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CONTENTS:

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Block- I

UNIT- 1
REALISM IN CINEMA

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1.1 Objectives

By the end of this unit, the learner will be able to

- *Learn* about the notion of realism;
- *Understand* how realism works in cinema;
- *Identify* cinematic techniques that create 'reality effect';
- *Compare* montage and mis-en-scene as two modes of depicting reality.

1.2 Introduction

Realism, as described by M. H. Abrams, can be understood in two key ways: first, as a specific literary movement that took hold in the nineteenth century, with key figures like Honoré de Balzac in France, George Eliot in England, and William Dean Howells in America. Second, it is also used to designate a broader mode of representing human life and experience that has recurred in various

literary eras (Abrams 269). The realist writers of the nineteenth century sought to depict the ordinary lives of people with as much fidelity to reality as possible, avoiding the embellishments and idealizations often found in earlier romantic and sentimental literature. In drama, this meant a shift away from grand, heroic figures and sensational plots, and toward everyday characters and situations that reflected the complexity of human behavior and social interaction.

The roots of Realism can be traced back to the 1830s in France, although it gathered momentum by the 1850s and became a defining trend in European literature by the latter half of the nineteenth century. The French were pivotal in the development of this movement, with major contributors including Gustave Flaubert and Honoré de Balzac. Realism arose as a response to the over-romanticized, idealized portrayals of life that dominated Romanticism. It sought to depict life as it was, without embellishment, focusing on the commonplace and often harsh realities of existence.

The term "Realism" was first used in the 1820s but gained prominence as a literary strategy in the 1830s. By this time, a reaction against Romantic ideals, which emphasized emotion, imagination, and the glorification of the past, had set in. This reaction was particularly strong in Germany, where a group of radical writers known as the Young Germans, including Heinrich Heine and Carl Gutzkow, voiced their opposition to Romanticism. They also rejected the classical notion of art for art's sake, advocating for a literature that reflected political and social realities.

Realism was not confined to France and Germany. A tendency toward realism emerged in various parts of Europe and America, starting in the 1840s. In Russia, writers such as Fyodor Dostoevsky

and Leo Tolstoy became key figures of the movement. In England, George Eliot and Charles Dickens are considered among the foremost realists, while in America, William Dean Howells and Henry James exemplified the movement. Although Realism was not a monolithic or entirely uniform movement, its fundamental goal was to offer an accurate, objective portrayal of the external world and human experience.

Realism as a movement rejected the idealization found in Romanticism and Classicism, striving for a truthful, unembellished depiction of life. Realist works often feature ordinary people from different social strata, especially the working class and the lower-middle class, presenting their daily struggles in a straightforward and unidealized manner. Realism focused on the present and contemporary life, avoiding nostalgic longings for an idealized past.

In cinema , realism works both at the level of narrative and image/picture. Cinema brings together physical realism and psychological realism and makes them interpenetrable. In a technical sense, all cinema can be shown to involve a certain kind of realism in so far as this physical reality is concerned. But historically, realism in cinema came as a distinctive movement that arose out of a certain socio-historical situation and that enabled the filmmakers to choose a certain set of techniques for film-making. Manipulation of the camera and techniques of editing, use of colour and sound and other elements go together to create a sense of reality in whatever is shown on the screen. Like the assumption of the technique of omniscient narration in novels give us an undisturbed sense of an authentic reality seemingly unmediated by the creator/novelist, a film-maker also uses the techniques ranging from cinematography to editing and light and sound to project a cinematic image as 'real'. In other words, these techniques used in realistic

cinema generally keep the audience glued to an illusion'of life, not inspire any scepticism about the authenticity of things portrayed.

1.2 Creation of Illusion or Creation of Realities?

Seamless realism in cinema involves the deployment of various cinematic techniques to disguise the illusion of realism and create what Christian Metz calls the 'reality effect' (Hayward 311-312). The use of lighting, colour, sound, editing, and camera movement is meticulously orchestrated to sustain this illusion. The spectator is drawn into the cinematic world, experiencing events as if they were unfolding naturally, without overt acknowledgment of the constructed nature of filmic representation. Thus, the study of realism in cinema is essentially an exploration of these techniques and their role in producing the effect of reality.

However, in constructing this illusion, certain aspects of reality are inevitably suppressed. Another strain of realism, as represented by André Bazin, challenges this seamless construction. Bazin contends that cinema does not merely suppress reality but also creates new truths and realisms. Unlike the self-conscious stylization seen in certain avant-garde movements, this form of realism seeks to minimize the filmmaker's mediatory role, allowing for a direct engagement between the spectator and the cinematic world. Techniques such as location shooting, natural lighting, and deep focus cinematography serve to enhance this sense of immediacy and autonomy, providing the spectator with the freedom to interpret the film independently. This perspective is further elaborated in a separate section titled *Montage and Mise-en-Scène: Two Modes of Depicting Reality*.

A significant development in the pursuit of cinematic realism was the introduction of synchronized sound. Early cinema was a silent visual medium, but the quest for realism necessitated the integration of sound with moving images. Technical innovations were introduced in all aspects of film production to achieve this synchronization. The challenge lay in developing a system where sound could be recorded directly onto film and reproduced in sync with the image. The breakthrough came when sound could be converted into light beams and recorded alongside the visual track, with a projector capable of converting these beams back into sound.

The transition to synchronized sound, however, did not immediately enhance realism but instead introduced several challenges. The first hurdle was making sound audible and amplifiable. The invention of the audion tube by Lee De Forest in 1906 provided a means of amplification, followed by his creation of the Phonofilm sound system in 1921. Around the same time, Western Electric developed the sound-on-disc process, which allowed for synchronized playback of recorded sound alongside projected images. The advent of *The Jazz Singer* (1927), the first feature film to incorporate synchronized dialogue as a storytelling device, marked a turning point. This success was followed by *The Singing Fool* (1928), solidifying the commercial viability of synchronized sound in cinema.

However, early sound technology imposed restrictions on filmmaking techniques, often undermining the realism it sought to enhance. The whirring noise of cameras necessitated heavy soundproofing, making them less mobile. As a result, camera movement was drastically restricted, leading to static and visually dull scenes. Actors had to remain close to hidden microphones to ensure audibility, affecting naturalistic performance and blocking.

Furthermore, early dialogue recordings often failed to replicate the spontaneity and rhythm of real-life speech, making conversations sound artificial.

Over time, technological advancements resolved many of these issues, gradually enhancing the reality effect. The introduction of multiple microphones, the use of boom microphones mounted on mechanical arms, and the development of sound mixing technology allowed for greater flexibility in recording and balancing audio. These innovations restored the fluidity of cinematic storytelling, integrating sound seamlessly into the mise-en-scène rather than disrupting it.

Today, sophisticated sound design, artificial intelligence, and advanced digital recording techniques enable filmmakers to capture an extraordinary range of auditory detail—from the faint hum of insects to the deafening explosion of a bomb. Similarly, innovations in camera technology, including lenses with varying focal lengths and fluid camera operations, have expanded the visual scope of cinematic realism. High-definition imaging and digital post-production techniques further refine the illusion of reality, blurring the boundaries between cinematic fabrication and lived experience.

Thus, the study of realism in cinema is not merely about how reality is represented but also about how cinema itself constructs new realities. The interplay between illusion and authenticity remains central to cinematic storytelling, shaping how audiences perceive, engage with, and interpret the world on screen.

1.4 Italian Neorealism

Critics tracing the history of novelistic realism often look back to the seventeenth-century writer Daniel Defoe. Writers such as Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding marked a departure from the aesthetics of old-fashioned romances. The broader shift from romance to realism is now well established. However, the novel was not merely an 'inverted' romance. The challenge of literary realism, therefore, lies in the relationship between the literary work and the reality it seeks to imitate. Philosophically, realism was grounded in the belief that individuals can discover truth through sensory experience. This realist enterprise was backed by the philosophical school of empiricism, while the vast potential of human observation was evident in the numerous narratives of exploration and travel across the globe.

The first major realist experiment in cinema emerged in what we now recognize as Italian *neorealism*. I have deliberately used the term *experiment* here. In literature, modernism represented a departure from realism in many ways. However, in cinema, the modernist credo was to express compelling social truths that were otherwise suppressed. In Italy, Mussolini was a strong patron of cinema, founding a large film studio and a film school. He banned American films and shielded Italian productions from foreign competition (*A Short History of the Movies*, 340). Under the Fascist regime, depictions of society, sex, art, and politics were considered

problematic, while any portrayal of economic hardships, such as unemployment, was strictly prohibited.

After the Second World War and the fall of Fascism, Italian filmmakers were finally able to address urgent social and political issues—albeit with limited resources. In the liberal atmosphere that followed, there was greater access to global cinema, including American films, and filmmakers began experimenting. Though financial constraints and shortages of film stock posed significant challenges, these limitations were transformed into creative opportunities. Traditionally, achieving clear visual images required controlled lighting and studio shooting. However, Roberto Rossellini, the foremost Neorealist, opted for non-professional actors—laborers and peasants—and introduced location shooting. These choices were not driven by artistic self-consciousness but were pragmatic responses to resource constraints. The result was remarkable: a raw, immersive realism that remains essential viewing for any student of cinema today.

The first major Italian Neorealist film was *Open City* (1945). In *Germany Year Zero* (1947), Rossellini explored the hunger and unemployment of post-war Germany, further solidifying the movement's commitment to social realism. It was , However, Cesare Zavattini, who defined the key tenets of neorealism.(By the way, Zavatini wrote most of the scrpipts of Vittorio de Sica'sfims, including *Bicycle Thieves*.) a key principle was to show things as they *are*, not as they *seem*. Apparently self-explanaotry as it might seem, this principle in fact allowed the filmmakers to pursue truth luing beneath the veneer of appearance. It involves an exposition of reality lying behind the veil of bourgeois myth.

Location shooting was another radical principle of Neorealism. As mentioned earlier, a studio setup—with its controlled lighting and

sound—ensures a polished image. In contrast, lighting and shadow configurations in real locations depend on the vagaries of nature, which, paradoxically, enhance the authenticity of the filmed image. Neorealist films uncover a bleak post-war reality through everyday sights, stripped of the glamour and artificiality of so-called *aesthetic* cinema. In other words, the choice of location shooting was instrumental in depicting the social crisis of the time. Equally radical was the depiction of ordinary people rather than professional actors. Fine cinematic acting was not a prerequisite; all that was needed was the face of an ordinary person whose temperament suited the character—someone who also represented the common man. Neorealist filmmakers explored the artistic potential of non-professionals, incorporating their natural gait and gestures into cinematic performances. DeSica, for instance, was offered millions to cast Cary Grant as Antonio in *Bicycle Thieves*, but he chose a non-actor instead. What was gained was not artificial polish but authenticity, not pretension but raw human emotion—an earthy realism that resonated with audiences. The squalid spaces of homes and streets, the worn-out clothes, and the bare walls were captured as they were, intensifying the sense of crisis that permeated people's lives.

Depiction of the everyday rather than the exceptional is another defining feature of Neorealist films. Conventional cinema, which typically centers on grand narratives and dramatic action, often discards the familiar and the mundane. Neorealism, however, brings everyday life back to the screen, imbuing ordinary moments with new significance. The most important function of these everyday details is their ability to articulate deeper socio-historical truths. A striking example of this is the scene of an old man selling his binoculars to cope with poverty. On the surface, it is a simple act— an aging man parting with an object he likely once used for leisure

or work. But beneath this small detail lies a profound commentary on the socio-economic crisis engulfing post-war society. His act of selling the binoculars symbolizes the loss of vision—both literally and metaphorically—of a generation struggling to navigate a world marked by economic despair. It reflects the harsh reality of individuals forced to surrender even their modest possessions in the face of poverty, encapsulating the broader struggle of the working class in the aftermath of war.

The conflict between the common people and the immense social, economic and political forces constitutes a common theme running across many Neorealist films. Despite the social crisis and squalor and economic hardships, the central figures in many films, especially in the 1940s were shown to assert humanity. From 1950s, in the face of newly stabilized post-war Europe, the Italian films turned more psychological and less sociological. Polished scripts, carefully constructed sets, more conventional fictional structures came to be part of filmmaking.

Luchino Visconti's *Obsession* (1942), an adaptation of James M. Cain's novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, employs squalid settings and realistic human figures as the backdrop for its intense psychological drama, foreshadowing Neorealism. However, Visconti focuses on personal struggles rather than using social reality as a defining force in his narratives. In his films, social reality serves as the milieu rather than the central subject. Among the three major Neorealist directors, Visconti's approach is marked by a more sensuous and formal style in camera movement and composition. In *La terra trema*, his use of long takes, sweeping pans, and an acute fixation on characters' environments and tools is particularly striking. These techniques not only enhance the film's realism but also immerse the viewer in the daily struggles of its

protagonists, capturing the rhythms of their existence with extraordinary depth.

SAQ:

Please watch Vittorio de Sica's Bicycle Thieves, and omment on the representation of social realism in the film. (200 words)

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1.5 Montage and Mise-en-Scène: Two Modes of Depicting Reality

Representation of human reality has been, like other art forms, a constant preoccupation of cinema. Soviet cinema exemplified a great experiment in storytelling, with innovative filmmakers such as Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Dziga Vertov advancing the very process of depicting reality. Their primary focus was not merely on the construction of individual images but on the combinatory axis of cinematic images. Pudovkin famously stated, "The foundation of film art is editing" (*A Short History of Movies*, 175). Through experience and experimentation, Soviet filmmakers and theorists developed a distinctive theory of cinema, one shaped by both aesthetic considerations and practical constraints. Due to the shortage of raw film stock, they devised ways to maximize its use, which necessitated that shots be brief and meticulously planned.

Lev Kuleshov conducted influential experiments in drafting scenarios, editing, and re-editing existing film strips to explore the

impact of juxtaposed images. Inspired by D.W. Griffith's innovative use of cuts in *Intolerance*, Soviet filmmakers discovered how diverse shots could be combined to generate new meanings and accelerate narrative progression. One of Kuleshov's most famous experiments involved is cutting the neutral face of actor Ivan Mozhukhin with different images—a bowl of hot soup, a child in a coffin, and a girl playing with a toy bear. In each case, audiences interpreted the actor's expression differently, perceiving hunger, sorrow, or joy, respectively. This discovery solidified the theory of montage: two shots, when placed in sequence, could create a third, composite meaning greater than the sum of their parts.

From Griffith, the Soviets also learned the narrative functions of cutting—how to structure action-reaction sequences and psychological drama through edits. However, they expanded upon these techniques by exploring the associative potential of cuts, introducing cinematic metaphors through montage. A famous example is the opening of Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*, where the hurried movement of factory workers is cross-cut with a flock of sheep, symbolizing dehumanized labor. Kuleshov also experimented with how the juxtaposition of shots could manipulate an audience's emotional response, affecting the perceived tempo, speed, or slowness of a scene. This led to the development of tonal montage, wherein the rhythm of cuts conveys mood as effectively as performance or dialogue.

Eisenstein, in particular, demonstrated the power of montage to create intellectual and emotional effects. His *Strike* opens with dynamic shots of whirring machines, factory whistles, and tracking shots of industrial landscapes, constructing a visual language that conveys the energy of mass labor and impending rebellion. One of the most iconic uses of montage in cinema occurs in *Battleship*

Potemkin (1925), where Eisenstein intercuts shots of three different lion statues—one sleeping, one sitting, and one roaring—to create the illusion of a stone lion awakening and roaring in defiance, symbolizing the revolutionary fervor of the sailors. Pudovkin, in contrast, focused on narrative continuity, using editing to ensure fluid scene construction in the tradition of Griffith.

While montage emphasizes the collision of images to produce meaning, **mise-en-scène** refers to everything within the frame: set design, lighting, composition, movement, and spatial relationships. If montage relies on cuts to generate meaning, mise-en-scène emphasizes the internal arrangement of cinematic space. Classical Hollywood cinema, particularly filmmakers like Orson Welles and Jean Renoir, favored deep-focus cinematography and long takes over rapid cutting, allowing meaning to emerge through visual depth and the movement of actors within the frame.

The introduction of CinemaScope in the 1950s significantly expanded the possibilities for mise-en-scène. Utilizing anamorphic lenses, CinemaScope squeezed wide images onto standard 35mm film, which were later stretched back to their original proportions during projection. This technological innovation allowed for expansive compositions, enabling filmmakers to stage elaborate scenes in a single frame rather than relying on frequent cuts. The Cahiers du Cinéma group celebrated Cinema Scope as a transformative development, as it encouraged a return to long takes and deep staging, emphasizing visual storytelling through mise-en-scène rather than montage.

Directors like Nicholas Ray and Akira Kurosawa exploited the potential of CinemaScope by crafting intricate blocking and choreography within wide compositions. Kurosawa, for example, used lateral movement across the widescreen frame in *Seven*

Samurai (1954) to maintain dynamic action without excessive editing. Similarly, in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), Nicholas Ray used the expanded frame to depict psychological tension between characters by positioning them at varying depths within the scene.

Stop to Consider:

The **Kuleshov Experiment**, conducted by Soviet filmmaker **Lev Kuleshov** in the 1910s, demonstrated the power of film editing in shaping audience perception. As I have already mentioned, Kuleshov intercut the same neutral expression of an actor with different images—a bowl of soup, a child's coffin, and a woman—which led viewers to attribute different emotions (hunger, sorrow, desire) to the actor's face. This experiment highlighted the **Kuleshov Effect**, proving that the meaning in cinema is constructed through montage rather than individual shots.

1.6 Summing Up

Cinema has never been confined to a single format of realism; rather, it has continuously sought new expressions and explored fresh possibilities in cinematic language. The French New Wave, for instance, serves as a case in point, with filmmakers like François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard breaking away from classical Hollywood realism and conventional narrative structures. Techniques such as the use of handheld cameras, jump cuts, the avoidance of significant action, and the rejection of the seamless realism of traditional aesthetics were employed by Godard with remarkable effect.

On a deeper level, cinema has always aspired to be realistic, yet the very notion of reality has evolved over time. While the objectivity

of the external world was once considered an undisputed fact, reality also crucially depends on human perception and subjectivity. The portrayal of the inner lives of characters with greater authenticity and suggestive techniques has been a persistent concern for directors, leading to the expansion of cinematic language.

In this unit, we have explored various aspects and experiments in realism, examined the relationship between realism and technical innovations in cinema, and discussed relevant films in their respective contexts. Although the topic is vast and invites further discussion, we hope that our analysis has successfully addressed key aspects of realism and fulfilled the objectives outlined at the beginning.

1.7 References and Suggested Readings

- Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*

- Hayward, Susan. *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies*. Routeledge, 2004.

- Mascelli, Joseph V. *The Five C's of Cinematography: Motion Picture Filming Techniques*.Silman-James Press, 1965.

- Mast, Gerald and Bruce F. Kawin. *A Short History of the movies. Sixth Edition*. Allyn and Bacon, 1996.

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UNIT- 2

FRENCH NEW WAVE (CINEMA): AN INTRODUCTION

Unit Structure:

2.1 Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- *learn* about the French New Wave;
- *know* the major characteristics of the movement;
- *analyse* the cinematic techniques of the movement;
- *understand* its influence on contemporary cinema.

2.2 Introduction

The French New Wave, popularly known as Nouvelle Vague, was a seminal cinematic movement that emerged in the late 1950s in Paris.

The movement revolutionized the art of filmmaking, leaving an ineffaceable mark on the history of cinema. Characterized by a deliberate rejection of traditional filmmaking conventions, New Wave filmmakers embarked on a path of experimentation and innovation, driven by a spirit of iconoclasm that sought to challenge and subvert established norms. Some of the key aspects of the movement included innovative story-telling, often featuring non-linear narratives, experimentation with genre, and a focus on character development; location shooting, abandoning traditional studios; handheld camera work, creating a sense of intimacy; and featuring young, rebellious protagonists, reflecting the changing values and attitudes of the time. These innovations not only refreshed the aesthetic of French cinema but also influenced filmmakers worldwide, contributing to a global cinematic renaissance. The French New Wave revolutionized French cinema and also had a significant influence on world cinema. It also paved the way for other cinematic movements, such as the American New Wave and the New Hollywood era.

2.3 French New Wave: An Overview

The French New Wave, also known as Nouvelle Vague, was a revolutionary cinematic movement that emerged in the late 1950s and 1960s, a time of great cultural and social change in France. The country was still processing the devastation of World War II, and the French film industry was struggling to recover. However, this period of upheaval also created a sense of excitement and experimentation, as French critics and filmmakers began to explore new ways of making movies. The movement was primarily characterized by a rejection of traditional filmmaking conventions. It laid significant emphasis on innovation, experimentation, and authorial expression.

The movement was spearheaded by a group of French film critics and cinephiles associated with the influential French film magazine, *Cahiers du cinéma*, founded in 1951 by André Bazin, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, and Joseph-Marie Lo Duca.

The French New Wave movement emerged out of a complex interplay of cultural, social, and historical factors. The influence of Italian Neorealism and American film noir, combined with the cultural and social upheaval of post-war France, created a fertile ground for innovation and experimentation. The French New Wave filmmakers, including Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Éric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette, and Claude Chabrol, among others, employed a range of innovative techniques to create a new kind of cinema. These techniques included the use of portable equipment, location shooting, and a documentary-style approach to filmmaking. As the critics-turned-filmmakers began to produce their own feature films, they faced significant challenges in terms of financial constraints. The rejection of big studios and their resources necessitated the development of innovative, low-budget production methods. This led to the adoption of techniques such as location shooting, natural lighting, and direct sound, which became hallmarks of French New Wave cinema. These aesthetic choices not only reflected the movement's emphasis on realism and spontaneity but also enabled filmmakers to work efficiently and effectively within limited financial means.

Stop to Consider:

The Italian Neorealism and American Film Noir and their influence on the French New Wave:

Italian Neorealism was a cinematic movement that emerged in Italy after World War II. It focused on depicting the everyday lives of ordinary people, often highlighting social and economic issues. Prominent directors associated with this movement include Vittorio De Sica, Luchino Visconti, Federico Fellini, Roberto Rossellini, and Michaelangelo Antonioni among others. Some iconic films of the era include "Bicycle Thieves" (1948) by Vittorio De Sica, "Rome, Open City" (1945) by Roberto Rossellini, and "La Terra Trema" (1948) by Luchino Visconti. On the other hand, Film Noir is a genre of American cinema that originated in the 1940s and 1950s. characterised by its dark and moody visual style, Film Noir often explores themes of crime, corruption, and moral ambiguity. Some classic examples of American Film Noir include "Double Indemnity" (1944), "Out of the Past" (1947), and "Chinatown" (1974).

One of the key factors that contributed to the emergence of the French New Wave was the influence of Italian Neorealism and American film noir. During World War II, France had been cut off from the rest of the world, and films from outside the country were not imported. However, after the war, the proscriptions were lifted, and French cinephiles were suddenly exposed to a flood of new movies from Hollywood and Italy.The films of Italian Neorealists like Vittorio De Sica and Luchino Visconti, with their emphasis on location shooting, non-professional actors, and socially conscious themes, had a profound impact on French filmmakers. The Neorealist movement's focus on everyday life and its use of non-traditional narrative structures also influenced the development of the French New Wave.

At the same time, French critics and filmmakers were also discovering the works of American directors like Orson Welles, Alfred Hitchcock, and John Ford. These directors' innovative use of

camera angles, lighting, and editing, as well as their emphasis on storytelling and visual style, inspired a new generation of French filmmakers. The French New Wave movement was also shaped by the cultural and social context of post-war France. The country was undergoing rapid modernization and urbanization, and the old social hierarchies were being challenged. The French New Wave reflected this sense of change and upheaval, with its emphasis on youth culture, rebellion, and social critique. The movement's key figures, including François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, and Éric Rohmer, were all film critics who had grown up watching American and Italian movies. They were determined to create a new kind of French cinema that was more innovative, more personal, and more connected to the lives of ordinary people.

One of the defining features of the New Wave movement was its bold experimentation with editing techniques, visual styles, and narrative structures, with major emphasis on narrative ambiguity. The films of this movement often raised questions and posed problems, but refused to provide easy answers or resolutions. This approach created a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity, drawing the viewer into the world of the film and encouraging them to engage with the narrative on a more active and interpretive level. A group of visionary critics, including Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, and Éric Rohmer, sought to challenge the dominant studio system and its restrictive control over the creative process. They advocated for the autonomy of the director, championing the concept of "auteur theory," which posits that the director is the primary author of a film, imbuing it with their unique artistic identity.

The New Wave movement was also marked by a profound engagement with the social and political upheavals of the era.

Filmmakers addressed pressing issues such as existentialism, consumerism, and social inequality, often incorporating irony, satire, and critique into their works. Movies like Godard's "Breathless" (1960) and Truffaut's "The 400 Blows" (1959) captured the angst and disillusionment of post-war French youth, while Rohmer's "The Sign of Leo" (1962) explored the tensions between traditional values and modernity. The New Wave's existential themes, in particular, resonated with the intellectual and philosophical currents of the time. Filmmakers drew inspiration from the works of existentialist philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger, exploring the human condition, freedom, and the absurdity of life. This focus on existentialism added depth and complexity to New Wave cinema, elevating it beyond mere entertainment and into the realm of artistic expression.

The influence of the French New Wave can be seen in a number of other cinematic movements and cultures. In the United Kingdom, for example, the "kitchen sink realism" movement of the 1950s and 1960s shared some similarities with the French New Wave, in its emphasis on social realism and its challenge to traditional social conventions. In the United States, the "new sincerity" subculture of the 1980s and 1990s, which emphasized a return to emotional authenticity and vulnerability in filmmaking, can be seen as a response to the ironic and detached tone of much postmodern cinema. The French New Wave also had a significant impact on the development of film theory and criticism. The movement's emphasis on authorial expression and the role of the director as a creative artist helped to establish the concept of the "auteur" as a central category of film analysis. The French New Wave also influenced the development of feminist film theory, with filmmakers such as Agnès Varda and Claire Denis exploring themes of female identity and experience in their work.

The French New Wave was a revolutionary cinematic movement that challenged traditional filmmaking conventions, and influenced a number of other cinematic cultures and movements. The movement's emphasis on auteur theory, creative freedom, and innovative production methods enabled filmmakers to produce a body of work that was characterized by its freshness, spontaneity, and artistic expressiveness. Its emphasis on narrative ambiguity and authorial commentary continues to shape the way we think about and engage with film in the contemporary times. The French New Wave continues to inspire filmmakers and cinephiles alike, who have drawn upon its innovative spirit and aesthetic sensibilities to create their own unique cinematic visions. Many of its films remain classics of world cinema, and its influence can still be seen in contemporary filmmaking. The French New Wave has had a lasting impact on the development of world cinema, influencing generations of filmmakers and continuing to inspire new waves of cinematic innovation.

Stop to Consider:

The Auteur theory:

The American critic, Andrew Sarris, coined the term "Auteur Theory" in 1962. The auteur theory, a central tenet of the French New Wave, drew inspiration from the works of pioneering directors such as Orson Welles and Alfred Hitchcock, who were regarded as exemplars of auteur filmmakers. By emphasizing the director's role as the primary creative force behind a film, the auteur theory empowered filmmakers to exert control over their work, fostering a sense of personal expression and artistic freedom. These directors' innovative storytelling, visual styles, and thematic concerns had a profound impact on the development of the French New Wave.

The notion of the auteur, denoting an artist characterised by a distinct and idiosyncratic approach, has its roots in French film criticism of the late 1940s. The emergence of auteurism as a critical framework can be attributed to the influential writings of Andre Bazin and Alexander Astruc, two French film critics who played a pivotal role in shaping the discourse surrounding film authorship. Bazin argued that a director's unique perspective and artistic vision were the primary factors that imbued a film with its distinctive character. Astruc, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of the director's role in shaping the narrative and visual elements of the film.

The auteur theory posits that a director's body of work exhibits a coherent visual style, thematic preoccupations, and narrative sensibilities. Later, auteur theory began to be applied to other creative fields beyond film direction and often used by professionals like record producers and videogame designers, etc. The expansion of the auteur concept began to reflect the growing recognition of the importance of individual creative vision and agency in various artistic and cultural contexts. The auteur theory remains a vital and influential framework for understanding the role of individual creativity and artistic expression in film and other cultural contexts.

SAQ:

How do you assess the differences between French New Wave and Italian Neorealism? (100 words)

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2.4 Characteristics of the French New Wave movement

The French New Wave movement, which emerged in the late 1950s and flourished until the late 1960s, was characterized by a few primary characteristics that distinguished it from traditional filmmaking. Let us discuss it in detail:

- **Informal and innovative style of filmmaking:**

One of the key characteristics of French New Wave films is their informal style of filmmaking. This approach rejected the more formal and traditional methods of filmmaking that had dominated the French film industry for decades. Instead, French New Wave directors opted for a more spontaneous and improvisational approach, often shooting on location and using natural lighting to create a sense of realism and immediacy. This informal style of filmmaking was reflected in the movement's use of handheld camera work, location shooting, and direct sound recording, which added to the sense of spontaneity and realism. The movement's directors were known for their experimentation with new techniques, such as on-location shooting, natural lighting, and innovative editing styles. The use of on-location shooting, for example, allowed directors to capture the perseverant realism of everyday life, while the use of natural lighting added to the sense of spontaneity and immediacy. The movement's innovative editing styles, which often featured jump cuts, non-linear narrative structures, and other unconventional techniques, helped to create a sense of complexity and experimentation. For instance, Jean-Luc Godard's "Breathless" (1960), features innovative editing and a realistic narrative theme. François Truffaut's "The 400 Blows" (1959), uses location shooting and natural lighting to create a sense of realism and immediacy.

- **Rejection of the studio system:**

The French New Wave's rejection of the studio system was a deliberate attempt to wrest creative control from the major studios and place it in the hands of film directors. This shift in power dynamics allowed directors to explore innovative storytelling techniques and challenge audiences in ways that were not possible within the traditional studio system. However, this newfound freedom came at a cost, as directors had to work with limited resources, including small budgets, basic equipment, and location shooting. As a result, French New Wave directors developed a distinctive aesthetic, characterized by handheld camera work, natural lighting, and direct sound recording. This approach not only added to the movement's sense of realism and spontaneity but also enabled directors to work efficiently and effectively within limited financial means. One significant example is Claude Chabrol's "Les Cousins" (1959), which uses handheld camera work and direct sound recording to create a sense of spontaneity and realism.

- **Departure from strong narrative structures:**

One of the prominent characteristics of French New Wave cinema was its departure from strong narrative structures. In contrast to traditional films, which emphasized immersive and entertaining storytelling, French New Wave films sought to challenge audiences and prevent them from becoming complacent. Directors employed innovative techniques, such as jump cuts, non-linear narrative structures, and actors addressing the audience directly, to remind viewers that they were watching a film. This self-reflexive approach, which drew attention to the artificial nature of the cinematic experience, was a deliberate attempt to subvert the traditional narrative structures that had dominated Hollywood filmmaking for decades. By rejecting script-based filmmaking in

favour of heavy improvisation, French New Wave directors created a sense of spontaneity and freshness that captivated audiences worldwide. The French New Wave was characterized by a greater emphasis on improvisation and spontaneity. The movement's directors often rejected the use of fully written scripts, instead opting for a more improvisational approach that allowed for greater flexibility and creativity. Éric Rohmer's "The Sign of Leo" (1962), which features experimental editing and a complex, nuanced narrative theme.

- **Expression of complex ideas:**

The narrative themes of French New Wave films were characterized by a greater emphasis on complexity and grittiness. The French New Wave cinema emphasized on expressing complex ideas and exploring intellectual themes. In contrast to traditional films, which prioritized entertainment over intellectual curiosity, French New Wave films sought to engage audiences on a deeper level. The movement's directors rejected the more traditional and simplistic narrative themes of classical French cinema, instead opting for more complex and challenging stories that explored the human condition. Directors explored difficult topics, such as existentialism, the absurdity of existence, and the human condition, in a way that encouraged audiences to think critically and reflectively. The use of long takes, which allowed audiences' minds to wander and bring their own experiences to the film, was a deliberate attempt to create a sense of intellectual and emotional engagement. By encouraging audiences to think both during and after viewing, French New Wave films created a sense of cinematic experience that was both challenging and rewarding. The films of the French New Wave often dealt with themes such as alienation, and social disillusionment, which were reflected in the movement's use of gritty, realistic settings and complex characters.

The French New Wave movement was characterized by a distinctive set of filmmaking practices and aesthetic sensibilities. The movement's informal style of filmmaking, innovative film techniques, complex narrative themes, experimental editing, and emphasis on improvisation and spontaneity all helped to define its unique characteristics and had a profound impact on the development of world cinema. The French New Wave's emphasis on creative freedom, innovation, and intellectual curiosity continues to inspire filmmakers to this day, and its influence can be seen in a wide range of cinematic movements and genres. The French New Wave's influence can still be seen in contemporary filmmaking, and its innovative approach to storytelling and filmmaking continues to inspire directors around the world.

Check Your Progress:

Enumerate the departures of the French new wave techniques from conventional filmmaking.

2.5 Cinematic Techniques of French New Wave

The French New Wave movement, revolutionized the cinematic landscape by introducing innovative film techniques that challenged traditional production methods. Inspired by the Italian Neorealist generation, French New Wave directors employed low-budget alternatives to convey their artistic visions, fostering a unique style that emphasized authorial expression and experimentation. Let us briefly discuss some prominent cinematic techniques of the French New Wave:

1. Location Shooting and Natural Lighting:

One of the defining characteristics of French New Wave cinema was the extensive use of location shooting, which allowed filmmakers to capture the authenticity of everyday life. By shooting on location, directors like Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut were able to tap into the vibrant energy of the city, incorporating real-life settings and situations into their narratives. This approach also enabled them to work with limited budgets, as they didnot require elaborate studio sets. Natural lighting was another key aspect of French New Wave cinematography, with filmmakers often relying on available light to create a more realistic and spontaneous atmosphere.

2. Handheld Camera Work and Mobile Framing:

The French New Wave movement witnessed a significant increase in the use of handheld camera work, which added to the sense of spontaneity and immediacy. Directors like Éric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol employed handheld cameras to create a more intimate and fluid shooting style, often using mobile framing to capture the dynamic movement of their characters. This technique allowed for greater flexibility and freedom, enabling filmmakers to respond to the unpredictability of location shooting and to experiment with innovative camera movements.

3. Jump Cuts and Discontinuous Editing:

French New Wave filmmakers were known for their bold experimentation with editing techniques, particularly the use of jump cuts and discontinuous editing. Godard's "Breathless" (1960) is a seminal example of this style, featuring abrupt cuts and deliberate discontinuities that challenged traditional notions of narrative flow. This approach created a sense of fragmentation and disorder, mirroring the chaos and uncertainty of modern life. By rejecting the conventions of classical Hollywood editing, French

New Wave directors were able to create a more dynamic and expressive cinematic language.

4. Long Takes and Real-Time Sequences:

In contrast to the fragmented editing style, French New Wave filmmakers also employed long takes and real-time sequences to create a sense of continuity and duration. Truffaut's "The 400 Blows" (1959) features a memorable long take of the protagonist, Antoine Doinel, running through the streets of Paris, capturing the fluidity and spontaneity of childhood experience. This technique allowed directors to observe their characters in real-time, creating a more immersive and engaging cinematic experience.

5. Authorial Expression and Meta-Cinema:

The French New Wave movement was characterized by a strong emphasis on authorial expression, with filmmakers often inserting themselves into their narratives or addressing the audience directly. This self-reflexive approach, known as meta-cinema, allowed directors to comment on the nature of filmmaking itself and to challenge the traditional boundaries between fiction and reality. Godard's "Contempt" (1963) is a prime example of this style, featuring a film-within-a-film narrative that blurs the lines between reality and fiction.

