

Comparative Analysis of the Kite Runner: Novel and Film Adaptation

Areej Ibrahim Al Khalaf

Institute of Graduate Studies, English Language and Literature Department, Istanbul Aydin University, Turkey, Istanbul

Email: [aroeyalang\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:aroeyalang[at]gmail.com)

Abstract: *This study conducts a comparative analysis of Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner and its 2007 film adaptation. Using postmodernism, structuralism, and hybridity theories, it explores the similarities and differences in narrative techniques between the novel and the film. The study concludes that the novel surpasses the film in creative merit and narrative depth.*

Keywords: The Kite Runner, Film Adaptation, Comparative Analysis, Narrative Techniques, Literary Adaptation

1. Introduction

The adaptation process has opened the door to a new way of viewing any literary piece. The world is full of mirrors, each with its own reflection of the same text, and joining this world as an audience means having an infinite number of interpretations, perspectives, points of view, means, and objectives. What I mean by these mirrors are adaptations of one novel, play, or book, even a short story, into another form of art, primarily cinema. Each of these mirrors has a unique perspective on the chosen text, which can either enrich it or spoil it. This is the general concept of adaptation, particularly in the transformation of a written text into a cinematic rendition. So, when any literary piece is projected onto a screen, we should ask ourselves the following questions: Is literature superior to cinema? Should we analyze a film in the same manner we interpret a literary piece, or should we draw parallels? Should we deal with the first (cinematic form) as art that creates a new image of the original one, or as a business whose goal is to make a profit while spreading a certain ideology that could be political, cultural, social, or any other hidden messages in a certain society in order to create a fundamental shift that shakes the standards, norms, and traditions of that community? Is the term adaptation a synthesis of art and science? There are numerous questions that should be addressed in this topic. As an academic scholar, the main issue here is that assessing the cinematic version of the original text must be done in a scientific and systematic manner by applying specific theories to this or that artistic visual work. This allows us to understand the underlying significance of current critical thinking and intermediality as well.

The purpose of this article is to conduct a comparative analysis of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and its film adaptation, examining how narrative techniques and thematic elements are portrayed in each medium and exploring the impact of these differences on the audience's perception and interpretation.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the field of adaptation theory, offering insights into how literary

works are transformed into cinematic narratives. It highlights the challenges and creative decisions involved in adapting a complex novel to film, enhancing our understanding of narrative techniques across different media.

The first step will be to provide a general analysis and summary of the text and its cinematic rendition, with an emphasis on making a brief comparison between the two, followed by an attempt to apply some adaptation theories to the cinematic version, then focusing on the film's weaknesses and strengths, and finally, as a reader of the original text and a viewer of its cinematic rendition, I will present my own justification for believing that the film is superior.

2. The Kite Runner: The Book and The Novel

The Kite Runner as a novel was written by Afghan American writer Khalid Hosseini and published in 2003 then adopted as a movie in 2007 under the same name, directed by Mark Forster and David Benioff as the screen player. The book was considered as a bestseller and translated into different languages around the world. Both the book and the movie are based on the same storyline and sharing the same main themes of regret, betrayal, war's destructive impact and the idea of recovering from a sin. we feel that in Rahim's Khan words (the best friend of Amir's father) when he says to Amir "You should come back, there is a way to be good again" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 1).

In both the book and the film, we see the close relationship between the two children characters, Hassan, the Hazard servant's son, and Amir, the son of a well-known affluent man in Kabul. We can see how Hassan was a true and loyal friend to Amir, who ultimately abandoned and betrayed him when he was being raped by Assef. The story has a combination of human faces with historical background or context accompanied with the tragic image of war from Afghanistan during the 1980s and 1990s with the domination of Taliban and the way they ruled the country through the language of blood and terrorism, that period witnessed a dramatic shift in the way people live and act.

In the story, we see the coward Amir abandoning his friend to be abused and raped by the criminal teenager Assef while doing nothing for him, and from that point on, the story has taken a new turn due to the psychological consequences on Amir's reactions throughout the rest of the story as he tries to escape from his sin. This appeared when Amir accused Hassan of being a thief, forcing him to leave his life forever in an attempt to forget his sin of abandoning Hassan in the most important and serious moments when he needed him.

Another similarity and a merit in both the book and the film is the easiness in moving between the past and the present without feeling the emotional distance or disconnection. For example, in the novel, the narration carries you from the present to the past and then back to the present without leaving you confused. In the film, we observe that when Rahim Khan calls Amir after many years apart, we are transported back to the 1970s in Kabul while also being aware that they are now in the year 2000 in America and still having the feel of enjoyment.

