

Hallmarks of the Novel and the Film

Sr. Sujata Marvi

“Art is what you cannot define, nevertheless it’s fun to try”

– Robert Frost

Every art is shaped not only by the politics, philosophy and economics of society, but also by its technology. The relationship is not always clear: sometimes technological development leads to a change in the aesthetic system of art; sometimes aesthetic requirements call for a new technology; often the development of the technology itself is the result of a combination of ideological and economic factors. However, until artistic impulses can be expressed through some kind of technology, there is no artefact. Every art also depends on the relationship between the work, the artist and the observer. This triangular view of the artistic experience directs our attention away from the work itself, to the medium of communication, and we become interested in the mode of its transmission.

*“My task which I am trying to achieve is,
by the power of the written word,
to make you hear, to make you see....”*

“To make you see” assumes an effective relationship between a creative artist and receptive audience. Novelist and director meet here in a common intention: see visually through the eye or imaginatively through the mind. Between the perfect of the visual image and the concept of the mental image lies the root difference between the two media: the novel and the film.

Part of the definition of the two media may be read at their respective points of origin. The origin of the film, according to Panofsky, suggests two fundamental implications. First, that the “primordial basis of the enjoyment of moving pictures was not an objective interest in a specific subject matter, but the sheer delight in the fact that things move,” no matter what things they are. The second fact we are to understand,

Panofsky goes on, is that films are originally products of genuine folk art.

At the very beginning of this we find the simple recording of movement: galloping horses, railroad trains, fire-engines, sporting events, street scenes. These films were originally produced and were enjoyed by people who did not claim to be artists and who would have been much offended had anybody called them art lovers. They were taken by photographers who were anything but “directors,” and were performed by people who were anything but actors.”

On the other hand, the novel is more complex because its history is longer and its materials more refined. The novel has come into being from multiple points of origin: culturally, linguistically, geographically and historically. In other words the novel emerged out of a variety of narrative and non-narrative sources to become a cultural institution which absorbed and transformed the dangerous conflict of society and politics into the microcosmic domestic world, with social and political conflicts being rewritten along lines of gender division. In approaching the novel we are faced internally with the fluidity of its boundaries and externally with its particular relationship to life. If the film is protean because it has assimilated photography, music, dialogue, the dance, the novel is protean because it has assimilated essays, letters, memoirs, histories, religious tracks and manifestoes.

Jane Austen’s *Emma*, Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*, Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*, George Eliot’s *Mill on the Floss*, Charles Dickens’ *Bleak House*, Henry James’ *The Spoils of Poyton*, H. G. Wells’ *Ann Veronica*, Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*, and Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* are some of the novels that are explored in more or less chronological succession to illustrate the ways in which the narrative strategies of the novel have been subject to both change and continuity over the course of two and a half centuries, from the origins of the English Novel in the eighteenth century to the Postmodern novel in the late twentieth. Say ‘novel’ in 1750 and we were, probably, referring to one,

or at most, a small handful of things. Say 'novel' in 2006 and we could be referring to scores of things.

In analysing the two arts, it is befitting that we look at the similarities and differences that give them their unique identity. The media of the film and the novel apparently overlap but they are marked by such essentially different traits that they belong to separate artistic genres. The distinguishing traits follow primarily from the fact that the novel is a *linguistic* medium, the film essentially *visual*. There is visual stimuli in the film and verbal manipulation in the novel. The governing conventions of each medium are further conditioned by different origins, different audiences, different modes of production and different censorship requirements. The film has been supported by a mass audience, produced co-operatively under industrial conditions and restricted by a self-imposed 'Production Code'. These developments have reinforced rather than vitiated the autonomy of each medium.

The narrative potential of film is so marked that it had developed its strongest bond not with painting, not even with drama, but with the novel. Both film and novels tell long stories with a wealth of detail and they do it from the perspective of a narrator, who often interposes a recent level of irony between the story and the observer. The differences between the two arts, besides the obvious and powerful difference between pictorial narration and linguistic narration, are quickly apparent. Films operate in real time, they are limited. Novels end only when they feel like it. Film is restricted to what Shakespeare called "the short two hours' traffic of our stage". Commercial film still cannot reproduce the range of the novel, in time. An average screenplay, for example, is 125 to 150 typescript pages in length; the average novel three times that. At the same time, film is limited to a shorter narration, however, it naturally has pictorial possibilities the novel does not have. What cannot be transmitted by incident might be translated into image.