6. Influence of Literary Theory and Existentialism:

The French New Wave movement was heavily influenced by literary theory and existentialist philosophy, particularly the works of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Filmmakers like Truffaut and Chabrol were drawn to the concept of the "auteur," which emphasized the director's role as the primary author of the film. This approach allowed them to express their own unique worldview

and to explore themes of existentialism, individuality, and social critique.

The French New Wave movement was a revolutionary cinematic phenomenon that challenged traditional production methods and introduced innovative film techniques. By emphasizing location shooting, handheld camera work, jump cuts, long takes, and authorial expression, French New Wave directors created a unique style that continues to influence filmmakers around the world. Their experimentation with narrative structure, editing, and cinematography expanded the possibilities of cinematic storytelling, paving the way for future generations of filmmakers to come.

SAQ:

Mention some of the filmmakers of French New Wave. (50 words)

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2.6 The "Right Bank" and the "Left bank"

The French New Wave is often characterized by the distinction between two groups of filmmakers: the "Right Bank" and the "Left Bank" groups. While both groups were associated with the New Wave movement, they differed in their aesthetic styles, philosophical approaches, and cultural affiliations. Let us discuss them in detail:

- **The Right Bank:**

The Right Bank group, also known as the "Cahiers du cinéma" group, consisted of filmmakers such as Claude Chabrol, François Truffaut, and Jean-Luc Godard, who were closely associated with

the influential film magazine, *Cahiers du cinéma*. The Right Bank group played a significant role in shaping the French New Wave movement and influencing the development of world cinema. Their innovative style, youthful energy, and commitment to artistic expression helped to create a new kind of film that was more personal, more experimental, and more relevant to contemporary audiences. These directors were known for their love of American genre films, and their emphasis on cinematic innovation and experimentation. They were often characterized by their youthful energy, their rebellious spirit, and their desire to challenge the conventions of traditional French cinema.

The Right Bank group was characterized by their love of American genre films, particularly Film Noir, westerns, and musicals. They were influenced by the works of American directors such as Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford, and Fritz Lang, and sought to apply the lessons they learned from these filmmakers to their own work. The Right Bank filmmakers were passionate about film and spent countless hours watching and discussing movies. They were deeply influenced by the American film industry and sought to emulate the style and craftsmanship of Hollywood films. They were committed to pushing the boundaries of cinematic storytelling and technique. They experimented with new camera angles, editing styles, and narrative structures, which helped to define the French New Wave movement. The Right Bank filmmakers were young and rebellious, and their films often reflected this spirit. They challenged the conventions of traditional French cinema and sought to create a new kind of film that was more vibrant, energetic, and relevant to contemporary audiences. They explicitly believed in the concept of the director as auteur, which held that the director was the primary creative force behind a film. They sought to express their own

unique vision and style through their films, rather than simply following a script or formula.

Some notable filmmakers associated with the Right Bank group include François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, and Claude Chabrol. Truffaut was one of the most influential and iconic filmmakers of the French New Wave. His films, such as "The 400 Blows" (1959) and "Jules and Jim" (1962), are known for their innovative storytelling, visual style, and emotional depth. Godard was another key figure of the Right Bank group. His films, such as "Breathless" (1960) and "Contempt" (1963), are known for their experimental style, philosophical themes, and critique of modern society. Chabrol was a prolific filmmaker who was known for his dark, witty, and often provocative films. His works, such as "Les Cousins" (1959) and "Les Bonnes Femmes" (1960), are characterized by their complex characters, moral ambiguity, and social commentary.

- **The Left Bank:**

The Left Bank group, which included filmmakers such as Chris Marker, Alain Resnais, and Agnès Varda, was characterized by a more mature and introspective approach to filmmaking. These directors were often older and more established than their Right Bank counterparts, and they tended to see cinema as an art form that was closely related to literature and the plastic arts. The Left Bank filmmakers were known for their experimental approach to filmmaking, which included the use of non-narrative structures, unconventional camera angles, and innovative editing techniques. They believed in the importance of artistic expression and the role of the filmmaker as an artist. They sought to create films that were personal, expressive, and innovative. The Left Bank filmmakers were often influenced by literature and poetry, and many of them collaborated with writers and poets on their films. The filmmakers

were often concerned with social and political issues, and their films frequently addressed topics such as inequality, injustice, and social change.

The Left Bank group, also known as the "Rive Gauche" group, was a collective of French filmmakers who emerged in the 1950s and 1960s. The term "Left Bank" refers to the geographic location of the filmmakers' studios and offices, which were often situated on the left bank of the Seine River in Paris, where many of them lived and worked. The Left Bank filmmakers were often associated with the French intellectual left, and their films frequently explored themes of social justice, existentialism, and personal freedom.

The Left Bank group was also characterized by their fondness for a bohemian lifestyle, their rejection of mainstream culture, and their emphasis on artistic experimentation and innovation. They were known for their collaborations with one another, as well as with writers and artists from other disciplines. The Nouveau Roman movement in literature, which emphasized the use of experimental narrative structures and the blurring of boundaries between fiction and reality, was also a strong influence on the Left Bank style.

Some notable filmmakers associated with the Left Bank group include Alain Resnais, Chris Marker, Agnès Varda, and Jean-Pierre Melville. Resnais was a key figure of the Left Bank group, and his films, such as "Hiroshima mon amour" (1959) and "Last Year at Marienbad" (1961), are known for their innovative storytelling, visual style, and exploration of themes such as memory, identity, and social justice. Marker was another renowned filmmaker, photographer, and writer who was vehemently associated with the Left Bank group. His films, such as "La jetée" (1962) and "Sans soleil" (1983), are known for their experimental style, philosophical

themes, and exploration of social and political issues.Varda was a filmmaker and artist whose films, such as "Cléo from 5 to 7" (1962) and "Vagabond" (1985), are known for their innovative storytelling, visual style, and exploration of themes such as identity, social justice, and feminism. Melville's films, such as "Le Samouraï" (1967) and "Army of Shadows" (1969), are known for their exploration of themes such as identity, morality, and social justice. These films are characterized by their use of non-narrative structures, their emphasis on the poetic and the philosophical, and their exploration of themes such as memory, identity, and social justice.

The Left Bank group played a significant role in shaping the French New Wave movement and influencing the development of world cinema. Their emphasis on experimentation, innovation, and artistic expression helped to create a new kind of film that was more personal, more expressive, and more concerned with social and political issues. They were influenced by the avant-garde movements of the time, including surrealism, existentialism, and the French literary movement known as the "Nouveau Roman".

The distinction between the Left Bank and Right Bank groups within the French New Wave movement reflects fundamental differences in aesthetic style, philosophical approach, and cultural affiliation. While both groups were committed to cinematic innovation and experimentation, the Left Bank group was characterized by a more mature and introspective approach, an emphasis on the poetic and the philosophical, and a commitment to social and cultural critique.

2.7 The influence of the movement on Contemporary film and Cinema

The French New Wave or the Nouvelle Vague movement, which emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, had a profound impact on contemporary film and cinema. The movement's innovative storytelling, visual style, and cinematic techniques influenced a wide range of filmmakers and film movements, shaping the course of world cinema.

One of the key impacts of the French New Wave was its influence on the development of independent cinema. The movement's emphasis on low-budget filmmaking, location shooting, and innovative storytelling paved the way for independent filmmakers to produce high-quality films outside of the traditional studio system. This influence can be seen in the work of filmmakers such as Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, and Steven Soderbergh, who all cite the French New Wave as a major influence on their work.

The French New Wave had a profound impact on the development of world cinema. The movement's emphasis on national cinema and the importance of preserving cultural identity influenced filmmakers from around the world to explore their own national cinemas. This can be seen in the work of filmmakers such as Akira Kurosawa, who was influenced by the French New Wave's emphasis on visual style and innovative storytelling. In addition, the French New Wave's influence can be seen in the development of various film movements, including the American New Wave, the New Hollywood movement, and the Dogme 95 movement. These movements all shared the French New Wave's emphasis on innovation, experimentation, and cinematic storytelling.

The French New Wave's influence can also be witnessed in the work of contemporary filmmakers, who continue to draw on the

movement's innovative storytelling, visual style, and cinematic techniques. Filmmakers such as Quentin Tarantino, Wes Anderson, and Sofia Coppola all cite the French New Wave as a major influence on their work. Furthermore, the French New Wave's influence extends beyond the realm of film to other art forms, including literature, music, and visual art. The movement's emphasis on experimentation and innovation has influenced artists across a wide range of disciplines.

The French New Wave movement had a profound impact on contemporary film and cinema, influencing a wide range of filmmakers, film movements, and art forms. Some notable films that demonstrate the impact of French New Wave on contemporary cinema include Martin Scorsese's "Mean Streets" (1973), which was influenced by the French New Wave's emphasis on location shooting and innovative storytelling; Francis Ford Coppola's "The Conversation" (1974), which was influenced by the French New Wave's emphasis on visual style and cinematic technique; Steven Soderbergh's "Sex, Lies, and Videotape" (1989), which was influenced by the French New Wave's emphasis on low-budget filmmaking and innovative storytelling; Quentin Tarantino's "Pulp Fiction" (1994), which was influenced by the French New Wave's emphasis on non-linear storytelling and cinematic technique; and Wes Anderson's "The Royal Tenenbaums" (2001), which was influenced by the French New Wave's emphasis on visual style and innovative storytelling. These films demonstrate the ongoing influence of the French New Wave on contemporary cinema, and highlight the movement's continued relevance and importance in the world of film. The movement's innovative storytelling, visual style, and cinematic techniques continue to shape the course of world cinema, and its influence can be seen in the work of filmmakers and artists around the world.

2.8 Summing Up

The influence of the French New Wave on world cinema cannot be overstated. The movement's innovative storytelling, visual styles, and thematic concerns have inspired generations of filmmakers. The New Wave's emphasis on location shooting, handheld camera work, and naturalistic acting has become a staple of contemporary filmmaking, while its engagement with social and political issues continues to shape the cinematic landscape. The French New Wave was a ground-breaking cinematic movement that transformed the art of filmmaking and left a lasting legacy on the history of cinema. Through its experimentation with form and style, its engagement with social and political issues, and its exploration of existential themes, the New Wave redefined the possibilities of cinematic storytelling, influencing filmmakers worldwide and cementing its place as one of the most influential movements in the history of cinema.

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UNIT- 3

CAMERAWORK

Unit Structure:

3.1 Objectives:

By the end of this paper, the learner will be able to

- *identify* various kinds of camera angle;
- *appreciate* camerawork as intrinsically linked to film language;
- *understand* the link between camera movement and cinematic storytelling;
- *obtain* some knowledge about 'reading' a cinema in terms of the camerawork.

3.2 Introduction

In this paper, we are concerned about 'reading' a film. Unless we develop a framework of cinematic appreciation that enables us to read a film meaningfully, the core concept of adaptation from literature into film will remain somewhat hazy. We are not focusing

on the technicalities of a camera's function in shooting which would be part of a course in film-making. However, as you will understand throughout this unit, the operations of camera cannot be brushed aside in the context of watching a movie, especially when we are concerned about the production and negotiation of meaning and perspective in a cinematic narrative. It is not difficult to see why a film audience is intuitively alive to the use of camera. But the point we are making are worth pondering upon: that the use of camera is central to how a movie builds up a narrative, sets up a dynamic relation with the audience through expectations and its frustrations, creates and undoes emotions, and produces meanings and resonance. You may ask: what is the point of focusing on camera where a movie generally does not present one on the screen? True that a movie does not show up the camera with which its shots are taken, (except for a certain genre of modernist and post-modernist films of which I will refer later). All we see on the screen is an image. But the image that we see is not an inert photograph: it has subjects in its who might move or not move, and/or the setting against which it is projected. The image, its configuration and movement are all unproblematically there in a shot. There can be varying special relationship between the subject and the setting, one subject and another. But all that we see on screen are constant reminder of an observer which observes and captures them. In other words, it is the camera that informs a whole reality in front of our eyes, and dialectically shapes the way we see this reality. Camera creates an image, and the image lends itself for viewing by audience. The camera might be apparently absent in that image, but the image itself is a constant reminder of the existence of a camera. Think about it philosophically: you watch a tree in real life, but the tree is not a reminder as such of your existence; the tree is a separate, and autonomous entity, and not a projection of an unseen creator, at least in in the everyday realistic framework. But the

image of a train moving across a field of *kaash* flower, being eagerly watched by two children of Nichindipur (from *Pather Panchali*) reminds you of how Satyajit Ray's camera creates an interesting dialectic between the background and foreground, between the men and the giant of a machine, between the quiet rhythm of the countryside and the attractive yet potentially disruptive forces of modernity. To watch Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* is essentially to be gripped by a sense of horror: and Kubrick builds up this emotion by making crucial choices in terms of how the camera would be used. Consider how the protagonist speeds along the winding hilly terrain to the Overlook Hotel in the introductory sequence and how a dynamic areal view is offered to create the necessary mood of apprehension.

Before delving into various uses of camera in film for narrative and semiotic purposes, let us have a brief discussion of film as language.

3.3 Film as Language:

Cinema is a powerful modern art form, and its appeal is not limited to some elite cinephiles. History of poplar film in any language will conform to the view that there is something universal about the appeal of cinema, and a cinematic narrative can affect people across cultures and languages. Since its inception in the late nineteenth century, cinema has both evolved both as a popular medium of entertainment and as a language. Its function is to communicate, but verbal language is not the core of this medium. Dialogue is usually a common element in this art form, but dialogue is not essential to its operation. What is cinema if not a story told essentially by means of an array of images? Thus, the language of cinema is constructed around the image, its configuration as well as its relations to preceding and succeeding images. If cinema works powerfully as a

language, it must work by means of its images, which is the result of camerawork. Any analysis of film language must take account of how a shot is set up and how an image is constructed. Christian Metz says that a film tells a story through images and sounds, but in the history of cinema image arrived first with the silent films, and sound is later additions. This is not denying the importance of sound in cinema; in fact, it is the sound that points to the temporal dimension of cinematic narrative, determining its pace, music and rhythm. It is , however, the sound and the visual that constitute the composite cinematic image. Let us still reiterate the fact that verbal language, if anything, is only a small part of the complex semiotics of cinema which largely depends on visual image, and hence on the camera use. The Russian Formalists first discussed film as language. Soviet filmmakers like Sergei Eisenstein considered 'montage' as a key aspect of cinema as a language and emphasized the emotional and symbolic potential of techniques such as 'close-up' in cinema. In discussions of the semiotics of cinema, they also dwelt on the rules governing shot composition, spatial relationship and narrative structure. The parallel between the structure of verbal language and cinematic narrative is not difficult to see: as words combine into meaningful sentences, likewise shots are also linked to form a meaningful sequence in film, thus leading to greater chunks of meaning. But in cinema, even before a shot, we can consider the frame itself. A shot constitutes a frame, or a moving shot is made up of a number of frames. Look at a frame: it has various elements of light, colour, sound, but most importantly the manipulation of elements through spaces of background and foreground, depth of field etc requires in the first place use of camera angle and camera movement. Though these 'movements are not palpably shown on screen, their effect is what the cinema is.

Let us discuss another aspect of how camera creates a unique language. The shots by themselves are semantic units, but the complex semiotics of cinema is more dependants on how these shots are combines. Camera work and editing cannot be separately investigated in so far as this complex semiotics of cinema is under discussion. This combinatory axis of cinematic discourse finds best elucidation in Eisenstein's theory of montage. Montage is, in essence, a combination of two images so as to elicit a third meaning. This contradictory combination of cinematic images is part of editing where images are stitched together to create dynamic meaning and resonance. But apart from this, there is a logic of continuity, which, again, requires careful camerawork. I will explain continuity shot in the next section which is "Camera Angle".

3.4 Camera Angle

Do you ever think about the difference between cinema and theatre, and how you articulate the difference? In a theatre, the audience is seated in front of the stage and action shown there. The audience's viewpoint is fixed. But in cinema, the fixed physical, spatial gap between the screen and the spectator is only apparent: the real psychological distance between image and spectator is varying. The spectator in cinema can be virtually located anywhere in the three dimensional space via-a-vis the image shown. A filmmaker does not necessarily always operate the camera, but he/she must be acutely alive to the varied opssibilities opened up by camera angles and camera movement.

Camera angle is placing of the camera at an appropriate viewpoint via-a-vis the player(s) and the setting that primarily determine the meaning and appeal of a shot. Among the virtually endless possibilities of camera positions, we can identify two large

categories of subjective and objective shots. While there cannot be an absolute 'objective' angle from which we can view reality, art invariably involves variable play with subjective and objective angles. Subjective camera angle assumes a personal viewpoint and avoids pretensions of objectivity. The viewer can participate in the action of a cinema in two ways: either on his own, or by trading places with the performer. In the first case, the viewer sees the event through his eyes, and hence the camera movement has to simulate the anticipated movement of the viewer.

In objective camera angle, therefore, the camera records the action as though the audience is a passive onlooker watching events unfold. It does not involve the viewer in the character's personal perspective or emotions but instead maintains a detached, third-person viewpoint. For instance, if a sequence is to capture the conversation of two characters, and if the shots are set up alternatively from either character's side but keeping both figures in the frame, it uses objective point of view. It implies a distance between the character's viewpoint and the viewer's angle, however great or small that distance is. An omniscience point of view is adopted in an objective camera angle. Usually use of long or medium shot enhance objective per caption to the viewer. Placing of the camera at the height of the character/performer creates a natural viewpoint.

Subjective camera angle places the viewer directly in the position of a character, as if the audience is seeing the scene through the character's eyes. This is also referred to as the "point-of-view" (POV) shot. Subjective shot basically allows the audience to participate in the screen action as a personal experience. In other words, it places the audience in the shoes of the characters. In point of view shot, a shot of character sis cut to the shot of the object viewed by the character. Besides the POV shot, placing the camera

closer to the character also enables a subjective perception, allowing the viewer to have a closer and emotional more intimate understanding of the character's condition. Placing the camera at low or high angles breaks the neutrality of observation, imposing some feeling to the image viewed. However, the objective and subjective are not discreet categories always; the filmmaker can play with both viewpoints even within a single shot. A shot begun with a diminished subject captured by camera from a distance might have a more enlarged view of the subject, in a close shot, or the camera might tilt up or down to give a more subjective meaning to the image.

Let us now briefly look at various kinds of shots involving various camera angles.

Extreme long shot:

An **extreme long shot** captures a vast area that might include the subject and setting or the setting alone. This type of shot is typically taken from a very far distance, making the subject appear small or even insignificant within the larger context. This type of shot is taken to establish the setting of an action. You may notice an interesting analogy between the use of extreme long shot in cinema and panoramic descriptions that often figure in novels to establish the setting before delving into the story. Just have a look at George Eliot novel, for instance. Middle March starts with the following words: "A town of visible homes and visible families, with fields and woods beyond, and a background of grey-blue hills." In Robert Wise's *The Sound of Music* (1965) the film extreme long shot of the protagonist Maria twirling and singing in the Austrian Alps that the film begins with. Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) begins with an extreme long shot of earth rising over the moon,

which is in keeping with the cosmic setting of the narrative. A variety for narrative functions can be performed through the use of this camera angle, from describing a setting, to evoking a mood or presenting social dynamics.

Let me give you an example of the use of extreme long shot. In Abbas Kiarostami's *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999), this is how the narrative starts: the protagonist drives along a winding road of a desolate hilly terrain. The camera slowly pans to follow the car that speeds along, leaving a trail of dust. The protagonist and his companion talk about the remarkably big and isolated trees of the terrain, while the audience at once sees the trees appearing almost above the horizon. This is an example of a brilliant use of extreme long shots, which establishes the place, introduces the motif of journey and carries out an interesting drama of 'telling' and 'showing'.

Stop to Consider:

Take a few classic world movies. Watch them. Try to identify the extreme long shots, if and where they are used. What purpose do the serve in the narrative?

Long Shot: in a long shot the overall appearance of the people and the place are captured from a distance. The shot may include a house, a street, a room, or any place where the action takes place. Its primary function is to give information about the location of action, and the persons involved, in a way which is required. The long shot may involve the movement of the characters, and most importantly, creates a sense of space through the use of depth of field. As the character's facial expression are not captured in a long shot, it is less like to evoke subjective feeling. Of course, creation of the depth of

field through specific use of camera lens is an important point to ponder in so far as the shot's overall meaning and intent is concerned. It so happens that a character occupies the foreground and another in diminished form stands in the background within a frame. Here classification of the shot will depend on the way the camera maintains primary focus.

Medium Shot: a medium shot falls between a long shot and a close-up. The players are filmed from above the knees or just from below the waist. The characters' gestures, facial expressions and movements are clearly captured here. After a long shot establishes a scene, a medium shot presents the action with more clarity. The moving camera may follow the players simultaneously showing the setting in which action takes place, keeping the viewer constantly reoriented. Two-shots are a kind of long shot where two characters are shown to interact or converse. In a profile two-shot, neither of the characters are relatively more focused, and both are given importance, with their profile to the lens. A profile two shots may have two characters occupying disproportionate frame space, creating depth.

Close-Up: a medium close-up features the players approximately mid-way between waists and shoulders to above heads. There are, besides, head and shoulder close-up, head close-up, choker close-up and so on, based on the size of the player(s) filmed on the screen. Close-p is used for visual dramatic emphasis, and also to cover up a jump cut. Through a close-up, tiny objects or smaller portions of a larger object may be filmed. There is, further, an over-the shoulder close-up which provide transition from objective angle to point-of-view close up. A cut-in close up magnifies a portion of an object captured in the preceding large scene. A close up brings the subject closer to the viewer making the latter more deeply perceptive of the mental and emotional make-up of the player viewed.

In Satyajit Ray's *Apur Sansar*, after Apu brings the newlywed Aparna back to his Calcutta accommodation, the signs of poverty and want all around her husband's place distracts her, when suddenly she sees an infant being consoled by an old lady in the neighbourhood. Ray uses a close-up here to show the transition in Aparna's face from anguish to a resolute acceptance of the new life as a married woman. Further into the narrative, in the train scene, as a pregnant Aparna is about to stay at her ancestral home, successive close-ups of the couple heightens their mutual love and the pangs of separation. Close-up brings the audience closer to the player in a way where the effect of facial expression is more pronounced.

Check Your Progress:

Describe the following shots with reference to any classic film that you have watched—long shot, medium shot, close-up. (200 words)

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3.5 Camera Movement:

The language of cinema is largely shaped by the operation of the camera. In still photography, space and time are frozen into a static image. Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* features an extraordinary gypsy named Melquíades, who brings to Macondo a daguerreotype—a camera obscura—that performs the miraculous act of freezing reality for eternity. Still photography not only captures reality but also renders it in a state of eternal stasis, which the Macondians perceive as a philosophical marvel.

However, the greater miracle is performed by the movie camera, not only because it captures reality in its continuous flux but also because it introduces movement—both through the motion of the subjects it records and through its own movement.

Some of the instances of camera movement are panning, tilting, tracking (dolly) shot, crane shot, zoom in, zoom out, areal shot, handheld camera etc. furthermore, innumerable experiments by various filmmakers have been carried out in terms of camera movement, and hence great filmmakers have been able to evolve their own distinctive cinematic idioms. We have briefly discussed some of the camera angles, but let us not forget that the camera, by means of its movement, can fluidly connect various kinds of angles, creating varied dynamics in cinematic storytelling. Let us briefly enumerate some of these movements:

Panning: Panning is a technique where the camera moves horizontally from a fixed position to follow a character's movement, reveal a wider landscape or setting, or create a sense of continuity between different areas of the frame. In essence, panning mimics the natural motion of rotating one's head. Its primary effect is that of the frame shifting horizontally, allowing the spectator to orient themselves within the cinematic space.

The revelation created by a horizontal camera movement can evoke different emotions depending on the director's intent—ranging from surprise to comic relief. One unforgettable example is the extraordinary pan shot in Ramesh Sippy's *Sholay*, where the camera, from a low angle, follows Gabbar Singh as he walks across the rocky terrain, heightening his menacing presence and instilling a sense of terror. On the other hand, Abbas Kiarostami achieves a profoundly aesthetic and semiotic effect in the initial sequence of

The Wind Will Carry Us, where the use of panning is remarkable. (This sequence has been briefly discussed in the unit titled *Realism in Cinema*). You may ask**:** What is the difference, in terms of cinematic effect, between an object (or a subject) moving within a fixed frame and a camera moving horizontally to follow the object? When an object or character moves across a static frame, the focus is distributed between the subject and its surroundings, allowing the director to emphasize spatial composition and the relationship between the subject and the environment. This approach often creates a psychological distance between the spectator and the image, encouraging a more observational mode of viewing.

However, when the camera pans to follow the movement of the object, the effect is more subjective and immersive, drawing the spectator into the cinematic action. This technique enhances engagement, making the audience feel as though they are moving alongside the character, intensifying the emotional impact of the scene.

Tilting: Tilting is when camera vertically moves up and down from a fixed position. The camera's normal horizontal perspective gives an ordinary, natural view of things, creating realistic effect. In contrast, tilting up (i.e. a low-to-high tilt) can make the building or setting appear larger than life and the subject appear dominant. tilting down (i.e. high-to-low tilt) can make a character seem weak and vulnerable. Let me give an example from Ritwik Ghatak's film *Meghe Dhaka Tara*. In one of the most memorable sequences, Ghatak uses a tilt-up shot to frame Nita (the protagonist) against the towering, oppressive structure of a large building or an urban landscape. The camera starts at Nita's level, and then tilts up to reveal the imposing structure that has dwarfed her, to suggest how the larger societal forces have pushed her into a condition of

vulnerability. Of course, there can be other uses of tilt shots, such as mimicking point-of-view shot, building tension by slow tilt, creating disorienting effect by fast tilt etc.

Tracking: In a tracking shot, the camera moves smoothly forward, backward, or sideways, immersing the viewer in the scene and enhancing realism. It can also dynamically follow a subject, making the audience feel more engaged with the action. However, realism in cinema is not merely about recording external reality; it largely depends on the choice of camera position and the orchestration of camera movement. In many cases, the creation of realism and the creation of cinematic effect are one and the same.

The tracking shot is one of the most commonly used techniques to achieve cinematic impact. Cinematic effect is the result of multiple elements working together — the actor's performance, the recording of ambient sound, sound and colour editing in post-production, and, crucially, the movement of the camera.

To understand how a tracking shot can create an extraordinary cinematic effect, one can examine Mrinal Sen's film *Akaler Sandhane* (1980). The film follows an urban group of filmmakers who travel to a remote village in Bengal to shoot a movie about famine. *Akaler Sandhane* is, therefore, a film about filmmaking, depicting the director's struggles with actors' performances, technical challenges, and camera movement.

One of the mostemotionally powerful tracking shots in the film follows Smita Patil's character, one of the few remaining in the devastated village. As she prepares to leave for Calcutta in search of a livelihood, abandoning her famished home, the tracking shot follows her movement with remarkable emotional intensity,

emphasizing both her personal despair and the larger tragedy of displacement.

Handheld Camera: The conscious use of handheld cameras remains prevalent, particularly in action films. However, since cinematic realism has no fixed format and continues to evolve through time and experimentation, the handheld camera contributes to a realistic feel by introducing a shaky, unfiltered, and spontaneous visual style. In classic Indian cinema, the use of handheld cameras was relatively rare. While SatyajitRay created a fluid, spontaneous realism through meticulously orchestrated, smooth camera movements, Mrinal Sen often interrupted his narratives with handheld shots. Sen's brilliant use of handheld cinematography was particularly effective in depicting the socio-political turmoil of Calcutta in the 1960s and 1970s.

One of the most extraordinary filmmakers to master the handheld technique was Jean-Luc Godard. Breaking free from the conventions of classical cinema, Godard embraced radical creative freedom, incorporating techniques that seemed heretical at the time—such as jump cuts and handheld cinematography.He shot *Breathless* (1960) on the streets of Paris using a handheld camera, a stylistic choice that gave rise to an entirely new cinematic language. The jerky, hand-held movement introduced spontaneous actor performances, less rehearsed and more improvised actions, real street scenes integrated seamlessly into the narrative. By rejecting the polished aesthetics of studio cinema, Godard's handheld cinematography redefined cinematic realism, influencing generations of filmmakers across the world.

3.6 Summing Up

Camerawork is not merely a technical matter of filmmaking; it resurfaces in actual experience of watching a film. What we have discussed is not a few tips about making a film but 'reading 'one. First of all, it is important to understand cinema as a distinct language, and the operation of camera is intrinsically connected to how this cinematic language works. Various modalities of this operation, the static position of the camera, its various kinds of movements, or its angle with respect to the cinematic image—these are all part of how a spectator creates meaning out of a cinematic scene. The camera might appear to be invisible, as in static shot, enhancing a direct relationship between the spectator and the reality shown on the frame. Objectivity of the cinematic image, as highlighted by Andre Bazin, is also a result of a certain kind of camerawork. On the other hand, there can be bewildering possibilities of creating subjective reality and exploring moods and emotions of characters and events by means of various uses of the camera. As we have discussed, the very movement of the camera can simulate the mental movement of a character. I hope you will,

with the above discussions, be able to watch film more meaningfully and engage with how the film produces meanings.

3.7 References and Suggested Reading

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UNIT- 4
EDITING

Unit Structure:

4.1 OBJECTIVES

Through this unit, you will be able to:

- *understand* what constitutes adapting book into film;
- *analyse* how the narrative of the text is edited to reshape it into film;
- *appreciate* how editors use media to craft the cinematic narrative;
- *develop* an understanding of successful and unsuccessful adaptations through case studies.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

The practice of adapting literary works into films has been a cornerstone of the cinematic industry since its inception, serving as a bridge between the realms of literature and visual storytelling. This intricate process not only brings beloved narratives to the silver

screen but also interprets and transforms them to suit the cinematic medium. This introduction delves into the history of book-to-film adaptations, highlighting key milestones and the proponents who have championed this art form.

The origins of literary adaptations trace back to the early 20th century, during the silent film era. Pioneering filmmakers recognized the potential of popular literature to attract audiences. One of the earliest known adaptations is Georges Méliès's 1899 film *Cinderella* based on the classic fairy tale by Charles Perrault. Méliès, renowned for his innovative techniques, also adapted *King John* in 1899, marking the first known film adaptation of a Shakespearean work. In 1902, Méliès released *A Trip to the Moon*, a film loosely inspired by Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon* and H.G. Wells's *The First Men in the Moon*. This adaptation showcased the imaginative possibilities of cinema and set a precedent for future science fiction films.

As cinema transitioned from silent films to "talkies," the scope of adaptations expanded. The 1924 film *Greed*, directed by Erich von Stroheim, is a notable example from this period. Adapted from Frank Norris's novel *McTeague*, *Greed* was initially a nine-and-a-half-hour epic, meticulously capturing the novel's depth. However, studio demands led to significant cuts, reducing it to about two hours. Despite its initial commercial failure, *Greed* has since been recognized as a masterpiece, illustrating the challenges and potential of faithful adaptations.

The Golden Age of Hollywood (1930s-1950s) witnessed a surge in adaptations of literary classics. Producers saw these works as both prestigious and profitable. Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* was transformed into a 1939 film that became a cultural phenomenon, winning multiple Academy Awards and solidifying its

place in cinematic history. Similarly, adaptations like *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), based on John Steinbeck's novel, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962), from Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning book, demonstrated cinema's ability to tackle complex social issues through literary narratives.

In contemporary cinema, adaptations span a wide array of genres, from fantasy epics to young adult dystopias. J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, adapted between 2001 and 2011, not only achieved massive box office success but also influenced a generation's cultural landscape. Similarly, J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, brought to life by director Peter Jackson between 2001 and 2003, set new standards for fantasy filmmaking. These adaptations highlight the symbiotic relationship between literature and film, where each medium enriches the other.

Throughout cinematic history, numerous filmmakers have championed the adaptation of literature into film, each bringing their unique vision to the process.

- **Alfred Hitchcock**: Known for his mastery of suspense, Hitchcock frequently turned to literature for inspiration. His 1960 film *Psycho*, based on Robert Bloch's novel, is a seminal work in horror cinema. Hitchcock's ability to translate psychological tension from page to screen showcases the director's interpretative prowess.
- **Stanley Kubrick**: Kubrick's adaptations are renowned for their distinctiveness. *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), from Anthony Burgess's novel, and *The Shining* (1980), based on Stephen King's work, are testaments to his ability to infuse literary stories with his unique cinematic style, often diverging from the source material to explore new thematic depths.

- **Francis Ford Coppola**: Coppola's "The Godfather" series, adapted from Mario Puzo's novels, is often cited as a pinnacle of cinematic achievement. The films delve deeply into character development and moral complexities, elevating the crime genre and demonstrating the potential of adaptations to transcend their origins.

Adapting literature to film is fraught with challenges, primarily due to the inherent differences between the mediums. Literature allows for introspection and detailed exposition, while film relies on visual and auditory elements to convey narrative and emotion. This necessitates creative solutions to effectively translate internal monologues or abstract concepts into visual storytelling. Moreover, the length constraints of films often require condensation of complex plots and characters, leading to omissions or alterations that can disappoint fans of the original work. Balancing fidelity to the source material with the demands of cinematic storytelling is a delicate endeavor.

The economic allure of adaptations is significant. Films based on pre-existing literary works often come with a built-in audience, reducing financial risk. According to Words Rated, movies adapted from books on average gross 53% more than their original counterparts, highlighting the commercial viability of adaptations. Culturally, adaptations serve as a conduit for introducing classic and contemporary literature to broader audiences. They can reignite interest in the source material, leading to increased book sales and renewed scholarly attention. For instance, the release of a film adaptation often results in a surge of interest in the original work, as new audiences seek to engage with the narrative in its original form.

Adapting a literary work into a cinematic experience is akin to translating a rich tapestry of words into a vivid mosaic of images

and sounds. This transformation demands meticulous narrative editing to ensure that the essence of the original story resonates on screen. The process encompasses several critical stages: selecting key elements for adaptation, making structural adjustments, refining characters and dialogue, and tailoring the narrative to meet audience expectations and market demands.

4.3 NARRATIVE EDITING: RESHAPING THE BOOK FOR FILM

Adapting a book into cinema requires the consideration of several factors. These are detailed below:

1. *Selecting Key Elements for Adaptation*

The initial step in adapting a book to film involves discerning which components of the source material are essential to the narrative's core. This selection process requires a deep understanding of the story's themes, central plotlines, and the emotional journeys of its characters. Not every subplot or character from a novel can be accommodated within the confines of a film's runtime. Therefore, filmmakers must identify the primary narrative thread that drives the story forward. This often involves focusing on the protagonist's journey and the central conflict, ensuring that the film maintains a coherent and engaging storyline. For instance, in adapting J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, director Peter Jackson had to make tough choices about which elements to include. He preserved the overarching quest narrative and the central themes of friendship, bravery, and the struggle between good and evil. However, certain episodes, such as the encounter with Tom Bombadil, were omitted to streamline the story for cinematic purposes. Jackson's approach demonstrates the necessity of balancing fidelity to the source

material with the practicalities of filmmaking. Moreover, filmmakers often seek to capture the tone and atmosphere of the original work. This involves translating the author's descriptive passages into visual imagery that evokes similar emotions. The goal is to create a film that feels authentic to fans of the book while also being accessible to new audiences.

2. *Structural Adjustments: Aligning with Cinematic Storytelling*

Literary works and films inherently differ in their narrative structures. Novels have the luxury of expansive pacing, delving into intricate details, and exploring multiple perspectives. In contrast, films typically adhere to a three-act structure, comprising setup, confrontation, and resolution, all within a limited timeframe. Adapting a novel to this structure often necessitates reordering events to heighten dramatic impact. Filmmakers may choose to begin the story in medias res, plunging the audience directly into the action to capture immediate interest. Flashbacks can then be employed to provide necessary backstory without slowing the narrative's momentum.