3. The Main Differences

Talking about the similarities imposes us to search for the differences, and we know that the cinematic version always appeals our senses by the visual and sound effects and the performance of actors. On the other hand, text appeals our minds, imagination, and feelings. In this story a lot of differences we could find, some of these changes spoiled the work from one side while other changes added a magical effect to the original work making it more powerful and interesting. Here I'm going to mention some of the main changes that caught my eyes while watching the cinematic version.

Firstly, the cleft lip of Hassan was not mentioned at all in the movie, we did not see any mention to this important physical trait in Hasan's face. Secondly, in the film the main protagonist young Amir (Zakaria Ibrahimi as the original actor) moved to America when he was only 13 years old which is different from the book as he was 18 not 13 which may create a point of confusion while watching the film after reading the book.

Third, the language utilized in the film is a blend of English, Persian Dari, Urdu, and Pashto, while in the novel there is no such mix of languages or dialects, and this may be to make reading the text easier for the readers by the author. Fourth, Assef's raping of Hassan was not fully presented as it was in the book. Because of the sexual nature of this painful time, which contrasts with the traditional society, the author gives us with many details of the action in the book, making us feel the moment more than the film, and this could be a positive trait rather than a weakness, as I believe.

Fifth, the funeral scene of Amir's father in the film depicts the Christian method of burial rather than the Islamic method, which begs the question, "Why did the director do that?" What is the point of generating a scene that isn't highlighted in the

original text in the same way? Sixth, Soraya's confession to Amir regarding her previous romantic relationship with a man, occurred over the phone rather than in face to face, as depicted in the film. Was it dropped by the filmmaker by chance or on purpose? Finally, we did not see the moment of Sohrab committing suicide when his uncle told him that he would send him to an orphanage temporarily, despite the fact that it was portrayed in length in the novel. We lived Amir's fear after discovering that, his downfall, remorse, grief, prayers, we could visualize the scene of blood everywhere in the bathroom, it was truly a vibrant scene and completely removed in the film. Again, the question of WHY? arises.

4. Theory of Adaptation in the Kite Runner

Because the fundamental definition of adaptation is, the process of interpreting the original text based on at least one perspective, this definition raises the following question: To what extent does the film adhere to the text? In other words, if the film is not faithful to the original book from which it was adapted, what is the reason for this? Slethaug links adaptation to cultural aims in his book *Adaptation Theory and Criticism*. In the book, the author states "adaptation is systemic in culture and not limited to the movement from literature to film" (Slethaug, 2014, p. 5).

Why we adapt? Here we have another reason for adaptation illustrated by Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn in the book *Theory of Adaptation* (2013). In their book, it is stated that "As noted earlier, their aim might well be to economically and artistically supplant the prior works" (Hutcheon & O'Flynn, 2013, p. 20). Deborah Cartmell also gives the following premise in her study of adaptation in her book *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation* (2012). She states "Adaptations are exclusively cinematic, involving only films that are based on novels or plays or stories" (Cartmell, 2012, p. 133).

5. Modernity in the Kite Runner

When we observe the word Modernity, we immediately associate it with the idea of developing new forms, new techniques, new perspectives and new interpretations. From a modernist point of view. When a director is inspired by the original text and, he or she adds his own sense of originality, and he finally creates a film that is distinct, unique, and independent by itself. This point was achieved in *The Kite Runner* because Khalid Hussein reflects the historical image of Afghanistan during a dramatic time of change, with an emphasis on the terrorist strength of the Taliban there, making the film amazing in expressing the entire picture of how people were suffering there then the film makers and the director added modern and technological techniques like the visual effects in order to add a new dimension and influence to the original work.

6. Structuralism in the Kite Runner

The main principle of Structuralism is the death of the author, which means that when we read the text, we aren't interested in wondering what the author means by this or that; in other words, the text speaks for itself, and we imagine the story based on various interpretations and perspectives, rather than being locked into one. As a result, the author or writer is either absent or silent. In the novel *The Kite Runner*, Khalid Hussein describes the scene and presents some facts about the culture, characters, and setting while in the film, the director created his own work based on his perspective rather than the author's voice; and we, the audience, interpret it based on our own perceptions, not those of the writer or the director. For example, some will perceive Amir as a guilty and coward, while others will sympathize with him, thus it all relies on your personal opinion as a reader of the novel or a viewer of the film.

7. Postmodernism and Refusing Originality in the Kite Runner

We know that one of the fundamental characteristics of postmodern literature is the loss of faith, morals, values, and everything associated to religion. We can see this more in the character of Amir's father, who regards all religious men as something that should be eliminated from community, because the story takes place in the 1970s and afterward which is linked with the post-modern era. The era that witnessed a gradual shift in the history of humankind, led many people to create new cultural values mostly away from moral or ethical standards and his occurs particularly in the western world more than the eastern world. Amir's father highlights his postmodern character when he says to his son when Amir was a kid "*Amir: You'll Never learn anything of value from those bearded idiots.*" (Hussein, 2003, p. 8).

