

Literature on the Celluloid: A Critical Study of Ang Lee's Film Adaptation of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*

Naina Agarwal, Renu Josan

Dayalbagh Educational Institute, Dayalbagh, Agra- 282005 India

Abstract

In the present study, Ang Lee's eponymous film adaptation of Jane Austen's novel *Sense and Sensibility* has been analyzed in the light of the Adaptation theory. The paper provides a detailed introduction of the Adaptation theory which is followed by a critical study of the socio-economic background and influences on Austen as a creative writer. The concept provided by the adaptation theorist, Linda Hutcheon in her seminal work, *A Theory of Adaptation* has been used to form a comparative analysis between the novel and the film. The critical analysis has been done regarding the adherence of the chosen film to the novel on the basis of five common elements shared between the two namely, narration, time and temporality, setting, theme, and characterization. Specifically, the paper focuses on shattering the conventional beliefs of considering film adaptations as secondary or inferior, and has studied the film at hand more objectively as an autonomous work in relation to its source text.

KEYWORDS: adaptation, fidelity, narration, time and temporality, setting, theme, characterization

I. Introduction to Adaptation Theory

The Oxford English Dictionary defines Adaptation as 'the action or process of adapting or being adapted' (2016: np). To adapt a work means 'to adjust, to alter, to make suitable' (Hutcheon 2006: 4). However, in media context, Adaptation is defined as a movie, television drama, or stage play that has been adapted from a written work, typically a novel. While the academic studies began to be conducted on the films in the early period of cinema itself, film adaptations were not worked upon till a long time. Literary scholars and critics questioned the film adaptations on the grounds of fidelity, and considered them as secondary to the original work. But with time, this bias associated with the film adaptations was worked upon by a number of adaptations theorists namely, George Bluestone, Linda Hutcheon, Robert Stam, Deborah Cartmell, Bela Balazs, and Sarah Cardwell. These adaptation theorists went beyond the fidelity criterion and asserted that a film adaptation are as much a work of art as the source text it is based upon.

A successful adaptation, Hutcheon states, is the one which is 'a repetition without replication' (2006: 4), the one which balances 'the comfort of ritual and recognition with the delight of surprise and novelty' (2006: 25). Saying thus, Hutcheon presents the process of Adaptation (for films) as 'the process of appropriation of taking possession of another's story' (2006: 10) and understanding the various elements in it: narration, time and temporality, themes, settings, and characterization, through one's own sensibility, using media techniques of cinematography, *mise-en-scene*, sound, and editing in order to 'transcode' or 'transpose' (2006: 4) them; subtracting or compressing the story which is

necessary in order to fit it in a limited time frame; deploying creativity, skills and techniques so as to make the text one's own, and thus, autonomous.

Adaptations assert the fact that while the form changes, the content persists, and so they just cannot be studied alone as the sense that they are 'adaptations' will always prevail. It is generally believed that the adapter, for an adaptation to be successful, should capture the "spirit" or the soul of the source text. However, this aspect is too abstract to theorize but the other one of 'story' is considered as the "common denominator" (2006: 6), the core element which is transposed or transcoded across different media. Thus, as the two mediums are quite different, instead of finding out which art form is better, a healthy discourse would be to study the common grounds between them as it will help in understanding how a film reproduces the experience of the book.

Adaptations are very popular in the present time as almost every third movie in the film industry is an adaptation of a popular novel mainly because of the appeal it provides in terms of popularity and story-line to the makers, the economic advantage it has which is due to the fact that it had already succeeded in being a national or an international bestseller, and the fact that it is a franchise on its own which provides less risk to its investors. It should also be noted that along with earning well at the box-office and gaining a lot of attention from the audience mainly on the social networking sites, most of these adaptations in the Hollywood make it to the Academy Awards. One such writer is Jane Austen whose novels have been adapted many times mainly due to the universal appeal which they provide, and the 'adaptable' quality which they adhere.

II. Biographical Details of Jane Austen

Austen was born on December 16, 1775, at Steventon Rectory in Hampshire, as the seventh child of a country clergyman, George Austen, and his wife Cassandra Austen. Although Austen wrote during the Romantic period and witnessed the shift to the Gothic novel which came up in the early 19th century, yet she cannot be categorized in any of the literary periods or schools mainly because she chose to remain aloof from all of them. Her works are a product of her time, but she does not fit in any of the eras, except for the Regency period, when most of her works were published.