In a novel, we see and hear only what the author wants us to see and hear. In films, however, we see and hear a great deal more than a director necessarily intends. More important, whatever the novelist describes is

filtered through his language, his prejudices, and his point of view. With film, we have a certain amount of freedom to choose, to select one detail rather than another. The driving tension of the novel is the relationship between the material of the story (plot character, setting, theme) and the narration of it in language; between the tale and teller, in other words. The driving tension of a film, on the other hand, is between the materials of the story and the objective nature of the image. It is as if the director of a film was in continual conflict with the scene he was shooting. The words on the page are always the same, but the image on the screen changes continually as we redirect our attention. Film is, in this way, a much richer experience. Many critics of the novel believe that true comprehensiveness comes only from reading the novel again and again. However, this is the very strength of a novel that the reader has the novel as a physical thing in his/her hand to refer to time and again.

The trend of film and television adaption of fiction has become, over the decades, more sensitive to its source material. In film versions of the novel, an inevitable abandonment of “novelist” elements are discovered very often. This abandonment is so severe that, in a strict sense, the new creation has little resemblance to the original. With the abandonment of the language as its sole and primary element, the film necessarily leaves behind those characteristic contents of thought which only language can approximate: tropes, dreams, memories and conceptual consciousness. In their stead, the film supplies endless spatial variations, photographic images of physical reality, and the principles of montage and editing. All these differences derive from the contrast between the novel as a conceptual and discursive form, the film as a perceptual and presentational form. In this term the film maker treats the novel as raw material and ultimately creates his own unique structure. That is why a comparative study which begins by finding resemblances between novel and film ends by loudly proclaiming their differences.

Many times we hear the statements like – “The film is true to the spirit of the book”; “it is incredible how they butchered the novel”; “Thank God they changed the ending,” which are based on certain assumptions which blur the mutation process. The change is inevitable the moment

one abandons the linguistic for the visual medium. It is true that cinema audiences, unlike novel readers, cannot bear too much reality. Pool their respective IQs, and that of the film-watchers would be points lower than an equivalent number of public library readers. However, it is insufficiently recognized that the end products of novel and film represent different aesthetic genera, as different from each other as ballet is from architecture. The film becomes a different thing from the historical painting which becomes a different thing from the historical event it illustrates. It is fruitless to say that film A is better or worse than novel B. Thus the results of conversion from linguistic to visual image are disastrous to both. The difference is too great to overcome.

Each “take” on a novel unmask a facet not only of the novel itself, but also of the historical time and the discursive culture of the adaptation. Each grid, in revealing aspects of the source text in question, also reveals something about the reigning ideologies in the moment of the reinterpretation. By revealing the prisms through which the novel has been re-imagined, adaptations grant a kind of objective materiality to the prisms themselves. It is only in the eyes of another medium, that the medium reveals itself fully and profoundly. And this has profound implications for adaptation. Adaptation is potentially a way of one medium seeing another through a process of mutual illumination.

Each medium has its “blindness” and “insight”. The filmmaker sometimes sees what the novelist was blind to. A filmmaker can flesh out and sound out the writer’s vision. Adaptation can become another way of seeing, and bearing, and thinking the novel, showing that which cannot be represented except in film. The “excess seeing” of cinema at its best, can illuminate the dark corners and dialogizing backdrops of the classics of world literature.

Twentieth-century novels have abandoned the drama of human thought and action for the drama of linguistic inadequacy. “It is almost as though language and subject had reversed roles. Where language was formerly used to comment on social and psychological conflicts, sociology and psychology now elucidate the traits of language itself”. In other words language has become a character in the novel.

The relationship between film and media becomes stronger with each passing year. Technology (image and sound), is a clear exposition of the intriguing science of cinema. However, seemingly untechnological arts like the novel are deeply influenced by the technical determinant. For example, the novel could not exist in the form we know today without the invention of the printing press.

Film is one of the dramatic arts, and is strongly pictorial, which is why films are collected more often in art museums than in libraries. On the more advanced level, film is more clearly a sophisticated art – possibly the most important art of the twenty-first century. Film operates on us psychologically, and affects us politically. However, film also operates as a language as it has developed as an art without much dependency on technology throughout history of the film. As a medium, film needs to be considered as a phenomenon very much like language. It has no codified grammar, it has no enumerated vocabulary, it does not even have very specific rules of usage, so it is very clearly not a language *system*, like written or spoken English; but it nevertheless does perform many of the same functions of communication as language does.

Since the 1960s, semiotics has presented an interesting approach to the logical description to the language phenomenon of film and the other recording arts. The linguist Ferdinand de Saussure laid the ground work for semiotics in the early years of this century. Saussure's simple yet elegant idea was to view language as simply one of a number of systems of codes of communication. Linguistics, then, becomes simply one area of the more general study of systems of signs – semiotics. Through this approach a serious attention to films is given. This approach emphasises not only in what is said but 'how' it is said. It does this by using linguistic models; that is the semiotics of film describes film as a language.

