific affordances. Despite the breadth of adaptation scholarship, critical gaps remain in the narratological examination of how core narrative elements such as focalization, temporal structure, character function, and thematic development are restructured in the movement from literature to screen. Much of the existing literature tends to privilege either fidelity criticism or thematic interpretation, often overlooking the narratological mechanisms by which meaning is reshaped in adaptation. Moreover, while several studies have explored Western adaptations of established texts, fewer have examined how such transformations operate across culturally diverse contexts, especially within South Asian cinematic traditions.

This study addresses that gap by undertaking a comparative narratological analysis of three canonical literary works i.e., *A Suitable Boy* by Vikram Seth (1993), *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë (1847), and *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare (1606) and their respective screen adaptations, including Mira Nair's *A Suitable Boy* (BBC, 2020), Coky Giedroyc's *Wuthering Heights* (2009), and Vishal Bhardwaj's *Maqbool* (2004). While the compression of *A Suitable Boy* for the screen can be seen as a practical response to medium constraints, it may also reflect an ideological choice to render the postcolonial narrative more accessible to a global (particularly Western) audience. Engaging with this possibility allows the analysis to account for how such editorial decisions shape the narrative's emotional urgency and audience reception, highlighting the interplay between form, affect, and cultural positioning. These texts and films span diverse temporal, cultural, and generic contexts, ranging from colonial and postcolonial India to Victorian England and contemporary Mumbai. This demonstrates the necessity of a culturally-aware narratology, as the shift in setting fundamentally alters the narrative's moral perspective. By drawing on classical and transmedial narratology, alongside adaptation theory and

postcolonial critique, the study explores how filmic media reconfigure narrative form and affect in ways that are both medium-specific and ideologically situated. In doing so, this research frames adaptation as an interpretive act of narrative rewriting, shaped not only by intertextual fidelity but by shifts in focalization, character construction, narrative temporality, and cultural context. The research, therefore, adds to an emerging insight into the workings of narrativity in a cross-media, cross-cultural context, as well as to adaptation as a mode of cultural translation, as also to a critique of the cultural assumptions underlying literary canons. To analyze and compare the narrative structures, techniques, and thematic reconceptualization's in selected literary texts and their film/TV adaptations through a transmedial narratological framework. How do the narrative structures, focalizations, and thematic concerns of *A Suitable Boy*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Macbeth* transform in their respective film and television adaptations, and what do these transformations reveal about the dynamics of adaptation across media and cultures?

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study draws upon a robust body of scholarship spanning narratology, film studies, and adaptation theory, with particular attention to focalization, narrative voice, and transmedial reconfigurations of literary narratives. The discussion is anchored in Genette's (1980) model of narrative discourse, which provides the analytical apparatus for examining order, duration, frequency, mood, and voice. These categories serve as the core tools for tracing how narrative structure and agency are reconfigured as the novel moves from text to screen. Based on the outline of Genette, Manfred Jahn (2021) suggests the Filmic Composition Device (FCD) and a modified constructivist focalization model in analyzing films. Jahn: FCD is a creative intelligence that facilitates the interaction of other multimodal elements (visual, auditory, narrative), whereas the types of focalizations (outside view, proximate inside view, direct inside view) provide the ultra-fine-grained perspective on how the perception by the audience is achieved. His work is particularly relevant for analyzing the reconfiguration of focalization across film and text in adaptations like *Maqbool* and *Wuthering Heights*.

Marie-Laure Ryan (2004) and Werner Wolf (2002) provide narrative frameworks in comparison to cross-media storytelling. These thinkers support media-independent narrative concepts, enabling an investigation into how stories adapt to and are

shaped by the affordances and constraints of different semiotic systems, such as the linguistic mode in literature versus the audiovisual mode in film. The notion of adaptation is not premised in the ideas of fidelity but rather in creative new interpretation. Linda Hutcheon (2006) considers adaptations as repetitions and transformations, and Robert Stam (2005) refers to them as intertextual dialogues. Such understandings play a key role in the analysis of how *Maqbool* evolves Shakespearean *Macbeth* into an Indian underworld or how *A Suitable Boy* reconverts the postcolonial vision of Seth into a contemporary televised style. The fact that *Macbeth* and *A Suitable Boy* have been recontextualized in South Asia contexts requires a postcolonial prism. The recontextualization of *Macbeth* and *A Suitable Boy* within South Asian contexts necessitates a postcolonial lens that foregrounds how these adaptations negotiate questions of nation, politics, and cultural identity. Drawing on Homi Bhabha's (1994) concepts of hybridity and cultural translation, the analysis examines how each adaptation reworks its source material to articulate forms of cultural negotiation and resistance. There is support in the critique of Eurocentrism in media that is made by Shohat and Stam (1994). The theoretical foundation of this study is based on a multi-disciplinary direction, which is composed of the combination of classical narratology, transmedial narratology, adaptation theory, and cultural/postcolonial criticism. This episodic method allows one to analyze the narratives developing between media in a sophisticated way, being conditioned by the sociocultural circumstances. In this research, Genette's (1980) theory of narrative discourse helped to compile the basis of the narrative structure. His terms include order (analepsis/prolepsis), duration (narrative speed), frequency (repetition of narrative events), mood (distance and perspective), and voice (narrative agency and focalization), giving analytic foundations on differences in narrative time and perspective between texts of literature and cinema. The notions enable us to establish the continuity or deviance of structure across forms of media.