While Austen lived, her works registered consistence sale and were appreciated especially by the upper class gentry but none of her books became best-sellers, and very few reviews about them were written, probably because they failed to conform to the Romantic or the Victorian expectations. Her transformation from little-known to internationally renowned author began in the 1920s, when scholars began to recognize her works as masterpieces, thus, increasing her general popularity. Today, she is considered as one of the greatest writers in the history of English Literature, both by academicians as well as the general public. Her novels are often included in the lists of readers' favorites, and her letters are a source of entertainment and biographical information. Set among the English middle and upper classes, her works are notable for their wit, social observation and insight into the lives of early 19th century women.

Austen never left the South of England, and so her experience of the world was rather limited, but she made it a point of writing about what she knew from her own experiences. She was highly receptive, conscious, a keen observer of society, and made her observations as one of her greatest strengths. Thus, her social background became a major influence on Jane Austen, as most of her inspiration came from what she saw around her. Earlier women writers like, Madame de La Fayette (1634-1693) influenced Austen's writing style and purpose, but gradually, she developed a style of her own and her greatness lies in the fact that although she wrote about what she knew best, that is, the society of nineteenth century English countryside families, yet her works possess universal implications for the insight they provide. In one of her letters to her nephew, Edward, she spoke of her works as paintings on 'the little bit (two inches wide) of ivory' (1870: np)- a phrase which has earned a literary reputation of its own with time.

Sense and Sensibility is considered as her first published work of Jane Austen which she published in 1811 under the pseudonym of "By a Lady". Set in Southwest England, London and Kent, between 1792 and 1797, it is a romantic novel which follows the story of Dashwood sisters, Elinor and Marianne as they move to a new home on a distant relative's property, where they experience love, romance and heartbreak.

The film adaptation with the same title as the novel was produced in 1995 by Lindsay Doran, under the direction of Ang Lee, with Emma Thompson and Kate Winslet playing the main characters of ElinorDashwood and MarrianeDashwood, respectively, and actors Hugh Grant and Alan Rickman playing their respective suitors. The film was released on December 13, 1995 in US and February 23, 1996 in UK, and was an instant commercial success, earning around \$135 million worldwide, garnering positive reviews, receiving various accolades- including seven nominations at the 68th Academy Awards and two awards for the same, and is considered as one of the best adaptations of Austen's works.

III. Analysis of Joe Wright's Film Adaptation

Lindsay Doran, the Producer of the film adaptation, *Sense and Sensibility*, in one of her interviews to *NewsWeek* revealed that she became a fan of Austen in her school itself, and since *Sense and Sensibility* was the first novel of the author read by her, it became her favourite. Being the daughter of a Studio Executive, she had grown up learning about what makes a good film. Thus, as she grew up, she realized that *Sense and Sensibility* has all the elements that are required to make a good movie. Also, she had always liked to make movies that produce positive emotions in the audience. All these reasons led her to decide on making a film adaptation of her favourite Austen novel.

The first step towards concretizing her dream was to search for a screenwriter who could bring about an effective amalgamation of Austen's satire and romance, but she came across scripts that were either strong on satire or on romance. It took her ten years before she came across the sketch series *Thompson* by Emma Thompson, and liked the humour and wit in it. This made her give Thompson the task of writing the screenplay for the movie. Thompson worked hard on it day and night amidst her busy acting schedule, making numerous drafts, even losing the entire work once due to laptop failure, but

finally succeeded in the endeavour. Her award acceptance speech at the Golden Globe which is filled with Austen's wit and humour, clearly reflects her knowledge and understanding of the author.

Since the process of adaptation is "repetition without replication" (2006: 4), a screenwriter should have the ability to mould his/her voice with that of the writer. This has been achieved by Thompson to a great extent as she has removed various events from the source text and has introduced certain new scenes in the movie that have helped in highlighting different aspects of the movie. Moreover, since the movie was to be released internationally, it was important to make necessary changes in the script for the clear understanding of the viewers. For example, unlike the British, for foreign viewers, especially the ones who have not read Austen, it would be difficult to understand that Norland Park and Barton Park are the names of houses described in the novel.

