

Impossible Possibility of Fidelity in the Film Adaptation of Dan Brown's *Inferno*

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Abstract

Literature studies benefit from film criticism because it enables us to approach the creations from new perspectives and search for the veiled narratives of social reality and underlying power structures. Novels have frequently served as the basis for cinematic representation ever since the advent of cinema as a literary artistic work. *Inferno*, a controversial Film Adaptation, is more than just an adaptation; it is a fascinating illustration of how fundamental difficulties with adaptation—intention, faithfulness, and reception—can be addressed. This article focuses on the idea of Bluestone that books and movies are independent forms of media, and changes in the adaptation are inevitable when one switches from the linguistic to the visual medium.

Keywords: Fidelity, Film Adaptation, Novel to Film, Director's Cinema

Introduction

Cinema as a form of art embraces both elitist and mainstream ideas of art and collaborates directly with literary aesthetics. The verbal and visual arts are not just parallel; they also interact, reciprocate, and depend on one another. The reader/viewer interaction is quite complicated, and the two media are highly distinct. In the digital society, the public primarily relies on films and television series for stories, and it is typical to see storylines transposed from other media to the cinema. Surprisingly, up until 1992, 85% of the Oscars for Best Picture went to cinema adaptations (Hutcheon & O'Flynn, 2013:4).

Inferno (2016) is adapted from the book of the same title by Dan Brown, written in 2013. The plot revolves around the secret agencies and WHO hunting Langdon because he has a piece of evidence that will help them figure out where a pandemic is likely to break out. The screenplay closely follows the book's plot, keeping Howard's pacing tense and breathless while vividly bringing the drama and quest to life unlike his earlier adaptations. Although the goal is the same—telling a story—a novel and a movie are two very distinct mediums

with their own creative frameworks. The novel serves as the filmmaker's exhilarating source of inspiration, and this is the point at which the two mediums overlap and are relatively near to one another. The fictional universe that author Brown has constructed, is surrounded by characters who lead lives that reflect the creator's imagination. The novel's characters and storyline serve as the director Howard's starting point, but he must uniquely use that material because he is also an artist. The Film is ultimately his craft, and what he creates from the novel is influenced by the choices his characters make, which in turn are influenced by his artistic impulses and perspectives that highlight the development of the plot. In earlier adaptations of Dan Brown, Howard altered the story with subtle aspects, whereas in this one, he altered the whole climax. Indeed, it's a seamless climax, yet some may be concerned about why it was changed significantly from the original.

The Issue of Fidelity

The textual narrative may not offer all the options that visual media provides. There is more autonomy in choosing one's perspective, as there are many different agencies involved, including the camera, the narrator, the

lights, the utilisation of space, the spoken dialogue, body posture, facial expression, and silences, which explore human interactions with uncommon sensitivity. With so many cinema adaptations, academic fields have formed adaptation studies that concentrate on the transferring literature into film. By examining literary film adaptations, academics can change their opinions about the understanding of fidelity, which is a significant concept in adaptation studies. Studies illustrate intertextuality and the creativity of adaptation by criticising fidelity.

But in 2022, fidelity appears to be out of date because there is no longer much of a focus on the hierarchical order the two media once underwent. "Since 2000, adaptation scholars have shifted away from the idea that film adaptations should faithfully imitate an original novel or stage play" (Sandra, 2014, p. 170). Instead of focusing on how faithful they are, modifications are judged for their creativity (Hutcheon & O'Flynn, 2013:15). Certain groups claim that much fidelity becomes unattainable since a modified work is produced in different media formats (Sidiropoulou, 2014).

The audience's thoughts on modifications made in the film adaptation are exemplified by a survey conducted by People's Magazine. In the case of adapted films that digress from the original work, a 23% divagation is endurable for the audience. For 52% of the audience, their concern spikes mainly when the character's visual description changes from that of the book, and having a different disposition bothers much for 51% of the audience. Other distress includes having different time and place (43%), varied accents (28%), and dissimilar climaxes (27%). However, three-fifths of respondents agreed that these diversions are acceptable if they contribute to the finest narrative (Staff).