Handling subplots and minor characters requires careful consideration. While these elements enrich a novel, they can clutter a film's narrative if not managed judiciously. Filmmakers might consolidate multiple minor characters into a single composite character or eliminate certain subplots entirely to maintain focus on the main storyline. Peter Jackson's adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* illustrates such structural adjustments. Tolkien's narrative interlaces multiple storylines, a technique that enhances the depth of the literary work but poses challenges for cinematic storytelling. Jackson opted to intercut between parallel storylines, such as the journeys of Frodo and Aragorn, to maintain narrative coherence and pacing. This approach ensured that the film's structure remained

engaging for the audience while honoring the source material's complexity.

3. *Character and Dialogue Refinements*

Characters are the heart of any story, and their portrayal is crucial in adaptations. Streamlining character arcs involves focusing on the development of key characters, ensuring their journeys are compelling and resonate with the audience. This may involve altering or omitting certain traits or backstories to fit the film's narrative scope. Adapting internal monologues and narrative exposition presents a unique challenge. Novels often delve into characters' thoughts and emotions, providing readers with intimate insights. Translating this to film requires visual storytelling techniques, such as expressive cinematography, nuanced performances, and symbolic imagery. Voiceovers can also be employed, though they should be used sparingly to avoid redundancy.

Writing cinematic dialogue necessitates brevity and impact. Unlike novels, where dialogue can be extensive, film dialogue must convey character, advance the plot, and reveal subtext efficiently. The language should be natural and authentic, reflecting the characters' personalities and the story's setting. In *The Lord of the Rings* films, character arcs were adjusted to suit the cinematic medium. Arwen's role, for example, was expanded to enhance the romantic subplot and provide a stronger emotional anchor. This change not only added depth to Aragorn's character but also broadened the story's appeal. Additionally, the films utilized visual storytelling to convey complex themes and emotions, such as the corrupting influence of the One Ring, through recurring visual motifs and the actors' performances.

4. *Adapting for Audiences and Market Considerations*

Films must cater to audience expectations and market dynamics, necessitating adjustments that balance creative integrity with commercial viability. Runtime constraints are a significant factor; most films aim for a duration that maintains audience engagement without causing fatigue. This limitation requires concise storytelling, where every scene serves a purpose in advancing the plot or developing characters. Balancing creative vision with commercial appeal involves making the story accessible to a broad audience while preserving its unique qualities. This might entail modifying content to align with cultural sensitivities, audience demographics, or rating systems. Filmmakers often conduct test screenings to gauge audience reactions and make necessary adjustments before the official release.

The adaptation of Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* by Netflix exemplifies this balance. The novel's complex narrative structure and themes posed challenges for adaptation. The filmmakers aimed to faithfully capture the novel's essence while making it accessible to contemporary audiences. This approach reflects a sensitivity to both the source material's literary significance and the audience's viewing preferences.

SAQ:

1. In what ways can the omission of certain subplots or characters impact the narrative coherence and depth of a film adaptation? (100 words)

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2. How does the traditional three-act structure of film influence the restructuring of a novel's narrative, especially when the

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source material employs a non-linear or unconventional format? (100 words)

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3. In what ways must filmmakers balance creative integrity with commercial appeal when adapting literature for the screen? (100 words)

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4.4 CINEMATIC EDITING: CRAFTING THE VISUAL NARRATIVE

Adapting a literary work into a cinematic experience is a delicate dance between honouring the original text and embracing the unique language of film. This transformation hinges on the art of cinematic editing, where raw footage is sculpted into a visual narrative that resonates with audiences. The process encompasses several key aspects: transitioning from script to screen, setting rhythm and pace, translating literary style through visual techniques, and enhancing the narrative with sound and music.

1. *Transitioning from Script to Screen: Crafting a Coherent Narrative*

The journey from script to screen begins with the editor's discerning eye, shaping raw footage into a cohesive story. This task is akin to assembling a mosaic, where each fragment contributes to the larger picture. Editors meticulously select and arrange scenes to ensure the

narrative flows seamlessly, capturing the essence of the source material while adapting it to the visual medium.

One of the paramount challenges is aligning the film's pacing with that of the book. Literary works often luxuriate in detailed descriptions and internal monologues, elements that can decelerate a film's momentum if translated verbatim. Editors must distill these passages into visual cues, employing imagery and performance to convey the same depth without compromising pacing. For instance, in adapting a novel with intricate internal dialogues, editors might focus on actors' subtle expressions or incorporate symbolic visuals to externalize internal conflicts. This approach maintains narrative integrity while embracing the show-don't-tell principle intrinsic to cinema.

2. *Setting Rhythm and Pace: The Art of Cutting*

The rhythm of a film is orchestrated through the cadence of its cuts, a symphony conducted by the editor to elicit specific emotional responses. Fast cuts can heighten tension and urgency, propelling the audience through action sequences with bated breath. Conversely, slow cuts allow for introspection, granting viewers the space to absorb and reflect upon the unfolding drama. Consider a thriller adaptation: rapid cuts during a chase scene amplify excitement, mirroring the protagonist's adrenaline. In contrast, lingering shots in a poignant drama enable the audience to connect deeply with characters' emotional journeys. By modulating the tempo of cuts, editors control the film's emotional beats, guiding viewers through a carefully curated experience.

Walter Murch, a renowned film editor, encapsulates this notion, stating that editing is "the process of discovering what the film is about" (Murch). Through deliberate pacing, editors unveil the

narrative's core, ensuring that each moment resonates with its intended impact.

3. *Translating Literary Style Through Visual Techniques*

Adapting a novel's stylistic nuances into film demands creative visual strategies. Montage sequences can effectively replace extensive expository passages, condensing time and information into a dynamic visual narrative. This technique allows filmmakers to convey complex backstories or thematic elements succinctly, maintaining audience engagement without resorting to verbose explanations.

Cross-cutting and parallel editing are instrumental in portraying multiple perspectives or simultaneous events, mirroring a novel's shifting viewpoints. By interweaving scenes from different narrative threads, editors create a tapestry of interconnected stories, enriching the film's depth and complexity.

Flashbacks and nonlinear storytelling further emulate literary devices, offering insights into characters' pasts or presenting events out of chronological order to enhance dramatic effect. These techniques invite viewers to actively piece together the narrative, fostering a more immersive experience. In adapting complex narratives, such as those with multiple timelines, editors might employ distinct color palettes or visual styles to differentiate between eras, aiding audience comprehension while preserving the story's intricacy.

4. *Enhancing Narrative with Sound and Music*

Sound and music serve as the emotional undercurrents of a film, subtly influencing audience perception and amplifying the narrative's impact. A well-crafted score can evoke specific moods, foreshadow events, or underscore thematic elements, enriching the

storytelling beyond visual representation. In literary adaptations, music bridges the gap between the internal experience of reading and the external experience of viewing. For example, a melancholic melody can convey a character's sorrow, replacing lengthy descriptive passages with an evocative auditory cue. Sound design, encompassing ambient noises and effects, further immerses the audience in the film's world, making it tangible and relatable.

Voiceovers, when used sparingly, can retain a novel's literary tone, providing insight into characters' thoughts or offering narrative context. However, reliance on voiceover must be judicious, ensuring it complements rather than supplants visual storytelling. As noted in a study on film music's role across genres, "composers may evoke passion in a romantic scene with lush string passages or inspire fear throughout horror films with inharmonious drones" (Ma et al.). This underscores the deliberate selection of musical elements to align with the film's emotional landscape, a crucial consideration in adaptations.

Cinematic editing in book-to-film adaptations is a multifaceted craft, harmonizing narrative structure, pacing, visual innovation, and auditory enhancement. Editors and sound designers collaborate to translate the essence of literature into a sensory cinematic experience, ensuring that the story not only survives the transition but thrives in its new form.

Stop to Consider

Composer Bernard Herrmann's work on Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* is renowned for its use of string instruments to heighten tension. Herrmann employed an all-string orchestra to create a "screeching, stabbing sound-motion of extraordinary viciousness" during the infamous shower scene, effectively inspiring fear through dissonant

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tones. Similarly, composer James Bernard utilized unconventional string techniques in his scores for Hammer Films's horror movies. In *The Quatermass Xperiment*, Bernard employed tone clusters and instructed string players to bow on the wrong side of the bridge, producing unsettling sounds that enhanced the film's horror elements.

4.5 CASE STUDIES: SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL ADAPTATIONS

4.5.1 Successful Adaptations: Case Studies

Adapting literary works into films is a complex endeavor that requires balancing the original material's essence with the cinematic medium's demands. Several adaptations have achieved remarkable success, offering valuable insights into this intricate process. Below, we analyze three notable case studies: *Never Let Me Go*, *The Twilight Saga*, and the works of Merchant Ivory Productions.

1. *Never Let Me Go*: Translating Subtlety and Emotion to Screen

Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* presents a dystopian narrative that explores themes of humanity, love, and mortality through the lives of cloned individuals raised for organ donation. The novel's subtlety and introspective tone posed significant challenges for adaptation. Director Mark Romanek's 2010 film adaptation managed to capture the novel's melancholic atmosphere by focusing on visual storytelling and nuanced performances. Romanek collaborated closely with Ishiguro to ensure the film remained faithful to the source material. The director emphasized the emotional depth of the story, selecting an exceptional cast, including Carey Mulligan, Andrew Garfield, and Keira Knightley, to portray the complex relationships among the characters. The

film's cinematography utilized muted colour palettes and serene landscapes to reflect the narrative's somber mood.

The adaptation's success lies in its ability to convey the novel's profound themes without relying heavily on exposition. Instead, it uses visual cues and the actors' subtle expressions to communicate the characters' internal struggles, preserving the novel's introspective nature while utilizing the strengths of the cinematic medium.

2. *The Twilight Saga*: From Young Adult Phenomenon to Box Office Success

Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series, a young adult vampire romance, became a cultural phenomenon, leading to a highly successful film franchise. The first novel was adapted into a film in 2008, directed by Catherine Hardwicke. The adaptation faced the challenge of satisfying a dedicated fan base while appealing to a broader audience. Hardwicke's direction focused on capturing the novel's romantic and supernatural elements. Casting choices, particularly Kristen Stewart as Bella Swan and Robert Pattinson as Edward Cullen, were pivotal in bringing the characters to life. The film's visual style, characterized by its blue-gray color scheme, mirrored the novel's moody and mysterious tone.

The adaptation's success can be attributed to its fidelity to the source material and its ability to translate the novel's emotional intensity into a visual format. The film's soundtrack, featuring contemporary artists, resonated with the target demographic, enhancing the overall viewing experience. The franchise's subsequent films continued to build on this foundation, resulting in a series that garnered both commercial success and a lasting cultural impact.

3. **Merchant Ivory Productions: Mastering Literary Adaptations**

Merchant Ivory Productions, founded by producer Ismail Merchant and director James Ivory, is renowned for its meticulous adaptations of literary works, particularly those by E.M. Forster. Their films, such as *A Room with a View* (1985), *Howards End* (1992), and *The Remains of the Day* (1993), are celebrated for their attention to period detail, nuanced performances, and fidelity to the source material. The success of Merchant Ivory adaptations stems from their collaborative approach, often working with screenwriter Ruth Prawer Jhabvala. Their films are characterized by a deep understanding of the original texts, which allows them to translate complex characters and themes effectively to the screen. The production design and cinematography in their films meticulously recreate the settings of the novels, immersing audiences in the story's time and place. For example, *Howards End* explores class divisions and social change in early 20th-century England. The film's detailed set designs, costumes, and faithful dialogue capture the novel's essence, while the performances by actors like Emma Thompson and Anthony Hopkins bring depth to the characters. This dedication to authenticity has cemented Merchant Ivory's reputation for producing some of the most successful literary adaptations in cinema history.

4.5.2 Unsuccessful Adaptations: Case Studies

Adapting beloved literary works into films is a challenging endeavour, often fraught with the risk of alienating fans and critics alike. Several adaptations have notably failed to capture the essence of their source material, resulting in critical and commercial disappointments. Below, we examine a few such cases in detail.

1. *The Scarlet Letter* (1995)

Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1850 novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, is a seminal work exploring themes of sin, guilt, and redemption in Puritan America. The 1995 film adaptation, directed by Roland Joffé and starring Demi Moore as Hester Prynne, significantly deviated from the original narrative, transforming the story into a more conventional romantic drama. This departure included altering key plot points and character motivations, which diluted the novel's complex moral and social commentary. Critics and audiences alike criticized the film for its lack of fidelity to the source material, leading to its poor reception and box office performance.

2. *Battlefield Earth* (2000)

Based on L. Ron Hubbard's 1982 science fiction novel *Battlefield Earth* was adapted into a film in 2000, with John Travolta both producing and starring. The story, set in a dystopian future where humans are enslaved by an alien race, was criticized for its incoherent plot, poor dialogue, and subpar special effects. The film's execution failed to capture the novel's expansive narrative and was widely panned, earning multiple Golden Raspberry Awards and becoming a case study in unsuccessful adaptations.

3. *The Golden Compass* (2007)

Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy is celebrated for its intricate world-building and philosophical depth. The 2007 film adaptation of the first book, *The Golden Compass*, featured a star-studded cast, including Nicole Kidman and Daniel Craig. Despite this, the film failed to resonate with audiences, largely due to its oversimplification of complex themes and the omission of critical narrative elements. The adaptation's reluctance to engage with the source material's religious allegory led to a diluted storyline,

resulting in underwhelming box office performance and the cancellation of planned sequels.

4. *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* (2016)

Directed by Tim Burton, this adaptation of Ransom Riggs's novel aimed to bring the peculiar world of Miss Peregrine and her wards to life. While visually striking, the film made significant changes to character abilities and plot structures, which alienated fans of the original work. The narrative alterations disrupted the story's internal logic and emotional resonance, leading to mixed reviews and a lackluster box office performance.

5. *The Time Machine* (2002)

H.G. Wells's 1895 novella, *The Time Machine*, is a cornerstone of science fiction literature, exploring themes of time travel and societal evolution. The 2002 film adaptation, directed by Simon Wells (the author's great-grandson), struggled to translate the novella's philosophical inquiries into a compelling cinematic narrative. Critics pointed out that the film's reliance on special effects overshadowed character development and thematic depth, resulting in a superficial retelling that failed to engage audiences.

Check Your Progress:

1. How can deviations from the source material's core themes and narrative structure impact the reception of a film adaptation? (100 words)
2. What is the impact of involving the original author in the adaptation process, and how can their input influence the final cinematic product? (100 words)

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3. How should filmmakers approach the adaptation of literature that includes outdated or offensive content, considering modern audience sensibilities? (100 words)

4.6 SUMMING UP

In this unit, we have discussed the art of editing. We have discussed how narrative and cinematic editing is performed in order to adapt the written word into visual media. We have also discussed successful and unsuccessful film adaptations. I hope that this unit gives you an introduction to book-to-film adaptations, and fosters curiosity within you about the same.

4.7 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READING

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UNIT- 5

AUTEUR THEORY

Unit Structure:

5.1 Objectives:

By the end of this unit, the learner will be able to

- *define* the concept of auteur theory;
- *trace* the historical development of auteur theory;
- *identify* key theorists and their contributions;
- *apply* auteurist frameworks to analyze global cinema;
- *learn* about the limitations and relevance of auteur theory.

5.2 Introduction

Auteur theory is a critical framework in film studies that positions the director—or filmmaker—as the principal author (*auteur*) of a film. At first glance, this assertion may appear obvious or even simplistic, but it is both illuminating and contentious. When the idea emerged in the mid-twentieth century, it represented a radical

departure from the dominant view of cinema as a fundamentally collaborative art form shaped by industrial conventions and the studio system. Under this system, the producer often exercised overarching control over various aspects of production, and films were typically crafted within a pre-established set of commercial and aesthetic norms. In popular commercial cinema, especially within the studio-driven models of Hollywood and mainstream Hindi cinema, such conventions are visibly at play. For instance, song-and-dance sequences in Hindi films often serve commercial purposes rather than fulfilling the director's artistic or narrative vision. The director's creative agency is frequently circumscribed by formulaic elements, and the framing of star performers whose public personas and previous roles heavily influence audience expectations.

Against this backdrop, the notion that a director could imprint a personal vision, distinct style, and thematic consistency across a body of work was a provocative intervention. This idea gained momentum in post-war France, particularly among a group of critics writing for the influential film journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Drawing inspiration from Alexandre Astruc's concept of the *caméra-stylo* (camera-pen), critics such as François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, André Bazin, and Astruc himself argued that cinema could, and should, be approached as a form of authorship akin to literature. They championed directors who used the film camera as a writer uses a pen, expressing their worldview through cinematic form. These French critics identified certain Hollywood filmmakers—such as Alfred Hitchcock and Howard Hawks—as auteurs, directors who managed to assert a personal vision despite working within the constraints of the studio system. They also celebrated European directors like Jean Renoir for their artistic individuality and thematic coherence.

The term "auteur theory" was later popularized in the English-speaking world by American critic Andrew Sarris, whose seminal 1962 essay "Notes on the Auteur Theory" and subsequent book *The American Cinema* provided a systematic articulation of the idea. For Sarris, a true auteur demonstrates technical competence, a signature visual style, and a consistent worldview across films. Central to his approach was the emphasis on the director's control over the film's *mise-en-scène*—the arrangement of visual elements within a frame—as a primary index of authorship. Thus, auteur theory reoriented film criticism and theory by foregrounding the role of the director as a creative force, offering a lens through which a director's body of work could be evaluated for stylistic and thematic coherence.

In this self-learning module, we will explore the auteur theory comprehensively. We begin with its historical background and origins in France, then discuss major theorists and contributors to auteur theory. We will also the addresses critiques and counterarguments that have challenged auteur theory – from concerns about filmmaking's collaborative nature to feminist and post-structuralist critiques – and consider the contemporary relevance of auteur theory in today's film culture.

SAQ:

What is auteur theory? (50 words)

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5.3 Historical Background:

A foundational moment in the development of auteur theory can be traced to Alexandre Astruc's influential 1948 essay, *The Birth of a*

New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo. In this seminal text, Astruc proposed a new mode of filmmaking in which the director could express personal ideas and artistic vision through the medium of the camera, much like a writer uses a pen. His metaphor of the *caméra-stylo* (camera-pen) challenged the conventional view of the director as merely a technical functionary and instead positioned the director as an intellectual and creative agent. By overseeing all visual and auditory elements of a film, the director, according to Astruc, occupies a more central role in the filmmaking process than even the screenwriter. This notion marked one of the earliest articulations of what would later evolve into the auteur concept.

The post-World War II period in France was marked by political, cultural, and intellectual upheavals that created fertile ground for rethinking the status of cinema. Cinema began to be regarded as a legitimate art form deserving of serious critical engagement. Within this climate, a new generation of French film critics associated with the journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*—including François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol, and Eric Rohmer—began to question the conventions of classical narrative cinema and to champion a more personal, expressive approach to filmmaking.

Building on Astruc's vision, these critics developed a body of writing that would become central to auteurist thought. In his 1954 polemical essay *Une certainetendance du cinémafrançais* (*A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema*), Truffaut launched a pointed critique of the so-called "Tradition of Quality" in French cinema. He denounced these films as excessively literary, overly reliant on prestigious screenwriters, and lacking directorial personality or innovation. In contrast, he praised directors such as Jean Renoir, Roberto Rossellini, and Alfred Hitchcock for demonstrating recurring thematic concerns, distinct narrative

structures, and a recognizable visual style—hallmarks of personal authorship.

Stop to Consider:

"Tradition of Quality": refers to a style of French filmmaking dominant in the 1940s and 1950s, characterized by lavish production values, polished scripts adapted from literary classics, and an emphasis on screenwriters over directors. These films often relied on established theatrical techniques, elegant cinematography, and restrained performances. While technically proficient, they were seen by some critics as formulaic, conventional, and lacking originality. François Truffaut famously attacked this tradition. He argued that such films prioritized literary prestige over cinematic innovation and stifled the director's creative voice.

For these French critics, true cinematic artistry emerged when directors exercised creative autonomy and left behind a discernible signature in their work. They argued that such auteurial presence could be identified through the consistent treatment of themes, stylistic traits, and formal strategies. However, it is important to note that auteur theory does not indiscriminately declare every director the primary creative force behind a film. Rather, it serves as a critical lens through which to distinguish directors who exhibit a coherent personal vision and aesthetic consistency from those who merely function within commercial or collaborative constraints.

The theory gained international traction when American critic Andrew Sarris introduced and formalized these ideas in his landmark 1962 essay *Notes on the Auteur Theory*. Sarris outlined three criteria for identifying a director as an auteur: (1) technical competence; (2) a distinguishable personality evident across multiple films; and (3) an "interior meaning" arising from the

tension between the director's vision and the material. His subsequent book *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929–1968* (1968) offered an auteurist history of Hollywood cinema and helped establish the theory within academic and critical discourse in the United States.

Thus, what began as a critique of cinematic conventions evolved into a full-fledged critical framework that reshaped the field of film criticism. Auteur theory not only canonized great directors in world cinema but also sensitized audiences and scholars to the ways in which cinema could serve as a medium for subjective expression and artistic authorship.

Check Your progress:

Q.1: What have you understood by Altruc's idea of the 'camera-pen'? (50 words)

Q.2: Mention a few essays crucial to the exposition of the idea of auteur theory, and briefly outline the arguments. (80 words)

5.4 Major Theorists and Contributions

In the previous section we have referred to the film critics who expounded (or whose thought helps us understand) the auteur theory. In this section we will offer elaboration of their ideas.

André Bazin: Bazin espoused cinematic realism in no ambiguous terms. This realism is grounded in the belief that man has striven to copy the visible world by various means, and it is the camera that enables him to do it with extraordinary precision. Other arts such as painting copy nature, but they somehow foreground the authorial vision and perspective. It is through this world's surface with exactness and accuracy without any intervention or mediation by the

cameraperson. Because of the lack of human agency in this part of reproduction, a cinematic image, according to Bazin, is truthful. One of Bazin's central arguments was that cinema, as a medium, has an ontological relationship with reality. In his seminal essay, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," he argued that photography and film possess an indexical relationship with the real world. The movie camera captures moments in time without the distortion introduced by an artist's hand. This distinguishes cinema from other art forms, making it a uniquely powerful medium for presenting the world as it is rather than as an artist interprets it. Whereas the later auteurists, particularly Truffaut and Sarris, celebrated directors for their consistent personal style, recurring themes, and formal innovation, Bazin was more cautious about placing the director at the center of cinematic meaning. For Bazin, a film's value lay not in the projection of a subjective vision but in its capacity to reveal truth through minimal manipulation.

François Truffaut: Truffaut's 1954 essay, "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema" is foundational to auteur theory. Here a key aspect of the French cinema is privileging the script. Central focus on script deflected attention from the filmmaking process. An auteur transcends script and imposes his own style and vision. The gap between the script and the final output is the actual creative process where the director's role is foremost. Truffaut celebrated such Hollywood directors as Alfred Hitchcock, Howard Hawks, Orson Welles, Fritz Lang etc., as they worked against scripts imposed upon them by the studios.

Truffaut does not call for abolition of script altogether, but railed against a script-centric filmmaking model. He took issue with what he saw as overly literary cinema—films that treated the screenplay as sacred text and followed the original novels or plays too faithfully, often translating their content into dialogue-heavy, static,

and didactic films. These adaptations typically belonged to what he called the "Tradition of Quality." In fact, his critique targets French films that adapted prestigious literary texts, often with reverence for the original and with the script written by dominant screenwriters such as Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost. Truffaut sought not to eliminate the script but to liberate it from literary dominance and allow directors to reinterpret the material through cinematic language.

Secondly, he praised certain American directors who managed to transcend the limitations of the Hollywood studio system that usually exerted control over formula-driven script and production. These directors were able to imprint their personal sensibility on the material.

A director cannot take absolute control over each and every aspect of film production. Still, he can leave his signature on his work by means of thematic and stylistic consistency. In this way, Truffaut's essay "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema" laid the philosophical foundation for auteur theory, positioning the director as a creative author on par with the novelist or painter.

Jean-Luc Godard: Godard's critical writing often praised directors like Howard Hawks, Orson Welles, and Nicholas Ray, treating their films not as formulaic commercial products but as expressions of individual vision and style. He was especially drawn to directors who broke with classical narrative forms and created formal innovations—precisely the traits he would later develop in his own filmmaking. But Godard, in the later period of his career, deconstructed the auteur theory and cinematic form from a patently political perspective. Anyway, the French New Wave films emerged concomitant with the new cinematic consciousness that cropped up in France. Some of the aesthetic features of these films are: they are slower in pace compared to Hollywood movies, they have strong

authorial voice, they are thought-provoking. Jean-Luc Godard employed the following production techniques to produce his films—

- **Location shooting**: Opposed to studio shooting. This is also marked in Italian neo-realism, in the film of Satyajit Ray, and now an accepted practice across the globe. Godard's films were shot in streets, cafes, apartments, highways, parks, stripping cinema of its artificiality and giving it authenticity. In his films we see, therefore, the texture of urban life with immediacy and freshness. For instance, look at the vibrant street scenes in *Breathless* (1960), rife with traffic noise and passersby that transformed the city into a character.

- **Use of hand-held camera**: The hand-held camera lent Godard the freedom from the constraints of fixed, static, and meticulously crafted shots, enabling him to evolve a free and fluid style. It enabled him to capture reality with immediacy and spontaneity, mimicking the natural movement of human perception. The shaky frames and sudden camera shifts in Godard's films are a reminder of Godard's resistance to the seamless realism of conventional Hollywood cinema. Its philosophical import was crucial: that the viewer is never an omniscient point of view but inhabits a fractured, unstable, and questioning gaze.

- **Jump Cuts**: Jump cuts are a formal innovation in the history of cinema and the credit goes to Godard. In jump cuts, two shots/sequences of the same subject taken from different times and spaces are put together, creating a sense of dislocation in terms of time, movement, and perspective. This breaks the illusion of seamless continuity which is a key concern of film editors. In traditional narrative cinema,

editing aimed to be "invisible"—that is, cuts between shots were meant to be smooth and unobtrusive so that the viewer would remain immersed in the diegetic world of the film. Temporal-spatial continuity, eyeline matches—these were the key aspects of continuity editing. In this context, jump cuts were a disruption of these rules. What made Godard revolutionary was his deliberate embrace of jump cuts as a tool of expression. In *Breathless* (1960), he not only used jump cuts unapologetically—he used them as the organizing principle of entire scenes.

Andrew Sarris: Sarris introduced the term "auteur theory" in his landmark 1962 essay, *"Notes on the Auteur Theory"*, published in the journal *Film Culture*. What had not been theorized yet, was systematized as a critical approach for an American audience by Sarris. He was particularly influenced by Truffaut's 1954 essay, *"A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema,"* which championed directors who demonstrated personal vision and style across their works, despite working within the studio system. But what qualifies a director as an auteur? Sarris elaborates three core criteria:

- **Technical competence**: Mere themes and plot-ideas do not make a director qualify as an auteur. He must have the technical competence such as the handling of mise-en-scène, editing, camera movement as well as narrative construction and pacing. The director, to Sarris, is a multifaceted personality whose choices are decisive in all aspects of filmmaking, not just in directing actors to act within a frame.
- **Thematic and stylistic consistency**: The director must display across his work a stylistic and thematic consistency. For instance, Hitchcock's obsession with guilt and voyeurism, or Hawks's theme of professionalism and male

camaraderie. We can, in the Indian context, cite the example of Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak. In the unit on Ritwik Ghatak we have seen that Ghatak is a remarkable auteur. One of the most remarkable aspects of Ritwik Ghatak as a filmmaker is his unwavering originality. At a time when aspiring filmmakers who wished to break away from the formulaic structure of commercial cinema were almost inevitably drawn to the influences of world cinema—be it American, European, or Japanese—Ghatak carved out a path uniquely his own and evolved a unique style.

- **Interior Meaning**: Sarris argues that not just the externally perceptible directorial style or the content of a film, but meaning emerges out of the way in which the director transforms a given material—conventional, genre-based, script—into something uniquely expressive. It is like an undertone or undercurrent that arises from implications, tonalities, and patterns.

Further, Sarris applied his auteur framework to classical Hollywood cinema in his 1968 book *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929–1968*. Here he places Hollywood directors in such hierarchical categories as "Pantheon Directors" (e.g., Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford, Howard Hawks, Orson Welles), "The Far Side of Paradise," "Expressive Esoterica," and so on.

Check Your Progress:

Q.1: Do you think that Andre Bazin is an auteur theorist? Give a reasoned answer. (100 words)

Q.2: Write a note on Truffaut and Godard's contribution to Auteur theory. (100 words)

5.5 Application of Auteur Theory to Global Cinema

Auteur theory is all about the importance of the director in the creative-productive process, and how the director marks his imprint within the film itself in the texture of the film. Auteur theory is also responsible for the prominence gained by some of the Hollywood directors in the middle of the twentieth century such as Alfred Hitchcock, Howard Hawks, Orson Welles etc. Auteur theory's central premise—that a director's personal vision and stylistic signature manifest across their body of work—has proven adaptable to a variety of national, political, and industrial contexts. In this section, we examine how auteur theory has been applied to different film cultures, with illustrative examples from global cinema. European auteurs have often been celebrated for their formal innovations and philosophical depth. Ingmar Bergman, Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, and Jean-Luc Godard each demonstrate how auteurism can engage with existentialism, surrealism, and reflexivity. In Indian cinema, Satyajit Ray is frequently cited as a paradigmatic auteur whose films integrate Bengali cultural heritage, humanist philosophy, and a distinctive visual grammar. His *Apu* Trilogy (1955–1959) exemplifies this synthesis, combining neorealist techniques with lyrical storytelling. Ritwik Ghatak is another powerful auteur whose films, like *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (1960), use fragmented narratives and symbolic imagery to convey the trauma of Partition and displacement. Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iranian filmmakers faced significant ideological and bureaucratic restrictions. Yet, rather than stifling creativity, these limitations led to the emergence of a poetically minimalist, allegorical, and deeply humanistic cinema. Perhaps the most internationally celebrated Iranian auteur, Kiarostami also challenges Western notions of authorship in films like *Close-Up* (1990). Otherwise, questions of life and death, truth

and representation are consistent themes of his films. Another major auteur, Mohsen Makhmalbaf is known for his radical political engagement and stylistic evolution, while Samira Makhmalbaf brings a gendered and sociopolitical lens to the lived experiences of marginalized communities in films like *The Apple* (1998) and *Blackboards* (2000). Jafar Panahi's films, such as *The Circle* (2000), *Offside* (2006), and *This Is Not a Film* (2011), are not only stylistically consistent in their realist aesthetic and use of non-professional actors, but also politically subversive. In East Asia, auteurs such as Akira Kurosawa, Yasujiro Ozu, Wong Kar-wai, and Hirokazu Kore-eda have become subjects of auteurist analysis. Kurosawa's dynamic composition, moral ambiguity, and Shakespearean influence reflect his distinctive approach to cinema. Ozu, in contrast, is known for his minimalist aesthetics, static camera, and thematic focus on generational conflict and impermanence. Auteur theory has been extended to postcolonial and revolutionary cinemas as well. In Latin America, directors like Glauber Rocha (Brazil) and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (Cuba) used cinema as a tool of resistance and self-representation. Rocha's Cinema Novo manifesto emphasized a politically engaged authorship, evident in films such as *Black God, White Devil* (1964). In Africa, auteurism intersects with oral tradition and anti-colonial narrative forms. Ousmane Sembène of Senegal, often hailed as the father of African cinema, infused his films with indigenous storytelling and socialist realism to challenge colonial legacies.

SAQ:

Mention some of the auteurs in Global cinema. Also add you personal assessment of any of them whose films you have watched. (150 words)

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5.6 Critiques, Counterarguments and Relevance:

Auteur theory has gone a long way in spurring creative cinematic undertakings across the globe by people of varied sensibilities and political convictions. It has also given new direction to the critical discourse of cinema. Still, it has been critiqued from multiple perspectives. Yet, auteur theory continues to hold considerable relevance in contemporary film criticism and scholarship.

One of the most persistent critiques of auteur theory is that it overlooks the collective nature of film production. Unlike literature or painting, cinema is a deeply collaborative medium involving screenwriters, cinematographers, editors, actors, production designers, composers, and producers. By assigning authorship solely to the director, auteur theory arguably marginalizes these essential contributors. As Pauline Kael famously remarked in her essay *"Circles and Squares"* (1963), the notion of the director as a solitary genius ignores the dynamic interplay of artistic input within filmmaking teams.

Further, studio mandates, budgetary limitations, censorship, and marketing considerations significantly influence the final form of a film. As scholars like Thomas Schatz and Janet Staiger have shown, many aspects of a director's work are shaped by systemic factors rather than individual vision alone. In this view, auteur theory risks romanticizing autonomy and underestimating the economic and ideological structures of the film industry. The director's personal vision cannot nullify these extrinsic factors of filmmaking and, hence, cannot exert complete authorial control over the cinematic work.

Feminist scholars have pointed out that auteur theory has historically privileged male directors and reinforced patriarchal frameworks of creativity and authority. Laura Mulvey's seminal

essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) critiques classical cinema's gendered gaze and the positioning of women as passive objects within male-authored narratives. Auteur theory, by celebrating the male genius, often replicates this bias. Feminist film criticism calls for a broader recognition of female auteurs and a more intersectional approach to authorship that accounts for gendered, racialized, and class-based experiences in cinematic creation. Moreover, in many non-Western contexts, the concept of the auteur may be ill-suited to account for collective forms of storytelling, oral traditions, or politically motivated group filmmaking. The imposition of auteurist criteria onto non-Western cinemas can lead to the erasure of indigenous practices and alternative epistemologies.

Despite the criticism levelled against it, auteur theory continues to play a significant role in the marketing and reception of films in today's global film industry. Directors like Wes Anderson, Christopher Nolan, Quentin Tarantino, Sofia Coppola, and Bong Joon-ho are often promoted as auteurs whose names and stylistic trademarks guarantee a particular kind of cinematic experience. Film festivals such as Cannes, Berlin, and Venice frequently curate their line-ups around auteur reputations, thereby reinforcing the notion of the director as a central creative figure. Moreover, following revolutions in information and communication technology, filmmaking has become greatly democratized. Newer techniques are being practiced by various filmmakers. For instance, guerrilla filmmaking typically refers to making films with minimal budgets, small crews, non-permitted locations, and a do-it-yourself ethos, often outside institutional support. While this may seem at odds with the controlled authorship envisioned in some traditional auteur models, it actually aligns well with key tenets of auteur theory. Guerrilla filmmakers often direct, write, shoot, and edit their

own work, asserting their vision in a way that is least mediated by external institutional forces. The films of Rima Das, an Assamese filmmaker, exemplify this mode of filmmaking and how it can result in a distinctive cinematic style.

5.7 Summing Up:

Auteur theory has played a transformative role in the field of film studies. Emerging in post-war France as a challenge to formulaic and writer-driven filmmaking, it proposed that the director could be regarded as the film's true author. This theoretical shift helped redefine cinema as a serious art form and established film criticism as a legitimate intellectual discourse. The writings of Alexandre Astruc, François Truffaut, and later Andrew Sarris were instrumental in institutionalizing auteur theory in both European and American contexts, while its influence on filmmaking practices—particularly in the French New Wave—was profound.

Auteur theory foregrounds the director's creative agency by identifying stylistic patterns, thematic consistencies, and narrative tendencies across an oeuvre. When applied globally, it has enabled critics and scholars to uncover the personal vision embedded in the works of directors from diverse cultural and industrial backgrounds.