To deal with changes in narrative logic involved in adapting the story to the screen, the paper relies on the research by Ryan (2004) and Wolf (2002), arguing in favor of a medium-independent or transmedial narratology. That is how this approach views narrative as an object of cognition and a semiotic process that can manifest itself in various media (print, film, TV, graphic novels). Transmedial narratology answers the question of how core narrative functions (plot, character development, narration) are rearranged by the very possibilities and limitations of the film

medium, such as visual sequences and editing, as well as *mise-en-scène*, and sound design.

Adaptation does not equal translation, but a process of creativity and interpretation. Linda Hutcheon (2006) conceives adaptation as a matter of repetition and variation in that she proposes that adaptations are a matter of re-interpretation, re-contextualization, and re-narration. The latter perspective is further enhanced by Robert Stam (2005), who also treats the phenomenon of adaptation through the prism of intertextuality, but one that focuses on dialogic relations between the texts and their cinematographic progeny. This paper employs these views as a means of questioning how the selected versions of all these adaptations (*A Suitable Boy*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Maqbool*) not only reflect but also are different from their literary precedents in terms of structure, character, and setting.

The given sociopolitical peculiarities of *Maqbool* and *A Suitable Boy* allow the implementation of the knowledge of the postcolonial narrative theory and of cultural studies in the study. Such lenses are essential to the analysis of localization and re-contextualization of narratives in the historical, religious, and political South Asian contexts. In the case, especially, *Maqbool* (2004) re-contextualizes Shakespearean motifs in an Indian sociocultural context, transposing *Macbeth* to the Mumbai underworld. Similarly, *A Suitable Boy* revises the post-Partition India of Seth in a manner that highlights nationalism, caste, and secularism in a pictorial narrative. The strand is based on the idea of cultural hybridity and translation introduced by Homi Bhabha (1994) and imperial narrative critique of Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994) in the field of film.

## Methodology

This paper discusses a qualitative, comparative narratological approach in addressing the topic of narrative change and strategies in a literary as opposed to a filmic text. Relying on the methodology of classical and transmedial narratology, the study aims to reveal how narratives that are created in literary terms are rethought in adaptation in the films. In addressing this question, the discussion can consider how narrative methods are rearticulated through the film's multimodal apparatus such as visual framing, camera movement, *mise-en-scène*, and sound design.

Its corpus is composed of three authorized literary works and their screen adaptations, which are selected based on diverse cultural backgrounds, time, and place of their setting, as well as the adaptation process. The literature works involve *A Suitable Boy* by Vikram Seth (1993), *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë (1847), and *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare (1606). The screen versions of their works, *A Suitable Boy* (BBC series directed by Mira Nair, 2020), *Wuthering Heights* (directed by Coky Giedroyc, 2009), and *Maqbool* (directed by Vishal Bhardwaj, 2004) provide a rich source of comparison because each takes a different stance on the interpretation and contextualization of adaptation.

Multiple perspectives are also used in the theoretical framework. According to the theory of narrative discourse by Gerard Genette, there are basic categories of narrative discourse that are used in applying the theory to both the textual and cinematographic narratives; they include order-duration-frequency-mood and voice. Manfred Jahn's concept of the Filmic Composition Device (FCD) and his typology of focalization, including outside views, proximate inside views, and direct inside views, are particularly valuable for understanding how point-of-view and viewer perception are orchestrated in film. Additionally, the work of Marie-Laure Ryan and Werner Wolf on transmedial narratology supports a cross-modal approach, treating narrative as a medium-independent phenomenon that takes shape differently across literature and film. Adaptation studies, particularly the contributions of Linda Hutcheon and Robert Stam, inform the interpretation of adaptation as a process of creative transformation and intertextual engagement rather than as a form of textual fidelity.

Each literary and filmic pair is analyzed using a comparative matrix that highlights five key dimensions: plot structure, focalization, characterization, thematic focus, and cultural recontextualization. In literary texts, narrative events and sequencing, internal and external points of view, character development through dialogue and description, and ideological underpinnings are examined. These are then compared to the film adaptations, with attention to visual storytelling strategies, temporal reordering, performance choices, cinematographic techniques, and the reconfiguration of themes within specific sociocultural contexts. For instance, *Maqbool* situates *Macbeth* within the Mumbai underworld, radically altering the narrative's cultural and ethical implications through its adapted *mise-en-scène* and cinematic narration.