Figure 2.1 Bothersome Changes for Audiences in Film Adaptation

The fundamental objective of modern adaptations is to design and create a universe that sounds plausible with the source novel's world, that is distinct from the actual or modern world, rather than to depict every detail described in the novel. In adaptation research, creativity is seemingly more embraced than fidelity. According to Hutcheon and O'Flynn's theory of fidelity, "One way to think about unsuccessful adaptations is not in terms of infidelity to a prior text, but in terms of a lack of the creativity and skill to make the text one's own and thus autonomous" (2013, p. 21).

Film adaptations ultimately benefit from creativity introduced by the filmmaker. Filmmakers must make the decision "whether their aim is to merely recreate visually the story of the book or to depart from it and offer their own creative vision of that particular story" (Radu, 2019: 6). In this way, the directors are accountable for the outcome because everyone contributed their ideas and interpretations of the original plot. Instead of producing the same thing repeatedly, they must take reasonable steps. In a sense, the influence of fidelity is compromised and is being usurped.

Fidelity in Inferno

In Dan Brown's *Inferno*, Robert Langdon, the admired protagonist of the well-known book and movie *The Da Vinci Code*, encounters a threatening challenge. The Langdon series, which started in 2006 with the launch of *The Da Vinci Code* and was followed in 2009 by *Angels & Demons*, continues with *Inferno*. Like the two adaptations, *Inferno*, which stars everyone's favourite Harvard Professor, closely follows Brown's storyline.

Both the novel and the movie begin with Robert Langdon in a hospital gaining his consciousness after being shot, enduring a bullet wound with no memory of the last couple days. When an assassin comes seeking him, a doctor named Sienna Brooks whisks him away, and he sets out to find a virus that will mitigate World's population. A couple of the text's dramatic cliffhangers are modified while Robert and Sienna look for the virus-related clues; this narrative worked for the novel and film in their own way. The scholarly hero of Dan Brown's novel Robert Langdon had several challenges to resolve and disasters to avoid, including overpopulation, a man-made virus,

amnesia, and Dante Alighieri's epic poetry. The conclusion of *Inferno*, the third Langdon movie to be adapted for the motion picture following *The Da Vinci Code* and *Angels & Demons*, is significantly altered, as those who read the book may have recognized.

The basic premise remains undifferentiated—Langdon must find the deadly virus before it spreads, which was hidden somewhere by a now-deceased billionaire—but the novel's ending is incredibly bleak. In the novel, Langdon discovers the virus's lair in Istanbul, but a third of the world's population becomes infertile and learns that the whole scavenger hunt was pointless since the virus-containing bag had already decayed weeks earlier. The film's climax, however, is more Hollywood-style and action-packed. The virus bag is not decayed yet, and Sienna continues to be evil, blindly following her lover's goals, which are different from those in the book. After some profound fighting, Brooks loses in a fiery explosion, and finally the virus is contained successfully.

When the writer conceives the novel, he sees it in one way, locates it within one cultural milieu, and his characters live in a specific framework of time. When the filmmaker visualises it, he looks at it from a different angle, for there is always more than one way of seeing a thing. It is the creativity of another mind that moulds the story and shapes the characters of the film.

Film adaptations of literary texts are generally despised, which reflects cultural assertions about the relationship between word and image. This is partially understandable in light of a continual insistence on faithfulness, or what should be reproduced from one medium to another, and how it should be done as if there were any screening technique to adaptation. Audiences usually juxtapose their own mental versions with the filmmaker's work. Brian McFarlane noted the following in his book *Novel to Film* (1996):

Everyone who sees films based on novels feels able to comment, at levels ranging from the gossipy to the erudite, on the nature and success of the adaptation involved. That is, the interest in adaptation, unlike many others to do with films (e.g., the questions of authorship), is not a rarefied one. And it ranges backwards and forwards from those who talk of novels as being "betrayed" by

boorish filmmakers to those who regard the practice of comparing film and novel as a waste of time.

According to Francesco Casetti (2004), adaptation is the "reappearance of an object (a storyline, a topic, a character, etc.) that has previously occurred elsewhere in another discursive field." Since we are working in a different communicative context, adherence to the source is not a crucial criterion. The source material, being the prior narrative component, is only alluded to as a recollection within the context of the time and location of the adaptation's current discursive events.

Consequently, focusing on both the word and the meaning is crucial. According to Casetti, recontextualizing a text or, better still, reformulating its interactional environment is the process of Adaptation. Accounting the context of the derivative text's existence is required, since the framework of the original text is probably different from that of the later. The displacement in the adaptation, both in terms of space and time, is quite common. As previously observed, there are a variety of nonliterary factors that affect how a work is adapted.