The task of direction of the movie was accorded to a Taiwanese director, Ang Lee who had at that time come into limelight by delivering two successful films, namely, *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), and *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994). His name was first suggested by Geoff Steir of Mirage Productions but the other people of the production house were apprehensive of according the task of directing a British Period Drama to an easterner. However, Steir's intuition proved correct as soon it became clear that having directed two movies both of which were related to family and love, and suffused with humour and romance, *Sense and Sensibility* was not a herculean task for Lee. His Asian way of taking long shots, and restraining the performances of actors to a more constricted tone- which he felt to be in tune with Austen's style (as she triggers our emotions by implications rather than stating them directly), greatly helped the film in its success from the critical point of view. Lee puts as much emphasis on the setting as on the characters and so in the movie, the houses of Norland Park, Barton cottage, Cleveland and so on, tell as much story as the characters.

Narration:

Narration is regarded as easily adaptable since it is made up of story and plot both of which are essential parts of the novel and the film. But the method of narration in these two genres, that is, novel and film, is quite different owing to the difference in their respective forms. The narration in novels is done in two ways, first or third person, and through dialogues of the characters, both of which provide us various details related to the plot, theme, settings, and other elements in the novel. But in the genre of film, it (narration) is done through cinematography, and sound, the latter employing dialogue, and voice-over as the essential tools which greatly help in the narration.

Camera as a narrator has greatly helped in unfolding the events in the film in a linear manner as has been depicted in the source text. Thus, the verbal description of the settings of Norland Park, Devonshire, and Cleveland, and the characters in the novel is presented visually in the movie with the help of camera. The various long shots in *Sense and Sensibility* under the direction of Lee, with 'continuity editing,' shifting the focus and employing zoom and tracking shots from time to time have helped in conveying the emotions of the characters to a large extent. For instance, in the opening scene, the

extreme shot of Mr. Dashwood's pale face shows his anxious expressions as he was desperately waiting for the arrival of his son in order to convince him to look after the financial well-being of his stepmother and half-sisters, as he was nearing his end. It should also be noted, that in this particular scene, the lights in the room have been dimmed and there is a kind of silence in the background with only the sound of Mr. Dashwood's urgent voice coupled with his heavy breathing that clearly states his final moments.

The camera acts as an objective narrator in the movie, depicting the actions, expressions and gestures of the characters, along with the portrayal of the scenic beauty of the background. This has served the dual purpose of creating visual appeal as the picturesque presentation of the Norland Park and Barton Valley captivate the attention of the audience who cannot help noticing it while making a keen observation of the characters. For example, in the scene where Elinor comes to fetch Margaret from her tree-house, the scenic beauty of the Norland Park is apparent by the way it has been captured in the camera. Moreover, there are various still-shots in the movie that depict the houses and places when they are introduced for the first time in the movie. For example, when the Dashwood sisters arrive in Devonshire, a still-shot of 2 seconds depicting the architecture of Barton Cottage is presented, and this one image is enough for the audience to understand in the kind of house in which the sisters would reside.

Sometimes, the camera serves as the subjective narrator by way of showing things from the perspective of Elinor, just like Austen focuses on Elinor's perspective. For example, John Willoughby's expressions as he displays his dislike for Colonel Brandon have been depicted in the way as Elinor perceives them. The visual element of the film is powerful and renders the ability to transpose the audience to the time period depicted in the novel, making them feel one with the characters, thus leaving a long lasting impact on them. The various shots roll along one after the other without any pauses or breaks, the scenic beauty adds to the romantic appeal, and the expression and gestures of the characters as they are viewed by the audience provides a visual depth to the movie.

Apart from camera, the element of dialogue has greatly helped in the narration of the movie. Thompson has carefully avoided the use of voice-over, but she has suffused the movie with powerful dialogues while also dramatizing certain scenes that are merely recounted in the novel. For example, Austen makes Marianne refer to Edward's reading from Cowper as "spiritless" (1811: 17) to her mother, where as in the movie, the whole scene has been dramatized by Lee as he makes Hugh Grant read Cowper's poem "The Castaway". Also, Thompson has removed a number of situations presented in the source novel, and greatly changed the language of the various conversations among the characters in order to make the movie appealing to the audience. In her work, *Diaries*, that was published before the release of the movie and contained her experience while working on the same, Thompson said, "the language in the novel is complex and far more arcane than in the later books. In simplifying it, I've tried to retain the elegance and wit of the original and it's necessarily more exacting than the normal speech" (1996: 252). For example, in the movie, when Marianne and Margaret go for a walk, the former

exclaims, "Is there any felicity in the world superior to this? ... There's some blue sky. Let us chase it." (1996: 44)

