Adaptation as an Act of Political Cloning and Alteration of Narratives: An Analysis of *The Hate U Give*

Shreya Bhatia
Research Scholar Department of English, Central University of Himachal Pradesh

Abstract: Literary adaptations either represent, reimagine, reinterpret, retell or rewrite the original narratives while remaining loyal to the main thematic strand. However, this 're' is often used in conjunction with a myriad of political propaganda to convincingly manipulate the audience's minds. This paper examines how the American cinematic adaptation (2018) of Angie Thomas' novel *The Hate U Give* (2017) politically clones / replicates as well as alters the novel's narratives where scenes are added or subtracted not necessarily with the theory of medium specificity but to manoeuvre the source story with a twist to meet the self-serving interests and thereby leading to the questioning of fidelity principle of the adaptation. Drawing upon the idea of adaptation as "repetition without "replication" (Hutcheon) alongside that of most "rewritings" working with "certain ideologies" (Lefevere) and politics, this paper aims to demonstrate that cinematic adaptation does not merely eulogize the source text; it rather seeks to unravel a deeper political purpose thereby attempting to understand the subject position and politics of the adapter. This, further throws light on how the degrees of variation introduced in the cinematic adaptation end up underrepresenting the theme of racial inequality and police brutality, which is critiqued vigorously in the novel.

Keywords: Alteration, Cloning, Fidelity, Ideology, Politics

The etymology of the term "adaptation" traces back to the Latin word *adaptare*, meaning "to fit." Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines adaptation as "the action or process of changing something, or being changed, to suit a new purpose or situation," which evidently suggests the omission of elements from the original. In the realm of arts, adaptation is defined as a process of transforming a piece of creative work from one form, genre, or medium into another while preserving a recognizable connection with the original. The form here signifies the structure into which a work

is organized (novel, poetry, drama, short film, etc.), genre serves as a type of creative work (tragedy, comedy, romance, thriller, folk, etc.), while the medium acts as the channel of expression (literature, cinema, music, dance, visual arts, etc.). Adaptation is not merely a process of transformation but a creative, learned process in which an adapter must be cognizant of both the source and target formats, understanding the conventions and limitations of each artistic channel.

The terms translation and adaptation appear similar but are distinct in their operational paradigms and aims. Translation is a linguistic process in which the original language, the source language, is converted into another language, the target language. The translator aims to achieve linguistic equivalence by remaining faithful to the original text, thus preserving its meaning; as translation is "reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style" (Nida 12). In contrast, the aim of the adapter is not to achieve linguistic equivalence but to reimagine a work so that it fits a different form, genre, or medium. Whereas translation restricts the translator to the vocabulary of the source text, adaptation provides ample room for the adapter to make alterations in language, characters, plot, or setting.

Adaptations can be classified on the basis of form, genre, and medium. Firstly, based on form, adaptations can be divided into intra-form, where the adapted work retains the same form as the original but is created for a different purpose or audience (e.g., the remake of the film *The Little Mermaid* [2023] from the 1989 animated film), and cross-form, where a work is adapted from one form to another (e.g., the *Panchatantra* literary fables adapted into a TV series). Secondly, genre-based adaptations are categorized into same-genre, where the genre remains the same (e.g., a horror storybook adapted into a horror film), and trans-genre, where a genre is adapted into a different one (e.g., a tragedy adapted into a comedy). Thirdly, medium-based adaptations are the most common type and can be further classified as intramedial, where the medium remains the same (e.g., *The Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, a literary retelling of the *Ramayana*), and

intermedial, where the medium is switched (e.g., the adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* into the Bollywood film *Haider* [2014]).

Moreover, other types of adaptation include cross-cultural, purpose-based, and fidelity-based adaptations. In cross-cultural adaptations, a work of art is transplanted into a different cultural context to make it relatable to an audience other than its original one, for example, adapting the American film *Memento* (2000) into the Bollywood film *Ghajini* (2007). Purpose-based adaptations are created with a specific intention, which may be political, educational, or commercial. Finally, in terms of fidelity-based classification, Geoffrey Wagner, in his book *The Novel and the Cinema* (1975), identified three types: transposition, a close adaptation in which "a novel is given directly on the screen with a minimum of apparent interference" (222); commentary, an intermediate adaptation;

> [w]here [the] original is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect when there has been a different intention on the part of [the] filmmaker, rather than infidelity or outright violation" (224); and analogy, a loose adaptation that "must represent a fairly considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art" (226).