Another postmodern feature in the adapted work is being a way from the dominance of the original source by building new ideas and refusing the notion of originality which finally will create a sense of motion to the text. Slethaug states "*Once a text—literary or cultural—has been adapted, the adaptation and originating source/s enter into a complex relationship in which the original cannot be thought to have all the "presence" and value*" (Slethaug, 2014, p. 28).

8. Hybridity, Ethnic Criticism, and the Notion of Intertextuality in the Kite Runner

In *The Kite Runner* there are many occasions the word Hazara is used as a mark for those who are inferiors, backwards, and less in everything with the lack of identity, social status, mental abilities and even in the physical inferiority (Hassan's cleft lip is an example). During the whole story this word (Hazara), appeared as a reminder to make us separate them from being equal to other groups of the society like Bashtons who are represented by Amir. Hazaras are portrayed as servants, followers for those who are in power despite the fact

that Afghani's society is a mix of different races who live together, interact with each other, and share the same region despite the cultural differences. This notion reminds us with the theory of Hybridity created by Homi Bhabha. In an article titled *Crisis of Cultural Identity in Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner*, Ramesh Adhikary talks about this issue he says "This novel presents the different identities based on two separate ethnical positions, Hazara and Pashtun. These identities are given meaning through the language and symbolic through which they are represented" (Adhikary, 2021, p. 180).

Intertextuality is another theoretical perspective that exists not just between texts, but also between texts and other kinds of art. It is the process of comparing and analyzing one text after having examined another. In *The Kite Runner*, we read the novel and comprehend the main themes and context via the lens of cinema by transforming it into a visual art form. For instance, without watching the film, we couldn't understand the devastation caused by war in Afghanistan. This helps us to grasp to what extinct people were suffering and this is one of the merits of the film as I believe.

9. Political and Economic Analysis

Although the author of the original text and the director of its version, succeeded in depicting the historical image of that period and that society, it also provides a good representation of the role of politics and economy in creating such a dramatic shift in the lives of Amir and his father, which was appeared mostly in the film, and here I'd like to hint to the Marxist literary theory in this respect, since it considers that economic reality is the base of everything meaning that if you have money so you have the power, reputation, domination (politically and socially), and will put you on the top of social hierarchy and when you lose money, you lose your value and identity as a human being. This is clearly what I noticed in Amir's father's fall when he lost his social and political status after leaving Afghanistan, and the difficulties he encountered in assimilating in the new American society, which was showed in both, the film and the novel.

10. Merits and Shortcomings

It is impossible to put the same persons and information from the book into a movie because they are separate mediums with their own uniqueness and creativity. To begin with, the film's strength is that it has provided additional dimension to the original text through the use of visual effects, which has caught a more accurate depiction of what was happening in Afghanistan at the time. We stopped considering or remembering Afghans as a part of the news we used to watch during the war and under Taliban terrorism; instead, we now understand their problems better and realize their issues more, we see, we feel, and we touch the facts. Also, some actors, such as Hassan, played their roles more than perfectly. The young Hassan (Ahmad Khan), makes me cry when I see him, forcing all the painful moments that I didn't experience while

reading the novel. His innocence filled my heart with love and compassion, and his acting increased my sympathy towards him more and more.

On the other hand, because most movies are roughly two hours long, there are numerous incidents in the book that are completely removed in the film, maybe to deliver a message or to create enjoyment, which impacts the faithfulness to the original text. A further weakness I observed in the film was the opening scene or the first moments of the love story between Amir and Soraya, which I couldn't feel in the film because in the book you can sense the instant love between the lines because it's a genuine narrative, however in the film nothing touched my heart. Unlike in the book, Amir expresses no emotion or tears in the film, instead he lives in regret and shame the entire time. Even the sense of atonement in attempting to be good again was insufficient to persuade the audience. Finally, several moments were exaggerated in terms of violence, such as the execution scene, which was full of violence, and shooting out Assef's left eye with Sohrab's slingshot was terrible.

11. Conclusion

In conclusion, this comparative analysis of *The Kite Runner* novel and its film adaptation reveals that while both mediums effectively convey the story's core themes, the novel offers greater depth in narrative and character development. The study underscores the importance of understanding the inherent differences between literature and cinema, and how these influence the interpretation of a story in its transition from page to screen.

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Author Profile



Areej Ibrahim Al khalaf received bachelor degree in English Language and Literature from Alalbait university in Jordan in 2007 and master degree in English Teaching Methods from Yarmouk University, Jordan in 2016. Worked in the ministry of education in

Kuwait as a high school English teacher from 2008 to 2013. Currently a master student in Istanbul Aydin University in English Language and Literature.