The tone and pitch with which the characters speak the dialogues, coupled with facial expressions and gestures, also help in the narration as they convey their emotions to the audience in the film. Sometimes, the characters do not speak at all, but their silence speaks a great deal as the facial expressions help in conveying their emotions. For instance, the expression on Marianne's face when she gazes at her house in Norland Park for the last time before leaving for Devonshire, explains her acute pain and grief. Austen explained this particular scene with words but the facial expressions of Kate Winslet with swollen eyes and sullen face are enough for the audience to comprehend the extent of her pain along with understanding the romantic streak in her character.

Austen's use of language is the most important element in her novels. The way she narrates the incidents, with powerful dialogue, irony, wit, humour and satire, is something incomparable. Thompson has tried to maintain this quality of language keeping in mind the wide range of modern audience, by introducing powerful dialogues, and witty tone that impregnates the whole movie. The humour is evident in the movie in the entire demeanor of Mrs. Palmer, in the affected manner in which Mrs. Dashwood displays her affectations while receiving Mr. Willoughby in the Barton Cottage when he arrives to check on Marianne as she had sprained her ankle, in the way Lucy Steele is rebuked by Fanny Dashwood, and through the loud characters of Mr. Middleton and Mrs. Jennings.

Austen wrote *Sense and Sensibility* in third person omniscient narration, focusing mostly on the character of elder Dashwood sister, Elinor. The novel has a linear plot and follows a chronological order with no flashbacks or flash-forwards. As has been stated above that Austen has a style of implying things rather than stating them directly, in this novel too she had acknowledged Elinor's actions, however, Marianne's passion has not been discarded altogether. Both the heroines have been favoured as they both get happily married by the end of the novel, but the narrative point clearly depicts that Elinor's sense has an upper hand over Marianne's romantic sensibility. Furthermore, through the narration it is also suggested that social practices are quite important as Elinor's and Marianne's lives are shaped by their behaviour in various situations with other characters around them. For example, Elinor kept herself in control many times in the company of the Middletons, the Palmers, and Mrs. Jennings which reflects her maturity, but Marianne confined herself only to talking to Willoughby and ignoring all of them due to which they both became the talk of the town even while not being engaged to each other.

Adapting a work belonging to another century is not easy as creating an atmosphere of the past in the contemporary period requires extensive research. Care has to be taken not to miss out on important details as the social and economic background, the objects of day-to-day life, dresses, hairstyles, manner of discourse and all these aspects have to be studied in order to transport the viewers to that era.

Time and Temporality:

As far as the element of time and temporality is concerned, Austen wrote *Sense and Sensibility* in the chronological order with a linear plot with no reveries by characters whatsoever. Thompson has maintained this aspect in her screenplay and so the whole story of the movie has been transposed in the same manner from depicting Mr. Dashwood's demise to Dashwood sisters shifting from Norland Park (where they meet Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood and Edward) to Barton Cottage, to the introduction of various other characters of Mr. Middleton, Mrs. Jennings, Colonel Brandon, the Palmers, and then John Willoughby- the depiction of whose character is later followed by that of Lucy Steele. All this is done while unfolding the story of the movie in the similar manner as has been done by Austen.

Thompson has also tried to maintain the tone that is specific to the writing style of Austen in order to create the aura of that time period. Thus, while she has altered the dialogue and simplified the language in the movie to a great extent in order to make them comprehensive to the modern audience, she has nevertheless maintained that quality in speech that is specific to the Regency time period. The people of the Regency Era used formal language even in the day-to-day communication and maintained a kind of decorum in speech. They stated their feelings in an indirect manner and kept the pitch of their voice to the minimum.

One more way by which the time period of Austen has been depicted is by the use of film techniques of *mise-en-scene*, sound and editing. The background of the English countryside with green pastures, big houses, horse carriages and so on; historically accurate costumes designed by Jenny Beaven and John Bright of Merchant Ivory films who visited various museums and studied the works of other writers writing in Austen's time to find inspiration for their work as the author has hardly provided details related to the dresses worn by the characters in the novel; props of atlas, handkerchief, books, pianoforte, etc.; suitable lighting that keeps on changing as per the demand of the scenes; and the music composed by Patrick Doyle that featured two songs sung by Marriane which have been adapted from the seventeenth century poems and other melodies that gently blend with the sentimentality depicted in the movie, have helped in creating the era of Austen's time to such an extent that in some of the scenes, the viewers can feel themselves one with the characters.