A film may not have grammar, but it does have systems of "codes". It does not, strictly speaking, have vocabulary, but it does have a system of signs. It also uses the systems of signs and codes of a number of other communication systems. Because of its clear organized rhythm as well as its soundtrack it has close connection with music. Any musical code,

for instance, can be represented in the music of film. Most painterly codes, and most narrative codes, can also be represented in film. Much of the preceding discussion of the relationship between the film and the other arts could be quantified by describing the codes that exist in those other arts that can be translated into film as opposed to those that cannot. Thus the “genius of an art may be just those codes that do not work well in any other art”.

Film has depended on musical theory for much of its effect. Music had quickly become an integral part of the film experience; silent films were normally ‘performed’ with live music. Film utilizes a set of musical concepts expressed in visual terms: melody, harmony, and rhythm are long established values in film art. Sound recording is also an integral component of cinema. The enormous use of technology makes critics feel that digital techniques like morphing and sampling destroy our faith in the honesty of the images and sounds we see and hear. We can no longer trust our eyes and ears. However, film is strongly environmental: as display technologies mature, architects increasingly integrate filmed background into their more tangible structure.

Along with the technological development that governs the language of the art, there are also shades of economic elements which need to be dealt with. Film as a recording art is both capital as well as labour intensive; that is, it involves, large expenditures of money and it often requires large numbers of workers. Moreover, each art is circumscribed by certain economic realities. Film, because it is a very expensive art, is especially susceptible to the distortions caused by economic considerations. The elaborate economic infrastructure of film – the complex rules of production, distribution and consumption that underlie the art – set strict limitations on film makers. As an economic commodity, film can often best be understood as selling a service that is essentially psychological in nature: we most often go to the movies for the emotional effects they evoke in us. Thus, the relationship of consumption is more important than that of production.

A film is based on the optical principle known as persistence of vision. After exposure, the retina of the eye retains the image of a picture for

approximately 1/10 of a second longer than the duration of actual contact. The camera is free to use almost endless visual variations. It is at this point that the camera announces itself as an artistic instrument. The mobility of the camera has helped achieve unprecedented visual effects. It can also distort light to fit a desired mood – deepen shadows, highlight faces, amplify contrast, turn night into day or faintly defined clouds into sharp ones. Like a precocious child, however, the camera can become offensive through sheer virtuosity. Behind the lens is a creative brain directing its steady and often ruthless vision. It is to the film-maker in relation to his instrument that we must look for the real centre of the film's uniquely creative process. The cameraman as a person, has got to interfere, to place the camera in such a way that the picture it records will somehow give the emphasis he desires.

Virginia Woolf, contrasting the novel and film, is especially sensitive to the unique power of the figure of speech. The images of a poet, she tells us, are a compact of a thousand suggestions, of which the visual is only the most obvious:

Even a simple image like, "*My love's like a red, red rose, that's newly sprung in June,*" presents us with impressions of moisture and warmth and the flow of crimson and the softness of petals, inextricably mixed and strung upon the lift of a rhythm which is itself the voice of the passion and the hesitation of love. All this which is accessible to words, and to words alone, the cinema must avoid.

Just as cinema exhibits a stubborn antipathy to novels, the novel here emerges as a medium antithetical to film, because language has laws of its own, and literary characters are inseparable from the language which forms them.

In one respect, however, the writing of a novel is comparable to the making of a film. When we watch a film we seem to be seeing 'things as they are' in reality. We need to remember that a director determines how we see these things. This reality, by making use of the camera, tricks us. The novelist, on the other hand, has a far greater range of choices open to him or her than does the film director, and we conventionally refer to

that particular selection which he or she makes as the *narrative technique of a particular work*.

Narrative techniques include such matters as the choice of narrator and narrative situation, the creation of a plot, selection and variation of perspective and voice, implied narrative medium, linguistic register and techniques such as Free Indirect Discourse. An author has the story told through the mediation of a *personified narrator*, or he uses an undefined source to make the reader doubtful about whether or not he is dealing with an individualized human source which comes between the author and the reader.

The novelist also uses narrative techniques such as *intradiegetic* (in the world of the story) or *extradiegetic* (outside the world of the story) to specify whether the something is part of or outside of the world of the story. There is also the technique called *omniscient* (all knowing) *narrative* where the novelist decides to give a narrator more knowledge than is possessed by an ordinary human being, and also decides to restrict this knowledge when it suits him. A novelist attributes his or her narrative to a single, personified source at one point in its unfolding, while creating the impression at other such points that it emanates from a more diffuse, less specific or human source.