However, the theory is not without its limitations. Its privileging of directorial authorship has been critiqued for overlooking the collaborative and industrial nature of filmmaking. Feminist, postcolonial, and post-structuralist frameworks have problematized auteur theory's assumptions regarding identity, coherence, and creative control.

Nonetheless, auteur theory continues to hold relevance. In today's media landscape, it persists in new forms—shaping director

branding, informing academic inquiry, and resonating within digital fan cultures. Whether embraced or critiqued, auteur theory remains a vital lens for exploring how meaning, artistry, and identity are constructed in cinematic expression

5.8 References and Suggested Reading

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UNIT- 6
CINEMATIC ADAPTATION

Unit Structure:

6.1 Objectives:

By the end of this unit, the learner will be able to

- *define* cinematic adaptation;

- *learn* about the ubiquity of adaptation in the world of cinema;

- *assess* the rationale and limitations of the principle of fidelity in adaptation;

- *explore* the problem of description in film;

- *familiaris*e with the various perspectives on adaptation;

- *understand* adaptation as translation and intertextual engagement.

6.2 Introduction:

Adaptation of literature into film has a long history and has been an extensive practice in cinema. Adaptation of canonical literature was a marketing strategy to allure middle class into the cinema halls and to confer value of good taste to cinematic form. Adaptation also had pedagogical value, teaching people through the medium of cinema about the value of a nation's great literary-cultural heritage. Adaptation is not a literal 'transcription' of a work of literature –a short story, play or a novel—into film. The literary text's story and characters find a new lease of life through this generic cross-over. There may be varying levels of transformations involved in the process—from literal rendering to a near-independent re-creation where story and characters are independent of the original text. Obviously, such adaptations can create stars, destroy the possibilities of a literary text or magnify a supposedly inferior 'text into excellent cinematic narrative.

This unit will enable you to gain a perspective on the phenomenon of film adaptation itself. When two texts are involved (one literary, the other cinematic) in a process in which one is supposedly an original 'one and the other 'derivative' of this original.What is the loss or gain in terms of meaning and signification? There are various dimensions of this crossover—from the semiotic to the representational, from the imaginative to the affective. This unit will give you a hint of these dimensions, and prepare you for the reading of the adapted films introduced in your course.

6.3 What is Adaptation?

Adaptation is apparently not difficult to identify, but requires a good deal of reflection on what is involved in the process. In*Key Concept in Cinema Studies*, Susan Hayward introduces the concept in this

way: "A literary adaptation creates a new story, it is not the same as the original, it takes on a new life, as indeed so the characters"(4). Obviously Adaptation is not a literal 'transcription' of a work of literature –a short story, play or a novel—into film; varying levels of transformation are involved in the process -- from literal rendering to a near-independent re-creation where the story and the characters are independent of the original text.

Among various kinds of adaptations, we can find out some such types: adaptation of literary classics, adaptation of plays and adaptation of popular fiction. Of these three, as Susan Hayward says, adaptation of drama into film is the most faithful adaptation of the original (Cinema Studies 4).

Let us now ask ourselves a question: if adaptation involves a transfer from one artistic medium to another, how do we understand it as a possibility? For conversion to happen from one medium to another, there must be some commonalities in both mediums. Common in narrative text (novel, short story, narrative poem etc) and narrative cinema is narrative. In fact, narrative is what exists in all possible mediums: film, comic strip, novel, opera, drama, puppetry, and so on. A narrative works through its dual time structure: it has astory time (which is the time of its plot events) and discourse time (that is manipulation of time through flashback or flash forward etc in the actual narrating of the story). These dual time orders function independently in narratives. For instance, different ordering of the discourse time is what characterises narratives in all mediums. Therefore the narratologists observed the translatablilty of a given narrative from one medium to another.

Check Your Progress:

Q: How do you make distinctions between translation and

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adaptation? How is, for instance, translating a novel from one language to another different from adapting the novel into a film? (60 words)

6.4 Adaptation: A Ubiquitous Trend

The history of film adaptation is as old as the history of cinema itself. A considerable body of cinema, in fact, consists of adaptations. In Hollywood, literature has been a persistent source of inspiration for sustaining the glorious cinematic tradition. Most of the films by D. W. Griffith are adaptations. He turned non-canonical texts into brilliant films. Griffith also adapted works by Tennyson, Browning, Thomas Hood, Jack London, and Charles Dickens, among others, and made films like *Enoch Arden*, *Pippa Passes*, *The Song of the Shirt*, *The Call of the Wild*, and *The Cricket on the Hearth*, respectively. What Griffith did, however, was not unique. He carried forward the legacy of French and Italian filmmakers who, right from the beginning of the twentieth century, looked back at literary materials to translate them into films.

In 1902, Georges Méliès filmed *A Trip to the Moon*, which had its origins in Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. The year 1908 saw the formation of the Société Film d'Art for the purpose of adapting outstanding literary works by Victor Hugo, Balzac, Charles Dickens, and others for the screen. Initially, Italian filmmakers were particularly drawn to historical works like Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii*, and Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Quo Vadis*, among others.

Filmmakers across different periods have drawn upon the works of Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Emily Brontë, Jane Austen, Dreiser, Thomas Hardy, Flaubert, Graham Greene, Joseph Conrad, Robert Bresson, Dante, James Joyce, John Steinbeck, and many

more. Many of these adaptations have been acclaimed as magnificent works of art. For instance, David Lean's *Great Expectations*, as Satyajit Ray has noted, "was and still remains the best Dickens film ever made" (*Our Films, Their Films*, p. 147). In the 1930s, we have *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) by Lewis Milestone, a vivid and moving adaptation of Erich Maria Remarque's pacifist novel of the same name. William Wyler's *Dodsworth* (1936) is a superb adaptation of Sinclair Lewis's novel. Margaret Mitchell's novel was adapted into *Gone With the Wind* (1939), one of the best examples of cinematic storytelling, directed by Victor Fleming.

In the world of Indian cinema, adaptation has also been a consistent trend. Chronologically, the first Indian feature film *Pundalik* (1917) by Nanabhai Govind was based on a Marathi play by Tipnis. The first feature film in South India, *Keechaka Vadham* (1919) by R. Nataraja Mudaliar, was based on a mythological episode from the *Mahabharata*. The *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, and other mythological narratives have had a profound influence on Indian cinema, especially in its early developmental phase. The films of D. G. Phalke — including *Raja Harishchandra*, *Mohini Bhasmasur*, *Satyavan Savitri*, *Lanka Dahan*, *Kalia Mardan*, *Setubandhan*, and *Rukmini Haran*—are all adaptations from Indian mythology.

Most of the early films made in Tamil in the early 1930s were 'photographed plays'. Telugu cinema's connection with theatre was even more intimate. Chunnibhai Desai's *Paduka Pattabhishekam* and *Shakuntala*, and the East India Company's *Ramadasu* and *Sati Savitri*, were all based on stage plays.

6.5 The Question of fidelity:

One important trend in critical theories on adaptation is fidelity criticism. It is founded on a principle of equivalence between the literary text and the cinematic text. In cultures where literature is highly valued, and film is only a recent development, the question of the filmmaker's ability to remain faithful to the original naturally becomes a key point. But, as we will discuss, such a restricted framework often does injustice to the differing conditions of meaning in the cinematic medium. There are other, more worldly questions of economy involved. Writing a novel does not palpably involve finance, but making a film obviously does. To remain faithful to the original would also require a whole paraphernalia for making the film, and a filmmaker cannot conjure up elaborate settings, locations, equipment, or logistics through an act of imagination. Let us elaborate the question further.

Whether a film—if it is a film based on literary fiction—is faithful to the original text is a question not entirely irrelevant. Canonical texts celebrated by wide readerships gain cultural importance in society. Readers make their own imaginary worlds through the projection of their desires, out of such popular classic texts. "When

we are confronted with someone else's phantasy," writes Robert Stam, "we feel the loss of our own phantasmatic relation to the novel, with the result that the adaptation itself becomes a kind of 'bad object'" (*The Dialogics of Adaptation*, 55).

However, fidelity cannot be a core methodological principle of adaptation. There are reasons why this is so. In the first place, strict fidelity is not possible. Literature and film are two different mediums. As already mentioned, the materials of their signifiers are different, and hence their processes in the production of meaning differ as well. For instance, a word or a sentence in a novel is not a fixed signal; it has the potential to trigger differing responses in readers. A novel allows for an inner construction of the novelistic world in different ways. When that line of literary description or narration is transposed onto the screen, it does not function merely as a means of inciting subjective responses—it is already concretized in the visual medium. "A beautiful garden"—a simple phrase from a novel—may generate varied imaginative gardens in readers' minds, but in the film, it must become a concrete garden with specific configurations of light, shadow, colour, and sound. Apart from this, the cinematic image affects the spectator not as a static picture, because its temporality is inscribed within the pacing of diegetic time in the film. A tree may be motionless in a long take, but the spectator remains aware of the temporality of its perception. Furthermore, the fact that shots are combined, edited, and synchronized with the soundtrack explains the intrinsic traits of cinema that set it apart from the novel. Besides, as hinted earlier, material differences in the modes of production of a literary text and a narrative film testify against the notion of 'complete fidelity'.

Moreover, to remain faithful to the original implies that the original has a core of meaning in itself. But a literary text does not have any such fixed, identifiable core; rather, it is amenable to a plethora of

interpretations. The passage of time further complicates the question of fidelity. As a text's interpretive horizon widens with time and as contexts shift, reverence for the original text tends to decrease, since the historical limitations of the values and ideologies it endorses become more visible. It is therefore likely that a somewhat antiquated classic of the past will be treated by a contemporary director through the prism of present-day values and ideologies. In more extreme cases, the past classic may become a mere pretext for exploring the troubles and turmoils besetting the present.

SAQ:

Can the phenomenon of film adaptation be understood from the perspective of "fidelity to the original"? Give a reasoned answer. (100 words)

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The Question of Description:

Description is a crucial issue in narrative literature. In early fiction, a text was interspersed with distinct descriptive passages, short or long. Elaborate description filled with ornate language in the midst of a relatively ordinary narrative discourse is often seen as a flaw in style. However, in pure description, the story time stops. Modern style integrates description carefully into the flow of the story so that the overall temporality of the narrative is not impeded. Background information, character traits, and setting details are never set off in any distinctively descriptive passage here but flow into the text to keep alive the narrative momentum. Even when

description is a necessity, carefully chosen details are presented so as to evoke in the reader's mind a complete picture. These details in literary narratives are asserted by a narrator. In cinema, plenitude of visual details does not ensure that the spectator grasps them all. The temporality of the cinematic flow does not encourage the spectator to achieve a total grasp of the visual situation. It is because the details are so presented that the spectator is obliged to consider only those details which are relevant to the plot. Over-emphasis on a specific detail may threaten to disturb the spectator's grasp of the narrative content of the film. The film's inherent dynamic structure does not allow the spectator to stop and speculate on the particular in the normal run of the cinema.

Cinema makes descriptive use of its devices such as a close-up shot, but it is for plot unravelling. The image constantly flows. Time elapsing in a 'descriptive' part of the film is also the time elapsing in the story. This simultaneous character of cinematic description can be illustrated through an analogy with live sports commentary. The commentator might describe a player, his past records, etc., which are unrelated to the action per se, but the action itself does not pause. What about the establishing shot in a film, then? Chatman argues that in some cinema, establishing shots serve a purely descriptive function, but it does not arrest the story-time; rather, the story-time "has not yet begun" (*What Novels Can Do*, 129). In a movie, the sense of "ticking away of story time" is difficult to dispel because, as Chatman contends, the movement in cinema is so iconic and so like the real-life movement.

Another important difference between novel and film lies in the mode of description itself. Description in a novel follows a definite (temporal) order, revealing the subjective position of the narrator. But cinematic description does not necessarily follow such order. In other words, in a novel, description unfolds sequentially across time,

which is a feature of linguistic narrative. The reader receives the information bit by bit, filtered through the perspective of the narrator, articulating the narrator's gaze, preferences, and values. This sequential ordering of description is part of the narrative's meaning. On the other hand, films describe visually, and the description is spatially simultaneous. Multiple elements in a single frame here appear at once. The spectator can scan the image and make meaning from the composite of details available at once. If temporality is a key marker of textual narrative, spatiality can disturb this sequential flow to create a different configuration of meaning.

Check Your Progress:

Q. Write a short note on the problem of 'description' in fictional text and film, with reference to text/film that you are familiar with. (100 words)

Adaptation as a Product, Process and Interpretive Event:

Linda Hutcheon defines adaptation from three interrelated perspectives: as a formal entity or product, as a creative process involving interpretation and recreation, and as a form of intertextual engagement by the spectator. For quite some time, adaptations had been viewed as inferior works compared to the literary texts that served as their sources. Even such writers as Virginia Woolf commented on the parasitic nature of film adaptations and how they prey upon literary works (Hutcheon 3). However, adaptations have gradually gained recognition as distinctive works of art—products with their own formal and stylistic identities, not necessarily lesser than their literary counterparts. Analysis of an adaptation's form and style helps us see that it involves an extensive transposition of a

literary work through a change of medium. With the rise of semiotics, critics began to highlight the distinctiveness of adaptation as a separate semiotic system. It is important to consider the contrasting structures of literary and cinematic appreciation: while literary texts begin with signs—graphemes and words that build propositions and gradually construct perception—film starts with perception and moves toward signification. From the givenness of a visual world, meaning is gradually derived. Fictional texts and films, therefore, belong to two different signifying systems: the novel's material is words and sentences, while the film's medium is projected light and shadow. Thus, understanding adaptation as a product requires attention to the change of medium. This shift involves crucial choices by the director regarding what to exclude, include, amplify, reproduce, or transform. Adaptation may also involve changes in genre or relocate the story within new geographical, historical, or political contexts to better connect with contemporary audiences. Consider, for example, the Shakespearean adaptations of Vishal Bhardwaj: *Maqbool* (2003), based on *Macbeth*, relocates the narrative from medieval Scotland to the Mumbai underworld, where the three witches are reimagined as corrupt, fortune-telling police officers. The film recontextualizes Shakespeare's tale of ambition, prophecy, and guilt within a mafia milieu. Similarly, *Omkara* shifts the setting of *Othello* from Venice and Cyprus to the rural heartland of Uttar Pradesh, replacing the racial outsider Othello with Omkara, a lower-caste leader. In *Haider* (2014), revenge, madness, and political intrigue in Denmark's royal court in *Hamlet* are reworked into a narrative of justice and loss set amid the insurgency in 1990s Kashmir. To see *Haider* solely as a representation of *Hamlet* is to overlook how Bhardwaj's film operates within an entirely different political, historical, and semiotic context.

The view of adaptation as a process focuses on the challenges that confront the filmmaker—particularly the interpretive relationship with the source text and the filmmaker's reading of it. The director's creative agency inevitably shapes the new work, often leading to a product that diverges significantly from the original. Two directors may interpret the same source text in entirely different ways. Adaptation thus becomes an act of interpretation, where the source is not simply given but must be understood and reimagined through the adapter's own values, ideologies, and aesthetic sensibilities. Consequently, adaptation studies can also serve as a study of the adapter's ideology. The focus, then, shifts from fidelity to the original toward the adapter's active, interpretive engagement with the text. Take, for example, Stanley Kubrick's 1971 adaptation of Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*. Kubrick makes critical interpretive decisions that reveal his philosophical and political concerns. While the novel ends with the protagonist's moral transformation and redemption, Kubrick omits the final chapter, ending the film on a darker, more ambiguous note. His adaptation critiques state control, psychological conditioning, and the suppression of individual agency—issues that resonated with Cold War anxieties. Kubrick's version suggests that forced morality is more sinister than natural evil, revealing his libertarian skepticism of authoritarian power.

The interpretive act alone does not result in a successful film. Once decisions have been made about what to emphasize, omit, or alter, the real creative challenge begins: to re-create the story as a coherent whole in a new medium. Transferring elements from literature to cinema cannot be a mechanical process; everything must be reconfigured to fit the language of film. This includes changes to the plot structure, setting, or point of view—but more importantly, it involves exploiting the full expressive potential of

cinema. Consider how Satyajit Ray adapted Rabindranath Tagore's *Nashtaneer* into *Charulata*. In the novella, the protagonist Charu's boredom and emotional longing are conveyed through subtle narrative cues and interior monologue. Tagore's prose captures a subdued yet powerful yearning, hinting that Charu is too refined for gossip and that her emotional world remains unexplored by her busy husband, Bhupati. Ray translates this inner life into cinematic experience through visual motifs: Charu embroidering in silence, walking through empty corridors, or peering through opera glasses. No words are necessary; instead, space and framing, movement and stillness, long takes and slow pans—all combine to evoke the protagonist's inner state in a language native to cinema.

Adaptation also invites an intertextual approach; it is not an isolated or self-contained phenomenon. Rather than viewing adaptation simply as the transfer of content from a literary source to a cinematic form, it is more productive to see it as part of a vast network of interconnected cultural artifacts. Adaptation involves a dialogic relationship between texts—across times, cultures, forms, and genres—and opens a space for meaning to be continually negotiated and redefined. Understood this way, even works not explicitly labeled as adaptations may still respond to or rework earlier narratives, motifs, or forms. This broader framework expands the scope of adaptation to include retellings, reinterpretations, parodies, homages, and cultural appropriations across media. A film might adapt a myth, a painting, a historical event, or even another film, often referencing multiple sources in the process. Adaptation thus becomes an act of cultural translation and transformation, firmly rooted in intertextuality. This expansive view enables us to approach cultural production in a more inclusive and dynamic way, recognizing how stories evolve, migrate, and acquire fresh meanings in new settings and among new audiences.

SAQ:

Explain adaptation as an interpretive act. (60 words)

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6.8 Adaptation as Translation and Intertextual engagement

The normative and moralistic framework of fidelity criticism cannot adequately account for the variety and diversity that persist in the world of adaptation. Robert Stam, therefore, proposes replacing the rigid notion of fidelity with the broader and more inclusive concept of translation. Adaptation as translation acknowledges that both losses and gains are integral to the process; film adaptation is no exception. Just as translation involves rendering a text from one language to another—negotiating cultural, linguistic, and stylistic differences—adaptation transposes a narrative across mediums, each with its own grammar, constraints, and expressive possibilities. As we have discussed, cinema as a multi-trek medium generates a wide range of possibilities for articulating meaning. Transformation, interpretation, and creative recontextualization are central to this process. The notions of "fidelity, betrayal, deformation, violation, vulgarization, and desecration," Stam argues, belong to fidelity criticism, where negativity is always implicit. What is required in this new approach to adaptation is a recognition of differences and a focus on the negotiation between languages, contexts, and audience expectations. The outcomes of these negotiations should not be dismissed as distortions but viewed as necessary strategies to effectively render meaning in a new medium. A film may amplify, reinterpret, reframe, or marginalize certain aspects of the source text. Moreover, just as translation is never a complete reinscription of a text's total meaning in another language but rather a specific

reading, adaptation too is a reading of the literary text, implying the possibility of many alternative readings. For instance, Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* has inspired numerous cinematic adaptations, including Jean Renoir's 1934 version, Vincente Minnelli's 1949 MGM production starring Jennifer Jones, Hans Schott-Schöbinger's 1969 German version, Claude Chabrol's 1991 adaptation with Isabelle Huppert, Sophie Barthes's 2014 film featuring Mia Wasikowska, and Anne Fontaine's *Gemma Bovery* (2014).

Adaptation is not merely a dialogue between two texts; any text—whether linguistic or cinematic—already possesses an intertextual dimension, formed through the intersection of multiple textual surfaces via quotation, conflation, or inversion of other texts. Mikhail Bakhtin argues that the dialogism of a text is multidimensional, rooted in social life and history, involving both literary and non-literary genres. Building on this idea, Gérard Genette provides a taxonomy of textual interaction, and Robert Stam contends that this framework is equally relevant to film adaptation. Genette's umbrella term, *transtextuality*, encompasses all aspects of a text's relationship with other texts. Within this, *intertextuality* refers to the explicit co-presence of two texts, where the source text is either directly inserted or clearly recognizable within the new one. Examples abound in cinema: in *Komal Gandhar*, Ritwik Ghatak explicitly references Bengali theatre and incorporates political slogans and songs from the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA); in *Akaler Sandhane*, Mrinal Sen includes a character who refers to Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali*; in *Apur Sansar*, Ray alludes to the myth of Shiva and Parvati through the cinematic treatment of plot and character; similarly, in *Subarna Rekha*, Ghatak's use of cinematic allusion to the *Ramayana* adds poignancy and depth to the suffering of the central characters. As a

viewer, you may take it upon yourself to identify and reflect on these intertextual aspects while watching a film.

Paratextuality refers to the ways in which peripheral elements shape the main text of a film. In the cinematic context, these include features such as opening credits, trailers, promotional posters, interviews, director's notes, and remarks made during the film's first screening. Though often considered supplementary, such elements play a crucial role in framing audience expectations and guiding interpretations of the film. They act as thresholds that mediate our entry into the cinematic narrative, subtly influencing how the viewer perceives the central text.

Metatextuality, on the other hand, denotes the critical relationship one text establishes with another, often through commentary or reflection. In Bollywood, there are several instances of films that exhibit a strong metatextual awareness. A notable example is Farah Khan's *Om Shanti Om*, which functions both as a self-aware tribute to and a parody of the Bollywood films of the 1970s. Another key category, hypertextuality, is particularly significant in the study of adaptation. In this relationship, the cinematic text—the hypertext—transforms an anterior literary text, known as the hypotext. This transformation may involve expansion, modification, or reinterpretation, rather than the direct co-presence of the original. As previously mentioned, the various film versions of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* are all hypertexts of the novel, each offering a distinct reading and creative reworking of the source text.

Check Your Progress:

Q.1: How does the concept of adaptation as translation challenge the traditional notion of fidelity in adaptation studies? Illustrate your answer with an example. (80 words)

Q.2: What is meant by intertextual engagement in cinema? Identify and briefly discuss one instance of intertextuality in an Indian film.

6.9 Summing Up

Adaptation, in both literary and cinematic contexts, is a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon that goes beyond the mere transfer of content from one medium to another. At its core, adaptation involves the re-articulation of a source text into a new form, shaped by a complex interplay of cultural, aesthetic, and ideological considerations. Far from being merely derivative, adaptation is a creative and interpretive act that both preserves and transforms meaning.

We began by exploring the definition and ubiquity of adaptation, recognizing that storytelling across media is as old as culture itself. From oral tales rendered into print, to novels reshaped into plays, and films based on historical texts, adaptation permeates global narrative traditions. The long-dominant question of fidelity—whether an adaptation remains 'faithful' to its source—has now been problematized. Fidelity is increasingly seen as a limited and reductive measure that overlooks the adaptive text's internal logic, contextual specificities, and medium-related constraints.

Closely related is the question of description: in cinema, for instance, the visual plenitude does not guarantee comprehension. The temporal flow of the medium often inhibits the spectator from fully grasping every visual detail. This challenges assumptions that filmic adaptation can offer a transparent or total representation of the source.

Adaptation functions simultaneously as a process, a product, and an interpretive event. As a process, it involves choices about selection, emphasis, medium, and audience. As a product, it is embedded

within specific industrial, aesthetic, and ideological contexts. As an interpretive event, it invites audiences to compare, contrast, and generate new readings across media and texts.

In this regard, adaptation can be likened to translation—not in the narrow linguistic sense, but in a broader semiotic and cultural framework. Like translation, adaptation involves crossing borders—of language, form, time, and audience—where meaning is never fixed but continually reshaped by context.

Finally, adaptation must be situated within the paradigm of intertextuality. No text exists in isolation; every adaptation is enmeshed in a network of references and cultural codes. It engages not only with its source, but also with other adaptations, genres, audience expectations, and historical moments—becoming part of a continuum of meaning-making processes.

To sum up, adaptation is not a secondary or inferior mode of cultural production. It is a vital, generative, and interpretive practice—a space where creativity meets tradition, and where stories are not merely retold, but imaginatively re-envisioned for new audiences and new times.

6.10 References and Suggested Reading

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Block- II

Unit 1: **Andre Bazin: The Evolution of the language of Cinema**

Unit 2: **Ritwik Kumar Ghatak: An Introduction**

Unit 3: **Ritwik Kumar Ghatak: Sound in Film**

Unit 4: **Ann E. Kaplan:Is the Gaze Male?**

Unit 5: **Christian Metz: "Identification, Mirror", "Story/Discourse", "The Fiction Film and Its Spectator" (part I)**

Unit 6: **Christian Metz: "Identification, Mirror", "Story/Discourse", "The Fiction Film and Its Spectator" (part II)**

UNIT- 1

ANDRE BAZIN: THE EVOLUTION OF THE LANGUAGE OF CINEMA

Unit Structure:

1.1 Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 Andre Bazin: His Life and Work

1.4 Bazin as a Theorist of Cinematic Realism

1.5 Reading the Essay

1.6 Summing Up

1.7 References and Suggested Reading

1.1 Objectives:

By the end of this unit, the learner will be able to

- *learn* about Andre Bazin's life;
- *appreciate* Bazin as a key theorist of Cinema;
- *write* about the basic arguments in the essay;
- *apply* concepts of cinema in appreciation of film.

1.2 Introduction:

Study of cinema is a recent phenomenon, compared to study of other arts including literature. Cinema itself is the new art, coming into existence with the advent of photography in the nineteenth century. Cinema is perhaps the most popular art form, a fact even more true in our times when smartphones and digital technologies take over and visual culture is ubiquitous. But as a serious 'reader'

of films, we need to orient ourselves to certain basic questions and issues involving this art. Watching film is never a spontaneous act; it requires some training as to how to read a film. (By the way, How to Read a Film is the name of a book by James Monaco, itself a must read for a student of cinema.) whenever we discuss cinema, we discuss individual films, and sometimes we dwell on the filmmakers, but rarely do we focus on the great theorists of cinema whose huge compendium of study has enabled countless filmmakers to learn about this art and shaped their artistic sensibilities. Andre Bazin is one such pioneering figure in film studies. A man who created great furore in 1940s and 1950s among the cine-enthusiasts and directors across the globe and whose legacies still continues, Bazin died in late 1950s , leaving behind a huge compendium of writings with more than a thousand articles on cinema. Bazin was a saint-like figure, whose commitment to this form was almost religious. Bazin was a key figure who established the study of cinema as a legitimate domain of study, in a way institutionalized film study. His career as a critic started with the Nazi occupation of France and continued till the post-war era of liberation. It was this period when film study books began to emerge, critical film magazines in Europe , especially in France came be circulated. Underlying the work that Bazin produced was the basic idea: that film is essentially a realist art form. If we can cite Georg Lukacs as a theorist of realism in fictional literature, Bazin is a theorist of cinematic realism. We might have eclipsed the boundary of realism today and look for a variety of forms and styles of representation, yet Bazin's understanding of the cinema as a language and the role of the camera, beyond the manipulative hand of the filmmaker, to capture reality is still both rewarding and educative.

This Unit basically reads Andre Bazin's seminal essay "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema".

1.3 Andre Bazin: His Life and Work

André Bazin was a prominent French film critic and theorist who left an indelible mark on the world of cinema. He was born on April 18, 1918, in Angers, France. Bazin attended the prestigious École Normale Supérieure de Saint-Cloud, where he developed a strong foundation in philosophy and literature. He graduated in 1941. This time-period was crucial in developing his approach to film criticism and theory. Throughout his career, Bazin was committed to promoting a deeper understanding and appreciation of film as an art form. His passion for cinema and his unique critical perspective quickly established him as a leading voice in French film criticism.

Bazin's career as a film critic began in the 1940s, during which he wrote daily reviews for *Le Parisienlibéré* and contributed essays to various weeklies and monthlies. In 1951, Bazin co-founded the influential film magazine, *Cahiers du cinéma*, alongside Jacques Doniol-Valcroze and Joseph-Marie Lo Duca, which became a platform for Bazin to share his ideas and critiques with a wider audience. The magazine played a significant role in shaping the French New Wave movement. One of Bazin's most influential essays, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," was published in 1945 and laid the groundwork for his future writings on film. In this essay, Bazin explored the relationship between the photographic image and reality, arguing that the camera has the ability to capture the world in a way that is both objective and subjective. Later, this idea become a central theme in Bazin's film criticism and theory, influencing his advocacy for realism, location shooting, and the use of non-professional actors.

One of Bazin's most significant contributions to film studies is his four-volume collection of writings, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* (What is cinema?). Published posthumously, this collection covers the

years 1958 to 1962 and offers a comprehensive exploration of Bazin's thoughts on cinema. A selection of these writings was translated into English and published in two volumes in the late 1960s and early 1970s, thus introducing Bazin's ideas to a broader audience. An extensive collection of Bazin's texts, *André Bazin: Selected Writings 1943–1958*, came out in 2018. This comprehensive collection offers a thorough examination of Bazin's thoughts on cinema, covering topics such as film aesthetics, realism, and the relationship between cinema and literature.

André Bazin developed a critical system that emphasized the importance of objective reality in cinema. This approach prioritized the depiction of everyday life and the use of realist film techniques and became a hallmark of Bazin's critical methodology. He believed that films should strive to capture the complexity and nuance of real life, rather than relying on manipulative techniques or artificial constructs. This commitment to realism was reflected in his advocacy for the use of deep focus and the avoidance of montage, techniques that he believed allowed for a more objective and unmediated representation of reality. He believed that documentaries and films of the Italian neorealism school, which he referred to as "the Italian school of the Liberation," were exemplary models of this approach. These films, with their emphasis on everyday life and their use of non-professional actors and location shooting, offered a more authentic and realistic representation of the world. Bazin also championed the use of deep focus, wide shots, and the shot-in-depth as key techniques for capturing objective reality. He argued that these techniques allowed for a more realistic representation of the world, one that was exempted from the artificial constraints of montage and visual effects.

Apart from his emphasis on realism, he also advocated for the importance of directorial vision, and strived to promote a deeper

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understanding and appreciation of cinema as an art form. His ideas have shaped the work of numerous film scholars and critics, including François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, and Éric Rohmer, among others. Bazin's critical system was also characterized by his preference for "true continuity" through mise-en-scène over experiments in editing and visual effects. He believed that the careful arrangement of actors, sets, and camera angles could create a more realistic representation of the world, one that was more engaging and immersive for the viewer. His advocacy for the auteur theory, which posits that a film reflects its director's unique perspective and creative vision, has had a lasting impact on film criticism and theory.

André Bazin's film theory was influenced by a diverse range of philosophical and intellectual traditions, including Roman Catholicism, Personalism, and Hegelianism. These influences shaped his understanding of realism, his advocacy for the auteur theory, and his preference for certain filmic techniques, such as the long take. Roman Catholicism was a significant influence on Bazin's outlook on cinema. Bazin's Catholicism is the root which generates his understanding of realism, which is more closely linked with metaphysical realism than with corporeality. This metaphysical realism is characterized by a focus on the spiritual and the transcendent, rather than the material and the mundane. Personalism, a philosophical movement that emphasizes the importance of individual freedom and creativity, was another significant influence on Bazin's work. Bazin's personalism led him to believe that a film should represent a director's personal vision, an idea that had a pivotal importance in the development of the auteur theory. This theory, which was championed by Bazin and his colleagues at *Cahiers du cinéma*, posits that a film reflects its

director's unique perspective and creative vision. Hegelianism, a philosophical movement that emphasizes the importance of dialectical reasoning and the unfolding of history in time, has also been identified as an influence on Bazin's work.

During the German occupation of Paris, Bazin founded a ciné-club at the Maison des Lettres, a student organization that provided a platform for film enthusiasts to discuss and debate the latest cinematic releases. This experience not only deepened Bazin's understanding of film but also instilled in him a sense of community and camaraderie with fellow film enthusiasts. Bazin was diagnosed with leukaemia in 1954 and he passed away on November 11, 1958, at the age of 40.

André Bazin was a pioneering film critic and theorist who made significant contributions to the development of film studies. His emphasis on the importance of realism, his concept of the ontology of the photographic image, and his commitment to promoting a deeper understanding and appreciation of film as an art form have had a lasting impact on the world of cinema. His writings on film theory and criticism have been widely translated and anthologized, and his influence can be seen in the work of numerous film scholars and critics. The French New Wave, a movement that emerged in the late 1950s and 1960s, was particularly influenced by Bazin's ideas, with filmmakers such as François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard drawing on his theories and critiques in their own work. As a film critic and theorist, Bazin's work continues to influence film scholarship and criticism, offering a powerful framework for analysing and interpreting the cinematic image.

1.4 Bazin as a Theorist of Cinematic Realism

André Bazin was a saint-like figure in cinematic discourse: he had a missionary zeal to espouse the cause of the cinema. He founded cinema clubs that were not confined to elitist cinephiles. Cinema clubs founded by him showed films banned by Nazi authorities. After the Liberation, he was appointed as a film critic in a daily newspaper called *Le Parisien libre*. Jean-Paul Sartre even commissioned him to write essays for *Les Temps Modernes*. He wrote in magazines such as *L'ÉcranFrançais*, *France-Observateur*, *Radio-Cinéma-Télévision*, *La Revue du Cinéma*, *Critique*, *L'Éducation Nationale*, and *Esprit*. His most significant contribution to film theory was his co-founding of *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1951, a journal that became the intellectual cradle of the French New Wave.

Bazin's espousal of realism is grounded in the belief that man has striven to copy the visible world by various means, and it is the camera that enables him to do it with extraordinary precision. Other arts such as painting copy nature, but they somehow foreground the authorial vision and perspective. It is through this invention of the mechanical instrument, the camera, that it becomes possible to reproduce the world's surface with exactness and accuracy without any intervention or mediation by the cameraperson. Because of the lack of human agency in this part of reproduction, a cinematic image, according to Bazin, is truthful. It is easy to see why Bazin detested the montage technique offered by the Soviet filmmakers: the basic dichotomy he identified was between the manipulativeness of montage and the truthfulness of a non-manipulated, pristine cinematic image. This contrast manifests a larger debate: a notion of reality as a director's projection through manipulative ordering of shots versus a view of reality in which the camera does not lend any meaning, leaving the viewer to interpret it in their own way.

Bazin's theory of realism in cinema was largely influenced by his belief that film should reflect reality as closely as possible, preserving the spatial and temporal continuity of events. He championed the use of deep-focus cinematography and the long take, techniques that allow for greater depth and detail in a single frame. This approach, evident in the works of filmmakers such as Orson Welles, Jean Renoir, and Vittorio De Sica, fosters a sense of ambiguity and freedom for the spectator, who is invited to engage with the mise-en-scène rather than being guided by a director's manipulative sequencing of images. One of Bazin's central arguments was that cinema, as a medium, has an ontological relationship with reality. In his seminal essay, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," he argued that photography and film possess an indexical relationship with the real world. Movie camera captures moments in time without the distortion introduced by an artist's hand. This distinguishes cinema from other art forms, making it a uniquely powerful medium for presenting the world as it is rather than as an artist interprets it.

Let me give an example to demonstrate Bazin's idea of cinematic realism and the effect of mis-en-scene. In *Pather Panchali*, Satyajit Ray depicts Apu and Durga running across the fields to watch a passing train (you may watch this scene on YouTube.) This sequence is remarkable for its composition, where the foreground and background coexist in a single frame, allowing multiple layers of meaning to emerge naturally. In the foreground, Apu and Durga stand in awe, their fascination with the train visually and emotionally palpable. In the background, the train moves across the static frame, leaving a trail of black smoke behind. The long take and deep focus ensure that both the observers (the children) and the observed (the train) remain in sharp focus, inviting the spectator to interpret the scene freely rather than being guided by artificial

editing. This moment is extraordinarily cinematic yet deeply realistic because it is minimally mediated by the camera. Unlike montage-driven sequences that dictate meaning, this shot allows ambiguity to unfold organically. The image can be read in multiple ways: as a depiction of the children's natural wonder at the train, as their metaphoric contact with modernity, a world far removed from their rural existence, even as a premonition of Apu's future struggles, suggested by the ominous black smoke trailing in the background—a visual cue that subtly hints at the trials awaiting Apu in his engagement with urban life.