Director's Influence on Fidelity

Ron Howard explained in an interview that these minor adjustments were made purely for time constriction. "You don't take any structural changes lightly" (Bustle, 2016). The novel's tragic climax, in which Langdon's efforts are effectively in vain, is deemed unsuitable for a popcorn-eating audience. Howard says that the screenwriters David Koepp and the film's producers "felt conflicted" over the resolution but ultimately determined that "it wasn't cinematic." Problems arise when the images that the reader and the filmmaker create are not the same. Since what the reader sees in the real film is already someone else's imagination, Christian Metz remarks that the reader would not conceivably be able to locate his film. The familiarity with the original content itself contributes to the enjoyment or dissatisfaction of an adaptation, but the link to the original and the comparison to it are unavoidable. The audience's familiarity with and memory of the original material is another prerequisite for rating an adapted movie. Moreover, the constant sense of loss experienced during the transition from text to the film has plagued adaptation studies.

Adapting a book into a movie is a highly interpretive process rather than a transposition process that strives for authenticity. According to Howard, changing the climax in *Inferno* symbolises the juxtaposition between the two media types. Howard tells Bustle, "The ending of a modern movie thriller needs to be quite a bit different than what was a terrific resolution on a literary level for the novel." Even though he does not highlight how tragic the original climax was, he makes the argument that Hollywood fictions must have satisfying endings. A climax in which a virus infects half the population and renders them infertile is not justifying, at least for conventional audiences. Howard emphasises, "All these things are done, but with an eye toward the movie audience and making it work as a standalone movie," adding that when you go through the book prior to watching the movie, "you get something to talk about when it's over." (Bustle)

According to Howard, Langdon was not actively engaged in the novel because it was intricate and not cinematic. When he arrived in Istanbul, the infection had already been dispersed. The result is that almost half of the population has this condition, we are not entirely sure who has it, and we are unsure of what will transpire. Langdon pursues Sienna Brooks down and asks, "How could you have done this?" as she appears to escape away. After realising her change of mind, Langdon persuades Sinskey, the director of the WHO, to recruit Sienna to assist in the search for an antidote. The saddest aspect, as Howard sees it, is that not everyone will drop dead; this is a plague of fecundity rather than a quick death; It was exciting and intellectually stimulating, but it is extremely drawn out as we can picture the audience watching those sequences and pointing, "How many endings are we going to have?". Therefore, Howard decided to develop a more exciting ending that would demand less explanation and give Langdon more to accomplish.

The feeling was that the ending worked great for a novel, but the complexity of it required a tremendous amount of explanation. I think I felt like that was something we got bogged down with a little bit in the previous movies, and when we found a way of narrowing the focus of the

third act, it felt more satisfying on a movie level. (in an Interview with Bustle, Howard, 2016)

The filmmaker did not comment whether the novel's climax was much tougher than that of the film. Still, he certainly acknowledged that such alteration would spark a considerable debate with the fans of *Brown*. Even though he was happy with the third act, he recognised it to be not particularly cinematic. Howard delivers a bit more punch directly at the conclusion and gives viewers more of a cinematic resolution.

Conclusion

Why does *Inferno* have a different ending in the film than it does in the book? Brown himself said. During an interview with *Cinemablend*, Brown remarked, "Anytime you're going to adapt a novel into a movie, a movie that is not 25 hours long, some things will have to be simplified". Brown claimed that he had no expertise in the film industry and when the filmmaker modified it, he agreed. Brown affirms, "I know that the novel had a subtle, ambiguous ending" and "It concerns me that a crucial plot point was altered to 'simplify' things for the audience." (*CinemaBlend*)

According to Stam (2005), focusing on the narrative text as "a region of heteroglossia which can generate a multiplicity of different readings" and capable of being "reworked by a boundless environment" is more important than looking for an elusive essence in adaptation studies. As long as the observation is not oriented to endorsing one media over another, comparison and connotative analyses are significant and respected in appreciating adaptations. Speaking of novels as great artwork and movies as mediocre artwork is quite outdated presently; the traditional hierarchy is no longer valid. Therefore, any approach to adaptation must concentrate on the elements that can be translated from word to visual, as well as the solutions that adapters comprehend to facilitate the adaptation.

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