Setting:

The element of setting has also been transposed wonderfully in the film. Austen provides various settings in the novel- Old Mr. Dashwood's estate to Norland Park, Barton Cottage, Barton Park, and Allenham, though she hardly gives any description about these places except for few, for instance, she talks about Barton Valley as "a pleasant, fertile spot, well wooded, and rich in pasture," (1811: 16). The novel then moves to Mrs. Jennings' house in London followed by the depiction of the Ball where Marriane is ignored by Willoughby, then the Palmers' estate of Cleveland, and finally back to Barton Valley. Thus, we can see that the setting continuously changes in the

novel but Austen hardly describes them as her focus mainly lies in depicting the dialogues and the actions of characters.

Thomas Leitch in his work, “Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory,” states that, “it would be a hopeless endeavor to adapt Austen’s novels to film because their visual texture is so remarkably thin that adapters are compelled to draw on ancillary historical accounts to dress all the characters and furnish their rooms” (1811: 161). However, through their hard work, the makers of the film adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* have come up with such settings that have come quite close to their depiction in the novel.

The Department of Art Direction did an extensive research related to settings, so that they could be in accordance with the time period depicted in the novel. Thus, the Saltram House located in the countryside of Devonshire was chosen for representing Norland Park as its architecture closely resembled that of the Regency Era. Similarly, Montacute House in South Somerset that has been listed as the Grade I English Heritage site represented the Palmers’ estate of Cleveland; Flete House in the district of Devon, England that has been listed as Grade I country house was chosen for Mrs. Jennings’ house in London and the stone cottage of the same has been chosen as the Barton Cottage. Trafalgar house and Wilton House in Wiltshire stood for Barton Park and London Ball Room respectively; the eighteenth century Mompesson House in Salisbury stood for Mrs. Jennings’ town house; Compton Castle in Devonshire stood for Willoughby’s estate of Allenham, and the church in the last scene where Brandon and Marianne come out as a married couple is the village church of Berry Pomeroy. Some other scenes are also shot at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich.

In accordance with the setting of English countryside and the city of London, the movie was shot in specifically chosen places in order to lend authenticity to the period presented. Besides contributing to the aesthetic appeal of the film, the setting transcends the audience to the Regency Era where the viewers can easily relate them with the time period they are meant to depict. Director Ang Lee took special care of the fact that the settings should be related to the story and the theme of the movie. Therefore, while Norland Park was depicted as grand and beautiful, with a spacious library, expensive paintings, rich furniture, and dining sets, the Barton Cottage was isolated and cramped, with a small parlour containing humble furniture, and the Dashwood sisters are shown as sharing not only a single room but even a single bed which represents their humble economic condition. Furthermore, the sweeping landscapes, rainstorms, melancholic rides in the carriage, all add to the appeal of the film for the audience.

Theme:

The central theme of the novel can be derived from its title itself. Austen wanted to convey that a perfect balance must be maintained between reason and emotion represented by Elinor’s ‘sensible’ nature and Marianne’s ‘sensitivity’ respectively, in order to lead a happy life as the extreme of any one will lead to grief and discord. Apart from this, the novel focuses on the issue of money as an important factor that determines

the status of an individual in the society and acts as a decisive factor in marriages. The aspect of love is also vividly delineated as it depicts three love stories- Elinor and Edward's, Marriane and Willoughby's, and Marriane and Brandon's. Moreover, the issue of power relations which focuses on gender as a factor that determines the position of an individual in the society has been presented by Austen.

Thompson has adhered to all these themes in the film adaptation. The tagline of the film, "Love Your Heart and Come to Your Senses" depicts that an amalgamation of 'sense' and 'sensibility' is important in order to lead a happy life. However, Thompson has provided more weight to the male characters in the movie in order to highlight the aspect of romance. The novel is essentially about the Dashwood sisters, and their male counterparts remain in the background or absent (as in the case of Edward) for most of the time, but Thompson has given more weight to their characters because she found it necessary to make the male characters appealing in order to draw the attention of the audience which would in turn affect the success of the movie at the box-office.