Stop to Consider:

Watch a few films of Italian neorealism, including Vittorio de Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*. Try to single out the mise-en-scenes. Do they conform to Bazinian exposition of cinematic realism? Think about it. While analysing the scenes, attend to the use of long shot, wide frame, creation of space through deep focus, and the resulting ambiguity of meaning.

SAQ:

Write a note on Andre Bazin's notion of cinematic realism (100 words)

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1.5 Reading the Essay:

The advent of sound in cinema created apprehensions among directors of silent films. As Bazin maintains, this apprehension was understandable. However, he argues that the difference between silent and sound films was not primarily in editing. Rather, great directors of both eras demonstrated similarities in their approach to editing. Bazin, therefore, locates the key difference in their cinematic styles.

To explain the distinction between films of the 1920s and the 1940s, Bazin introduces a different category: the contrast between 'image' and 'reality.' Image is constructed through various means—set design, lighting, performance, and shot framing—all of which contribute to the representation on screen. On the other hand, images can also be simply arranged in sequence, as in montage.

In pre-war American films, montage remained invisible, serving only to provide dramatic logic for an episode. This is where the spectator accepts the director's viewpoint. However, this was not the full potential of montage. Other uses included parallel montage, where simultaneous actions are shown; accelerated montage, where a sense of speed is evoked by using shots of ever-decreasing length; and 'montage by attraction,' where the meaning of one image is imposed upon another image that is not intrinsically connected to it. These modes of combining shots can generate various reconfigurations. Essentially, montage is the creation of a third meaning through the juxtaposition of two images, as demonstrated by Kuleshov's experiment. The meaning and significance of a film, therefore, derive more fundamentally from the sequencing of shots rather than from their individual content. Meaning is not inherent in

the image itself—it is the director's projection through montage into the spectator's consciousness.

On the one hand, German cinema violated the plasticity of the image through such techniques; on the other, Soviet cinema developed the theory and practice of montage. In both cases, the interpretation or meaning of an event was imposed upon the spectator. Ultimately, all silent cinema did was add something to a given reality.

However, Erich von Stroheim, F.W. Murnau, and Robert Flaherty—emerging from the silent film era—challenged the notion of cinema as being fundamentally grounded in montage and image. Their conscious avoidance of montage and their focus, instead, on the actual duration of an event marked a departure from earlier cinematic practices, as Bazin argues. In *Nanook of the North*, Flaherty presents the actual time required for Nanook to hunt a seal. The representation of this real duration necessitates a fixed set-up. Murnau, on the other hand, prioritizes the dramatic space rather than the actual duration of events, making his images less pictorial. Above all is Stroheim, in whose films, as Bazin remarks, "reality lays itself bare like a suspect confessing under the relentless examination of the commissioner of police" (*Film Theory and Criticism*, p. 45). To Stroheim, the more closely and relentlessly one observes reality, the more it reveals itself.

For these three directors, the shot is not merely a semantic or syntactical unit; rather, the image is valued for what it objectively reveals. This is a remarkable Bazinian insight. In cinematic discourse, it is common to draw an analogy between the structure of cinema and that of verbal language. A shot is often likened to a word or a sentence, while larger clusters of shots are compared to

broader semantic units such as paragraphs or passages. In contrast, Bazin highlights the shot as something that presents a distinct reality — one not necessarily connected to what precedes or follows it in a sequence.

With the arrival of synchronized sound in the late 1920s, many believed that it had radically transformed cinema, creating a deep divide between silent and sound films. However, Bazin argues that sound did not create such a rupture. Instead, it represented a natural progression of film language, furthering cinema's realism. This does not mean that silent cinema was not true cinema.

During the 1930s and 1940s, a common cinematic language evolved in Hollywood, shaped by various trends, including comedy, burlesque, dance and vaudeville films, as well as crime and gangster movies. Meanwhile, French cinema, particularly the poetic realism of directors such as Jacques Feyder, Jean Renoir, Marcel Carné, and Julien Duvivier, gained prominence. In their works, sound cinema reached a level of maturity, characterized by the harmony of image and sound, the use of dramatic and moral themes, and an artistic balance.

Though technical improvements took place in the 1930s, they primarily enhanced detail rather than opening up new possibilities for direction. However, since the 1940s, advancements in cinematography have been remarkable. Jean Renoir had already employed deep focus in his films, demonstrating that it was no longer a technical challenge by then. All necessary technical elements, such as panchromatic stock, microphones, and crane shots, were already available in the 1930s.

Since the advent of sound, editing has largely moved away from associative montage, evolving into a new and dramatic mode of

storytelling. This dramatic-analytic mode retains the objectivity of the scene. The purpose of cutting is primarily dramatic and psychological, while maintaining spatial verisimilitude. Any shifts in perspective achieved through camerawork add nothing fundamentally new to the scene. This approach to montage can be traced back to D.W. Griffith's silent films. Another key observation by Bazin is that the introduction of sound pushed montage toward realism, as sound is far less flexible than the image.

Stop to Consider:

How sound creates realism can be understood by watching any film. Suppose you need to present a scene where Character A steps into another room where Character B is singing. How do you film it?

Character A hears faint music. Curious, he opens the door with his back to the camera. In the next shot, as he steps into the room, he faces the camera. On the soundtrack, the music becomes louder. The sound bridges the shots and provides a sense of continuity, thereby enhancing realism.

This mode of filmmaking reached new heights when *shot in depth* was introduced by Orson Welles and William Wyler. What Bazin emphasizes is that film language was not shaped exclusively by the Eisensteinian notion of montage but evolved beyond associative montage. Even the realistic use of montage was now challenged by the introduction of deep focus. With reference to Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane*, Bazin contends that the dramatic effect once created by montage is now achieved through the use of depth of field, a fixed frame, a fixed camera, long takes, and character movement. A certain montage effect can still be produced through the use of soft

focus, while background and foreground elements are structured within a single take. This, however, is more closely related to photographic style and the effects of camerawork.

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Stop to Consider:

Soft Focus: Through the use of specific lenses or camera techniques, a blurred visual effect can be created while still retaining the overall shape of objects within the frame.

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Bazin refers to Jean Renoir as a precursor to Orson Welles in the use of depth of field, as Renoir partially replaced montage with panning shots and other techniques to create a sense of continuity in dramatic space and duration. (It is important to note that Bazin highlights cinema's ability to preserve a view of reality in its actual duration rather than fragmenting it through cuts.) While Bazin acknowledges montage's contributions to the evolution of cinematic language, he argues that film language developed beyond the limits of montage. For Bazin, depth of field is not merely a technical effect dependent on equipment such as lenses. Instead, it introduces a new mode of film direction and language. Moreover, the use of depth of field alters the spectator's relationship with the image. First, it brings the spectator closer to the image than is possible in everyday reality, making the effect more immersive and realistic. Second, it requires a more active response from the spectator rather than passively guiding them toward a predetermined meaning.

The most crucial distinction Bazin makes between montage and *mise-en-scène* is in their metaphysical approach to reality. Montage directors viewed reality as singular and univocal—leading, as demonstrated by the famous Kuleshov experiment, to precise and fixed meanings. In contrast, *mise-en-scène* embraces the ambiguity of reality. The image, shaped through *mise-en-scène*, carries the

possibility of multiple interpretations rather than a singular, imposed meaning.

The avoidance of montage and the expression of an ambiguous view of reality are hallmarks of Italian neorealism. However, neorealism did not introduce any revolutionary changes in editing. Although American and neorealist filmmakers employed different styles, both were committed to capturing the continuum of reality.In this regard, Bazin specifically highlights Luchino Visconti's *La Terra Trema*, which is composed of one-shot sequences and makes exclusive use of deep focus.

Check Your Progress:

Q.1: How does Bazin differentiate between montage and mise-en-scène in terms of their approach to reality, and what role does depth of field play in this distinction? (150 words)

Q.2: In what ways does Italian neorealism align with Bazin's argument about cinema's ability to capture the continuum of reality, and how does *La Terra Trema* exemplify this approach? (150 words)

1.6 Summing Up

Bazin's influence extended to filmmakers and theorists who embraced his realist aesthetic. The Italian Neorealists, including Roberto Rossellini and Vittorio De Sica, embodied Bazin's ideals through their use of non-professional actors, location shooting, and narratives drawn from everyday life. Similarly, Bazin's impact on the French New Wave directors is well known. Filmmakers such as

François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard absorbed Bazin's ideas, even as they experimented with techniques that sometimes contradicted his emphasis on realism.

André Bazin remains one of the most influential figures in film theory. His advocacy for realism, his emphasis on the ontological nature of the cinematic image, and his critique of montage as a manipulative tool have shaped the discourse of film aesthetics. His ideas continue to inform contemporary debates about the nature of cinematic representation, making his work a cornerstone of film studies. François Truffaut dedicated *The 400 Blows* to Bazin, and the film itself reflects Bazinian thought through its use of deep focus, long takes, and location shooting.

Bazin's essay is not a survey of modern cinema but an account of how cinema evolved as a language in the early twentieth century. The key shift he highlights in this trajectory of cinematic language is the transition from montage to *mise-en-scène*, which simultaneously represents a shift from expressionism to realism. While Soviet filmmakers extensively practiced montage as a mode of metaphoric association between disparate shots, Bazin argued that this approach made the spectator a passive recipient of meaning, with the director as its ultimate arbiter.

American films, beginning with D.W. Griffith, used montage as a dramatic necessity rather than as an externally imposed intellectual formula. At the same time, *mise-en-scène* became increasingly prominent in American cinema and was later carried over into Italian Neorealism, lending an unprecedented realism to the cinematic image. The introduction of deep focus also transformed the spectator into an active participant in meaning-making, heightening their awareness of the ambiguity of reality.

1.7 References and Suggested Readings

- Braudy, Leo and Marshall Cohen. Editors. *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

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UNIT- 2

RITWIK KUMAR GHATAK: AN INTRODUCTION

Unit Structure:

2.1 Objectives:

By the end of this unit, the learner will be able to

- *obtain* an idea of Ritwik Kumar Ghatak as a filmmaker;
- *learn* about his life;
- *learn* about the films of Ghatak;
- *assess* Ghatak as a thinker of cinema

2.2 Introduction:

Ritwik Kumar Ghatak was a multifaceted Indian filmmaker, scriptwriter, actor, and playwright who left a lasting imprint on the Indian cinematic landscape. The new wave of cinema that swept across our country from the fifties started in Bengal. The 'trio' of Bengali filmmakers who were part of this revolution were Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Kumar Ghatak and Mrinal Sen. Ghatak made fewer

films compared to Satyajit Ray, yet his films were no lesser. What surprises a cinephile of today is the determination and confidence with which Ghatak achieved a style which is nowhere influenced by Ray, a style that made his films an inexhaustible source of fascination. Ghatak was at once a keen thinker on the cinematic form. Apart from the short essay 'Sound in Cinema' that you are to read in this course, there are plenty of other essays that speak volumes on Ghatak's deep obsessive thought about cinema as an art form. This unit will also give you a perspective on his films with which you will be able to connect some of the ideas he articulates in the essay mentioned.

2.3 A Brief Biographical Sketch:

Ritwik Kumar Ghatak was born on November 4, 1925, in Dhaka, Bengal Presidency, in British India. His father, Suresh Chandra Ghatak, a district magistrate, poet, and playwright, and his mother, Indubala Devi, were major influences on his early life which later moulded his ideals and principles as a visionary writer. Driven by significant events such as the Bengal famine of 1943, communal riots of 1946, and the partition of Bengal in 1947, his family migrated to Kolkata. Ghatak attended the Mission School in Mymensingh, followed by Baliganj Govt. High School in Kolkata. He graduated from Krishnath College in Baharampur in 1958 and later enrolled in the MA program at Calcutta University. His elder brother, Manish Ghatak, a professor and writer, was deeply involved with the Tebhaga movement, a peasant uprising in Bengal during the late 1940s. Ghatak's life and work were deeply influenced by the socio-political landscape of his time, and he went on to become one of the most important figures in Indian cinema.

RitwikGhatak began his artistic journey in 1948 by writing his first play, *Kalosayar* (The Dark Lake), and participating in the revival of the landmark play, *Nabanna* (The New Rice Celebration). His literary compositions as a playwright include *Koto Dhane Koto Chaal* (1952), *Ispaat* (The Steel) (1954-55), *Jwalonto* (The Burning), *Shey Meye* (The Damsel), among others. Ghatak's writing career took off with contributions to various papers, including *The Desh*, *The Xanibarer Chithi*, and *The Agrani*. Ghatak's entry into the film industry began with Nimai Ghosh's *Chinnamul* (1950), where he worked as an actor and assistant director. He worked as an assistant director in the film *Bedini* (1951) and joined the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) in 1951. A year later, he completed his first film, *Nagarik* (The Citizen,1952), a ground-breaking work that, along with *Chinnamul*, revolutionized Indian cinema. Ghatak's most notable works include the *Partition Trilogy*, comprising *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (The Cloud-capped Star, 1960), *Komal Gandhar* (A Soft Note on a Sharp Scale, 1961), and *Subarnarekha* (The Golden Thread, 1962). These films showcased Ghatak's unique blend of documentary realism, stylized performance, and Brechtian filmic apparatus. Ghatak's filmmaking career spanned over two decades, during which he directed eight full-length films, including *Ajantrik* (The Unmechanical, 1958), *Bari Theke Paliye* (The Runaway, 1958), and *Titash Ekti Nadir Naam* (A River called Titash, 1973). His plays, *Dalil* (1952) and *Sanko* (1953) serve as a critical examination of the intricate political landscape surrounding the Partition of Bengal and its socio-economic aftermath. Throughout his career, Ghatak was known for his innovative and influential filmmaking style, which often explored themes of social reality, partition, and feminism. Ghatak's films were often characterized by their use of location shooting, non-professional actors, and a focus on the lives of ordinary people.

As a scriptwriter, Ghatak achieved significant commercial success with the Hindi film *Madhumati* (1958), which earned the Filmfare Best Story Award. He also directed several documentaries and short films, including *Adivasis* (1955), *Places of historic interest in Bihar* (1955), *Scissors* (1962), *Civil Defence* (1965), *Scientists of Tomorrow* (1967), *Yeh Kyu* (1970), *Amar Lenin* (1970), *PuruliarChhau* (1970), and *Durbar Gati Padma* (1971). His last film, *Yukti Takko Aar Gappo* (Reason, Debate, and a Story, 1974), was an autobiographical work that reflected his personal life and outlook. In 2007, Ghatak's film *Titash Ekti Nadir Naam* (1973) topped the list of best 10 films rated by the British Film Institute. Apart from being a playwright and director, he also acted in a number of remarkable plays like *Chandragupta* by Dwijendralal Ray, *Dakghar* by Rabindranath Tagore, *Kolonko* by Bijon Bhattacharya, *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare, and *Nildarpan* by Dinabandhu Mitra.

Ghatak moved to Pune to teach at the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) where he mentored several prominent filmmakers, including Mani Kaul, Kumar Shahani, and Aparna Sen. During his tenure at FTII, Ghatak was involved in the production of two student films, *Fear* (1965) and *Rendezvous* (1965). Ghatak's involvement with the Communist Party of India, of which he was a member until his expulsion in 1955, significantly influenced his artistic vision. He played a crucial role in the party's cultural wing, the Indian People's Theatre Association.

Ghatak's cinematic contributions were recognized with several prestigious awards. In 1974, he received the Rajat Kamal Award for Best Story at the National Film Awards for his film *Jukti Takko Aar Gappo*. Additionally, he was honoured with the Best Director's Award from the Bangladesh Cine Journalist's Association for his

film *Titash Ekti Nadir Naam*. He was awarded the prestigious Padma Shri by the Government of India in 1970.

Alongside prominent contemporaries such as Satyajit Ray, Tapan Sinha, and Mrinal Sen, Ghatak's oeuvre is distinguished by its nuanced portrayal of social reality, partition, and feminism. Ghatak's films are characterized by their meticulous attention to social detail, their exploration of the human condition, and their commitment to feminist and socialist ideals. His work continues to be celebrated for its aesthetic innovation, its emotional depth, and its intellectual complexity. Through his films, Ghatak engaged with the complexities of Indian society, addressing issues such as poverty, inequality, and social injustice. His work also reflected his deep concern with the trauma of partition and its ongoing impact on Indian society. By exploring these themes, Ghatak's films offer a nuanced and multifaceted portrait of India's social reality, one that continues to resonate with audiences today.

Ritwik Kumar Ghatak passed away on February 6, 1976, in Kolkata, leaving behind a rich cinematic legacy that continues to inspire and influence filmmakers and scholars today. He was a prominent filmmaker who made significant contributions to Indian cinema. His commitment to social realism, feminism, and aesthetic innovation combined with his unique filmmaking style, which combined elements of realism, stylization, and Brechtian theory has inspired generations of filmmakers and scholars. Ghatak's artistic contributions have had a lasting impact on Indian cinema, and his influence extends beyond national borders. As a pioneering figure in Indian cinema, Ghatak's legacy serves as a testament to the power of film to shape cultural narratives, challenge social norms, and inspire new perspectives.

2.4 The Films of Ghatak:

A few of Ghatak's films remained incomplete. *Bedeni/ Arup Katha* shot between 1951 and 1952, based on Tarasankar Bandhopadhyay's short story "Nagin kanyar Kahini", did not see the light of day, owing to the technical fault in the camera. *Kata Ajanare* shot in 1959, based on Shankar's story, was also aborted, even as shooting was largely completed. *Bagalar Bangodarshan* was yet another unfinished feature film. Ghatak made documentaries and short films as well. Here, we will introduce the major feature films with which the name of Ritwik Ghatak has been associated in popular mind.

Nagarik (**1977**):

The first film made by Ritwik Ghatak, *Nagarik* was released posthumously, twenty-five years after its completion. Had it been released earlier, it could have been recognized as the first work of alternative cinema in Bengali, preceding even Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* (Carrigy, "Ghatak, Ritwik"). The film follows Ramu, the central character, who searches for employment in Calcutta. Set against the backdrop of the post-Partition period, it captures the struggles of countless people migrating to the city, grappling with widespread unemployment and starvation. While Ramu battles to secure a job, his sister languishes at home, silently enduring the drudgery of house work, and the family is forced to survive on his father's meagre pension. With the rising economic strife things turn grimmer, and the family, along with the impoverished neighbour

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Jatin Babu, is forced to move on to cheaper accommodation in a slum. Completed in 1953, *Nagarik* demonstrates Ghatak's remarkable control over the cinematic medium. (Carigy, Megan. "Ghatak, Ritwik". December, 2003). The script was brilliant and the visuals were stunning. It was an important film also because Ghatak it was an early film in art cinema, and Ghatak had little to fall back on.

Ajantrik (1958):

Ajantrik was a markedly different film, both in terms of artistic maturity and content. Based on Subodh Ghosh's eponymous short story about an eccentric cab driver's bittersweet relationship with his car, this is arguably the most philosophical of Ghatak's films, dwelling on ideas of humanity, its bond with the machine, and the essential dynamic principle of life. Ghatak himself explained the film through Carl Gustav Jung's theory of the collective unconscious. Bimal, a solitary taxi driver, shares a deep, almost human bond with his battered old car, Jagaddal. Despite facing constant ridicule from others for the car's decrepit condition, Bimal remains fiercely protective and affectionate, treating Jagaddal with reverence and care. Struggling with poverty, he finds solace and dignity in his relationship with the vehicle.During the course of his journeys, Bimal once helps a young bride abandoned by her husband, revealing his underlying compassion. On a desolate forest road, when Jagaddal suddenly breaks down, Bimal encounters a tribal procession; their ecstatic dance intensifies his own sense of loneliness and alienation. As Jagaddal deteriorates beyond repair, Bimal exhausts his resources trying to restore it but ultimately is forced to sell his beloved car to a scrap dealer, marking a poignant end to their companionship.

The film employs various motifs, such as a Christian cemetery as a reminder of human mortality, and a tribal festival as a symbol of an alternative, life-affirming stream opposed to mechanical, alienated existence. Except for some initial verbosity when two passengers get into the car enroute to a wedding, the film uses dialogue in a minimalist way, relying instead on visual metaphors to explore the relationship between Bimal and his vehicle, as well as his connection to the surrounding environment.

Meghe Dhaka Tara (1960):

The film narrates the story of an East Bengal refugee family struggling to survive in Calcutta. Neeta, the elder daughter, single-handedly shoulders the responsibility of running the household. Her brother Shankar spends his time rehearsing music, aspiring to become a successful singer. Neeta encourages and supports him financially. She is in a relationship with Sanat—a relationship that troubles her mother, who cannot think beyond Neeta's departure after marriage and fears the financial crisis that would engulf the family. As the narrative unfolds, the family's dependency on Neeta only deepens. Her younger brother suffers a disabling accident, further compounding the burden she must carry. Sanat, unable to cope with the prolonged wait and domestic pressures, eventually marries Neeta's sister Gita. Neeta's personal dreams and emotional life are gradually crushed under the weight of familial obligations.Neeta contracts tuberculosis - a condition that not only symbolizes her physical deterioration but also metaphorically reflects the cost of her silent endurance. Shankar, now a successful singer, takes her to a sanatorium in the hills. In one of the most iconic and haunting scenes in Indian cinema, Neeta, moments before her death, cries out, *"Dada, amibachte chai"* ("Brother, I want to

live")—a line that resonates with devastating emotional and political implications. Shankar takes her away to a sanatorium, but she eventually dies.

A poignant film filled with pathos and melodrama, *Meghe Dhaka Tara* is a deeply political film, exploring the impact of displacement, patriarchy, and sacrifice on the lives of women. Through Neeta's suffering, Ghatak articulates the trauma of a generation uprooted by Partition and left to rebuild their lives in alienating urban spaces.

Komal Gandhar (1961):

Komal Gandhar, translated into English as *E-flat*), directed by Ritwik Ghatak, is the second film in his celebrated "Partition trilogy." While *Meghe Dhaka Tara* foregrounded personal tragedy, *Komal Gandhar* explores the search for collective healing and regeneration through art and human relationships in the aftermath of Partition.The story revolves around two rival theatre groups — Dakshinpath and Niriksha — each struggling to assert its creative vision while grappling with the practical difficulties of survival. Anusuya, a member of Dakshinpath, finds herself in a conflicted position when she is invited by Niriksha, led by the passionate and idealistic Bhrigu, to perform in one of their plays. Despite initial hesitations, Anusuya agrees to participate, and through their collaboration, a powerful emotional and ideological bond begins to develop between her and Bhrigu. Under Anusuya's efforts, the two theatre groups eventually agree to unite for a common project: a performance of Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*. However, Anusuya remains torn between her loyalty to her original group, her sense of duty, and her growing affection for Bhrigu, who embodies a commitment to social idealism and collective action.

Throughout the film, the trauma of Partition casts a persistent shadow. The characters are haunted by a lost homeland, fractured communities, and an underlying sense of displacement. Yet *Komal Gandhar* is notably more optimistic than *Meghe Dhaka Tara.*The film is richly interwoven with musical motifs—wedding songs, folk tunes, and Rabindra Sangeet—highlighting the cultural memory and collective spirit of the people. Music in *Komal Gandhar* does not merely embellish the narrative; it acts as an emotional and political force that binds characters and communities together.

Subarnarekha (1965):

Subarnarekha, directed by Ritwik Ghatak, is the final installment of his Partition trilogy, offering a stark and deeply tragic meditation on displacement, caste, poverty, and shattered dreams in post-Partition India. The film follows the life of Ishwar Chakraborty, a Hindu refugee who, after migrating from East Bengal, is initially settled in a refugee camp in West Bengal. Seeking stability, Ishwar moves to Chatimpur, near the banks of the Subarnarekha river, to take up a job in a factory. Along with him, he brings Abhiram, a young boy whose mother had been abducted by landlords' goons during their stay at the refugee camp.

Committed to offering Abhiram a better future, Ishwar sends him away for education. Abhiram eventually completes his studies and returns, harboring dreams of becoming a writer. Ishwar, however, envisions a different future for him, encouraging him to go to Germany for higher studies. Abhiram refuses, choosing to remain rooted to his artistic aspirations and his emotional ties at home. Meanwhile, Ishwar's sister Sita and Abhiram discover a growing love for each other. Their bond faces a cruel obstacle when Abhiram's low-caste background is revealed, leading Ishwar—himself caught between progressive ideals and societal prejudices—

to vehemently oppose their union. Sita's marriage to another man is hastily arranged, but on the day of her wedding, she elopes with Abhiram to Calcutta, where they are forced to live in a slum under harsh conditions.

Tragedy strikes when Abhiram dies, leaving Sita alone to fend for herself and their young son, Binu. Meanwhile, Ishwar, isolated and disillusioned, reconnects with an old comrade from the refugee camp days, Haraprasad. In a drunken stupor during their tour of Calcutta, Ishwar stumbles into a brothel—only to make a devastating discovery: Sita, now driven to desperation, has become a sex worker. In a heartbreaking scene, Sita recognizes Ishwar as her first client and, overcome with shame, takes her own life.

The film closes with a deeply poignant note. Ishwar, now stripped of all illusions and worldly ties, meets his orphaned nephew, Binu. Having lost his job at the factory—where his former subordinate Mukherjee has now risen to become the manager—Ishwar is forced to vacate his workers' quarters. Yet, amidst utter desolation, he decides to take Binu under his care, suggesting a faint glimmer of hope in an otherwise bleak landscape.

Subarnarekha presents an unflinching portrayal of the human cost of Partition, displacement, and the betrayals of a rapidly industrializing, caste-stratified society. It is a film marked by Ghatak's signature use of powerful visual symbolism, recurring motifs of rivers and thresholds, and an intense emotional undercurrent.

Titas Ekti Nadir Nam (1973):

The story begins with Basanti, a young girl of the Malo community, and her childhood friend Kishore, who harbours deep feelings for her. As they grow up, Kishore is married to another young woman from the same community. However, soon after the wedding

ceremony, Kishore's wife is abducted by a group of bandits. Kishore is devastated and his mental health deteriotates from guilt and sorrow. His wife, with the help of a village woman, manages to escape captivity and gives birth to a son. She raises her son. named Ananta, amid poverty and isolation from Kishore. Meanwhile, the fishing community's life faces steady disintegration and the river itself begins to dry up. The Malo people faces extreme economic hardship, leading to disintegration and internal feud, in contrast to earlier aura of cooperation and solidarity. Ananta's mother dies, and Basanti, still unmarried and burdened with loneliness, takes him under her care after his mother's death. She treats him with deep affection, seeing him as a connection to the past she has lost. In the end, both Basanti and the Malo way of life stand battered and broken. The once vital river Titas—symbol of sustenance and continuity—becomes a shallow, dying stream, mirroring the collapse of the community's collective spirit and identity. The film betrays weakness such as the use of intense melodrama, or in terms of performance, but demonstrates Ghatak's brilliance as well. For one thing, Ghatak's masterful creation of atmosphere, use of background music and the representation of the ebb and flow of village life.

Jukti Takko Ar Gappo (1974):

This film, the last one of Ghatak, is a series of episodes. Nilkanta Bagchi, a theatre director is abandoned by his wife for alcoholism. Forced from home, Nilkanta embarks on a journey seeking adventure through rural Bengal accompanied by motley group of companions. Nilkantha wanders through a Bengal ravaged by famine, displacement, and ideological confusion, he encounters various figures representing different segments of society—revolutionary students, disillusioned peasants, religious mendicants, and rural landlords. Through a series of conversations, debates, and

encounters, the film lays bare the ideological disarray of the times: the failure of revolutionary idealism, the betrayal of the peasantry, the decay of cultural traditions, and the loss of human values in an increasingly fractured world. The film's narrative is fragmented and episodic, intensely political, yet lacks the artistic vigour that characterises his earlier films.

Check Your Progress:
- Write a note on how the Partition figures in Ritwik Ghatak's film. (100 words)
- Write a note on the themes of Ritwik Ghatak's films. (100 words)

2.5 Ritwik Ghatak as a Filmmaker:

One of the most remarkable aspects of Ritwik Ghatak as a filmmaker is his unwavering originality. At a time when aspiring filmmakers who wished to break away from the formulaic structure of commercial cinema were almost inevitably drawn to the influences of world cinema—be it American, European, or Japanese—Ghatak carved out a path uniquely his own. It is not that he lacked exposure to global cinematic traditions. On the contrary, a cursory reading of his writings, particularly *Chalachitra, Manush Ebong Aro Kichu*, reveals a deep and thoughtful engagement with international cinema. Yet, what distinguishes Ghatak is the manner in which his films remained firmly rooted in Indian soil—more specifically, in the cultural, emotional, and historical landscape of Bengal. His cinematic vision was shaped less by the aesthetic conventions of global auteurs and more by his own experience of Partition, displacement, and socio-political upheaval. In both form and content, his films reflect a deeply personal idiom. The themes he chose to explore—dislocation, memory, cultural rupture, and the

anguish of rootlessness—are handled with a voice so distinct that it defies easy categorization. Even Satyajit Ray, his contemporary and peer, acknowledged this rare originality. Ray observed that Ghatak was "extraordinarily aloof from the influence of Hollywood," and praised the way he infused his films with a strong sense of Bengaliness.

Ritwik Ghatak, unlike his contemporary Satyajit Ray, does not explore a wide range of cinematic genres, nor is he primarily driven by a preoccupation with aesthetics. Rather, Ghatak's cinema is defined by a singular obsession—the trauma of Partition and its enduring psychological and cultural aftermath. His films are intense and uncompromising; they are serious meditations on the human condition, marked by a profound engagement with suffering, resilience, and the ebb and flow of life. Yet, beneath this gravity lies a quiet but persistent optimism—a belief in life's capacity to endure and regenerate. *Ajantrik* marks a significant departure from Ghatak's Partition-centric narratives. It steps away from the overtly historical and enters into a philosophical domain. In this film, the focus shifts from national trauma to a more universal inquiry: what does it mean to be human? While Ghatak's Partition films portray man as alienated and displaced by the political decisions of history, *Ajantrik* introduces a different kind of displacement—one rooted in existential reflection rather than historical rupture. Here, the human protagonist forms a profound emotional bond not with another person, but with a decrepit machine. The car, Jagaddal, is anthropomorphized, blurring the boundary between human and non-human, subject and object. This unusual attachment becomes the thematic core of the film, raising questions that are essentially philosophical—about identity, loneliness, memory, and the human capacity to love and find meaning in unexpected places. In *Ajantrik*, history recedes into the background, and metaphysical inquiry

comes to the fore. Throughout Ghatak's oeuvre runs a deeply reflective consciousness. It is evident not just in his themes, but also in his cinematic techniques—in his use of composition, mise-en-scène, and camera angles that compel the viewer to pause and think. His cinema does not merely tell stories; it provokes contemplation, often suspending narrative momentum to dwell on a moment, a gesture, a sound, or a silence that opens up new layers of meaning.

Iraban Basurai has an important essay on Ghatak's cinema, titled "Jiban, Chalachitra, Rajniti Ebong Ritwik Kumar Ghatak", contained in Rajat Ray's book *Ritwik Ghatak*. Basurai's observations on Ritwik Ghatak's use of sound and music in cinema are both nuanced and critically insightful. He rightly highlights Ghatak's distinctive approach to sound design and music as central to his cinematic language—far from being ornamental, it is integral to thematic and emotional expression. In *Komal Gandhar*, Basurai appreciates the pervasive use of wedding songs as a recurring motif that symbolizes the aspiration for reunion between the two divided Bengals. The film's thematic engagement with the IPTA (Indian People's Theatre Association) movement naturally necessitates the presence of music and song, not merely as cultural references but as vehicles of political and emotional resonance. Ghatak, with his theatrical background, was deeply aware that film music need not be lyric-driven alone. In *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, he employs raga-based music to evoke and intensify the mental atmosphere surrounding his protagonist, using melody as an emotional and psychological signifier. Basurai's critique that *Subarnarekha* may contain an excessive use of song is not without merit. However, he also acknowledges that the recurring strains of music in the film function as emotionally charged, suggestively layered backdrops to the action on screen. The use of folk music, especially, aligns with Ghatak's recurring representations of folk life, as seen vividly in *Titas Ekti*

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Nadir Naam. A wedding song used during Kishore's marriage reappears later in a changed context, acquiring new emotional weight and irony. In *Ajantrik*, non-musical sound plays a crucial role in humanizing the car, Jagaddal. The film's soundscape—composed of mechanical groans, engine noises, and horn beeps—endows the machine with character and subjectivity, blurring the lines between object and companion. Ghatak thus transforms sound into a philosophical inquiry, exploring the emotional life of things.

Ghatak's integration of sound and music often transcends classical narrative frameworks. In *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, he subverts the Aristotelian logic of plot-driven character by using music and sound to interpret characters and enrich narrative depth. Nita's emotional journey, for instance, is profoundly heightened by the use of songs that invoke the mythical figure of Uma. The 'Gauridaan' motif, expressed through song, metaphorically aligns Nita's suffering with sacrificial traditions embedded in cultural memory, thereby deepening the viewer's affective engagement. In *Subarnarekha*, mythological resonance adds yet another dimension. The narrative draws upon the Ramayana, with the heroine paralleling Sita—born of the earth and ultimately returned to it. Her journey is marked by sensuality, protest, sacrifice, and finally, self-annihilation. Her brother Iswar, by contrast, becomes a tragic figure of impotence—an uprooted, hollow man estranged from any sustaining sense of life.

Ghatak's musical sensibility bridges the classical and the folk. The use of Ali Akbar Khan's *sarod* in *Ajantrik* brings a refined emotional gravity to the film's atmosphere, while the folk music of the Oraon community—resonant with primal awe and wonder—complements the spiritual bond Bimal shares with his car. Even in *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, the jarring mechanical whip-like sound recurs

with symbolic force, interpreting Nita's suffering and the oppressive forces around her with unnerving precision.

The use of symbolism is a crucial element in Ritwik Ghatak's cinematic language and cannot be overlooked. Throughout his career, Ghatak articulated a metaphysical vision of life—one that emphasizes its essential continuity through the cyclical processes of birth, marriage, death, and rebirth. To express this philosophical worldview, he often employed potent symbols that resonated with both cultural memory and personal anguish. In *Ajantrik*, a seemingly minor episode involving a madman feverishly attached to his old cooking pot carries symbolic weight. When the man abruptly abandons the pot upon receiving a new one, the act becomes a metaphor for the dialectic of the old and the new—suggesting life's perpetual movement and renewal, even through rupture or loss. In *Komal Gandhar*, the striking image of a dead-end railway track becomes a haunting symbol of the Partition of Bengal. It powerfully evokes the historical trauma of dislocation, suspended journeys, and the severance of cultural continuity, anchoring the film's emotional core in a single, stark visual metaphor. In *Subarnarekha*, the sudden appearance of a *Bahurupi*—a traditional folk impersonator—at a deserted aerodrome serves as a cryptic and powerful symbol. This surreal encounter evokes the mythical and tragic dimensions of Sita's fate, positioning her not merely as a character within the narrative but as a symbolic figure swept into the whirlwind of history. The *Bahurupi* becomes a harbinger of fate, marking a moment where personal sorrow and historical catastrophe converge.