Framed narratives (named and unnamed narratives) are another important aspect which a novelist uses. Many novelists also feel the need for combining named and unnamed narratives. Intimacy and involvement in the narration makes the narrative seem more familiar, intimate and colloquial, and has a very definite effect on the way a reader responds to the narrative. The use of the present tense gives the scene more *dramatic force*: we feel that we are actually watching the actor doing something, without losing a sense of the guiding presence of the narrator.

In addition to choosing a narrator or narrative source, the novelist selects a stated or implied *medium* for his or her narrative. Of course all novels consist of written, normally printed, words in a literal sense, but a novel at times is presented to the reader as if it were spoken or thought rather

than written, or it is also presented in such a way as to suggest that it is a sort of medium-less narrative – something impossible outside the realm of literature. The novelist also keeps in mind the language-use that is appropriate to a given circumstances. Language in one sense is the medium of a novel as paint is the medium of a painting, but this is a poor comparison as painters do not generally represent paint where as a novelist often represents language.

Novelists at times represent a character's consciousness in such a way that it gives the reader knowledge of his/her consciousness, without any sense of this information being told or transmitted. The novelist also pays heed to ways of telling that has lots to do with a reader's response. Different narrators, and different narrative media change a story; they affect not just how we are told something, but what we are told, and what attitude we take towards what we are told. For some novelists, narrative involves such elements as *complicity, intrusion and intimacy* – all of which are normally instantly recognized by readers.

Choosing the right relationship between the narrated events, characters and the reader is essential for the success of fiction. A narrative that a novelist chooses is either *recollective* or *dramatic*. Use of *future narrative* helps in many ways where we are given the impression that the narrative knows what events are to happen, in a sense that they exist already in completed form. The use of the present tense in the narrative gives a sense of immediacy.

The craft of the novel has its history, and different narrative techniques emerge at different times in response to changes in the way people live and think. Thus the rise of the epistolary novel in the eighteenth century cannot be understood apart from the great importance of letter-writing at that time, while the emergence of the stream of consciousness novel in the twentieth century has to be related to the development of modern psychology and the increasing interest in mental operations that accompany it.

There are some important elements in assessing the significance of a particular narrative technique that novelists draw their attention to - changes in the dominant modes of human communication, the effect of different world-views, philosophies and ideologies, changes in relationship patterns and habits, and larger changes in human life and modes of consciousness.

Novelists also use the technique of *stream of consciousness and internal monologue*. The integral monologue implies the use of language, as if an individual is talking to himself or herself which presupposes a certain amount of consciousness of what is going on in person's mind. *Free Indirect Discourse*, 'represented speech and thought', and 'narrated monologue' are some techniques used to distinguish between what a narrator says and what a character thinks or verbalizes. The use of the grammar of third-person utterance is made to present us with a character's speech or thought. *Free Indirect Discourse* (FID) makes use of grammatical or linguistic evidence. This involves seeing FID as a midway point between Direct and Indirect Discourse, or as a combination of the two which blends their grammatical characteristics in a distinctive mix.

There is also called a *colour narrative* which involves the 'colouring' of a piece of third-person narrative with words, phrases, and expressions which a reader associates with the verbal habits of a particular character. The technique is closely related to a method used to mock, mimic, or satirize others in speech. The term *tone* refers to the attitude of the narrator towards what is narrated, whereas *mode* refers to the point of view of the narrator. Not only are there technical changes in the way novelists learn to create and reveal characters, but also changes in human beings outside literature often inspire novelists to use new methods to produce a new sort of character.

Some of the differences that exist between literary characters are major and minor characters, flat and round characters. There is also a term known as *synonymous character* used especially for experimental novels; these possess the same characteristics as prose fiction. The term is very close to the more old-fashioned 'stock character'. *Projection characters* are characters where novelists project aspects of themselves. Different

types of characters are portrayed by the novelist for a range of different purposes: they can be used to tell a story, to exemplify a belief, to contribute to a symbolic pattern in a novel, or merely to facilitate a particular plot development. There are different ways of characterization: it can be established by action, through characters thought or conversation. In doing this, a novelist can use symbols or images to reveal and develop a character.

Plot is another important element a novelist uses to make his work more interesting. The plot of a novel may move backwards (*analepsis*) or forwards (*prolepsis*) in time, instead of proceeding steadily forward in chronological order. This division is termed as *anachrony*. A novel's plot may include gaps, omission, absences. These are referred to collectively as *ellipses*. The purpose of this is that the reader's attention is drawn to the fact that something that is known to the narrator is withheld from him or her. By doing so the novelist gets the reader's imagination working.