The theme of 'Sense and Sensibility' has been depicted mainly through the difference in the personalities and actions of Elinor and Marriane. While Elinor restrains her emotions towards Edward till the end, Marriane is passionate and bold in the depiction of her fondness for Willoughby. Ang Lee has made brilliant use of imagery in order to distinguish the two sisters- where extrovert Marriane is seen playing pianoforte, or reciting poems, and going for walks outdoors, introvert Elinor is confined to her home. It is only at the end of the movie that Elinor is unable to control her emotions and cries vehemently (when Edward informs her that he is still a bachelor as Lucy married his younger brother, Robert Ferrars, and that he loves her) that the element of 'sensitvity' is seen in her character both by her family as well as the viewers.

The theme of money has also not been ignored in the film. Unlike the novel, Thompson has made Dashwood family richer in the movie as compared to the book and added elements that helped in differentiating their present condition from the past. For instance, in the Norland Park, Elinor is made to address a large group of servants, where as their staff at Barton Cottage consisted only of two maids and a male servant. Elinor and Marriane are seen repeating their dresses, and the former takes the hold of finances in her house, deciding what they can afford to buy and what they cannot. Furthermore, their dwindling position in the society is depicted in the movie through the objection of Fanny Dashwood to Elinor's engagement with Edward. Fanny also throws Lucy Steele out from her house when the latter reveals about her secret engagement with Edward as Lucy's economic status was much inferior in comparison to the Ferrars.

Gender can also be seen as a major theme that has been transposed in the film as the movie tries to depict Austen's indictment of power relations in the Regency Era in a number of ways. The women characters are depicted as confined indoors where as males are always moving throughout the countryside. Mrs. Dashwood always looks out for a suitable match for her daughters as marriage is the only way for women to maintain their financial security. The Law of Primogeniture about which Elinor talks to Margaret, and her conversation with Edward regarding the same clearly depicts Thompson's agenda in

the movie. Like Austen, Thompson has not been radical in her approach, and has maintained the conservative outlook (that was peculiar to the author) in the movie as the stereotypes belonging to the time period of the Regency Era had to be kept in mind while transcoding the themes.

Characterization:

As far as the characterization is concerned, Thompson has made various changes in transcoding various characters from the novel to the film. She has kept the major characters namely, the Dashwood sisters, and their respective suitors, Mr. Ferrars and Colonel Brandon, the character of John Willoughby, and even the minor characters Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood, Mrs. Dashwood, Mrs. Jennings, Palmers, Lucy Steele and Miss Grey, true to their basic nature, but has made some changes in the personality of certain characters like that of Mr. Ferrars in order to make them more appealing on the screen.

As it is known that unless it is the depiction of some monster or villain, the audience does not like to see unattractive people on screen, Thompson developed the character of Mr. Edward Ferrars keeping in mind the actor Hugh Grant (who is immensely good-looking) even when Austen in the novel had clearly depicted that Mr. Ferrars “was not handsome” (1811: 8). However, he did justice to his role of Mr. Ferrars by way of stammering and shaky voice, rapid blinking of eyelashes, buttoned suits, shy but charming persona.

There are various other changes which have been made by Thompson in the characterization. She had Vanessa Redgrave’s daughters, Natasha and Joely Richardson in mind to play the Dashwood sisters, but when Ang Lee approached Thompson to play Elinor, she expressed her doubt as to how she could play a 19-year old character at the age of 36. But Lee suggested that they should change Elinor’s age to 27 so that her character could be played by Thompson. Lee also thought that this alteration would explain the character’s spinsterhood to the modern audience. Thus, Elinor has been portrayed as a 27-year old in the movie, but her basic character of a sensible and mature elder sister, who knows the importance of social practices, and possessed immense self-control has not been meddled with in the movie. Thompson played the character so well that she received various awards for her acting skills.

Moreover, Kate Winslet as the “monstrous pretty girl” (1811: 64) Marianne who represents the aspect of ‘sensibility’ in the novel, Greg Wise as handsome and charming, John Willoughby, and Alan Rickman as “neither very young, nor very gay ... not handsome” (1811: 35) Colonel Brandon, have remained true to their characters both in terms of appearances as well as character traits. Apart from these major characters, the minor characters have also played a huge role in making the movie highly appealing.