Data sources include the primary texts, the full-length literary works, and their official screen adaptations, as well as secondary materials such as screenplays (where accessible), interviews with directors or writers, adaptation notes, and critical reviews. Data collection involves a combination of close reading of literary passages and scene-by-scene breakdowns of selected sequences from the films. Emphasis is placed on identifying shifts in focalization and narrative emphasis using Jahn's film-specific tools. The analysis also considers visual elements like storyboards, shot composition, and the use of voice-over, especially in cases where narration diverges from the original text or constructs new interpretive layers.

The study acknowledges several limitations. Rather than aiming for exhaustive coverage of each narrative, it focuses on representative scenes and sequences that exemplify significant narratological shifts or adaptations. Due to the unavailability of complete production documentation and screenplays for some films, certain interpretive claims rely on the observable output of the film itself, supported by available critical commentary. Nonetheless, the multimodal and comparative lens employed ensures a theoretically grounded and methodologically rigorous exploration of narrative transformation across media.

**Table 1.1 – Each film-text pair will be analyzed using the following matrix**

Category	Literary Text	Film Adaptation
Plot structure	Narrative events & sequence	Visual/temporal reordering, omissions
Focalization	Narrative voice, internal/external POV	Cinematic focalization via FCD, camera
Characterization	Description, dialogue, and indirect discourse	Performance, mise-en-scène, visual cues
Thematic focus	Ideological underpinnings, motifs	Reframing themes in filmic language
Cultural Recontextualization	Original historical/cultural frame	Adapted cultural codes and meanings

## Discussion and Analysis

### ❖ A Suitable Boy

The BBC adaptation of Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993), directed by Mira Nair and adapted by Andrew Davies in 2020, condenses a sprawling, intricately layered

novel into six tightly curated episodes. This adaptation performs significant narrative compression while selectively preserving the key thematic and structural elements of the source material. Through a narratological lens, particularly drawing from Genette's narrative discourse framework and Manfred Jahn's constructivist focalization model, we can examine how the adaptation reshapes plot structure, characterization, focalization, and thematic focus to suit the cinematic medium and time constraints, all while striving to retain the novel's socio-political texture.

### ❖ Narrative Structure and Plot Compression

Seth's original narrative spans nineteen parts and involves the intersecting lives of four central families: the Mehra's, the Kapoors, the Khans, and the Chatterjees across post-Partition India. The novel's multi-strand plot structure, laden with political, cultural, and emotional complexities, is necessarily streamlined in the series. The TV adaptation foregrounds key narrative threads: Lata Mehra's romantic journey, Maan Kapoor's infatuation with Saeeda Bai, and Mahesh Kapoor's political trials. Each episode of the series corresponds loosely to specific parts of the novel, albeit with restructured sequencing. For instance, Episode 1 opens with the wedding of Savita and Pran Kapoor, replicating the novel's opening but abbreviating the surrounding exposition. Subsequent episodes selectively foreground certain scenes (e.g., Lata's forbidden romance with Kabir or Maan's spiral into scandal) while omitting or telescoping subplots and characters. Despite the compression, the series retains the essential narrative arc. For example, Maan's growing obsession with Saeeda and the resulting scandal is dramatized across several episodes and culminates, as in the novel, with his violent confrontation with Firoz and subsequent self-exile. Nevertheless, some scenes, political dialogues in the legislative assembly, or the transformation of a character, Varun, take much less screen time, and this leads us to the political lens being narrowed to the point that it is in the novel. Moreover, *A Suitable Boy*, originally spanning approximately 1,500 pages across 19 parts, is condensed into six episodes in Mira Nair's BBC adaptation (2020). This significant compression not only reflects medium constraints but also strategically heightens emotional urgency, concentrating key narrative arcs and character dilemmas. By foregrounding these editorial choices, the analysis highlights how narrative density and pacing are recalibrated for screen while maintaining thematic and affective impact.



### ❖ Character Function and Proppian Roles

Considered in the light of the Vladimir Propp model on functions of characters, the novel *A Suitable Boy* cannot be easily classified because it is a social realist novel with an ensemble cast. The adaptation, however, does place some characters in slightly altered Proppian roles. Mrs. Rupa Mehra comes out as a quasi-hero whose aim is to secure a good groom for her daughter. Lata, who makes a journey, is a mixture of objects of quest and a developing subject exercising agency at the end of the series. Kabir Durrani, the first lover of Lata, serves as an alleged hero who can be viewed as the romantic ideal, yet he departs. The couple Arun and Meenakshi act as antagonists, who want to make decisions related to marriage of Lata against her will. The suitor of the girl, Haresh Khanna, is the real hero, albeit the pragmatic, socially acceptable version of him. Interestingly, it is the setting itself (namely post-Partition India) which serves as a donor both in the form of ideological issues and historic drive informing the choices made by the characters. The adaptation cleverly dramatizes them without having moral dualities. As an example, when Amit Chatterjee is portrayed as a charming and successful man, the series discloses the ambiguous attitude of Lata to his poetical detachment. The conclusion, in which Lata is not drawn to Haresh by love but by stability and compatibility, highlights her inner change of status from being a passive object to being a rational actor and represents a slight twist in focalization and conclusion.