A more technical classification of plot provides us with terms such as 'picaresque/episodic' 'well-made', 'multiple'. The element of duration is also of great significance. A novelist may use fifty pages to tell us about one day or use five pages to tell about fifty years. Structure involves a sense of some sort of pattern: completion, reiteration, contrast, repetition, complementarity - all of these and others can be invoked by a work's structure. A suitable setting can also be a crucial factor in the creation of mood or moral environment. A complex novel is likely to be susceptible to analysis in terms of many different, perhaps interlocking, themes. Thus, a novelist makes use of different possibilities available to create desired effects.

While analysing a comparative study of the novel and film we need to look at many aspects like the medias' ability to handle time and space in which consciousness absorbs the signs of both language and the photographed image. If language has become a protagonist in the novel, there is a sense in which time has become its foil. Like the novel and film, language and time begin in apparent harmony and end in hostility.

The novel and the film differ in their modes of consciousness. The novel has tended to treat more and more from external action to internal thought, from plot to character, from social to psychological realities. It is the reduction of the novel to experiences which can be verified in the immediate consciousness of the novelist which E. M. Forster calls "hidden life". The hidden life that appears in external signs is hidden no longer, and has entered the realm of action: it is the function of the novelist to reveal the hidden life at its source. On the other hand the film, having only arrangements of space to work with, cannot render thought, for the moment thought is externalized it is no longer thought. By its visual perception the film can lead us to thought but it cannot show us thought directly. It can show us characters thinking, feeling, and speaking but it cannot show us their thoughts and feelings.

Another important aspect is chronological time. The novel has three tenses; the film has only one. From this follows almost everything else one can say about time in both media. Chronological time in the novel exists on three primary levels: the chronological duration of the narrator's time; and the chronological span of the narrative events. The film is saved at least partly from this conflict because one of the levels is omitted. Since the camera is always the narrator, we need concern ourselves only with the chronological duration of the viewing and the time-span of the narrative events. Even when a narrator appears in the film, the basic orientation does not change.

Besides *fictional* time in the novel, there is also called *psychological* time both in the novel as well as film. In the novel the line of dialogue stands naked and alone, in the film; the spoken words are attached to its spatial image. The film then cannot render the attributes of thought; but it can find adequate equivalents for the kind of psychological time which is characterized by variations in rate; and it approaches, but ultimately fails, like the novel to render time flux. The failure of both media ultimately reverts to root differences between the structures of art and consciousness.

This analysis however permits a usable destination between the two media. Both novel and film are time arts, but the formative principle in the novel is *time*, the formative principle in the film is *space*. Where the novel takes its space for granted and forms its narrative in a complex of time values, the film takes its time for granted and forms its narrative in arrangement of space. Both film and novel create the illusion of psychologically distorted time and space, but neither destroys time or space. The novel renders the illusion of space by going from point to point in time; the film renders time by going from point to point in space. The novel tends to abide by, yet explore, the possibilities of psychological law; the film tends to abide by yet explore, the possibilities of physical law.

Where the twentieth-century novel has achieved the shock of novelty by explosions of words, the twentieth-century film has achieved a comparable shock by explosions of the visual image. Like two intersecting lines, novel and film, like all exemplary art, have within them conventions that make them comprehensible to a given audience. At this remove, what is peculiarly filmic and what is novelistic cannot be converted without destroying an integral part of each.

An art whose limits depend on a moving mass audience and industrial production is bound to differ from an art whose limits depend on language, a limited audience and individual creation. In short, the filmed novel, in spite of certain resemblances, will inevitably become a different artistic entity from the novel on which it is based.

Writers' tools like painters', can have a marked effect on the work. The main advantage of the novel as a written work is its ability to revise. All the high – tech advantages are intriguing. It is not the technical superiority of print or bound pages that will prove the lasting value of the book but rather its physical reality. It is only a matter of time before digital technology provides the resolution and visual power of the film. What it can never provide is the “*thingness*” of a book. As Wallace Stevens puts it:

“In an increasingly virtual and abstract world, these physical objects, with unique weight, feel and smell will be increasingly prized”.

Finally, one of the novel's greatest assets is its ability to manipulate words. Films have words, too, of course, but not usually in such profusion and never with the concrete insistence of the printed page. If painting under the influence of film has tended toward design, then the novel is approaching poetry as it redoubles its attention to itself and celebrates its material: language.

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- * Sr. Sujata Marvi CCR is a student of the TYBA class at St. Andrew's College.