We all grew up surrounded by adaptations, from our grandparents' bedtime stories to learning and performing poetry in childhood. Before technological developments, narratives remained fluid and were reshaped as they passed from generation to generation. In the pre-literate era, stories were reshaped not to fulfil commercial greed but for communal purposes, with the enterprise aimed at preserving cultural memory. Hence, some scholars consider adaptation an ancient phenomenon, while others argue that it is a product of modern times. In the ancient world, before people knew writing and reading, myths, epics, and folktales were transmitted orally. The Greek epics, such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and the Indian epics, such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, grew from oral tradition to written form. Greek dramatists such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides adapted myth into tragedy, while Roman playwrights such as Plautus and Seneca adapted Greek plays for Latin audiences. There were also visual adaptations, in which myths and folktales were represented in sculptures, murals, and pottery. During the medieval period, religious adaptations flourished as

biblical stories were transformed into mystery and morality plays, as well as church art, while secular adaptations included Arthurian and Charlemagne legends. Similarly, Buddhist *Jataka* tales were reworked into religious poetry and performances.

With the Renaissance, Shakespeare adapted myths and tales into plays, while artists such as Michelangelo and Raphael reimagined biblical and mythological narratives in visual art. In the During the Enlightenment period, satirical adaptations appeared, such as Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*. In the nineteenth century, Romantic writers such as Byron, Shelley, and Goethe adapted myths and folklore into poetry and drama. With the rise of mass media, cinema became the most important medium for adapting religious epics, which were retold on screen. In the twenty-first-century digital age, adaptations have become more purpose-driven to reach broader audiences, and the addition of artificial intelligence has expanded possibilities, enabling stories to be easily adapted from written text to on-screen art.

The title of the research paper, Adaptation as an Act of Political Cloning and Alteration of Narratives: An Analysis of *The Hate U Give*, encapsulates the central argument that adaptation is not merely an innocent act of transformation but a deliberate and political process. At times, the changes made are not simply dictated by the demands of the target medium but serve the wider self-interested purposes of the adapter. The phrase 'Adaptation as an Act of Political Cloning' signifies the replication of the original text into another medium with the infusion of political motives. On the surface, Angie Thomas's novel *The Hate U Give* appears to have been faithfully adapted and cloned, with central themes such as systemic violence and racial prejudice seemingly reproduced accurately. However, a critical analysis reveals that cloning is often shallow and agenda-driven. The second part of the title, 'Alteration of Narratives,' highlights the ideological negotiations undertaken by the adapter. The alterations in characters and plot work against the source narrative, where the original message of the novel is softened or de-radicalized.

The novel *The Hate U Give* (2017) by Angie Thomas is a young adult novel that portrays the traumatic experiences of a sixteen-year-old African American girl, Starr Carter. The novel is told

from a first-person perspective where the teenage protagonist is torn between her two worlds: one in the struggling Garden Heights neighbourhood, home to the Black community, and the other at the predominantly white Williamson Prep, her school. Her struggle is truly reflected when she says, "Being two different people is so exhausting. I've taught myself to speak with two different voices and only say certain things around certain people" (Thomas 266). The novel opens with a party in a neighbourhood where she feels lonely, but finally encounters Khalil, her childhood best friend. Her life takes a dark turn when Khalil is shot dead by an American police officer (whom she refers to as One-Fifteen from his badge number), who views him with suspicion because of his Black identity. Starr's pain is conveyed when she states, "An earsplitting scream emerges from my gut, explodes in my throat, and uses every inch of me to be heard" (Thomas 25). The police justify the action of shooting, labelling Khalil a gang member involved in drug dealing: "On the Monday night news, they finally gave Khalil's name in the story about the shooting, but with a title added to it—Khalil Harris, a Suspected Drug Dealer." (Thomas 96).

The incident shatters Starr to the core, and she is made to remain silent. But she could no longer tolerate the racial jokes of her Williamson friend, Hailey, and her biases, for which she had never been confronted before. Starr finally decides to speak for Khalil as she can no longer endure the justification of the shooting. Starr, in a TV interview, shares her childhood memories with Khalil and humanises him. She also testifies to Khalil's innocence before the grand jury to seek justice, but the jury decides not to indict One-Fifteen. The decision triggers riots, in which Starr also participates. The novel ends with the Carter family relocating to ensure a safe future.