Adaptation *A Suitable Boy* (BBC, 2020) summarizes the 1,500 pages of the novel of the same title by Vikram Seth into six episodes but still has the functional structure that was identified in Proppian analysis. Lata Mehra serves the hero role, and her narrative agency is focused on the selective focalization, and distributed screen time, which allows the audience to follow her emotional and moral growth too closely. The villain has societal limitations, including family pressure and caste demands, and the hostile role of it is highlighted with the help of visual framing, dialogue, and montage scenes, which emphasize the tension between relationships. The aiding characters, including Maan Kapoor and his friends, play the role of helpers, having their advice and intervention emphasized through mise-en-scene and proxemic composition, whereas, matchmakers and elder people play the role of donors and dispatchers, respectively, which makes them initiate the key narrative actions and tests. A tracking of these functions all along the adaptation, the analysis shows how compression and multimodal methods strengthen structural functions at the same time increasing emotional urgency, which results in functional continuity in spite of the narrowing in narrative scope.

In *Maqbool* (2004), the adaption of Shakespeare to a South Asian context, of *Macbeth*, predicts the Proppian version with an earthquake clearness. *Maqbool* himself is the hero, his path of ambition and moral struggle underlined by the cinematic focalization, camera movement, and light which emphasize the psychological aspect. Lady *Macbeth* and the conspirators are turned into villains, their manipulative impact being increased by the use of space composition and close-up framing, which creates the affective tension thereof. The witches serve as donor characters who bring forth prophecy that leads to action; the supernatural feel is enhanced through the use of fog, low angle shots, and sound effects which mediates the decisions that the hero makes and gives a sign of narrative challenges. The presence of supporting characters like Banquo is that of a helper and as a result, their presence leads and reflects the agency of *Maqbool*. The first prophecy, the dispatcher, is the first step of the causal sequence of events, which is arranged in the film cinematically by means of montage and time sequence. This mapping represents how the maintenance and amplification of functional roles is achieved by multimodal adaptation, and therefore it serves to show the structuralist logic of functions as exemplified by Propp in an even culturally and temporally recontextualized narrative.

The 2009 film version to *Wuthering Heights* radically condenses Brontë Gothic novel into a narrative line structure, therefore, partially reassigning Proppian roles. Heathcliff still takes the role of the hero; his main agent is achieved with focalization and close-up shots that prelude interiority to Gothic uncertainty. The roles of the villains are taken over by Hindley and society in general and their antagonistic roles are dramatized through staging, lighting and pacing which enhances the conflict of morals and society. Nelly and other intermediaries are assistants, and they lead the story telling by exposition of dialogue and camera shots. Interestingly, the classical donor roles, previously revealed in the novel in the form of supernatural or Gothic motifs, are minimized, and in their place, there are psychological prompts and an emphasis on performance. The dispatcher role, including events that give rise to revenge and relational conflict is maintained but edited in time. This operational redefinition highlights the adaptability of Proppian analysis in transmedial settings by the fact that multimodal adaptation calibrates Proppian roles to place more importance on character psychology and narrative coherence.

In all the three versions, the Proppian mapping shows structural continuity and adaptive change. The archetypes of a hero and villain are kept in the center, the roles

of donor and helper are highlighted or redefined with the help of cinematic methods like framing, sound, and montage. Causal coherence is maintained in dispatcher functions, therefore, making narrative intelligible. Notably, this discussion shows that the functionalist roles remain despite the shifts in the medium, cultural context, and narrative scope, thus confirming the concept of the Proppian methodology in different genres and the interpretive depth that multimodal adaptation allows.

### ❖ **Focalization in Narratives**

Narration of the novel takes place via the third-person omniscient narration, with the focalization of the text switching between characters and families. This series conveys such through cinematic focalization, as postulated by Manfred Jahn (2021), in the control of the gaze through visual prompts, framing, and mise-en-scène. Lata is conveyed in close-ups, reaction shots, and scenes of inner lateral reflection so that the viewer can attune to the process of her maturation. In the same way, we can pick the moral decline in Maan Kapoor, and the rich intervener, through a lack of inner dialogue that describes his moral and ethical decline. But through his increasingly erratic physical presence and visual framing, mirroring Genette's 'mood' or distance. In addition, actual interiority of the inside is rare since letters are read in the audience, diaries, or other dramatic monologues are unavailable, and the adaptation must be based on proximate interiority: mellifluous silences joined by expressive gazes of Lata or the distracted look of Maan become the alternatives to the literary interiority. The adaptation thus eliminates the need to use the voiceover narration to apply a level of narrative immersion and suggests a more hidden type of involvement with the character's mind.

