

# Cinematic Adaptation of William Trevor's *Felicia's Journey* : A Critique

Akanksha Shekhawat

---

Humans have been adapting the texts in various forms from a very long time. They are inspired by sculpture, paintings, literary texts, songs and historical events. Few writers prefer to give a second opportunity to their texts in order to boost the readership. When the text is made into a movie, it can be admired further by the readers. Movie makers are gradually moving to adaptations. "Novel to film adaptation studies is the systematic study of the process of novels being turned into film, focusing on both the change of the content and from novel to film and the changes being inferred on the originating text " (Jorgen 73). Making a film of two to three hours is a tedious operation for the director. Often, the original plot is too lengthy to be cut in order to be in time limits. To create a film, the auteur had to leave few characters, scenes and sub-plots. If the novel is lengthy then the characters are cut but there is always an extension in case of short stories.

According to Corrigan, one estimate claim that 30 percent of the movies today derive from novels and that 80 percent of the books classified as best sellers have been adapted to the cinema. "If the connection between the two practices has persisted so adamantly through the years, it seems especially pressing now, at the end of the twentieth century, as an index of why the movies are important, why literature still matters, and what both have to offer a cultural period in which boundaries are continually being redrawn." (Corrigan 2)

There has always been a tussle between film and literature to rank one another in supremacy. Nearly three-quarters of all the movies ever produced have been adapted from classical literature novels, plays or short stories from all languages. Adaptations were seen by most critics as inferior to the adapted texts, as "minor", "subsidiary", "derivative" or "secondary" products, lacking the symbolic richness of the books and missing their "spirit". (Hutcheon 12). The printed text is also said to have actually been better than the filmed version and more ethical. George Bluestone in his book on adaptation *Novel to Film* (2003) states that the literary text is superior to the cinematic version. He says that adaptation is just a simple duplicate of the printed text. The importance of film fidelity in adaptation studies is highlighted in his book.

This paper throws light on such adaptation- the adaptation of William Trevor's award-winning novel *Felicia's Journey* (1994) to Atom Egoyan's Film *Felicia's Journey* (1999). William Trevor was born on 24 May 1928 in Mitchelstown, Cork County, and Republic of Ireland. He was a short story writer and novelist. Trevor was a world class writer who won the Hawthornden prize for his novel *The Old boys* and also won the Whitbread Prize thrice. He has

published more than 30 works in his career. He received an honorary KBE in 2002 in recognition of his literary contributions.

Atom Egoyan is a Canadian stage and film director, producer and writer. He was born on July 19, 1960 in Cairo, Egypt. He has directed fifteen films that received four awards at the Toronto International film festival, two nominations for the Academy Award and five awards at The Cannes Film Festival.

The novel itself was not found by Egoyan. Instead, Mel Gibson's production company 'Icon' previously acquired production rights for the novel. Icon approached Egoyan and offered him to compose the script and direct the film in a budget of \$10 million. Egoyan's work as director and author has gained him international respect for his films *The Sweet Hereafter* and *Exotica*.

As far as the story of the novel and film is concerned, they both resembles each other. The viewers witness the struggle of a seventeen-year-old unmarried pregnant Irish girl, Felicia. She was on a journey to England in order to find the father of her unborn baby but instead falls prey to the hands of a British serial killer. Felicia doesn't find the father of her baby in either novel or film, nor is she killed. The text is parallel up to now. In addition, both the artists reflect on the protagonist's rebirth, but then the texts tend to diverge. Felicia is the main subject of Trevor's book, while in the movie of Egoyan, he focuses on the Mr. Hilditch.

Trevor's book pinpoints Irish emigrants in Britain in the 1990s, and is postcolonial and subtextual in nature, while the film of Egoyan, is more validly explored in a post-structuralist way and explores the person's emotional and mental capacities.

Egoyan's lack of engagement in the British-Irish radical setting in the film was not liked by Trevor as noticed by Egoyan. The original intent of Egoyan was to introduce Felicia to his own childhood region, Victoria. And that she should come from Quebec's small town to the western shore of Canada. When Egoyan discusses the same with Trevor, he learned that Trevor was reluctant to keep the essential subtext intact into film that is the conflicts and violence history between Ireland and Britain, and that was something which cannot just transferred to Canada.