Thompson has cut down on certain minor characters like that of Old Mr. Dashwood, Lady Middleton and her four children, and elder Miss Steele, in order to make the script more compact and cohesive, but Fanny Dashwood as a mean and selfish woman, and

John Dashwood as a respectable but money-minded and status-conscious man, Mrs. Dashwood¹ who shares Marianne's sensibility, Mr. Middleton² as "a good looking man of about 40 ... good-humoured and friendly" (1811: 17), Mrs. Jennings³ as a loud but friendly woman who was always interested in gossip and was fond of match-making, and Mr. and Mrs. Palmer⁴ who share a funny relationship, have been portrayed really well in the movie.

A special emphasis is given to the character of the youngest Dashwood sister, Margaret⁵ in the movie. She seemed to have not much to do in the novel, and has only been presented as a 13-year old, but in the movie, her role seems to have a lot of significance as since the beginning, Margaret is seen as a bold and vocal girl who puts up questions, demanding answers from her elder sisters. It is through her character that the filmmakers have provided various answers to the audience, thus, filling up essential gaps in the movie.

It can be stated that the main auteur of the movie is the screenwriter and actor, Emma Thompson who has cut down on various scenes and some minor characters, and dramatized some scenes that have been merely stated in few lines by Austen. She has taken five or six lines from the source text and has rewritten the conversations between the characters in a more explicit manner for the contemporary viewers to understand them, and also highlighted the feminist angle of the novel though she has not neglected the stereotypes of the Regency Era. The result is a film that is different from its source text but not entirely, something that caters to the demands of the modern audience but adheres to the time period and the theme of the novel.

IV. Conclusion

A kind of dichotomy exists between literature and film. Hutcheon in her work, *Theory of Adaptation* notes that literature is conceptual and is a passive endeavour where as film is perceptual and is an active endeavour; reading is generally a solitary activity where as films are viewed in the theatre hall. But it should not be assumed that literature is better or worse than film. Both the genres have their own limitations as well as merits, and both aim to provide pleasure to the readers/viewers as both are the works of art. So, it would be wrong to assume that the written word is aesthetically and culturally superior to the newer genre of film as such an opinion clearly shows inclination towards the more traditional experience. Both the genres are different, and so, both should be judged in accordance with the pertinent criterion rather than establish the dominance or superiority of one over the other.

Comparison of the film adaptation to its source text is certainly inevitable but Adaptation theory demands an unbiased study of the film in relation to its source text. It

¹Played by the actor, Gemma Jones.

²Played by the actor Robert Hardy.

³Played by the actor, Elizabeth Spriggs.

⁴ Played by the actors, Hugh Laurie and Imelda Staunton respectively.

⁵ Played by the actor, Emilie Francois.

treats novel and its film adaptation as two different works of art made by two different artists. It can be said that being a straight adaptation of Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, Thompson and Lee's film has certainly succeeded in its effort to create the aura of writer's world, retelling the popular narrative with cinematic innovation. As studied in this chapter, the film adaptation has proved itself on all the parameters that the two genres of novel and film share: narration is effective, setting stays true to the time period it depicts, themes are transcoded well, and characterization is up to the mark. The film is capable of satisfying both the types of audience, that is, the one acquainted with the source text and the one that is not.

It is difficult to work upon a writer like Austen whose name appears in the first row of great writers in English Literature, and whose works contain such depth, such an aesthetic appeal that coming near to her novels alone is considered an achievement in itself. But the filmmakers of *Sense and Sensibility* with their talent, creativity, and hard work have been able to touch the 'soul' of the novel if one views the movie objectively, and the appreciation, the various accolades they have received at the award shows for the same are well-deserved by them.

References

Austen, Jane (1811), *Sense and Sensibility*, Planet PDF, <https://www.planetebook.com/free-ebooks/sense-and-sensibility.pdf> . Accessed 24 Apr, 2020.

Austen-Leigh, James Edward (1870), 'To Edward, 16 December, 1816,' *Memoir of Jane Austen, The Republic of Pemberley*, n.d., <http://www.pemberley.com/janeinfo/auslet22.html#bits> .Accessed 6 Apr. 2020.

Hutcheon, Linda (2006), *A Theory of Adaptation*, New York: Routledge.

Oxford English Dictionary(2016), 'adaptation,' Oxford University Press, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/adaptation> Accessed 5 April, 2020.

Sense and Sensibility (1995), Ang Lee (dir.), Columbia Pictures, Mirage.

Thompson, Emma (1996), *The Sense and Sensibility Screenplay & Diaries: Bringing Jane Austen's Novel to Film*, Newmarket Press.