### ❖ **Thematic Reframing and Cultural Recontextualization**

Among the most remarkable details of the adaptation, one can count its visual representation of post-Partition India. The socio-political tensions, particularly the Hindu-Muslim ones, are brought close and visual and emotional in the series, more so as compared to the novel. As an example, the Holi party during which Maan sees Saeeda Bai first time is but a personal crisis, but also a metaphor of cultural interaction and a break that is about to happen. In the same way, the temple-mosque conflict and the inter-religious love story between Lata-Kabir are set within graphic visual surroundings, increasing their effects to a vast audience outside the history of Partition. The adaptation downplays some of the political subplots in the book, including the Bihar Zamindari Act and internal dynamics of the Uttar Pradesh

assembly, in favor of human drama. This selective emphasis recenters the narrative from a socio-political panorama to an intimate, character-driven melodrama, a shift shaped by the conventions of prestige television. But this standardization increases emotional urgency and brings out the issues of individual choice, generational responsibility, and cultural compromises, easier to understand. Such a transition is epitomized in the last episode, whereby Lata rather rejects both Kabir and Amit and settles with Haresh, not because it is a case of romance but because she is making a rational decision, and thus it seems that the theme of self-determination against all cultural constraints, as realistic might be the theme of this story.

### ❖ Narrative Resolution and Adaptational Choices

Even though the novel by Seth leaves on a dimmer note, reflecting the resignation of Lata into the realms of pragmatism, the adaptation tends to be more closure-oriented and emotionally sound. Haresh's apology and Lata's proposal offer a redemptive arc that does not present with the same clarity in the novel. The viewer is left with a sense of stability and resolution, a choice driven by the episodic structure and the demands of mainstream global viewership. Nevertheless, the adaptation retains the core question: What constitutes a 'suitable' match not just in love, but in identity, class, and nationhood?

## Wuthering Heights

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is a structurally and thematically complex narrative, deeply embedded in Gothic tradition, layered narration, and the emotional turbulence of revenge, obsession, and transgressive love. The 2009 TV adaptation directed by Coky Giedroyc, starring Tom Hardy as Heathcliff and Charlotte Riley as Catherine, offers a striking reinterpretation of the novel. However, while the film foregrounds the central love story, it omits several crucial narrative and structural elements, significantly altering the interpretive experience. The 2009 adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* significantly reduces the Gothic ambiguity of Brontë's original, transforming the text's philosophical worldview from one defined by unresolved, supernatural haunting to a more contained, psychological romance. This shift not only alters the narrative's tonal and affective register but also reconfigures its critique of Victorian society, foregrounding linear temporality and character psychology over the disruptive, cyclical patterns of the Gothic. By making these changes explicit, the adaptation reframes how audiences interpret moral causality, social constraint, and the permeability of past and present within the narrative.

### ❖ Narrative Voice and Structural Compression

The novel's narratological uniqueness lies in its dual narrative framing: it begins in 1801 with Lockwood, an outsider and unreliable narrator, who encounters the strange residents of Wuthering Heights and documents his experience through a first-person account. Lockwood's narration transitions to the retrospective embedded narrative of Nelly Dean, the housekeeper, whose story spans two generations and is mediated through Lockwood's diary. Such a recursive narration scheme creates a temporal and psychological depth, and the reader is invited to cast doubt on the reliability of the accounts of both the narrators, who were subjective beings themselves.

On the contrary, this framing pattern is removed in the film. The adaptation abandons Lockwood as a narrating figure, and with him, the novel's meta-narrative design. The omission of the ghost scene where Lockwood sees Catherine's appearance at the window, a moment that signals the novel's supernatural undertone, is particularly striking. This omission not only erases the novel's spectral Gothicism but also diminishes the cyclical narrative tension that connects the present to the traumatic past. As a result, the film unfolds in a linear progression that lacks the novel's complex manipulation of time and perspective, and the story becomes more of a tragic romance than a haunting psychological study of generational trauma.

### ❖ Characterization and Emotional Tone

The adaptation reconfigures several characters, notably Catherine and Heathcliff, in ways that soften or simplify their darker psychological contours. In the novel, Catherine is capricious, enthusiastic, and sometimes selfish, which is also enhanced by her tendency to be volatile during adolescence. Her passion toward Heathcliff has become inexorable with the presence of violence, a sense of identity, and the pursuit of social ambition. By casting Charlotte Riley, significantly older than the teenage Catherine of the novel, the adaptation presents a more poised and mature heroine. This shifts the narrative by diminishing the volatility and emotional unpredictability that shaped Catherine's role in the literary text. The film compressed and conflated these distinct historical periods.