Egoyan might have acknowledged the demand of Trevor on the regional Ireland and the British industrial Midlands surroundings, but it excludes major characteristics from this subtext by substituting them for its own creative concerns by pointing out on media's deforming impacts on the human mind. As Hilditch always used to watch the old tapes of his mother's cooking show whenever he used to prepare his food.

Hilditch's meticulous concern for his catering provides a shielding of honesty and cultural growth. But it also hides his underlying social needs, he used to trap innocent young girls who have no families and have no homes or wealth. Situation of Felicia was different, she had

enough cash with her which she borrowed from her grandmother who speaks Irish. Thus, Hilditch robs the money of Felicia, intending to make her helpless, this act of Hilditch is present both in the film and the novel. In Egoyan's film, Hilditch was not shown killing his prey, instead he used to recollect their videos, which he recorded in his car by the help of a secret camera. He used to keep those video tapes among his mother's food shows programs tapes. With this mixing of footages, he adores all those women on camera while enjoying his dinner made by his mother's recipe.

Egoyan refuses to turn the Hilditch mother into a villain and his dynamic play with the feminized Hilditch who kills vulnerable women to regain his wisdom of masculinity makes the Egoyan a great auteur. Trevor focuses on Irish – British conflicts but on the other hand Egoyan focuses on gender dynamics. And this particular element in the novel is missing. The military imagery and war history which shook Trevor's Hilditch from adolescence to death was not shown in the movie.

Moreover, the apparent physical limitations of Hilditch in the novel reflect the inability of a glorious military career. Bob Hoskins played the role of Hilditch in the film. The actor had no trace of Trevor's Hilditch physical appearance. The charming older appearance of Hoskin makes him suitable as a friendly father figure to the young girls. The overweight and timid appearance of Trevor's Hilditch makes him less likely to be a serial killer. The lady like little car which Hilditch owns is exactly same in film as described by Trevor. And it looks like a bug which stalks its prey and is the place where the murders of young girls take place.

Egoyan takes a decision to allow Felicia to go when Hilditch eventually manages to imprison her in order to kill her. Referring to the message of salvation conveyed by a Christian missionary Miss Calligary, whose desperate search for the soul of Hilditch echoes the insanity of him, he unlocks Felicia's door and thereby produces a 'moment of salvation' for himself. He realises about his misdeeds and hangs himself in the film. In the last scene of Egoyan's film, Felicia was seen planting flowers in a park of London, while watching kids who were playing nearby. She regrets abortion but was well dressed and fed. She was seemingly at peace under the sky of beautiful summer. Felicia of Trevor was also calm but was more disturbed. She witnessed the insecurities when Hilditch robbed her money. Her father awaited her return to Ireland but still she does not return. Rather, she goes to England from town to town, city to city and wherever she travels, she moved in with homeless people.

## CONCLUSION

The emergence of cinema has introduced new concepts and also new methods and techniques of the literary text. Classical adaptations emphasize on the fact that film-makers are inspired by novels. Many novelists such as Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemmingway also had influenced of cinema in their works. Classics offer film with pretested, ready-made material. Cinema can be seen as an audio-visual narrative. Cinema and Literature are the works of art,

they both have some differences and similarities. Both the works are autonomous in nature and should not be compared.

The title Felicia's Journey is same in the novel as well as in the film, but still the auteur recreates and offers the new original dimensions to the book. With many little touches that Egoyan adds to the misery of his characters in a visual media, he shows a flash for dramatic development, but seems reluctant to cut out scenes which work best in the novel. The pace in the book is good. The fine details are taken up by Egoyan in the film. The idea of Trevor was not to understand the psychology of a serial killer or to search for Irish identity in Britain. Instead he wanted to provide a homeless girl with a life and a history of all the nameless homeless people whose misfortune is not to have their own identity, place or image, and to escape their hope. Egoyan focuses much on the psychology of a serial killer.

## REFERENCES

- Bazin, A. *Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest / Film Adaptation. An Anthology*. Edited and with an introduction by James Naremore New jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000, pp. 19-27.
- Bluestone, George. *Novels into Film*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.
- Bruhn, Jorgen, et al. "What Novels Can Tell That Movies Can't Show." *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.
- Corrigan, Timothy. *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader*. Prentice Hal, Inc, 1999.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge, 2006.
- Tom Costello. *International Guide to Literature on Film*. London: Bowker-Saur, 1994.
- Trevor, William. *Felicia's Journey*. London: Viking, 1994.