An ardent visionary and a romantic at heart, Ritwik Ghatak pursued his cinematic thought and dream even at the cost of material and economic comfort. A fearless experimenter and uncompromising artist, Ghatak created a small but powerful body of films that remain timeless treasures of authentic cinematic experience. Born in an

undivided Bengal and deeply immersed in its folk culture, he carried throughout his life the indelible trauma of Partition—a theme that recurs across his works with emotional and philosophical depth. His association with the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) and his complex, often bitter-sweet relationship with the Communist Party significantly shaped his ideological and aesthetic outlook. Ghatak's nuanced understanding of social class, his sociological awareness of human struggle, and his deep philosophical conviction in life's continuity amid adversity all informed the substance and structure of his cinema.

Importantly, Ghatak never viewed cinema as a mere aesthetic indulgence. For him, it was a potent instrument of social transformation—a medium through which the pains, dreams, and truths of the people could be voiced. In this respect, he stood apart from many of his contemporaries. His work continues to carry immense pedagogical value for contemporary filmmakers. Ghatak teaches us that true originality lies not in imitation but in the courage to draw from one's own cultural and historical reservoir, and to render lived reality through a deeply personal and inventive lens. His commitment to portraying the inner truths of his people—eschewing exoticism and cinematic gloss—remains a powerful and enduring lesson for cinema today.

SAQ:

Make a note on some of the features of Ritwik Ghatak's Films. (100 words)

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2.6 Summing Up:

In this unit, you have learned about the life of Ritwik Ghatak. Born in undivided Bengal, Ghatak was obsessed with the Partition, and made films on the consequences of this historical event. His association with the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) also shaped his artistic sensibility and social thought. We have briefly discussed the major films of Ghatak, and you will do well to watch them to better appreciate him as a filmmaker. Fewer in number compared to his contemporary and lesser known abroad, the films of Ghatak nevertheless are brilliant example of Ghatak's cinematic imagination, his mastery over the craft and the unique style that he developed with little influence of Hollywood or other Indian films. It is this astonishing originality of Ghatak that makes him alive in a very different cultural ambience of the Twenty first century. As I said, or Ghatak, cinema was never merely an exercise in artistic expression or visual beauty. He envisioned it as a dynamic force for social engagement—a means of capturing the collective anxieties, aspirations, and lived realities of ordinary people. In this regard, he diverged markedly from many of his peers, who often leaned toward aestheticism or narrative detachment.

With this in mind, we may now move on to the next topic, that is Ritwik Ghatak's essay 'Sound in Film".

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UNIT- 3

RITWIK KUMAR GHATAK: SOUND IN CINEMA

Unit Structure:

3.1 Objective:

3.2 Introduction:

3.3 Sound and Image: The Eisensteinian Vision

3.4 Reading the Essay "Sound in Cinema"

3.5 Summing Up

3.6 References and Suggested Reading

3.1 Objective:

By the end of this unit, the learner will be able to

- *understand* the difference between sound film and silent film;

- *read* the essay effectively;

- *appreciate* cinema in terms of the uses of sound and music.

3.2 Introduction:

Ritwik Ghatak is one of the pioneering figures of Indian cinema both as a filmmaker and as a thinker on cinema. Ghatak was a teacher of cinema in Pune Film Institute for a considerable period of time, and his ideas on cinema influenced people like Kumar Sahani and others whose contribution to Indian cinema is also remarkable. "Sound in Cinema" is a short essay. Ghtak has also written on various aspects of film such as editing, acting, problems of Indian cinema, filmmaking, documentary, literary influences on cinema, as

well as various comments on cinema across the globe, including his own.

This essay on sound must be read against our conventional notion of sound. Especially, we can understand Ghatak's take on sound against two naïve views about how sound works in cinema: first, sound is a natural accompaniment to an image, and second, music is super-added to a film to increase its aesthetic and entertaining value. The first assumption seems obvious, because its is part of cinema's realistic project: to simulate the characteristic sound of a given object which is filmed. When a character talks to another in a frame, it looks pretty obvious and quite natural. The second statement seems validated by the popular, entertaining and commercial films that we are generally exposed to. It is another matter that reproduction of sound in cinema took years of relentless effort and experiments in the West. There is a whole history of technical innovations that various people introduced to create sound films that we have today. We have already discussed this aspect in the unit "Realism in Cinema". Now, let us go straight to Ghatak's notion of how sound works in cinema, and see whether his insights go beyond our usual and naïve idea of film sound.

3.3 Sound and Image: The Eisensteinian Vision

Before delving into Ghatak's essay, let us read another one. This is "Synchronization of Senses" by Sergei Eisenstein, from his seminal book *Film Sense*. Eisenstein does not extensively explore the possibilities of sound in a singular way, but connects the idea of sound with the notion of montage. In other words, his explanation goes beyond the realistic aesthetic based on the presumed unity between sound and image. Eisenstein here analyses the composite nature of the cinematic image and its ability to bring together

disparate elements. His central argument is that, just as multiple senses simultaneously contribute to human perception, film too combines sound and image—not merely based on their intrinsic relationship but on the principle of montage. In montage, shots are stitched together to produce a third meaning that emerges from their juxtaposition.

Eisenstein extends this idea to what he calls *vertical montage*, which operates in cinema similarly to how an orchestra performs music. While individual instruments may be heard sequentially, different groups of musical pieces may overlap, creating both continuity in melody and a simultaneous layering of varied musical notes, pieces, and harmonies. Likewise, in cinema, sound and image are not merely aligned in a straightforward sequence; rather, they interact as independent yet interwoven elements within the montage. Sound exists in its own order, functioning as an independent score, rather than simply being fitted into the image in a linear sequence. The effect of combining these distinct but concurrent lines—rather than just isolated elements—creates a complex, dynamic cinematic experience, where the overall effect emerges from both the singular impact of each element and their interplay within the montage.

Eisenstein also discusses the various ways in which sound and image are synchronized in film. Beyond the physical challenge of synchronizing sound and image, he explores the concept of inner synchronization. At a fundamental level, rhythm serves as a connecting link between them—shots can be edited in accordance with the rhythm of the music playing on the parallel soundtrack. At a more advanced level, synchronization can be based on the melodic movement of the soundtrack. Even tonal changes in the soundtrack can be synchronized through the use of colour. This type of synchronization does not necessarily imply consonance, but it should be compositionally controlled.

Sergei Eisenstein explores the intrinsic link between sound and color in cinema, arguing that they are expressive forces, not mere embellishments. He envisions sound and colour not as realistic reinforcements of the image, but as independent elements that, when juxtaposed, contribute to the film's rhythmic and emotional structure.Eisenstein draws a parallel between how sound interacts with image in montage and how colour can be integrated into film in a similarly dynamic way. Just as sound in cinema need not be literally synchronized with actions but can function contrapuntally—adding depth through contrast or association—colour, too, should be deployed expressively rather than naturalistically. This aligns with his broader theory of intellectual montage, where meaning emerges from the collision of elements rather than their direct correspondence.

SAQ:

Explain montage. How does Eisenstein elaborate the composite image of cinema as a vertical montage? (100 words)

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3.4 Reading the Essay: **"Sound in Cinema":**

The essay, as it occurs in Ghatak's book *Rows and Rows of Fences* is a translation by Samik Bandopadhyay of Ghatak's short essay originally published as "Chabite Shabda" that appeared in *Parichay*, Vol. 35, no. 6, January, 1966. Cinema, Ghatak argues, is usually seen as a visual art, and hence its auditory aspects are not much attended to.

Ritwik Ghatak comments extensively on the uses of sound in film, identifying five key functions, one of which is music. Music, in particular, can re-articulate a film's message on a parallel level. In the title sequences of his films, Ghatak employs music as a condensed summary of the entire narrative. Nowhere is this more evident than in *Subarnarekha*.The music in the title sequence seamlessly flows over the pages of a manuscript, evoking the grandeur and sublimity of an epic. Its orchestration captures the continuity of life—the aspirations for a better future, the inevitable ruptures of tragedy, and the melancholic tonalities that underscore the film's emotional depth. At the same time, the rhythm suggests the resilience and renewal inherent in life's journey. This musical prelude perceptively encapsulates the film's overarching themes: the tragic grandeur of its narrative, the ruptures within personal and social history, the enduring bonds of love and family, and the ceaseless search for a new home. In this way, Ghatak's use of music in *Subarnarekha* functions not just as an accompaniment but as a deeply suggestive, thematic overture, articulating the film's emotional and intellectual landscape.

Music can resonate with the main message of the film. In *Titas Ekti Nadir Naam*, a Bengali folk song is used, called bhatiyali, and this resonates with the life of the community of the Malos, a riverine fishermen's community. You may look at Satyajit Ray's use of the musical motif in *Pather Panchali,* which suggests life's continuity amid struggle as well as connotes the typical fervour of the lush green characteristic feature of the life in the countryside.

But music is not just an accompaniment to an isolated scene; it can have crucial role in the entire structure of the film. That is, music is not just a specific figuration of a specific image within the narrative; it works in subtle, suggestive ways in the whole pattern of the plot, in the ironical twists and turns, and plays an interpretive role vis-à-

vis the cinematic action. So sound does not have to work merely on one-to-one relationship with the image. The use of music in the whole structure of the film is pertinent.

Let us not forget that Ghatak in a way describes his own filmmaking process. First, music can articulate the film's message on a parallel level. Apart from this specific melodic pieces or compositions are used to resonate with, and comment on, the events and characters. In using this one takes care to use the specific melody ad a signifier of the director's main message towards the film's culminating point.

Music as an interpreter of events needs some discussion. If a cinematic image creates an emotional timbre around it, the same can be articulated through music. But in scenes where contradictions are played out, the very choice of music can be crucial, because it offers a specific perspective, and necessarily does not resonate with a certain part of the contradiction. To take a simple example, is a hero and a villain contradict in a cinematic action, the background music which is used would usually adopt the protagonist's point of view. In Ghatak's films, interesting use of music is noticeable in the context of offering a perspective. In *Ajantrik*, a middle-aged man, and his insane nephew hire Bimal's car for them to reach the bride's home for the marriage. They are seated on the car, and Bimal drives them along a bumpy road amid adverse weather conditions, that caused considerable inconvenience to the passengers. On the soundtrack is heard soft, rhythmic sarod , creating an aura of joy and spirit, in stark opposition to the condition of the passengers. Here Ghatak's use of music is in line with the main emotional structure of the narrative: Bimal's everyday life, his self-contented life, and this also helps the characters of the passengers to be treated as frivolous and something of a nuisance.

Secondly, a given piece of music in its alterations and variations, even in its sameness, can evoke various emotions when placed in various places of a given cinematic narrative.

Ghatak also dwells on the use of silence in cinema. As Ghatak himself says, silent film was a different form of art altogether. With respect to the use of silence in sound film, Ghatak sees silence as a positive element, not merely the absence of sound. He calls silence "the most evocative element". Sound can evoke all kinds of emotions and sentiments. In the first place, silence can be consciously built up to engage the spectator in the reality shown on the screen, pushing him for moments of deeper involvement and realization. In Satyajit Ray's *Apur Sansar*, look at the train scene with Apu parting with his beloved wife Aparna who is going back home to stay in the ancestral home during pregnancy. The short sequence of close-ups of Apu and Aparna at the station and their silent matrix of gaze create such a compelling cinematic moment. The pangs of separation find in this silence its full articulation gripping the spectator. Or look at the final sequence where eventually Apu faces his son Kajol in a couple of wide-angle shots. The verbal exchange between the father and the son achieves its depth and resonance by the way in which Ray uses silence in mathematically precise yet poetically perceptive way.

Silence can also create a necessary precondition for the dramatic force of revelation to manifest itself. Ghatak is here explaining the very situation of silence, its precise timing in a sequence. this technique is almost ubiquitous in film—the use of silence before shock effect created through sound. Let me give you a one or two examples. In Stanley Kubrick's movie *The Shining*, Wendy notices "äll work and no play makes Jack a dull boy"written on the pages in a silent scene, followed by the appearance of Jack in his menacing countenance, and the soundtrack erupts. Ghatak argues that silence

can create the lethargic air of a situation or enhance the dynamism of a scene by contrast.

Thus, regarding the use of silence, Ghatak essentially speaks about the principle of contrast between sound and silence, which relates to the montage-like structure of a film, as well as the use of silence as an intrinsic element of atmosphere—the mise-en-scène aspect of a film.

'Design by inference'is another use of sound, as explained by Ghatak. Here the camera focuses on an object in a frame, while the environment and and events lie outside the frame but evoked only through sound. We can here refer to Satyajit Ray's *Charulata*. In one scene the protagonist sits by the window and hear the distant storm and passersby outside, but the camera does not show the source of sound.

Next, Ghatak discusses the use of these various functions of sound and silence in terms of their arrangement and mixing. Arrangement occurs at the very inception of the film that involves making connections of dialogue and music, and of various sounds and moments of silence. These connections can evolve in the course of the making of the film till every element of sound—the music, dialogue, diegetic sound and silence find their appropriate place in the film.

Next comes the mixing of sounds. Subtle variations in sound can evoke different emotions and meanings. An essential point to consider while appreciating a film is that the same sound, when played at different levels of loudness, can elicit distinct feelings. For instance, a joyful sound can take on a tragic quality when played at a lower volume.A powerful example of this technique can be found in Satyajit Ray's *Apu Trilogy* (*Pather Panchali*, *Aparajito*, and *Apur*

Sansar), particularly in the use of the central auditory motif—the recurring train sound.

The use of sound is crucial because a film's narrative operates at various level—and it is the auditory level is a most potent level of film narration. Ghatak writes: "The flow of sound offers observations, footnotes, and evocations in endless continuity, repetition and variations, to articulate the message of the film on a different level" (*Rows and Rows of Fences*).

Check Your Progress:

- What are the various kinds of sound used in a film? (40 words).

- Write a note on various uses of sound in cinema (150 words)

3.5 Summing Up:

Ritwik Ghatak had a profound sense of music and sound, and he integrates them as essential elements of his storytelling. His films are a dazzling testimony to various kinds of music—Indian classical music, folk songs, and Rabindranath Tagore's songs. They are deeply enmeshed with the very diegesis of the films that he made. Certainly, Ghatak was different from his contemporary filmmakers, notably Satyajit Ray. He differs from Ray's flair for seamless realism, using melodrama as an artistic choice to create dramatic intensity, of which sound and music were a part. Music and sound were a structural and emotional backbone to Ghatak, not just an accompaniment to the cinematic image.

The use of Indian classical music is remarkable in *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, but it is deeply connected to the filmic discourse. Marriage

songs in *Komal Gandhar* carry the trauma of the division of Bengal as well as articulate the wish for reunion. *Ajantrik* uses tribal songs and elegiac melody that resonate with the central thought of the film: Bimal's alienation from communal life and the ensuing sorrows. No less important is the use of sound, in which Ghatak exhibited his originality and artistic sensibility. You will also find moments of silence creating powerful emotional effects and suggestiveness. In fact, his own films are a testimony to the varied uses of sound that Ghatak enumerates in this essay.

In this unit, before delving into Ghatak's essay, we have briefly discussed Eisenstein's notion of the use of sound in relation to montage, especially in the context of the synchronization of senses that films carry out. It is important to note Eisenstein's point that sound is not just connected to an image but exists in an independent order, interacting with the image as part of a montage. Eisenstein also explores the intrinsic link between sound and colour.

As for Ghatak's essay, he enumerates five key functions of sound: music, dialogue, incidental noise, effect noise, and silence. Apart from various functions of music, such as articulating the film's message, commenting on the theme, enhancing a character, creating extraordinary effects, and so on, he also discusses the suggestive use of sound, the use of sound to create atmosphere and conjure up a setting without showing the source of sound, depicting the inner condition of a character, and so on. He also talks briefly, yet revealingly, about various uses of silence and how it can be combined with sound to enhance a particular effect. Finally, Ghatak relates the issue of arranging these varied functions of sound in a film in a way that each of these elements finds its proper place in the finished product. Lastly, he explains differing levels of loudness of sound—something that can be used to create varied emotional effects.

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UNIT- 4

E. ANN KAPLAN: IS THE GAZE MALE?

Unit Structure:

4.1 OBJECTIVES

Through this unit, you will be able to:

- *introduce* yourselves to the concept of "male gaze";
- *understand* the history of the concept;
- *examine* Kaplan's text and her perspective on "male gaze";
- *analyse* the implications and the contemporary relevance of the "male gaze".

4.2 INTRODUCTION

E. Ann Kaplan is a distinguished American scholar whose work has profoundly influenced feminist film theory and cultural studies. Born in 1936, she pursued her undergraduate studies in English Language and Literature at the University of Birmingham, graduating with honours in 1958. She furthered her education with a

postgraduate diploma from the University of London in 1959 and earned her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Rutgers University in 1970. Her doctoral dissertation, titled "Hawthorne and Romanticism: A Study of Hawthorne in the Context of the American and European Romantic Movements," set the stage for her interdisciplinary approach to literature and film.

Kaplan's academic career is marked by her tenure at Stony Brook University, where she serves as a Distinguished Professor of English and Cultural Analysis and Theory. She is also the founder and former director of The Humanities Institute at Stony Brook, established in 1987 to promote interdisciplinary research and collaboration. Her leadership roles extend to serving as the past president of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies and participating in the Modern Language Association's discussions on Age Studies.

Kaplan's contributions to feminist film theory are both foundational and expansive. Her pioneering research has explored the representation of women in film, delving into genres such as film noir, melodrama, and science fiction. Her seminal work, *Women in Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (1983), examines how women are portrayed in cinema and the implications of these representations on societal perceptions of gender roles. This book remains influential, offering critical insights into the ways patriarchal ideologies are perpetuated through visual media. In *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze* (1997), Kaplan introduces the concept of the "imperial gaze," drawing parallels between colonialist perspectives and the objectification of women in film. She argues that just as colonial powers imposed their values and perceptions onto colonized subjects, mainstream cinema often frames women through a lens that reflects male desires and fantasies, thereby marginalizing female subjectivity. Kaplan's

editorial work in *Feminism and Film* (2000) further consolidates key feminist film theories, tracing their evolution from 1973 onward. This anthology not only highlights pioneering essays but also addresses critiques and challenges that have shaped the field, reflecting the dynamic and contested nature of feminist film discourse.

In her influential essay "Is the Gaze Male?" (1983), Kaplan interrogates the gendered dynamics of spectatorship in cinema. Building upon Laura Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze," Kaplan seeks to explore whether the act of looking, as constructed in film, is inherently male or if it can be appropriated by female spectators. The central question she poses is: "Can women, within the structures of traditional cinematic narratives, occupy the position of the active viewer, or are they invariably positioned as passive objects of the male gaze?" Kaplan examines how classical Hollywood cinema constructs visual pleasure through scopophilia (the pleasure of looking) and voyeurism, mechanisms that often position women as objects to be looked at and men as bearers of the gaze. She argues that this dynamic is rooted in broader cultural patterns of dominance and submission, where "our culture is deeply rooted in 'masculine' and 'feminine,' and dominance-submission patterns."

However, Kaplan complicates this binary by considering the possibility of a female gaze. She questions whether women can adopt the gaze and, if so, what implications this has for the representation of female desire and agency in film. She suggests that "to own and activate the gaze, given our language and the structure of the unconscious, is to be in the 'masculine' position". This assertion implies that the structures of looking are not biologically

determined but are culturally and psychoanalytically constructed, allowing for the potential reconfiguration of these roles.

Kaplan also addresses the role of female spectatorship, acknowledging that women in the audience may experience identification with both the passive female characters and the active male protagonists. This dual identification reflects the complex ways in which women navigate their positions as both subjects and objects within patriarchal visual culture. She concludes that the exclusion from male culture provides an avenue to affect change in film and society.

Kaplan's exploration in "Is the Gaze Male?" challenges the monolithic understanding of spectatorship by highlighting its constructed nature. By questioning the inherent masculinity of the gaze, she opens up a discourse on the fluidity of viewing positions and the potential for subverting traditional gender roles in cinema. Her analysis underscores the importance of recognizing how cinematic techniques and narrative structures contribute to the reinforcement of gendered power dynamics. By deconstructing these elements, filmmakers and scholars can work towards creating representations that offer more equitable and diverse perspectives.

Furthermore, Kaplan's work invites contemporary audiences to reflect on their own roles as spectators. In an era where media consumption is pervasive, understanding the mechanisms of the gaze equips viewers with the critical tools to challenge and reinterpret the images presented to them. This awareness is crucial in fostering a media landscape that is inclusive and reflective of varied experiences and identities.

In conclusion, E. Ann Kaplan's contributions to feminist film theory, particularly through her interrogation of the gaze, have been instrumental in advancing discussions on gender and representation in cinema. Her work continues to resonate, offering valuable insights into the ways visual culture shapes and is shaped by societal constructs of gender and power.

4.3 UNDERSTANDING THE MALE GAZE

The concept of the "male gaze" is pivotal in feminist film theory, elucidating how visual media often portrays women from a masculine, heterosexual perspective, thereby objectifying them and reinforcing patriarchal norms. This framework was first articulated by British film theorist Laura Mulvey in her seminal 1975 essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," and has since been expanded upon by scholars like E. Ann Kaplan. Understanding the male gaze involves delving into its definition, mechanisms, and its role in perpetuating gendered power dynamics through media representations.

In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Mulvey employs psychoanalytic theory to explore how mainstream Hollywood films cater to male scopophilic tendencies—the pleasure derived from looking. She posits that the cinematic apparatus positions women as passive objects of male desire, aligning the audience's gaze with that of the male protagonist. Mulvey identifies two primary modes through which this occurs:

1. **Scopophilia (Pleasure in Looking)**: Rooted in Freud's concept, scopophilia refers to the pleasure derived from observing others as objects, often in a controlling and voyeuristic manner. The cinematic experience facilitates this by allowing viewers to

voyeuristically observe characters, particularly women, who are often displayed as objects of visual pleasure.

2. **Narcissistic Identification**: This involves the audience identifying with the male protagonist, adopting his perspective, and experiencing the narrative through his gaze. This alignment reinforces the male viewer's subjectivity while relegating women to the role of the "other."

Mulvey asserts that this dynamic reflects and perpetuates the societal imbalance wherein "men act and women appear," positioning men as active agents and women as passive spectacles.

Building upon Mulvey's framework, E. Ann Kaplan, in her essay "Is the Gaze Male?", examines whether the gaze is inherently tied to the male gender or if it is a position that can be occupied regardless of one's sex. Kaplan suggests that "to own and activate the gaze, given our language and the structure of the unconscious, is to be in the 'masculine' position." This implies that the gaze is less about biological determinism and more about the adoption of a position of power traditionally coded as masculine.

Kaplan's analysis indicates that women can occupy the position of the observer; however, when they do, they often adopt a masculine viewing position due to the prevailing structures of representation. This adoption can lead to complex identifications and internalizations of dominant, male-oriented modes of viewing. Kaplan's work underscores the fluidity of the gaze and its dependence on cultural and psychoanalytic constructs rather than strictly on gender.

The male gaze functions as a mechanism that reinforces and perpetuates patriarchal norms through various facets of media representation:

1. **Objectification of Women**: By consistently portraying women as passive objects of male desire, media reinforces the notion that women's primary value lies in their physical appearance and sexual appeal. This objectification diminishes women's agency and reduces them to mere spectacles for male consumption.

2. **Reinforcement of Gender Stereotypes**: The male gaze upholds traditional gender roles by depicting men as active, dominant protagonists and women as passive, submissive figures. This dichotomy mirrors and reinforces societal power imbalances, suggesting that men are natural leaders and decision-makers, while women are supporters or obstacles within narratives.

3. **Influence on Female Self-Perception**: Continuous exposure to media that embodies the male gaze can lead women to internalize these portrayals, affecting their self-esteem and body image. Women may begin to view themselves through the lens of the male gaze, prioritizing their appearance and sexual desirability over other attributes. This internalization can result in self-objectification and a diminished sense of agency.

4. **Marginalization of Female Narratives**: The dominance of the male gaze in media often sidelines stories centered on women's experiences and perspectives. When women are consistently portrayed in relation to men, their own narratives and complexities are overshadowed, leading to a lack of diverse and authentic representations of women in media.

Check Your Progress:

1. How do Laura Mulvey and E. Ann Kaplan define and analyze the concept of the male gaze in film theory? (100 words)

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2. How does Kaplan's interpretation of the male gaze expand or diverge from Laura Mulvey's original concept? (100 words)

4.4 THE TEXT: KAPLAN'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE MALE GAZE

Kaplan offers a nuanced analysis of the "male gaze," and delves into the implications of the male gaze on both men and women, emphasizing its role in constructing a hypersexualized feminine "Other." Her insights reveal how visual media perpetuates patriarchal structures and influences gender dynamics.

In "Is the Gaze Male?" Kaplan interrogates the inherent gendering of the gaze within cinematic contexts. While Mulvey posited that the gaze in classical Hollywood cinema is predominantly male, aligning spectators with a masculine perspective, Kaplan probes deeper into whether the act of gazing is intrinsically tied to biological sex. She contends that "to own and activate the gaze, given our language and the structure of the unconscious, is to be in the 'masculine' position" (Kaplan). This suggests that the gaze is less about the viewer's gender and more about adopting a position of power traditionally coded as masculine.

Kaplan highlights that the male gaze in media leads to the objectification of women, portraying them primarily as passive subjects of male desire. This objectification not only diminishes women's agency but also influences their self-perception. Continuous exposure to such representations can lead women to internalize these portrayals, viewing themselves through the lens of the male gaze. This internalization fosters self-objectification, where women assess their worth based on appearance and sexual appeal, aligning with societal standards dictated by patriarchal norms.

Kaplan notes that "women, in turn, have learned to associate their sexuality with domination by the male gaze, a position involving a degree of masochism in finding their identity through the eyes of men" (Kaplan).

For men, Kaplan argues, the male gaze reinforces traditional notions of dominant masculinity. By positioning men as active viewers and women as passive subjects, media perpetuates a power dynamic that aligns masculinity with control and dominance. This dynamic not only limits the emotional and expressive capacities of men but also pressures them to conform to rigid gender roles. Kaplan's analysis suggests that this reinforcement of dominant masculinity serves to maintain existing power structures, discouraging deviations from traditional male roles and behaviors.

A critical aspect of Kaplan's critique is her examination of how the male gaze constructs a hypersexualized feminine "Other." She asserts that this portrayal serves to distance and differentiate women from men, emphasizing traits that render them as exotic, mysterious, and sexually available. This "othering" process not only objectifies women but also reinforces their subordinate status within a patriarchal framework. Kaplan explains that "the domination of women by the male gaze is part of men's strategy to contain the threat that the mother embodies, and to control the positive and negative impulses that memory traces of being mothered have left in the male unconsciousness" (Kaplan). This suggests that the hypersexualization of women in media serves as a mechanism to manage deep-seated anxieties related to maternal figures and female sexuality.

Kaplan's insights have profound implications for media representations. By unveiling the mechanisms through which the male gaze operates, she calls attention to the need for more

equitable and diverse portrayals of gender. Her work encourages creators and audiences to critically engage with media content, recognizing and challenging the perpetuation of patriarchal norms. Kaplan's perspective underscores the importance of developing alternative narratives that resist objectification and promote agency for all genders.

Stop to Consider:

Addressing the pervasive influence of the male gaze requires a multifaceted approach:

1. **Promotion of the Female Gaze**: Encouraging and supporting media created from a female perspective can provide alternative representations that challenge traditional power dynamics. The female gaze offers narratives where women are subjects with agency, desires, and complexities, rather than objects of male desire.

2. **Critical Media Literacy**: Educating audiences to critically analyze media representations can foster awareness of the male gaze and its implications. By recognizing and questioning these portrayals, viewers can become more discerning consumers and advocates for change.

3. **Diverse Representation**: Advocating for greater diversity in media production—including more women and marginalized groups in roles such as directors, writers, and producers—can lead to a broader range of perspectives and narratives that move beyond the constraints of the male gaze.

4. **Redefining Visual Pleasure**: Exploring new aesthetic and narrative strategies that do not rely on objectification can help redefine what is considered pleasurable in visual media. This

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involves creating content that values characters for their depth and humanity rather than their adherence to conventional standards of beauty or desirability.

4.5 THEORY, CRITIQUE, AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE MALE GAZE

E. Ann Kaplan's exploration of the "male gaze" within film theory intricately weaves together psychoanalytic concepts, particularly Jacques Lacan's notion of the gaze, and feminist theoretical frameworks. Her analysis delves into how cinematic representations perpetuate patriarchal norms, influencing societal perceptions of gender and leading to the internalization of these perspectives by women. Furthermore, Kaplan's work has sparked critiques and discussions, including alternative viewpoints like the "female gaze" and Bracha L. Ettinger's "matrixial gaze."

Psychoanalytic Foundations: Lacan's Concept of the Gaze:

Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory introduces the concept of the "gaze" as a pivotal element in the formation of subjectivity. For Lacan, the gaze represents the awareness of being observed, which disrupts the subject's sense of autonomy and self-mastery. This realization often leads to feelings of alienation, as individuals recognize themselves as objects within the perceptual field of others. In the context of cinema, the gaze becomes a mechanism through which viewers identify with characters on screen, aligning their perspectives with the camera's viewpoint. This alignment fosters a sense of voyeuristic pleasure, as audiences engage in the act of looking while being shielded from reciprocation.

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Intersection of Feminist Theory and Psychoanalysis in Kaplan's Analysis:

Kaplan builds upon Laura Mulvey's seminal work on the male gaze, integrating feminist theory with psychoanalytic concepts to scrutinize how films reinforce gendered power dynamics. Mulvey posited that classical Hollywood cinema positions women as passive objects of male desire, with narrative structures and visual compositions designed to satisfy the scopophilic tendencies of a presumed male spectator. Kaplan extends this analysis by questioning whether the act of gazing is inherently male or if it is a position that can be occupied irrespective of the viewer's gender. She suggests that "to own and activate the gaze, given our language and the structure of the unconscious, is to be in the 'masculine' position" (Kaplan). This perspective implies that the gaze is less about the biological sex of the viewer and more about the adoption of a dominant, controlling stance traditionally associated with masculinity.

Implications of the Male Gaze on Societal Perceptions of Gender:

The pervasive presence of the male gaze in media has profound implications for societal perceptions of gender roles and relations. By consistently portraying women as objects of male desire and positioning men as active viewers, media narratives reinforce traditional gender hierarchies. These representations contribute to the normalization of male dominance and female passivity, shaping public consciousness and influencing real-world interactions. The male gaze thus serves as a vehicle for perpetuating patriarchal ideologies, subtly embedding them within cultural products consumed by mass audiences.

Internalization of the Male Gaze by Women and Its Psychological Effects:

Kaplan's analysis also addresses the psychological ramifications of the male gaze on women, particularly the phenomenon of internalization. Continuous exposure to objectifying representations can lead women to adopt an external perspective on their own bodies, evaluating themselves based on perceived attractiveness to men. This self-objectification is linked to various negative outcomes, including body dissatisfaction, diminished self-esteem, and mental health issues such as depression and eating disorders. The anticipation of being subjected to the male gaze can induce feelings of self-consciousness and anxiety, further entrenching the psychological impact of these media portrayals.

Critiques of Kaplan's Essay and the Concept of the Male Gaze:

While Kaplan's work has been influential in feminist film theory, it has not been without criticism. Some scholars argue that the concept of the male gaze is overly deterministic, suggesting that it does not account for the diversity of audience interpretations and the possibility of resistant readings. Critics contend that viewers are not passive recipients of media messages but active participants who can challenge and subvert intended meanings. Additionally, the emphasis on visual pleasure and scopophilia has been critiqued for neglecting other sensory and cognitive aspects of film engagement.

Alternative Perspectives: The Female Gaze and the Matrixial Gaze:

In response to the limitations of the male gaze framework, alternative concepts have been proposed to better capture the complexities of gendered spectatorship. The "female gaze" seeks to reframe visual narratives from a woman's perspective, emphasizing agency, subjectivity, and the multiplicity of female experiences. This approach challenges traditional representations by offering portrayals that are more reflective of women's realities and desires.

Bracha L. Ettinger introduces the concept of the "matrixial gaze," which offers a nuanced understanding of subjectivity and relationality. Ettinger's matrixial gaze emerges as a counterpoint to Lacan's phallic-centric model, proposing a space of shared affect and co-emergence that transcends binary oppositions. Scholar Griselda Pollock explains that "the matrixial gaze emerges by a simultaneous reversal of with-in and with-out (and does not represent the eternal inside), by a transgression of borderlinks manifested in the contact with-in/-out and art work by a transcendence of the subject–object interval which is not a fusion, since it is based on a-priori shareability in difference" (Pollock). This perspective emphasizes interconnectedness and the potential for transformative encounters that challenge traditional notions of identity and separation.

4.6 CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

E. Ann Kaplan's analysis of the male gaze remains profoundly relevant in contemporary media discourse, particularly in light of ongoing conversations about gender representation and power dynamics in visual culture. Her integration of psychoanalytic theory

and feminist critique provides a framework for understanding how visual narratives perpetuate patriarchal norms.

Kaplan's assertion that "to own and activate the gaze... is to be in the 'masculine' position" (Kaplan) underscores the association of visual control with masculine authority. This perspective is evident in modern media, where women are frequently depicted through fragmented shots that emphasize their bodies over their identities, reinforcing their status as objects of male desire.

The psychological impact of such representations is significant. Continuous exposure to objectifying imagery can lead women to internalize these portrayals, resulting in self-objectification and associated mental health issues. This internalization perpetuates a cycle where women assess their value based on adherence to these constructed ideals. Kaplan's integration of psychoanalytic theory and feminist critique provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the male gaze and its far-reaching implications. Her analysis elucidates how cinematic practices not only reflect but also reinforce societal gender norms, contributing to the internalization of these constructs by individuals. While her work has faced critiques, it has also paved the way for alternative perspectives that seek to address its limitations and offer more inclusive frameworks. The ongoing discourse surrounding the male gaze, the female gaze, and the matrixial gaze underscores the dynamic nature of feminist film theory and its continual evolution in response to emerging insights and critiques.

Kaplan's work also invites critical examination of alternative perspectives, such as the "female gaze" and Ettinger's "matrixial gaze," which seek to reframe visual narratives from a woman's perspective, emphasizing agency and subjectivity. These

frameworks challenge traditional representations by offering portrayals that are more reflective of women's realities and desires.

In the context of contemporary media, Kaplan's insights continue to inform discussions about the representation of women and the need for more equitable and authentic portrayals. Her analysis serves as a foundational tool for deconstructing visual narratives and advocating for a media landscape that recognizes and values diverse experiences and identities.

SAQ:

1. In what ways does Kaplan incorporate psychoanalytic theories, such as Lacan's notion of the gaze, into her analysis, and how does this integration affect her conclusions? (200 words)

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2. In the context of contemporary media, where female directors and creators are more prevalent, how does Kaplan's analysis hold up? Does the presence of women behind the camera alter the dynamics of the gaze she describes? (200 words)

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4.7 SUMMING UP

E. Ann Kaplan's exploration of the male gaze offers a critical lens through which to understand the complex dynamics of gender representation in visual media. By examining its impact on both men and women, and highlighting the construction of a hypersexualized feminine "Other," Kaplan reveals the pervasive

influence of patriarchal structures in shaping media narratives. Her work remains a cornerstone in feminist film theory, advocating for a more inclusive and reflective media landscape that challenges traditional power hierarchies and fosters authentic representations of all individuals. For further reading, refer to the section below.

4.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READING

- Ettinger, Bracha L. *The Matrixial Borderspace*. University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
- Kaplan, E. Ann. "Is the Gaze Male?" *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, Methuen, 1983, p. 35.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3, 1975, pp. 6–18.
- Pollock, Griselda (1996). *Generations & geographies in the visual arts: feminist readings.* Psychology Press.
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UNIT- 5

CHRISTIAN METZ: "IDENTIFICATION/MIRROR", "STORY/DISCOURSE"

Unit Structure:

5.1 Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 Reading Identification/Mirror

5.4 Reading Story/Discourse

5.5 Summing Up

5.6 References and Suggested Reading

5.1 Objectives

By the end of this unit, the learner will be able to

- *identify* the basic themes of the essays;
- *analyse* the concepts used in the essays;
- *evaluate* Christian Metz's psychoanalytical perspective on cinema.