Similarly, Heathcliff in the adaptation is also made out as a brooding romantic antihero, yet most of his more complex or ambiguous acts are either not present or downplayed. To illustrate this, the scene where Heathcliff hears it through listening

to her run down the idea of marrying him by Catherine, one should read that which accentuates his taking leave and inspiration of dedicating all his life to avenge this, is omitted altogether. This moment is essential because without it, the emotional and psychological reasons for the vengeance held by Heathcliff seem insufficient, and this diminishes the ambiguity of morals inherent to his character as a literary character.

The movie also makes the events that are not particularly unclear in the novel, or that are only alluded to in the novel. By way of example, it depicts clearly how Heathcliff is beside the corpse of Catherine, which is not even said in the novel, more than a symbolic gesture of interlacing hair in a locket. This literal image changes the mood of the narrative and leads to the realms of melodic and romanticization instead of preserving the gothic-like reserve and ambiguity of the novel.

#### ❖ **Temporal and Spatial Representation**

The historical background of the novel by Brontë is scrupulous and vacillates between the late 18th century and the early 19th Century, with the time conveyed in specific period details tracing life stages of two generations. The movie, though, compresses and conflates these periods, and it has brought some visual details into the present day in ways that blur the historical precision of the story. It is noteworthy that the dates on Catherine's gravestone have been advanced several decades, and her age is also increased by changes that not only blur the generational chronology but also affect the symbolic meaning of her young death. Spatially, the adaptation also makes problematic choices. The visual distinction between Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange critical to the novel's exploration of wildness versus civilization, is lost. The filming location lacks the architectural austerity and Gothic desolation associated with Brontë's depiction of Wuthering Heights. Consequently, the symbolic geography that reinforces the novel's themes of isolation, conflict, and liminality becomes visually muted.

#### ❖ **Thematic Simplification and Genre Shift**

The cumulative effect of these changes is a shift in genre emphasis. While the novel is a hybrid of Gothic, revenge tragedy, and romantic fiction, the adaptation leans heavily into the romance plot, stripping away the themes of intergenerational vengeance, psychological doubling, and the supernatural. The narrative of Hareton, Cathy, and the eventual redemption arc, suggesting reconciliation and cyclical

healing, is present but significantly underdeveloped, further reinforcing the reduction of the second-generation subplot to a mere epilogue to Heathcliff and Catherine's doomed love. The omission of Lockwood's return and his final reflections on the graves of Heathcliff, Catherine, and Edgar, a moment that philosophically contemplates peace, hunting, and historical closure, results in the loss of the novel's eerie afterlife and open-endedness. The film's narrative resolution, while tragic, lacks the novel's metaphysical ambiguity and thematic layering.

## **Macbeth and Maqbool**

Vishal Bhardwaj's *Maqbool* (2004), a contemporary Indian film adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, offers a compelling transposition of the original tragedy into the morally ambiguous world of the Mumbai underworld. By reimagining Macbeth's rise and fall within a modern gangster milieu, *Maqbool* not only localizes the Shakespearean text but also reconfigures its narrative strategies, character functions, and thematic focus. Through this culturally embedded adaptation, the film transforms Shakespeare's metaphysical drama of ambition, guilt, and fate into a fatalistic, emotionally charged commentary on power, desire, and loyalty in contemporary India.

### **❖ Character Reconfiguration and Functional Parallels**

*Maqbool* adheres loosely to Vladimir Propp's character functions while reassigning them within its narrative logic. Mian Maqbool (played by Irrfan Khan) assumes the role of Macbeth, not as a war hero but as a trusted lieutenant of Abbaji (Pankaj Kapoor), the powerful don who parallels King Duncan. The role of the dispatcher and instigator is split between multiple characters: Nimmi (Tabu), Abbaji's mistress and Maqbool's secret lover, and the two corrupt police officers, Pandit (Om Puri) and Purohit (Naseeruddin Shah), who replace the supernatural witches. These inspectors not only prophesize Maqbool's rise but also repeatedly manipulate events, acting as satirical, morally gray interpreters of fate rather than as mystical oracles. The character of Nimmi, while inspired by Lady Macbeth, is significantly more emotionally complex. Unlike Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth, coldly ambitious and destroyed by guilt, Nimmi is presented as a tragic figure caught between passion and power. Her manipulation of Maqbool is tinged with vulnerability, and the maternal dimension introduced in the film (as she gives birth to a child later adopted by Samira and Guddu) humanizes her in a way that complicates her moral

status. This addition also introduces a maternal redemption arc absent in the original play.

### ❖ **Setting, Motive, and Thematic Shifts**

The shift from feudal Scotland to the urban sprawl of modern-day Mumbai reshapes the play's setting and symbolism. Castles and battlefields are replaced with safehouses and gang territories. The dream of a kingdom that Macbeth is after here is transformed into the symbolic realm of an underworld empire of a more fragmented and postmodern imagination of power. The drive in *Maqbool* is very different from the one by Shakespeare on Macbeth, as the latter struggle to be politically sovereign, whereas the former is driven by the need to be loved and emotionally accepted simply by being given authority. His ambition is intertwined with personal longing for Nimmi and freedom from Abbaji's shadow. This shift from political ambition to erotic and emotional desire recasts the tragic arc of the protagonist. *Maqbool*'s eventual downfall is not just the product of hubris but also of emotional entrapment, highlighting how love and power intersect destructively in the world of crime.