The 2018 cinematic adaptation of the novel *The Hate U Give* is directed by George Tillman Jr. and written by American screenwriter Audrey Wells. The evaluation of the film's fidelity to the source text also involves examining the adapter's political and ideological agendas. Although at first glance the novel's core message appears to be retained in the film, a critical analysis reveals that the adaptation is not a naive act; rather, the alterations are made merely to attract a wider audience with highly engaged interests.

Opening Scene of the Novel Versus Film

The novel opens with a scene where Starr Carter is at a party in Garden Heights. An internal monologue depicts Starr's frustration at being caught between two different identities. The severe impact of racial conflicts and biases on teenagers' mental health is highlighted. Starr has to switch her slang, dress code, and mannerisms to fit in with her white Williamson Prep school identity. The beginning of the novel emphasizes the psychological toll and emotional labour that Starr is experiencing. On the other hand, the cinematic adaptation opens with "the talk," where Maverick, Starr's father, teaches his children how to behave if they are ever confronted by the police, a constant threat, as they are surrounded by a system where police brutality against Black people is common. He instructs, "Put your hands on the dashboard. Don't make any sudden moves." (*The Hate U Give*, 2018). He adds further, "Don't make any sudden moves. And don't reach for anything in the glove compartment or under your seat. Just do what they tell you to do" (*The Hate U Give*, 2018). The alteration in the opening scene exemplifies Hutcheon's concept of adaptation as "repetition with variation" (Hutcheon 7), where the primary themes of the novel– police brutality and systemic injustice are repeated to engage the mainstream audience immediately. However, the variation in plot sequencing and the neglect of psychological depth turn the story into a simplified, heroic journey in which Starr fights the system and ultimately wins, rather than a real, complex journey full of emotional battles.

Depoliticisation through Emotions

Khalil and Starr are childhood best friends. In the novel, it is depicted that Starr had an innocent childhood crush on Khalil, but she is currently dating Chris, her Williamson Prep boyfriend. When Khalil and Starr run away from the party because of the shooting, they kiss in the car, suggesting they are interested in each other. The addition of a romantic angle reflects Hollywood's patronage system, which aims to ensure box-office success. According to Lefevere, patronage refers to "the ideology

and poetics of people who hold some kind of power, or wish to use rewriting to gain power, in the target culture" (ix).

This addition also attempts to depoliticize the narrative, shifting Starr's fight against systemic racism from a collective struggle to a more personal issue, rather than a fight for the larger Black community, thereby working as a form of ideological manipulation.

Alteration of the Shooting Scene

In the novel, the police officer tries to intimidate Khalil for a broken taillight on his car. He is viewed with suspicion by the officer because of his black identity and is subsequently searched and humiliated. When the officer turns away, Khalil tries to check on Starr to see whether she is okay, reaching for his hairbrush to appear calm. He opens the driver's side door and says, "You okay, Starr—" (Thomas24). His movement turns out to be fatal, as the officer misinterprets it and shoots him three times due to the prejudices he holds against Black people.

In contrast, the cinematic adaptation depicts Khalil actually holding a hairbrush in his hands outside the car, presenting the shooting as a mistake rather than a deliberate act, thereby allowing the audience to sympathise with the officer as well. Here, the adapter's American subject position subtly maintains neutrality to avoid unsettling the comfort of the white American mainstream audience with existing power structures, while simultaneously engaging them with Black racial struggles.

Allies at Williamson Prep

Starr's mother decides to send her children to a white school because of the neighbourhood crimes. She wanted them to have a good education and a better future, but this eventually led Starr into an emotional conflict where she always had to try to fit in. As a result, she became more conscious of her Black identity and hence more sensitive to the racism of her friend Hailey. In the novel, her internal monologues depict her internal turmoil, and she finally stands up for herself and Khalil once she is drained of energy to suffer Hailey's racism.

In contrast, the film adaptation presents her confrontation with Hailey directly, thereby diminishing the emotional weight and complexity of Starr's internal turmoil; instead, Hailey is

portrayed in binary terms as the villain. Lefevere argues that “all rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way” (vii). The adapter here, to appeal to a broader audience, prefers clear-cut categories rather than portraying complex social relationships.

White Love Interest

Starr, both in the novel and the film, is depicted as having a white American love interest, Chris, from Williamson Prep. The novel portrays serious relationship tensions between them due to racial and class differences, whereas in the film, Chris is presented as a more understanding partner. According to Hutcheon, the adaptations assume “knowing audiences” (122). Hence, the alterations are made. Here, the adapter portrays Chris as a morally good, liberal character to satisfy the audience's expectations. a white, good character to be in demand by the viewers. This representation conveys the message that racial harmony is achievable through individual goodwill.