5.2 Introduction

Christian Metz's essay *"Story/Discourse: A Note on Two Kinds of Voyeurism"* looks at how films tell stories and how audiences watch them. He builds his ideas using two key terms from linguistics: story (what happens) and discourse (how it is told). In most traditional films, the way the story is told is hidden—we are shown events as if they just happen on their own, without anyone telling us. This makes us, the viewers, feel like we're just quietly watching things

unfold. In his essay *"Identification, Mirror"*, Metz explores how film makes us feel connected to what we see on screen—not just emotionally, but in terms of how we see ourselves. He uses ideas from psychoanalysis, especially Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, to explain how film creates a sense of identification in the viewer.

In the following sections we give a discussion of the main ideas of the essay by Metz. I hope, this will enable you to learn about Metz's psychoanalytical discourse of cinema, and offer you a perspective on the texts under discussion.

5.3 Reading the essay "Identification/Mirror":

In this section, we have structured our analysis into a few sections.

Section I:

In cinema, the signifier is primarily perceptual—it appeals to the senses through moving images and synchronized sound. While the graphic signifier in literature is also perceptual, as it must be read, its perceptual engagement is limited to the visual decoding of written language. Similarly, music is perceptual but restricted in scope, as it lacks the visual dimension. Cinema, however, mobilizes multiple perceptual axes—sight, sound, movement—and thus synthesizes the expressive capacities of other arts. It can present images akin to painting, sound like music, and narrative like literature.

Theatre, too, engages sight and sound and incorporates both linguistic and non-linguistic elements. However, its perceptual mode differs fundamentally. The objects and actions on stage exist in real space, shared with a live audience. The space is physically occupied by actors and props, and events unfold in real time before a collective presence. Theatre offers no images in the cinematic sense;

a chair on stage is materially present, though its meaning may shift with different performances.

By contrast, cinema operates entirely within the space of representation. Its visual and auditory elements unfold on a screen, but the objects, actions, and agents depicted are absent in the real, material sense. Even when a film is not a narrative, it remains a constructed spectacle. A reel of film contains an entire world of appearances—yet everything seen is simulacral.

From its very beginning, then, cinema is imaginary. It is a signifier par excellence, but one whose perceptions are fundamentally deceptive. Although the viewer hears the actual sound of a car or a human voice, the object of perception—the car, the person, the tree—is not present. What is perceived is not the real object but its image, its shadow, its mirror. This differs from literature, where the tree is not depicted perceptually but described through language. Literature does not attempt to reconstruct the sensory detail of perception in the same way cinema does.

Cinema thus embodies a fundamental duality: it offers a rich array of perceptual data—images, sounds, movement—yet these are, from the outset, marked by unreality. The cinematic signifier, therefore, is both sensorially full and ontologically hollow—a system of signs that simulates reality without presenting it.

Section II:

Cinema functions like a mirror, but unlike a conventional mirror, it does not reflect the spectator's own body. The cinematic screen becomes, in effect, a transparent surface—more akin to a clear glass than a mirror. In the mirror stage, a child perceives its own image and forms an identification with it, recognizing itself as an *other*—both beside and before another. This recognition establishes an

object-relation; the child identifies with its own image, an object that is both itself and separate from itself.

In cinema, by contrast, the spectator does not see their own body on the screen. The viewer is no longer the child of the mirror stage, yet brings to the cinematic experience the prior knowledge of the mirror's function. The spectator knows that objects exist outside themselves, knows themselves as a subject, and is aware that they can become an object for others. This prior knowledge allows them to constitute the cinematic object in their absence—without needing to see themselves reflected.

What, then, does the spectator identify with? Identification in cinema is not a necessity in the same way it is during the mirror stage, yet some form of identification must occur—otherwise, the film would be unintelligible. It is often assumed that spectators identify with characters or actors who are seen as human and relatable. However, this explanation is insufficient. Many cinematic sequences present landscapes or inanimate objects with no human presence, and yet they remain intelligible, effective, and compelling.

In the mirror stage, ego formation occurs through the identification with one's own image. But in cinema, where and how is this ego constructed? When the spectator recognizes something akin to themselves on screen, or even recognizes an absence of such likeness, what is the nature of this recognition? The screen presents an *other*, not the self. The spectator remains unseen and is positioned as the perceiving subject. It is through this act of perception that the cinematic experience is constituted. The spectator knows that the film is imaginary, and simultaneously knows that they are perceiving it—producing a dual awareness.

This duality is central: the spectator is physically engaged—the sense organs are stimulated by real perceptual input—yet the

perceived content is imaginary. The spectator is aware of the illusion, and in this awareness, the film becomes meaningful. The imaginary content of cinema is internalized by the spectator, as though the viewer becomes a "second screen" where perception is processed and transformed. The imaginary thus enters the symbolic order and is inaugurated as a signifier.

In this process, the spectator ultimately identifies not with another, but with themselves. The cinematic mirror is a paradoxical one. During film viewing, the spectator enters a state that is both hyper-perceptive and sub-motor—a condition where one is drawn into the imaginary, but through the real mechanisms of perception. Yet, unlike the child before a mirror who is both inside and outside the reflection, the spectator is wholly outside this cinematic mirror. The screen reflects everything except the self.

Section III:

In cinema, the camera has already looked at reality before the spectator encounters it. What the viewer sees on screen is a recorded reality, mediated through the camera's gaze. During the film screening, the camera is no longer physically present, but its function is preserved through the projector, positioned behind the spectator. The viewer, therefore, occupies the position formerly held by the camera and is led to identify with it. This identification is subtly but powerfully evidenced. For instance, during a pan shot—when the camera smoothly rotates to reveal a changing view—the spectator does not express surprise at the moving environment. In real life, if a tree appeared to move while the observer remained stationary, such movement would provoke astonishment. In cinema, it is accepted without question. This indicates the spectator's alignment with the camera's prior motion.

All acts of seeing involve two simultaneous processes: a projective movement and an introjective one. The projective aspect occurs when one casts their gaze outward—towards, say, a tree. The introjective process involves the perceived object returning to the subject, internalized and deposited within consciousness.

In the cinematic experience, the spectator's gaze is cast onto the screen, replicating the act of the projector, which itself replicates the gaze of the original camera. At the same time, the spectator becomes a receptive surface, paralleling the screen, which in turn mirrors the film strip. Thus, watching a film involves a dual process: the film is something the viewer receives (introjection) and something the viewer enacts through perception (projection).

These mirroring effects are central to the functioning of the cinematic signifier. It is through this continuous play of projection and introjection, of presence and absence, and of perceptual phantasms, that the symbolic dimension of cinema is constituted. The screen becomes a space of symbolic construction, where reality and fantasy coalesce through the mediation of visual and auditory signs.

In this dynamic, the spectator occupies the position of the voyeur—an unseen observer who looks without being looked at, engaged in the spectacle from a place of safe distance. This voyeuristic stance, structurally embedded in cinematic viewing, reinforces the spectator's identification with the gaze that once belonged to the camera, now inherited by the projector, and assumed by the viewer.

Section IV:

In this section, Christian Metz explores the application of phenomenology to cinema, proposing that phenomenology can provide valuable insights into the cinematic experience. He suggests that cinema, by its very nature, aligns with phenomenological

principles, as it engages the spectator in a unique mode of perception.

Metz draws parallels between the structures of phenomenology and the cinematic apparatus. In phenomenology, the phrase "there is" signifies the presence of a perceiving subject. Similarly, in cinema, the signifier is situated within the ego of the spectator. The viewer withdraws into a state of pure perception, engaging with the film on a level that transcends mere observation.

This phenomenological engagement is not solely a subjective experience but is also objectively determined by the physical and psychological conditions of film viewing. The design of the auditorium, the placement of the spectator, and the mechanics of projection all contribute to this experience. Moreover, Metz notes that human developmental factors, such as the dependency on caregivers and the motor immaturity of infants, influence our perceptual engagement with cinema.

Thus, phenomenology offers a framework for understanding the spectator's immersion in film. The cinematic experience is characterized by a complex interplay of projection and introjection, presence and absence, and the transformation of the imaginary into the symbolic. Through this lens, cinema becomes a medium that not only reflects reality but also shapes our perception and understanding of it.

Section V:

Metz explores the mechanisms through which identification is structured within cinema—not just through character or narrative content, but through technical codes like framing, eyeline matches, and editing patterns. Metz proposes that film spectatorship invites multiple identifications, and these are not only psychological but structurally encoded into the film itself. This is what he refers to as

"sub-codes of identification." These are not primary identifications with characters per se, but rather mediated points of access that help organize the spectator's relationship to what is being seen on screen. When two characters look at each other within the frame, they set up a visual circuit that does not directly involve the spectator. This reinforces the diegetic autonomy of the film's world. The spectator observes this interaction from a distance, but still may identify with either or both characters. However, identification is less direct, because the look is self-contained within the fiction. But Metz emphasizes that when a character looks offscreen, toward someone or something not shown, it introduces a spatial ambiguity. The spectator may be led to imagine that the offscreen character is closer to them—that is, just beyond the screen, in the viewer's space.

First, before the spectator identifies with the figure on the screen, he must identify with the look of the camera, which is primary identification. This is akin to Lacan's idea of mirror stage. Next, the spectator can identify with the character something that happens through techniques such as point of view shots, eyeline matches etc. but this identification with a character is mediated with screen images. And It is often encouraged by sub-codes, such as a character looking offscreen toward the camera (as discussed earlier), pulling the spectator into **a** phantasmatic space within the diegesis. The unseen, invisible out-of-frame character therefore mediates the process of identification and keeps the narrative moving.

Section VI:

The spectator identifies with a character investing the character with all the structures of intelligibility the spectator already has: language, memory, subjectivity, cultural schemata. This is imaginary identification from Lacan's mirror stage. At the same time the spectator knows that this is not real. This distance or gap is

essential for functioning of fiction. If the viewer wholly believed they *were* the character, there would be no room for play, reflection, or narrative engagement.

Similarly, the spectator knows that the photograph is present. But the object being photographed –be it the person, the place, or real setting—are absent. And here the present signifies the absent. This play of presence/absence is what structures cinematic meaning. Thus, cinema is phantasy because it plays out imaginary scenes of identification, wish-fulfillment etc. but it is not pure phantasy because the technological apparatus produces the absence materially. a fantasy inside the mind, cinema has an objective basis for its absence: a *real, material apparatus* that creates coded, rule-bound representations**.**

Check Your Progress:

- How does Metz differentiate between the perceptual richness of cinema and the material absence of what is shown on screen? (80 words)
- What is the significance of primary and secondary identification in Metz's theory? (80 words)
- In what way does Metz describe the spectator's experience of cinema as both imaginary and symbolic? How does this dual awareness affect the spectator's perception of reality and fiction in film? (80 words)

5.4 Reading the Essay "Story/Discourse"

Film is not merely a gimmick devised by producers to earn money; it is a phenomenon that demands serious analysis. The institution of

cinema ensures that audiences come and watch films, and through this engagement, the ideological function of cinema is fulfilled. However, this is also a matter of the audience's *symbolic positioning*—their desire is actively engaged in the process.

Christian Metz underscores the point that cinema is discourse. It is not a natural or transparent presentation of reality before a passive, disengaged audience. On the contrary, it is an intentional art form, one in which the filmmaker's intentions shape every aspect of the apparatus necessary to produce a film. In traditional cinema, however, this discursive character is concealed. What appears before the spectator is a *story*—seemingly self-contained, seamless, and natural—with no visible trace of enunciation. The spectator is thus presented with a narrative that obscures the mechanisms of its own production, hiding the fact that it is, fundamentally, *discourse*.

The phenomenology of cinema resists a simple, stable subject–object relation. Like a midwife, the spectator is not only a witness to the unfolding film but also someone who brings it into being. During its screening, the film essentially lives through the spectator. Christian Metz argues that, due to this *scopic* relationship, cinema possesses an exhibitionist dimension. However, this is not exhibitionism in the strict psychoanalytic sense—where subject and object perpetually exchange positions. Although cinema, as an institution, is created with the full knowledge that it will be watched (the filmmaker crafts the film as an object of the spectator's gaze), the traditional film does not want to acknowledge this fact. It does not display self-consciousness—unlike many postmodern films. Metz is specifically referencing classical Hollywood cinema, where the film does not "know" it is being watched, and therefore does not reveal any trace of this awareness in its form or content.

This paradox—cinema as simultaneously exhibitionist and non-exhibitionist—is linked to the erasure of enunciation. Traditional cinema conceals the signs of narration, presenting the story as if it flows naturally and impersonally through shots and sequences, with no discernible narrator. How, then, do we make sense of this contradiction? Metz proposes a distinction that echoes the Saussurean binary of *langue* and *parole*. He separates cinema as discourse (the institutional, intentional framework) from the filmic text (the individual product).

Cinema, as an institution, is an intentional and conscious process, fully aware of the presence of an audience. It organizes a range of discursive mechanisms—the structuring of plot, the construction of character, the manipulation of perspective through cinematography—all aimed at crafting a coherent viewing experience. Yet, once the film is completed and enters the theatre, it unfolds before the spectator as a self-contained world, following a predetermined trajectory. It no longer responds to who is watching; it becomes unaware of its own spectatorship, embodying a paradoxical non-exhibitionism even though it was created to be seen.

In the phenomenology of watching, therefore, the spectator assumes the position of the voyeur. Here, pleasure and satisfaction hinge upon the certainty that the spectator is not being watched. This voyeuristic pleasure is sustained by the erasure of discursive signs and the seamless unfolding of the story—which appears to emerge naturally, without the trace of a narrator or mediating presence.

Within the imaginary world of the film, the actor behaves as though he is not being seen and thus not subjected to the gaze. This illusion of non-awareness is critical to maintaining the cinematic illusion and constitutes what Metz identifies as the second type of

voyeurism. In this mode, pleasure arises from the actor's feigned ignorance of the spectator's gaze—unlike in classical theatre, where a mutual awareness between actor and audience often animates the stage.

During the film's unfolding, an imaginary order is established. Drawing on Lacan, this *Imaginary* refers to a realm of images, illusions, and identifications. When the actor pretends not to be watched, the illusion is preserved that the world of the film exists autonomously, independent of the spectator. This enables the viewer to project their desires onto the image and to identify with characters and perspectives without disruption, thereby intensifying cinematic pleasure.

SAQ:

- Why does Christian Metz describe cinema as a form of discourse rather than a natural reflection of reality? (60 words)

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- What does Metz mean when he says cinema is both exhibitionist and non-exhibitionist? (60 words)

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- How does Metz use Lacan's concept of the Imaginary to explain the spectator's identification with the film? (60 words)

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5.5 Summing Up

In this unit, we have discussed two essays by Christian Metz, namely "Identification/Mirror" and "Story/Discourse". In *Identification / Mirror*, Christian Metz explores how spectators relate to films not just emotionally or psychologically, but through complex structures of perception, representation, and identification.

Cinema, unlike literature or music, activates multiple perceptual channels—sight, sound, and movement. However, the objects and events shown on screen are not present in the material sense; they are *representations* captured by the camera and projected to simulate reality.

Metz compares the cinema screen to a mirror, explains how watching a film is different from looking in a real mirror. In a mirror, we see ourselves and recognize our own image. In cinema, however, we don't see ourselves—we see others, scenes, and stories. Still, the film acts like a kind of mirror because it creates a space where we can imagine, identify, and emotionally connect with what we see.

A key insight of Metz is that identification in cinema is "twice relayed." First, the viewer identifies with the *look* of the camera,. Then comes *secondary identification* with characters or figures on screen, mediated by techniques like camera angles, point-of-view shots, and eyeline matches. Metz calls such techniques "sub-codes of identification," which organize how viewers relate to what they see, even when human figures are absent.

Metz also explains how the physical and psychological conditions of film viewing—like the dark theatre, the viewer's immobility, and the placement of the screen—shape our experience. The viewer enters a state of pure perception, engaging deeply while remaining physically passive, much like the infant in early development. This

supports the cinematic experience as immersive, structured, and semi-conscious.

Finally, Metz argues that cinema is a space where the imaginary and symbolic converge. The spectator projects their inner structures on to the screen. Yet they are also aware of the fictionality and absence that cinema is built upon.

According to Metz, this combination of presence and absence is what makes cinema so powerful. We know what we're watching isn't real, but we still react to it emotionally. The experience of watching a film involves both our senses and our imagination. So, cinema is not just a fantasy—it is structured by real technology and codes that guide how we see and feel.

In *"Story/Discourse"*, Metz argues that cinema is not a neutral reflection of reality, but a form of discourse—an intentional and coded construction shaped by the filmmaker's decisions and the cinematic apparatus. However, classical cinema conceals this discursive nature by presenting stories as if they unfold naturally, without visible signs of narration. This concealment creates the illusion of transparency, making the film seem like an autonomous, self-contained world.

Metz explores how the spectator is both engaged and positioned within this illusion. Although the film is made to be watched—constructed for the gaze—it refuses to acknowledge the presence of the viewer, thereby producing a paradox: cinema is at once exhibitionist (made to be seen) and non-exhibitionist (pretends not to know it is being watched). This enables a specific kind of *voyeuristic pleasure*, where the viewer looks without being seen, and the actor behaves as if unobserved. Metz links this cinematic experience to the *Imaginary*—a realm of identification, illusion, and desire. The spectator's identification and emotional investment are

made possible precisely because the film does not break the illusion by acknowledging its own artifice.

5.6 References and Suggested Reading

- Allen, Richard. "Psychoanalytic Film Theory". *A Companion to Film Theory* edited by Toby Miller and Robert Stam. Blackwell, 1999.

- Lapsley, Robert and Michael Westlake. *Film Theory: An Introduction*. Manchester University Press, 2006.

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UNIT- 6

CHRISTIAN METZ: THE FICTION FILM AND ITS SPECTATOR: A METAPSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY

Unit Structure:

6.1 Objectives

6.2 Introduction:

6.3 Reading the Text:

    6.3.1 Film and Dream: The Knowledge of the Subject

    6.3.2 Film and Dream: Perception and hallucination

    6.3.3 Film and Dream: Degrees of Secondarisation

    6.3.4 Film and Phantasy

    6.3.5 The Filmic Visee

6.4 Summing Up

6.5 References and Suggested Reading

6.1 Objectives

By the end of this unit, the learner will be able to

- *learn* about Christain Metz's explorations of the relationship between film and dream;
- *understand* the aspects of cinematic perception from a psychoanalytic point of view;
- *find out* the differences between film and dream in terms of the role of the conscious mind;
- *gain* a perspective on the filmic state in terms of film's similarities with and differences from the daydream;
- *evaluate* film-spectator relationship.

6.2 Introduction

Film derives its unique power from its unparalleled ability, compared to other art forms, to create an illusion of reality. However, this is an *illusory* reality, distinct from the tangible presence of actors and action characteristic of theatre. Film is centered around sound and image, both recorded and later projected onto a screen. These elements work together to create an impression of reality in the mind of the spectator.The very mechanism of a film encourages the spectator to suspend disbelief. Film is not merely about images.The images are deliberately organized to signify another order of reality. Semiotic approaches to film often overlook the crucial question of the spectator's position in relation to the cinematic experience.

This unit explores Christian Metz's essay *The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, which examines the relationship between a film and the spectator. Metz focuses not just on the conditions of production but, more significantly, on the process of film reception. Adopting a psychoanalytic approach, he investigates the fundamental psychic processes involved in watching a film. Notably, Metz does not analyze any specific film; instead, his focus remains on the psychology of film spectatorship, particularly its parallels with dreaming and daydreaming.

6.3 Reading the text

6.3.1 Fiction and Dream: The Knowledge of the Subject

Christian Metz, in *The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, explores the relationship between a film and a dream, emphasizing both their similarities and differences. While cinema allows moments of deep identification where the spectator is emotionally absorbed into the

diegesis, this immersion is always temporary. Unlike naïve audiences who may mistake film for reality, the typical spectator remains aware that they are watching a constructed narrative. The cinematic experience oscillates between engagement and detachment: at times, the viewer is carried away by the film, only to soon step back, restoring the fundamental distance between film and reality. Even when a spectator expresses emotions physically—through gestures, laughter, or tears—this very act paradoxically serves to pull them back into wakefulness, reinforcing the distinction between film and real life. Metz describes this as a *paradoxical hallucination*: unlike endogenous hallucinations produced by the unconscious mind in dreams, cinema induces an illusion of reality using external stimuli, allowing the spectator to momentarily "hallucinate" what is actually present—images and sounds on the screen.

Metz draws further parallels between cinema and dreams by discussing moments of rupture within the dream state. Dreams are not entirely seamless; there are occasional gaps where the dreamer becomes self-aware or shifts between sleep and wakefulness. These gaps resemble moments in cinematic perception where identification with the narrative is broken, whether by an awareness of the screen, an external distraction, or a sudden disruption in the story. Metz explains this through Freudian psychoanalysis, where dreams are shaped by a struggle between the unconscious mind's desires and the ego's mechanisms of censorship. The *id* generates wishes, the *ego* seeks to maintain sleep, and the *superego* enforces censorship by repressing disturbing dream content. If censorship fails to sufficiently tone down the unconscious material, nightmares occur, forcing the dreamer to wake up. In a similar way, cinema—though structured and externally crafted—sometimes experiences perceptual breaks that pull the spectator back into reality.

From a metapsychological perspective, Metz argues that the illusion of reality in film is inversely proportional to wakefulness. Just as dreams intensify when one moves deeper into sleep, traditional fiction films induce a state of lowered wakefulness, a condition closer to dreaming. Unlike real-life events that demand immediate action, narrative cinema encourages a withdrawal into fantasy, creating an experience that is passive yet emotionally charged. However, this state is not enduring but episodic, fragmentary, and fleeting. At times, spectators experience brief moments of "psychic giddiness"—a heightened illusion where they momentarily lose awareness of film as fiction. Yet, this effect is always temporary, and the spectator soon regains their sense of detachment.

A fundamental distinction between film and dream lies in their perceptual transference. In dreams, the individual is entirely asleep, fully submerged in an internally generated world. In film, the spectator remains awake, even if their level of wakefulness fluctuates. Cinema, unlike dreams, is mediated by technological apparatuses—screen, camera, sound, and editing—whereas dreams are spontaneous, self-generated experiences. While cinema can resemble the immersive quality of dreams, it never fully replicates the unconscious, fragmented nature of dream perception.

Ultimately, Metz characterizes cinema as a *waking dream*, an externally produced yet immersive experience that allows the spectator to move between states of engagement and self-awareness. While fiction films induce moments of absorption, they also provide mechanisms that restore the viewer's conscious detachment. The paradox of cinematic spectatorship lies in its ability to create an illusion of reality while simultaneously reminding the viewer of its fictionality. This interplay between immersion and distance defines

the cinematic experience, making it a unique psychological and perceptual phenomenon.

Stop to Consider:

The first major difference between film and dream is the condition of the subject. In film the subject's usual condition is that of wakefulness while in dream it is of sleep. Though dream also contains moments of wakefulness or filmic condition triggers emotional involvement by inducing a condition of sleep and dream, through creation of illusion of reality. These are merely fragmented and fleeting moments, and not enduring periods of experience.

6.3.2 Fiction and Dream: Perception and Hallucination:

A dream does not require external stimuli, unlike a film. In this sense, its delusion is deeper. Yet, this delusion is partly neutralized by the dreamer's awareness that it is only a dream. In contrast, the delusion of film occurs while the spectator is awake, making it harder to neutralize simply by acknowledging that it is only a film.

Authentic sounds and images in cinema stimulate desire and aid fantasy. Classical cinema, much like the nineteenth-century novel, serves a social role by offering affective fulfillment—unlike the modern novel. However, film also provokes allergic responses and frustrations directed at the film itself. As a result, the spectator establishes an object relation with the film, leading to moments of cinematic displeasure. When id satisfaction becomes too intense, the ego and superego counteract, making the film seem excessive or in bad taste. For a spectator to enjoy a film, it must provide some degree of instinctual satisfaction, but this satisfaction must remain

within certain limits. Filmic displeasure arises when fiction disrupts fantasy—for example, when the spectator is frustrated by the plot's unfolding or the course of events. This frustration is especially pronounced in adaptations of novels into films. The spectator experiences the film as a repetition of a familiar path that stirs desire—similar to a child playing with the same toy in the same way.

Wish fulfillment in film is less certain than in dreams because film is not purely hallucinatory but based on actual perception. The spectator cannot manipulate cinematic perception at will, whereas dreams respond more directly to the subject's unconscious wishes, as though the dreamer were the auteur of the dreamwork. In film, fantasy is intertwined with reality and can either please or displease the spectator, just as real-life events do. Dreams operate according to the pleasure principle, whereas film is governed by thereality principle. The source of both cinematic pleasure and displeasure lies in the film's images and sounds themselves.

The driving force behind dreams is unconscious wishes, rooted in childhood memories and repressed experiences. These are activated by more recent unconscious or preconscious memories, which, through the mediation of the ego and superego, reach a hallucinatory vividness. In this process, ordinary sensory perception is not involved.

In dreams, regression occurs—a return to an earlier state of mental functioning, particularly childhood memories—allowing unconscious desires to manifest in a true hallucinatory form, breaking the boundaries of reality. However, in film, the same level of regression is not possible because the experience is driven by external stimuli (sound and image), which require cognitive and perceptual awareness. Furthermore, film involves secondary

processes, meaning that rational thought is engaged due to the structured nature of film narrative, as well as the fact that film is mediated through language and codes.

If this is the case, how do we explain perceptual transference in film? How is the mental leap from perceiving images and sounds to experiencing a more complete reality activated? How does the spectator transition from being a mere receiver of perception to a believer in the fictional universe? How does one move from an objectively real signifier (e.g., the image of a galloping horse) to a psychologically real signified (e.g., the sense of a living horse within the film's world)?

Metz answers this by examining the physical conditions of film viewing. While the spectator is awake, unlike in a dream, their physical environment in the cinema contributes to a dream-like experience. The darkened room, the immobile position of the spectator, the hushed atmosphere, and the social norms of silent reception suppress motor activity, even during highly evocative scenes. Leaving the cinema, then, is akin to regaining wakefulness. In everyday perception, psychical energy is dissipated across multiple sensory engagements, but in cinematic perception, it is conserved, intensifying the experience.

It is within this condition that perceptual transference takes place. Narrative cinema's fictional capacity functions because spectators are already conditioned by representational literature, art, and the Aristotelian tradition. Additionally, the abundance of cinematic output continuously provides opportunities for psychic satisfaction. However, the film form itself plays a crucial role—its ability to produce an impression of reality more vividly than any other art enhances its immersive power. The cinematic signifier's effect is to

bend fiction toward historically and socially plausible realism, further reinforcing the spectator's belief in the cinematic world.

6.3.3 Film and Dream: Degrees of Secondarisation

Diegetic film is evidently more logical and coherent than a dream. Even unrealistic films follow a different kind of logic or principle of coherence. Film does not create pure unintelligibility.

Metz differentiates film and dream in terms of their emphasis on primary and secondary processes. The primary process, characteristic of the unconscious mind and dreams, is defined by illogical, free-associative thinking and is driven by the pleasure principle, which seeks immediate discharge of psychic energy (immediate wish fulfillment) without concern for reality. Mechanisms such as condensation and displacement are part of this process. However, alongside the pleasure principle, the reality principle also operates in dreams, conferring a degree of coherence to the dream work and making it more intelligible. The secondary process, governed by the reality principle, is associated with conscious, waking thought. The overall product of dream work results from a "combination and compromise" of both processes. In this dialectic, the primary process dominates in dreams, making the absurdity and illogicality of the dream seem normal to the dreamer while they are dreaming. However, in the waking state, the same dream produces astonishment and shock.

Since unconscious desires and thoughts freely shape images and events in dreams with minimal intervention from waking rationality, the manifest dream does not create shock for the dreamer. Impossible occurrences—such as switching identities and the displacement of objects—are accepted without question. Though the

secondary process operates, it remains one among many processes, thus allowing for the acceptance of absurdities in dreams. Freud notes that the unconscious productions of the primary process must be "brutally transplanted" into conscious awareness, i.e., waking consciousness.

Metz argues that both processes are involved in film. However, in the waking state (which includes filmmaking), the primary processes of condensation and displacement cannot yield direct, observable results due to the intervention of the conscious, waking mind. In film, secondary revision is dominant. Essentially, a film is akin to a dream that has been heavily filtered through conscious thought and logic. Filmmakers, who are fully awake, engage in planning, scripting, editing, and other rational processes. The events on screen are not spontaneous eruptions of a dreamer's id but rather deliberately composed sequences, even when depicting chaos or fantasy. The narrative of a classical fiction film "unfolds clearly" with a coherent structure—any ambiguity or randomness is usually intentional and controlled. This is why the film diegesis is far more orderly than a dream. Even in films that depict absurd or surreal events, there is an underlying logic and principle of coherence, ensuring that this 'absurdity' is understood as a represented reality. A sense of organization remains integral to the film text. Additionally, the spectator's viewing experience is governed by the principles of coherence, narrative order, and causality.

Metz further discusses how certain cinematic techniques evoke primary process effects. Techniques such as superimposition and lap dissolve blend images or transition one into another. Superimposition creates equivalence between two distinct objects or scenes, while a lap dissolve involves a displacement in time and space. Although these techniques evoke astonishment and disquiet

characteristic of dreams, film language conventions rationalize them for the spectator. For instance, superimposition is typically read as indicative of a passage of time.

Metz argues that film resembles dreams more than other art forms because it requires a condition of lessened wakefulness. Several factors contribute to this, including the spectator's predispositions, prior expectations, and the darkened condition of the cinema hall. Additionally, like cinematic narratives, dream work is also a story—though a film is a 'told' story, a dream is a story without narration, where images follow a logic of succession. However, these primary processes offer little shock or astonishment to the spectator because they remain self-effacing, functioning only for the benefit of diegesis. The absence of astonishment is due to the dominance of the secondary process in film, as the spectator is awake. At the same time, the primary process emerges due to the spectator's reduced wakefulness while watching a film. In cinema, both processes negotiate a middle level, regulating each other so that neither fully dominates. Thus, film and the spectator exist in a dynamic state of mutual modulation.

Check Your Progress:

- How does Metz use Freudian concepts to understand cinematic experience? (150 words)
- Relate Metz's analysis of film in terms of the primary and secondary processes. (100 words)

6.3.4 Film and Phantasy

Metz introduces the concept of daydream to define the film and spectator relationship. Watching a film is like engaging in a waking phantasy. Both film and phantasy take place in wakefulness, unlike sleeping dreams. Yet, they allow the mind to wander freely in imaginary situations. When we watch a film, we sit, relax, and allow our imagination to be guided by the film. Similarly, even in wakefulness, in phantasy, we tune out the external world for a few moments and let the phantasy play out. In both cases, we are awake but internally preoccupied, occupying an intermediary zone of consciousness between complete wakefulness and dreaming.

Besides, Metz draws several parallels between film and daydream. A fiction film is a narrative characterized by logical coherence. Classical linear fictional narratives have a clear beginning, middle, and end, forming a distinct storyline. Phantasy, too, is a short story that people create in their minds, displaying similar logical coherence. Both film and daydream are shaped by an active imagination that involves the secondary process (see 'Secondary Process' in the Glossary section). Dreams, on the other hand, can be incoherent, chaotic, or disjointed due to the dominance of the primary process. Daydreams, by contrast, are sensible narratives that can be grasped by the conscious mind. Therefore, a film unfolds like an extended daydream rather than a night-dream. Thirdly, in both film and daydream, the creator (filmmaker/daydreamer) is awake and exercises conscious control. This indicates that similar mental processes are involved in both.

Yet, crucial differences set them apart. First of all, the mode of production differs. Film is not a purely mental phenomenon; it requires material execution, involving the careful selection of every element, such as visuals, sound, plot, and so on. The film's

imaginary world is fully fleshed out, offering the spectator a complete and concrete world. This explicitness and concreteness do not characterize daydreams, where blank spaces and vagueness might prevail. In daydreaming, there might be quick jumps, broad strokes, or glossing over inconsistencies, even though they are not as extreme as in night-dreams. Metz states: *"The filmic state is more explicit than the daydream… since film obliges one to choose each element in all the detail of its perceptible appearance, whereas the daydream… can tolerate more vague and 'blank' spaces."* However, Metz considers this a difference of degree rather than of kind.

Metz also finds a crucial similarity between film and daydream in terms of the subject's position. The spectator of a film never fully forgets that they are watching a film. This self-awareness of the spectator is a key point to consider. Similarly, the daydreamer also knows that it is just a daydream. In both cases, the mind maintains the distinction between imagination and reality and never fully confuses them. Both film viewing and daydreaming are conscious, controlled forms of imaginative indulgence and they are aligned. The lack of a complete and thorough illusion and immersive state defines both, making them variations of waking life. Metz places both film and daydream in the intermediary stage between maximum and minimum wakefulness, where complete perceptual transference stops before reaching conclusion.

However, in terms of the materialization of sound and image, film and daydream differ. Daydreams are purely mental phenomena, whereas film, as discussed, requires the complete materialization of sound and image. The spectator feels that these sounds and images are not their own, that the film is an external, alien form. Here, the

daydream is immaterial, like the night-dream, making film a more concrete and externalized experience.

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SAQ:

Write about the similarities and differences between film and daydream, as enumerated by Metz. (100 words)

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6.3.5 The Filmic Visee

The cinematic signifier is physical—an image is as sensory as an actual image in real life. While the cinematic image is less imperfect than reality, it surpasses other art forms in its sensory impact. However, stimuli alone are not everything. The cinematic signifier serves the realm of the imaginary more than that of real life. The impression of reality in film is closely tied to fictional perception, one aspect of which is the experience of dreams and daydreams.

Since narrative cinema generates fictional perceptions—one of which is the experience of dreams and daydreams—the spectator's psychical state while receiving a film incorporates elements of reality, dream, and daydream. This results in a unique mode of consciousness that does not fully merge with any one of these states but partakes of all three.

While watching a fiction film, the impressions of reality, dream, and daydream are no longer contradictory but instead intersect. These three qualities converge within the diegesis, ultimately give rise to a 'non-real real'—a simulation of reality. The power of cinema, therefore, lies in its ability to reconcile these three distinct regimes of consciousness. In the context of narrative cinema, the filmic state is defined by the intermingling of reality, dream, and daydream.

6.4 Summing Up

The spectator experiences moments of deep identification with the film, but such immersion is always transitory. Overall, the spectator watches the film in a state of wakefulness, ensuring that the distinction between film and reality remains largely intact. Even in dreams, moments of rupture occur—in which there is fleeting awareness that one is dreaming. Hallucinations and self-consciousness in dreams result from contradictions in the psychic processes, particularly the clash between the id, ego, and superego.

Secondly, the illusion of reality intensifies when wakefulness diminishes, both in film and in dreams. While dreams, in their pure form, require a complete submersion of consciousness, film largely operates within a state of wakefulness. The interplay between engagement and self-awareness defines the cinematic experience.

Paradoxically, because the spectator remains largely awake, it becomes harder to neutralize the film's illusion. The images and sounds of film stimulate desire and fantasy, offering affective fulfillment or, when these stimulations prove insufficient, evoking displeasure. Film, on the whole, moves along a trajectory of desire, engaging the spectator's own desires. However, unlike in dreams, where the dreamer can manipulate images and sounds for wish

fulfillment, the spectator cannot alter the filmic narrative. This is because film operates under the *reality principle*, while dreams function under the *pleasure principle*, where rational thought is subdued.