### ❖ **Focalization and Moral Perspective**

The film's focalization is aligned with *Maqbool*'s perspective, offering a sustained proximate inside view of his psychological descent. His transformation from a loyal subordinate to a tormented murderer is conveyed through intimate framing, minimal dialogue, and expressive silences mirroring the internal monologue and soliloquies found in the original play. However, *Maqbool* avoids theatricality and instead employs a subdued, cinematic realism, focusing on expressive cinematography and musical leitmotifs to reveal internal states. Pandit and Purohit, the modern-day analogs of the witches, repeatedly appear throughout the film, not merely once, as in *Macbeth*, and play a more active, ironic role in narrating and shaping events. Their continuous presence transforms them into a choric double those external commentators who blur the line between prophecy and manipulation, fate and farce; thereby guiding audience interpretation and amplifying the tension between inevitability and performative agency in the narrative. This narrative choice reinforces the fatalistic atmosphere of the film, underscoring the inescapability of *Maqbool*'s descent.



### ❖ Narrative and Structural Deviations

The film takes several liberties with Shakespeare's structure and ending. While the play culminates in Macbeth's death and the restoration of political order, Maqbool denies closure. The climactic murder of Abbaji does not grant Maqbool leadership or legitimacy; instead, it marks the beginning of paranoia and loss. Maqbool's isolation deepens as he is rejected by Nimmi and left powerless. The final scene, showing him visiting Nimmi in the hospital while their child is being adopted by Samira and Guddu (paralleling Banquo's lineage), creates a melancholic denouement rather than a cathartic one. This change makes us sympathize with Maqbool in making him more of a victim as opposed to a villain because of his love and longing, as opposed to his ambition. Moreover, the scenes of hallucination and guilt, which are the key elements of the Shakespearean tragedy, are altered. In the play Macbeth, the phenomenon of the ghost of Banquo and the hallucinated dagger objectifies Macbeth with his guilt and loss of sanity. In Maqbool, hallucinations are also used, but there are no actual visions, only the insertion of mood, atmosphere, and visual metaphor, making the psychological element more realistic. It was the police and not the supernatural that was according to luck, implying that the actual cause of the tragedy is none other than systemic corruption and not divine intervention.

### ❖ Cultural Recontextualization and Genre Hybridization

Maqbool is an example of cultural translation of adaptation that is not merely a relocation and the altering of language but a reinvention of ideology and genre. Whereas Macbeth is an Elizabethan tragedy, Maqbool is a crime drama in the Bollywood tradition, with song numbers, religious motives, and Bollywood visual language codes. Music and soundscapes permit the metered rhythm of the pentameter iambic of the Shakespeare verse to change, and the language of the movie substitutes the rhetorical monologues of Shakespeare. Nevertheless, Bhardwaj does not lose the existential angst and the moral uncertainty of the play and manages to intertwine Shakespearean accents with the social and political situation in India. The struggle for power, betrayal, and emotional suppression is revealed with the help of the Indian mafia while causing simultaneous cultural uniqueness and universality. It is not merely a version of Macbeth but a re-telling which transforms the original text at the psychological and moral level and shifts the text to a different level of narrative articulation. By means of cultural recontextualization, focus adjustments, and hybridity of genres, the film problematizes how ambition, love, and destiny are mediated by the modern system

of power and masculinity. It carries the tragic outline of the original but changes its moral value: *Maqbool* is not only a story of tragedy, but an exploration of emotional insecurity in a violent reality.

## Conclusion

*A Suitable Boy* represents a negotiation with scope, *Wuthering Heights* a negotiation with narrative voice and genre, and *Maqbool* a negotiation with cultural and moral context. This study extrapolates three pieces of canonical literature, *A Suitable Boy* written by Vikram Seth, *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë, and *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare, as to their onscreen adaptations, *A Suitable Boy* by Mira Nair (2020), *Wuthering Heights* by Coky Giedroyc (2009), and *Maqbool* by Vishal Bhardwaj (2004). Both adaptations provide different interpretive gestures in that they reshape the structure of narration, the construction of the characters, the theme, and focalization following the limitations and possibilities of the movie screen medium. Although these adaptations have been influenced by diverse historical, cultural, and aesthetic demands, they are also characterized by some common strategies of adaptation, which indicate some macro trends in transmedial storytelling.