However, in reality, achieving a society free from discrimination requires collective action through multiple protests and rebellions, then it be the Black Lives Matter movement or the Black Panthers.

The Omitted Dialogue

In the middle plot of the novel, Starr engages in a dialogue with her father, expressing disapproval of Khalil's drug dealing. Maverick explains the Black Trap to her, illustrating that their community lacks access to quality educational facilities, which, in turn, limits opportunities for good jobs. As he says, “Corporate America don’t bring jobs to our communities, and they are damn sure ain’t quick to hire us. Then, shit, even if you do have a high school diploma, so many of the schools in our neighbourhoods don’t prepare us well enough” (Thomas 151). Their poverty either drives them to consume drugs or forces them into selling drugs, as in Khalil’s case: his mother was addicted to drugs, and to support his cancer-stricken grandmother's survival, he had no choice other than to become a gang member. The deliberate omission of the dialogue between Starr and her father, and the

ideological constraints of the adapter, prevent the audience from seeing a clearer picture of the hardships faced by that community.

Omission of Sub-plots

The novel features a subplot in which Maverick Carter, Starr's father, attempts to assist a young boy named Devante, a low-level gang member. Devante steals money from the King Lords because he wants to send his mother and sister to another place to have a better life, and for this reason, the King Lords are after his life. Devante seeks help from Maverick, a former gang member. Maverick saves him by taking him in, giving him a new, safer life and protecting him from the dangers of the neighbourhood. The omission of Devante's character from the cinematic adaptation erases the portrayal of intra-community conflict and removes a message of hope for those trapped in cycles of violence and drug-dealing. The omission eliminates another dimension of the oppression that Black communities endure– not only external oppression but also conflicts within their own community. Devante's character symbolizes the possibility that Black youth, if given proper support and guidance, can break free from the cycle of crime and violence.

The Re-framed End

The adapter has completely reworked the end of the narrative and appropriated it. In the novel, the Carter family decides to move to a new place to secure a safer future for themselves because of the ongoing riots, as Officer 115 was not charged for the shooting of Khalil. Their relocation serves as an act of survival rather than a sign of defeat. On the other hand, the cinematic adaptation ends with a fight between the King Lords and Maverick, after King sets fire to Maverick's store while Starr and her siblings are still inside. The police arrive at the scene and hold Maverick, about to point a gun at him, at which point Sekani, Starr's little brother, takes the gun in his hands and points it at the police. He becomes a symbol of THUG LIFE—The Hate You Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody, which Khalil explained as "Meaning what society gives us as youth, it bites them in the ass when we wild out" (Thomas 19). Starr then takes a stand and calms him down, and as a consequence, the police also release Maverick.

The altered ending tries to centre on the idea that communal conflicts can be easily resolved, giving the story a happy ending. According to Julie Sanders, appropriation involves adaptations that "carry out the same sustained engagement as adaptation but frequently adopt a posture of critique, even assault" (4). The appropriation in the cinematic adaptation is done to convert the novel's raw critique of racial injustice into a more marketable form of racial discourse.

Conclusion

The analysis concludes that the adaptation of the novel *The Hate U Give* is a complex political act, where deliberate changes serve the adapter's ideological and commercial interests. The alterations, oversimplification of scenes, and omission of characters demonstrate a calculated strategy by the adapter. The adapter navigates dual allegiances: advocating for the Black community while simultaneously appeasing white audiences. According to the theory of medium specificity, the cinematic medium is time-bound, and the adaptation therefore struggles between fidelity and reinvention; beyond these variables, the adaptation embeds political messages and works with the adapter's ideologies.

Works Cited and Consulted

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2013.

Lefevere, André. *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. Routledge, 1992.

Nida, Eugene A. *Toward a Science of Translating: With Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating*. Brill, 1964.

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. 9th ed., Oxford UP, 2015.

Sanders, Julie. *Adaptation and Appropriation.* 2nd ed., Routledge, 2006.

Thomas, Angie. *The Hate U Give*. Walker Books, 2017.

The Hate U Give. Directed by George Tillman Jr., screenplay by Audrey Wells, 20th Century Fox, 2018.

Wagner, Geoffrey. *The Novel and the Cinema*. Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1975.