In all three adaptations, it is evident that there is a pattern of narrative compression. *A Suitable Boy* covers a wide scope of storytelling over 19 parts, before being compressed into six episodes; *Wuthering Heights* frames a multi-generational family saga in two parts; and *Maqbool* does the same with a five-act play by William Shakespeare in a movie of 130 minutes. Both adaptations practice partial rearranging of the plot by highlighting some story lines and leaving others out or simplified. This telescoping of the narrative leads to the changing of the pace, scope, themes, and affective immediacy. The extent and form of reorganization are different, however. *A Suitable Boy* is linear in its structure, under the original, whereas *Wuthering Heights* erases the layering in time created by the two storytellers. In the case of *Maqbool*, plot and setting are radically recontextualized: the movie provides a full cultural translation of the original, however, keeping the tragic form.

Literary speaking, focalization strategy is an overly complex one in all three texts, be it the stratified narrators in *Wuthering Heights* or the omniscient in the *A Suitable Boy* or the introspection in the form of soliloquy in *Macbeth*. Their adaptations, however, are dependent on a cinematic focalization which is akin to

visual framing, mise-en-scène, and character perspective. In *Wuthering Heights*, the narratorial presence between Lockwood and Nelly Dean has been abolished, and the lack of a subjective prism through which one might interpret ambiguously is rare. *A Suitable Boy* inclines itself to the side of Lata, but it leaves room for the moral decline of Maan Kapoor. In contrast, *Maqbool* also adheres to the same proximate inside view of its lead protagonist and, with the help of the choric commentary of the police officers, directs viewers, even as it disorients them. Such changes signal a larger movement in film adaptations: a shift away from both telling and narrating toward the showing, with the resulting loss of narratorial multiplicity, as well as the gain of an increased psychological immediacy.

One of the main lines of difference is that of thematic reframing. Although these original novels raise a variety of sociopolitical, psychological, and metaphysical issues, the adaptations tend to bring them back to mind to the cultural and commercial demands of the visual media. *A Suitable Boy* transforms into a coming-of-age and romantic and political narrative, focused on secularism and post-Partition self-definition. *Wuthering Heights* is also reinvented in the form of a tragic love story, a peripheral aspect of the Gothic and supernatural. The aspiration of power and politics as described by *Macbeth* changes to that of seeking sexual gratification and attraction in *Maqbool*, who redefines the *Macbeth* story as musings of an emotional trap and not a tale of unadulterated tragedy. In both instances, novel or stage to screen translation of genre expounds not only what is narrated but how it is to be experienced, a redefining of tone and emotion, and the identification of the viewer.

The transfigurations in the most deliberate manner happen with *Maqbool*, as the Shakespearean tragedy is integrated into the sectioning and reasoning of the modern Mumbai underworld. Along the same lines, *A Suitable Boy* represents the historical fabrics of postcolonial Indian history in rich period detail and costume, whereas *Wuthering Heights* fails to be convincing on its spatial authority, which limits the symbolic weight of opposing houses. This cultural recontextualization also proves that adaptation cannot be intersemiotic only, as it is ideological and spatial too. Adaptations do not necessarily re-tell something; they re-territorialize it; they negotiate global canons in the local sensibility.

## Research Implications

This paper confirms that films are not a reactive representation of literary works but active narrativizations that practice selection, transformation, and reinvention. The results carry some implications for the fields of adaptation, narratology, and cross-media pedagogical studies. The transition between the linguistic and the multimodal narration offers broader narratological framing, the one that includes a place for the image, the sound, the gestures, and the composition of the space based on the verbal discourse. This paper ascertains the demand (Ryan, 2004; Jahn, 2021) for a medium-conscious, but structurally based narratology. Maqbool demonstrates the process of adaptation as cultural rewriting, where the authorized texts of Western texts are rewritten with the help of a non-Western perspective. This leads to the opportunities of identifying the use of power, hybridity, and narrative sovereignty through postcolonial adaptation analysis. Compression of complex forms of narrative structure leads to unavoidable losses of narrator multiplicity (*Wuthering Heights*), thematic breadth (*A Suitable Boy*), or philosophical reflection (*Macbeth*). However, these losses are offset by cinematic gains in visual immersion, affective engagement, and audience accessibility. The comparative analysis of texts and adaptations can serve as a valuable pedagogical tool in literature, media studies, and cultural studies classrooms. It enables students to explore intertextuality, interpretive negotiation, and medium-specific storytelling strategies. In traversing the textual landscapes of 19th-century England, postcolonial India, and early modern Scotland, and their re-imaginings in 21st-century screen media, this study has traced the evolution of narrative across time, space, and medium. What emerges is a portrait of adaptation not as secondary or derivative, but as an artistic dialogue, one that bridges cultural histories, reconfigures narrative form, and reanimates the literary canon for new generations. Based on classical and transmedial narratology, the analysis demonstrates how narrative techniques, restructured through the multimodal apparatus of the film, such as visual framing, camera motion, *mise-en-scène* and sound design, generate new narrative effects, reconfigure character agency and involve audiences in a new way. Adaptation therefore comes out as an object of creative and interpretive conversation, emphasizing the fruitful interaction of literary form and cinema expression.

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