Still, film induces *perceptual transference*. The physical conditions of film viewing—such as the darkened cinema hall—enhance a dream-like atmosphere. Additionally, spectators are already conditioned by representational literature, and the cinematic signifier—its sounds and images—shapes fiction into historically plausible realism, reinforcing the illusion of reality.

Metz distinguishes between film and dreams in terms of *primary* and *secondary* psychic processes. Dreams are dominated by *primary processes*, such as condensation and displacement. In contrast, cinema is governed by the *secondary process*, which is crucial to both filmmaking and viewing. Filmmakers construct films in a fully wakeful state, carefully arranging images and structuring elements. As a result, the spectator's experience is shaped by principles of coherence, order, and causality.

Metz also identifies similarities between film and daydreams. Both involve a storyline, and both rely on the secondary process (rational thinking). However, film differs from daydreaming in its concreteness and explicitness. Every element in a cinematic narrative is meticulously crafted, whereas daydreams are often vague and contain gaps or blank spaces. Nevertheless, both film and daydreams exist in an *intermediary state* between maximum and minimum wakefulness.

Ultimately, Metz concludes that cinematic perception—particularly in the case of fiction films—is a complex phenomenon, blending qualities of dream, daydream, and reality. While watching a film,

these three elements converge and reconcile, producing a simulation of reality.

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Block- III

Unit 1: **The French Lieutenant Woman: From John Fowles's novel to Karel Reisz's movie**

Unit 2: **The French Lieutenant Woman: From John Fowles's novel to Karel Reisz's movie (Supplementary Unit)**

Unit 3: ***A Streetcar Named Desire*: From Tennessee Williams's Play to Elia Kazan's Movie**

Unit 4: ***A Streetcar Named Desire*: From Tennessee Williams's Play to Elia Kazan's Movie (Supplementary Unit)**

Unit 5: **From Charles Perrault's and Brothers Grimm's Fairy Tale, *Sleeping Beauty* to Robert Stromberg's movie *Maleficent.***

Unit 6: **From Charles Perrault's and Brothers Grimm's Fairy Tale, *Sleeping Beauty* to Robert Stromberg's movie *Maleficent.* (Supplementary Unit)**

Unit7: **From Lakshminath Bezbaroa's Tales to Bhaskar Hazarika's *Kathanodi***

Unit8: **Lakshminath Bezbaroa's Tales to Bhaskar Hazarika's *Kathanodi* (Supplementary Unit)**

UNIT- 1

THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN: FROM JOHN FOWLES'S NOVEL TO KAREL REISZ'S MOVIE

Unit Structure:

1.1 Objectives

In this comprehensive unit you will learn to identify the key concepts and engage in an in-depth examination of both the literary and cinematic works by exploring their themes, characters and historical concepts of the novel and the film which are:

- *analyze* Fowles's novel, exploring its themes, characters, and historical context;
- *examine* Karel Reisz's film adaptation, evaluating its interpretive strategies;

- *compare* and contrast the novel and the cinematic tools utilized in the film, identifying similarities and differences;
- *develop* critical thinking skills to appreciate the intersections of literature, film and culture.

1.2 Introduction

John Fowles is an influential English writer who emerged as a literary giant in the 20th century, defined by his complex characters and explorations of existential themes. Born into a family of middle-class tobacco importers in 1926, Fowles spent his initial years at a boarding school that laid the groundwork for his academic pursuits and athletic inclinations. His experiences in the Royal Marines for two years further shaped his worldview. Upon completing his military service, he attended New College, Oxford, where he studied French and German and developed a keen interest in literature particularly the works of existentialist writers like Camus and Sartre. After graduating, Fowles maintained the role of a teacher for many years, including a two-year period in Greece, where he met Elizabeth Christy. This relationship, marked by romantic complexities as Elizabeth was married to one of his colleagues, profoundly influenced his subsequent personal and professional life. The publication of his first novel, *The Collector*, in 1963 marked a turning point for Fowles, gaining significant critical acclaim and financial success that enabled him to leave teaching behind. This transition laid the foundation for his most celebrated works, including *The Magus* and *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, which showcased his talent for blending intricate narrative structures with philosophical depths. Fowles's writing frequently grapples with the tensions between the constraints of society and the pursuit of

personal liberty, reflecting the broader existential concerns of his time. His literary career was also intertwined with his life in Dorset, where he and his wife relocated in 1965. Their experiences living in a farmhouse and later in Lyme Regis not only provided the backdrop for his storytelling but also informed the settings of his most famous works. He also took up the role of a curator of Lyme Regis Museum which further connected him to the historical and cultural contexts that permeated his writing.

Throughout his career, Fowles's narratives often examined the intersections of class, gender, and societal norms, positioning him as a critical voice in the shifting currents of 20th-century literature. His works primarily challenges conventional viewpoints, inviting readers to reconsider assumptions about truth and history, making him a significant figure in postmodernism and a dedicated commentator on human experience. As a writer, Fowles' legacy continues to challenges discourse on the nature of fiction and the complexities of identity amid changing social landscapes.

1.3 Summary

John Fowles' novel, written in 1969, is set in the time period of 1867 against the coast of Lyme Regis, Dorset, England. It follows Charles Smithson, an aristocratic paleontologist and Darwin enthusiast, who is engaged to Ernestina Freeman, the coy daughter of a wealthy London merchant. Their engagement symbolized the rigid propriety of the era, until Charles ran across the enigmatic Sarah Woodruff, the titular "French Lieutenant's Woman" along the shore of Lyme Regis. Sarah, shrouded in scandal and isolation, is ostracized by Lyme's society as a fallen woman. Rumours among the locals say that she was heartbroken by French Lieutenant named Varguennes, leaving her in perpetual mourning. Her haunting

presence on the Cobb, a stone pier where she stares obsessively at the sea captivates Charles during a walk with Ernestina. Intrigued by her shrouded mystery, Charles seeks her out. Through clandestine meetings in the Undercliff, Sarah reveals fragments of her past which centers around her ruinous affair, her dismissal as a governess and her current exploitation by the pious but tyrannical Mrs. Poulteney, who is an awful woman afraid of damnation. Charles's scientific curiosity slowly transforms into a dangerous obsession. During a clandestine walk on Ware Commons, Sarah twists her ankle, forcing Charles to assist her to a barn. There, she confesses her love for him. Though Charles initially resists her advances, he finally gives in. Meanwhile, Ernestina's father, Mr. Freeman, discovers the engagement and threatens Charles with financial ruin if he dishonors his daughter. Dr. Grogan, with whom Charles shares a common ground of intellectual pursuits, diagnoses Sarah as a "melancholic" who frames herself as a miserable character to lure attention and manipulate people around her, particularly Charles. Charles attempts to cut ties but Sarah's plea for help drew him back. In a charged encounter at the Endicott family's hotel, both Charles and Sarah surrender to their intimate desires. When Charles returns afterward, she vanishes, leaving him tormented. Charles breaks his engagement to Ernestina, sacrificing his reputation and inheritance and embarks on a two year quest to find Sarah, discovering that she fled to London under the alias of "Mrs. Roughwood." This journey of Charles signals the Victorian hypocrisy; an affair with an alluring manipulator costs his once-respected name to be ruined. Meanwhile, Sarah reinvents herself as a model and a muse in Gabriel Rossetti's bohemian household, embracing independence, a stark contrast to the submissive Victorian ideal. However, Fowles fractures the narrative with three divergent conclusions, challenging traditional Victorian linearity. In the initial ending, Charles reunites with Sarah,

now part of a progressive circle, and meets their daughter. Though hopeful, their future remains uncertain. In the second ending, Sarah rejects Charles, asserting her hard-won autonomy. He walks away in disparity but free to forge his own destiny. The narrator interrupts in the third ending; freezing Charles mid-decision in London, leaving his fate unresolved which acts as a commentary on the illusion of authorial control in the Victorian era.

Check Your Progress:

Q1. Why did John Fowles consider a Victorian setting for his novel?

Q2. Discuss the two characters, Sarah and Ernestina, bringing out their differences.

1.4 The French Lieutenant's Woman: A Post Modern Classic

John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is generally regarded as a work that extends to the narrative styles of postmodernism due to its techniques of inter-textuality and subversion of literary and historical conventions in many ways. By blending Victorian pastiche with self-conscious meta-fiction, Fowles dissects the traditional form of storytelling by questioning the nature of authorship and critiques both 19th-century and contemporary social values.

An omniscient and authoritative writer (or narrator) is a third-person, "godlike" storyteller who stands outside the action, knows every character's thoughts and motives, and can interpret events for the reader, often with confident, judgmental commentary and full control over plot and pacing. Fowles both imitates and dismantles this Victorian convention in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. The

narrator openly breaks the spell of omniscience: "This story I am telling is all imagination…the novelist stands next to God." He immediately undercuts that pose by insisting on his characters' autonomy: "It is only when our characters and events begin to disobey us that they begin to live." These claims, quoted from the text and echoed in Fowles's reflections on fiction, recast the "author-as-God" as a maker who grants freedom rather than decrees fate. Fowles also metaleptically enters the story as a bearded man on a train, foregrounding the narrator as a present, fallible artificer rather than an invisible authority. Finally, instead of a single imposed resolution, the novel famously offers three alternative endings, pushing readers to confront the contingency of narrative "truth" and the limits of authorial control. Together, these devices subvert omniscience by exposing its mechanics and redistributing interpretive power to characters and readers.

The novel's engagement with existential themes, its destabilization of narrative authority and its interplay with literary and cultural texts solidify its postmodern legacy. Some of the remnants of postmodernist elements that dictate the text are as follows:

1.4.1 Meta-fiction and Narrative Self-Consciousness

A hallmark of postmodernism lies in the quality of being meta-fictional i.e. fiction that foregrounds its own construction penetrates the novel. Fowles disrupts the illusion of realism by inserting a self-aware narrator who comments on the artifice of storytelling. In the book, the narrator explicitly addresses the reader, declaring, "This story I am telling is all imagination. The characters I create never existed outside my own mind." This narrative intrusion dismantles the traditional convention of an omniscient, authoritative narrator and instead embodies a distinctly postmodern skepticism toward the

very notion of objective truth. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles repeatedly undermines the illusion of seamless storytelling by foregrounding the artifice of narration itself. The narrator's playful manipulation of time and perspective deliberately disrupts the historical continuity of the Victorian setting. This not only fractures the coherence of the narrative but also reminds readers that history and fiction alike are constructed through selective perspectives. By refusing to maintain the "all-knowing" stance of a conventional 19th-century narrator, Fowles draws attention to the relativity of interpretation and the impossibility of final meaning. In doing so, the text resists closure, aligning itself with postmodern strategies that challenge authority, destabilize linearity, and foreground narrative as a space of play rather than certainty. This phenomenon is also seen in Italo Calvino's *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1979), which similarly disrupts the reader's expectations.

1.4.2 Lack of a Proper Closure and Multiple Endings

Fowles, in the novel provides three contradictory endings, each reflecting different possibilities for the protagonists. The first narrative remains sincere to the Victorian melodrama, with Charles reuniting with his fiancée Ernestina; the second provides a bleak, existential resolution where Charles is abandoned by Sarah; the third, set in a modern context, sees the author himself intrude as a character, resetting the story's timeline. This multiplicity rejects the Victorian ideal of narrative closure and instead emphasizes the indeterminacy of meaning which is a core postmodern tenet. This technique is synonymous with the "forking paths" of Jorge Luis Borges' *The Garden of Forking Paths* (1941), challenging the notion of a singular and authoritative reality.

1.4.3 Prominence of Inter-textuality

The novel engages in an inter-textual discourse with the 19th-century literature, adopting the style of authors like Thomas Hardy and George Eliot while challenging their conventions. Sarah Woodruff, the archetype of "fallen woman", shrouded in mystery, directly responds to tragic Victorian heroines like Hardy's Tess or Elizabeth Gaskell's Ruth. However, Sarah defies Victorian morals by embracing her marginality as a form of agency which rejects societal redemption. Similarly, the novel's attention to detail in epistolary passages, Darwinian debates, and class tensions mirrors Victorian realism, yet these elements are undercut by postmodern irony. For instance, Charles' existential crisis over Darwinism mirrors the Victorian crisis of faith but is framed through a 20th-century lens of existential absurdity, similar to Albert Camus' "The Stranger" (1942).

1.4.4 Challenging Norms: Gender and Historical Narratives

Sarah's character embraces postmodern resistance to fixed identities as she refuses to conform to Victorian gender roles. She rejects marriage, carefully calculating her actions and words to influence those around her, while asserting autonomy over both her body and her narrative. These aspects situate her as a proto-feminist figure. Her agency has also been pitted against Charles's passivity, further flipping the traditional gender dynamics. This critique extends to the novel's interrogation of historical narratives. The narrator frequently contrasts Victorian repression with 1960s free-spirited liberalism, exposing both as constructed ideologies. For example, the narrator's digression from Victorian sexuality underscores how historical "truth" is shaped by cultural biases, aligning with Lyotard's postmodern critique of "Grand Narratives".

1.4.5 Existential Freedom and Power

The novel's existential themes which consist of having a choice and liberty are filtered through postmodern uncertainty. Charles' journey exemplifies Sartre's 'Existentialism' as he grapples with the burden of free will in a Godless universe. Yet Fowles complicates this by embedding Charles within a fictional world where the author appearing as a "godlike" manipulator in the third ending. This confrontation between creation and creator destabilizes the boundary between fiction and reality, a motif seen in short story collection of John Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse" (1968). Sarah, meanwhile, transcends even the author's control, signifying the elusive nature of meaning in a postmodern framework.

With these arguments we can say that *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is a postmodern novel. The novel's enduring relevance lies in its ability to critique both the past and the present that reflect postmodernism's preoccupation with the relativity of truth and fluid identity.

Stop to Consider:

What is Postmodernism?

Postmodernism in literature has developed in the mid-20th century as a reaction against modernism. It rejects traditional narratives, structures, and conventions. Postmodernism emphasizes fragmentation, paradox, and unreliable narration. It often blurs the lines between fiction and reality. Postmodern works employ pastiche, meta-fiction, inter-textuality, and irony. They question authorship, meaning, and truth. Unlike modernism, which sought

universal truths, postmodernism accepts subjectivity, ambiguity, and the construction of reality through language and cultural contexts. Postmodernism includes writers like Thomas Pynchon, David Foster Wallace, Italo Calvino, Jorge Luis Borges, and Salman Rushdie. Their works reflect the complexities and multiplicities of contemporary existence.

1.5 Primary themes associated with the novel

1.5.1 The Tension between Fiction, Reality and History

The novel is a classic work of historiographic meta-fiction. The narrator makes frequent references to plot construction and character development, repeatedly reminding readers that the events of the novel are fictional, not facts. This strategy poses profound questions about the relationship between narrative and reality. Fowles illustrates that stories are always filtered through the author's perspective and suggests that both fiction and history are subjective interpretations.

1.5.2 The Exercise of Free Will against Victorian Determinism

Characters such as Charles feel they have to adhere to the sense of duty that ruled the Victorian gentry but simultaneously want to be true to themselves. Charles is torn between marrying Ernestina and pursuing Sarah, which reflects social conditioning. As the novel progresses he becomes aware of the conventions that have been interfering with his free will when succumbing to the contemplation of winning the heart of Sarah. When Charles chooses Sarah over

Ernestina, he is freed from these conventions and makes a decision that is truly his own.

1.5.3 The Class Struggle

Fowles profoundly demonstrates the impact of class in the novel as characters from different classes influence the storyline and relationships. Charles belongs from the upper class while Sarah, from the underclass and their interactions show the limits of class and question morality based on social status. Charles is reluctant to break social barriers of love at first but ultimately gives in. Other characters such as the servants Sam and Mary also pushes the narrative of class through their presence.

1.5.4 The Question of Gender Biases

Sarah Woodruff represents the oppression of women in Victorian society in the novel. The novel although criticizes gender norms but at the same time poses difficulties for contemporary feminist interpretations. Sarah is seen through the relationships of men, such as Varguennes and Charles suggesting that she is defined by their views. While some feminists themes are engaged, critics argue that the novel reflects the limitations of gender in the 1960s and does not explore female solidarity deeply.

1.5.5 Existentialism and the search for meaning

The novel explores the characters' existential crises in a world devoid of morality. Charles's journey can be studied as an existentialist struggle to create meaning in an indifferent universe.

His obsession with fossils symbolizes extinction and impermanence which reflects his anxiety about purpose while Sarah's self-imposed isolation embodies Camus' notion of the "absurd hero" who rejects pre-conceived notions of society to forge her own meaningful existence.

1.5.6 Unreliable Truths

The novel shatters the notion of objective truth as it presents reality as a fragmented, subjective construct shaped by perspectives and manipulations. The mystery of Sarah, whether she was a victim, a manipulator or a mystic still remains unresolved. It tells us how truth is often a projection of others' biases. The novel's narrator fluctuates between Victorian omniscience and postmodern skepticism and says "I am writing a fiction, not a history," while its three endings transfer the command of the story to the reader.

Check Your Progress:

Q1. How does Charles's profession as a paleontologist highlight the tension between science and tradition in the novel?

Q2. How does Charles's engagement to Ernestina reflect Victorian class expectations?

Q3. The novel is set in the Victorian era but written in the 1960s. How do characters like Sarah and Charles grapple with societal constraints? Do you think they are truly "free" or are their choices shaped by forces beyond their control?

1.6 The Film Adaptation

Karel Reisz, a Czech-born British filmmaker who was associated with the British New Wave movement of social realism and working-class films, departed from earlier, more realistic films like "Saturday Night and Sunday Morning" (1960) to tackle Fowles's complex meta-fiction. Working with the imminent playwright Harold Pinter, Reisz embraced the challenge of adapting a novel full of authorial intrusion and Victorian literary conventions. His decision to employ a dual narrative structure, alternating the 19th-century story with a modern-day filmmaking subplot, reveals his intent to maintain Fowles' self-referential commentary while maximizing cinema's potential for visual appeal. Reisz's forte in social realism likely influenced his focus on character psychology and social constraints, which form the basis of both timelines in the film.

The Cobb at Lyme Regis, Dorset, England.

We know Fowles's novel resists conventional narrative through direct address to the reader, multiple open-endings, and a subversion of Victorian morals. Transferring this to the screen needed extensive creativity. However, Reisz and Pinter's response, a "film within a film" structure, enabled them to mirror Fowles' metafiction by

contrasting the Victorian romance between Charles Smithson (played by Jeremy Irons) and Sarah Woodruff (played by Meryl Streep) with the modern-day affair of actors Mike and Anna, who play them. The double frame not only maintains the novel's thematic investigation of freedom and artifice but also manage to disrupt the steady nature of performance. By situating the Victorian story as a film production, Reisz renders Fowles' authorial presence as a commentary on directorial and performative control, thus maintaining the source material's postmodern sensibility while reworking it cinematically.

Stop to Consider:

Meta-Fiction versus Meta-Cinema:

John Fowles' novel uses the conventions of meta-fiction (i. e. authorial intrusion, footnotes and multiple endings) to undermine Victorian narrative conventions and reveal history as a subjective construct. Reisz's film responds with a kind of 'meta-cinema', alternating the Victorian drama with an ostensibly modern affair between the actors. Scenes of Streep and Irons rehearsing or breaking character reveal filmmaking's conceit in parallel with Fowles' attack on narrative control. Both mediums break the "fourth wall" forcing viewers to confront storytelling as performance whether through Fowles' rebellious narrator or Reisz's self-conscious lens.

1.6.1 A Comparative study between the novel and the film

The French Lieutenant's Woman employs a layered narrative voice that critiques Victorian morality while reflecting on the act of storytelling. The 1981 film adaptation translates this complexity into two parallel plots: the Victorian tale of Sarah and Charles, and the modern relationship of actors Mike and Anna. In the historical strand, Sarah resists social ostracism while Charles rejects aristocratic expectations; in the contemporary frame, the actors struggle with emotional honesty. This dual structure mirrors the novel's concern with freedom and its limits, where liberation from tradition does not necessarily ensure happiness.

The novel famously offers three different endings: a cynical Victorian closure, a hopeful revision, and a metafictional alternative that highlights the instability of narrative authority. The film instead juxtaposes Sarah and Charles's tentative reunion with Mike and Anna's unresolved parting, visually reinforcing the themes of repression, autonomy, and disillusionment. Central to both versions is Sarah, whose rejection of patriarchal control challenges Victorian gender norms. In the novel, Fowles's narrator probes her enigmatic psychology, while the film conveys her intensity through Meryl Streep's performance and recurring visual motifs: the sea, her dark cloak, and expansive landscapes that emphasize her isolation. Charles's turmoil between social duty and personal desire is intricately drawn in the text but effectively embodied by Jeremy Irons on screen.

Together, novel and film interrogate agency, freedom, and gender. While Fowles's narrative destabilizes authorial omniscience, the cinematic adaptation externalizes these concerns, using parallel stories and symbolic imagery to explore the costs of both repression and liberation.

The modern day scene of the dual narrative in the film.

1.6.2 Stylistic choices made for the film

The French Lieutenant's Woman's stylistic choices are deeply rooted in its narrative and thematic concerns, and director Karel Reisz and cinematographer Freddie Francis use distinct color palettes and filming techniques to compliment the film's Victorian and contemporary timelines. The Victorian story is shot in a lush, romantic style, with rich, earthy tones and dramatic natural backdrops, such as the sweeping cliffs of Lyme Regis and the misty, brooding seascapes that reflect Sarah Woodruff's mysterious, isolated existence. These scenes are lit with soft, diffused light, recalling the period's painterly aesthetic and underscoring the emotional volatility and social restrictions of the period. By contrast, the contemporary scenes, which document the affair between actors Mike and Anna, are shot with a cooler, more clinical palette, dominated by grays, blues, and muted tones that reflect the cold,

impersonal nature of contemporary life and the artificiality of filmmaking. The use of handheld cameras and natural lighting in these scenes further emphasizes their realism and immediacy, creating a deliberate visual and emotional contrast with the stylized, almost dreamlike quality of the Victorian story. This dual visual approach not only enhances the film's thematic exploration of freedom versus constraint but also emphasizes the relationship between performance and reality, making the stylistic choices as much a part of the storytelling as the script itself.

Stop to Consider:

The reception of the film was praised by critics for its performances by Streep and Irons with Streep winning a BAFTA for Best Actress. The meta-narrative of the screenplay was deemed to be intellectually challenging, successfully combining Fowles' postmodern themes with cinematic innovation. The Oscar-nominated cinematography was described as capturing the claustrophobic era of the Victorians, and the emotional rawness of the 1980s.However, some viewers found the two timelines confusing and said they diluted the emotional impact of the Victorian story. Some critics complained that the movie deviated from the book too much, especially in terms of focusing less on Fowles' philosophical angles. A few critics said the modern subplot overshadowed Sarah's complexity, making her more of a symbol than a fully realized character.

1.7 Character Analysis of both the Narratives

The Characters in The French Lieutenant's Woman are interwoven with contrasts and parallels that reflect the conflict between social expectation and individual longing. In both the novel and the film, John Fowles and screenwriter Harold Pinter employ these relationships to decry repressive social mores—both Victorian and contemporary—while revealing the universality of human desire and rebellion. Sarah Woodruff, Charles Smithson, and Ernestina Freeman serve as a triangle of opposing ideologies. Sarah, the rejected "fallen woman" represents defiance and mystery as she confronts Victorian morality with her refusal to conform. Charles, the genteel paleontologist, represents the clash between tradition and modernity as he chooses between Ernestina's safe, socially acceptable companionship and Sarah's seductive unpredictable nature. Ernestina, with her polished manners and obsession with status, represents Victorian propriety—her vulnerability concealed by her strict adherence to societal mores. Together, these three characters reflect the era's contradictions such as repression versus liberation, duty versus passion, appearance versus truth. Other characters including the pious Mrs. Poulteney, the pragmatic Dr. Grogan, and the ambitious servant Sam serve as foils to highlight the protagonists' conflicts. Mrs. Poulteney's hypocritical devotion shows the Victorian hypocrisy while Dr. Grogan's "enlightened" rationalism replicates the era's patriarchal biases. Sam and Mary, the working-class servants, subtly satirize the aristocracy's pretensions, searing indictment in the class struggle. In the film, the meta-narrative i.e. the affair between the actors in the 1980s adds a contemporary twist to these relationships. Meryl Streep's "Anna" and Jeremy Irons' "Mike" mirror Sarah and Charles, bringing together the real and the imagined. This dual structure emphasizes how social expectations, Victorian or modern, limit individuality

and renders the characters timeless archetypes of humanity's search for authenticity. Both the novel and the film use these relationships to undermine grand narratives of progress, suggesting that every age constructs its own forms of control. Whether through Sarah's mysterious silence, Charles's existential crisis, or Ernestina's heartbreak, the characters collectively reveal the fragility of social hierarchies and the eternal complexity of the human heart.

1.7.1 Sarah Woodruff

Sarah is the most mysterious character in the novel. She is a "fallen woman" who has had an affair with a French lieutenant. She defies morality and represents rebellion and freedom. Fowles makes her intentionally ambiguous in order to expose hypocrisy of Victorian society. Her motivations are left unresolved which reflects postmodern ideas about fragmented identity. In the film too Meryl Streep maintains Sarah's mystery but she also makes her more vulnerable. The film's meta-narrative parallels Sarah's struggle for autonomy, which blurs the line between performance and authenticity. Whereas the book leaves Sarah's psyche opaque, the film humanizes her through subtle gestures through the cinematic process of incorporating longing glances and restrained dialogue deliveries.

Meryl Streep as Sarah Woodruff

1.7.2 Charles Smithson

In the book, Charles is the Victorian gentleman who is torn between duty and desire. His journey from conformity to self-actualization deconstructs the era's rigid class and gender structures. The privileges he acquires such as   wealth and position protect him at first but his moral awakenings makes him question his role in perpetuating social oppression. In the film, Jeremy Irons underscores Charles' internal conflict through restrained expression and quiet desperation. The dual timeline further shows that how relationships in the modern world still struggle with power imbalances. Although, the film sacrifices some of Charles's philosophical depth but it sharpens his emotional turmoil. For example, his painful expressions during his encounters with Sarah or his tense interactions with Ernestina channel his emotional state more viscerally than words could. Also, Charles' motivations in the movies are more of emotional choices than intellectual dilemmas. This can understood by a scene where his decision to break off his engagement to Ernestina was portrayed less as a socio-philosophical rebellion against norms and more as a raw, emotional response to his heightened passion and desire for Sarah. Apart from these agencies, the cinematic usage of shots and the actor's genius in capturing human emotions even the non-verbal cues adds the effect in the character of Charles.

Jeremy Irons as Charles Smithson

1.7.3 Ernestina Freeman

Ernestina is the embodiment of Victorian propriety, charming but shallow and obsessed with social standing. Her rigidity, in contrast to Sarah's unpredictability, reflects the suffocating expectations placed on women during the era, and her heartbreak when Charles abandons her demonstrates the human cost of conformity. In the film, Lynsey Baxter's Ernestina is more sympathetic, and we see her vulnerability beneath her polished surface. The film tries to downplay her materialism by emphasizing her heartbreak, making her a more sympathetic counterpoint to Sarah's defiance.

A scene depicting Ernestina and Charles.

1.7.4 Dr Grogan, Mrs. Poulteney, Sam and Mary

Dr Grogan, the scientist, who is progressive but also practical acts as Charles's confidant and is the first character to tell him to ignore Sarah and diagnosed her of having 'obscure melancholia'. Grogan's "rational" Victorian outlook is, of course, a reflection of the era's biases, a shining example of how supposedly enlightened figures can support oppressive systems. Leo McKern's Grogan in the film is character who is warm but is still enmeshed in patriarchal condescension as his dismissal of Sarah's agency underlines the

stigmatizing of female autonomy. Now, the archetypal Victorian moralist, Mrs. Poulteney wields religion as a tool for social control and her cruelty to Sarah exposes the hypocrisy of "respectability". The servants' subplot however sneers at class mobility in both stories. Sam's ambition to achieve social advancement by opening a haberdashery shop and Mary's practicality stand in stark contrast to the aristocracy's stasis, providing a small but significant glimpse of working-class agency. While their roles are reduced to lesser screen time but add a strong substance in the film. One of the most notable scenes to illustrate their pragmatic presence is seen when Sam blackmails Charles to secure his finances. This moment not only paces the plot but also shows the power dynamic at play between two classes. Sam's cunningness pitted against Charles' naivety i.e. how working class can exploit the vulnerabilities of the aristocracy.

Self Assessment Questions:

Q1. Charles Smithson's philosophical musings are reduced in the film. Discuss if this strengthens or weakens his character.

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Q2. Describe how the interations between Dr. Grogan and Mrs. Poulteney with Charles and Sarah influence the themes of the story.

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Q3. The book has three endings, while the film ties the Victorian story to a modern affair. Which approach do you think is more effective   and   why?

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The Male gaze:

Both in the novel and in film, Sarah is a ghost seen through the male gaze of Charles and Victorian society. Charles's obsession to "rescue" Sarah reduces her to a "Damsel in distress" archetype. Here the male gaze is literal, as Charles's inspection of her body reflects Victorian society's policing of female morality. However, the film's meta-narrative extends this critique. Mike (Irons) the actor playing Charles, instructs Anna (Streep) to "perform vulnerability" repeating the novel's gendered power structures. Sarah's silence in the novel is a narrative emptiness and in the film, Streep's disdainful glances become her weapon, taking her agency back from the men who wish to define her. Yet even in resistance, Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze remains like the act of watching, whether through Charles's eyes or through the camera which ultimately traps women within the very frames they seek to break.

Sam and Mary in the film.

1.8 Art as Identity: Visual Metaphors in the narrative

In both the novel and the film, art and aesthetics play a key role in framing the story. Sarah is repeatedly framed as a work of art: her very presence recalls the tragic heroines of Victorian paintings especially the Pre-Raphaelite muses, with their wild beauty and allure. Fowles purposefully makes her a mysterious figure, like a blank canvas. Her tangled hair, haunting stare, and lonesome pose on the Cobb at Lyme Regis render her a visual emblem of rebellion against Victorian propriety. Charles's deliberate obsession on "saving" her reflects the era's patriarchal male gaze, which reduces complex women to objects of pity or desire. In the film, Meryl Streep's performance heightens this mystique. Cinematographer Freddie Francis bathes her in 'Chiaroscuro lighting', masking her face in shadows and half-light, as if she were a portrait caught between obscurity and revelation. This visual ambiguity reflects the novel's refusal to resolve her motives and in the film's final moments, art also becomes Sarah's silent act of rebellion and a personal statement of reclamation. Though she doesn't paint or create in the literal sense, her very existence becomes a living work of art that makes sense to her previously fragmented identity. By refusing Charles's final appeal and disappearing into the anonymity of modernity she transforms herself from a tragic muse into an artist of her own fate.

In visual terms, the film renders Fowles' literary sensibilities. The Victorian scenes, for instance, are saturated with a muted palette of ochres, grays, and mossy greens. Costumes suffocated the characters with corseted silhouettes and heavy fabrics, and static, symmetrical compositions to recall the formal portrait of the period, enclosing figures in doorways or against desolate landscapes. By contrast, the 1980s storyline employs cooler, bleached tones, whites and steely blues to convey modernity's promise of liberation. Handheld

cameras and fluid tracking shots in these scenes generate a sense of restless motion, in contrast to the Victorian era's frozen vignettes.

An aesthetic scene at the end of the film featuring Charles and Sarah.

To translate the novel's artistic concerns into film syntax, the film deploys symbolic color grading, surrealist montage and textural contrast. The Victorian scenes' de-saturated palette is punctuated by flashes of color such as a red shawl draped over Sarah's shoulders, a flower in a bare room suggesting passions unmoored by convention. In surrealist interludes, the film might compliment Sarah's self-reflection with imagery inspired by Victorian art, like Ophelia drowned in water or Persephone trapped in shadow, externalizing her psyche as a gallery of mythic resistance. Textural details such as the coarse weave of Sarah's shawl versus Ernestina's silk dresses, the Cobb's rough stone against plush drawing room upholstery, visually reinforce class divides and her outsider status. Both the novel and film implies that identity is a shared creation, forged in the tension between self-expression and social expectation. In the visual metaphors of entrapment and excavation, palettes and even

the most precise details like the reflection into its fabric, the adaptation re-creates Fowles' vision while asserting its own voice.

Check Your Progress:

Q1.How does the film use lighting and color to portray the alternative meta-narrative landscape of the narrative?

Q2. Justify the idea of "Art as Therapy" translating to reclaiming identity in modern day context.

1.9 Summing Up

The French Lieutenant's Woman is altogether a work that seeks to challenge historical truth, human agency and critique a society through characters and is most clearly expressed in its tripartite endings catering to the postmodern spirit. The endings shatter the assumption of a single "truth" forcing readers to confront the constructed nature of all narratives. Karel Reisz's film however trapped as it is in the linearity of cinema renders this postmodern multiplicity into a dual storyline structure. Where the novel's three endings divided time, the film's parallel stories condensed it. Both the novel's three endings and the film's two timelines undermine the idea that we ever truly have control over our narrative destiny. And Fowles' meta-fictional interruptions find their cinematic counterpart in Reisz's blending of period drama and behind-the-scenes realism. Where Fowles undermines the Victorian novel's omniscient narrator, Reisz undermines cinematic immersion, reminding us that history and film are performances. The camera lingers on Streep's Anna doing her makeup or Irons' Mike smoking between takes, blurring the line between character and actor, fiction and reality.

This introspection underscores Fowles' core argument that all storytelling is an act of manipulation, a negotiation between the teller's agenda and the audience's expectations.

Both works also serves as an excellent commentary on the repression of the Victorian and the modern through their female protagonists. Sarah Woodruff, the elusive "fallen woman" is a figure of resistance and her three possible fates showcase the difficulty of defining a woman who lives outside patriarchal scripts. In the film, Streep's double performance as Sarah and Anna heightens this tension. Minor characters, too, are microcosms of societal critique. Mrs. Poulteney's performance of piety, Dr. Grogan's paternalistic rationality and Sam's attempt to climb up the social ladder all parody the systems that uphold inequality. The film streamlines these figures but retains their symbolic power. Mrs. Poulteney's strict rules mirror the director's control on set, while Sam's blackmail of Charles echoes the transactional nature of both Victorian and modern relationships. Global reception of both works hinges on their audacious ambiguity. The novel divided critics after the wide readership. Some hailed it as a masterpiece for its formal innovation but mocked its cerebral coldness. The film, too, divided audiences as some praised its intellectual ambition and Streep's career-defining performance, while others found its meta-narrative pretentious or emotionally distant. Yet both survive as cultural touchstones to this date. Ultimately, the novel and film remained as a hallmark into the ways in which narrative can shape and resist reality. The post-modernism take and the artistic appeal it lauds bypasses as devices to revolutionary acts of democratization, reclaiming lost identities and ceding power to the reader and viewer to negotiate ambiguity. Sarah Woodruff, in all her manifestations, remains an enduring icon of defiance against the odds of narrative, gender, and history. To read this work is to confront the disquieting

freedom of uncertainty and to realize, as Fowles writes, that "the only way you can write the truth is to admit that you cannot write the truth." In an age of constant polarized certainties, the work is a reminder that the search for meaning is not a journey to answers, but a conversation with the unknown.

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1.11 Model Questions

Q1. Elucidate the significance of the three endings of the novel. How does the film's dual timeline (Victorian/modern) adapt this postmodern critique for a cinematic audience?

Q2. Compare and justify the portrayal of Sarah Woodruff in the novel and film. How does Meryl Streep's performance reinterpret Fowles' ambiguity while retaining her symbolic resistance?

Q3. Analyze Charles Smithson's existential crisis in the novel.

Q4. Describe Ernestina's role in critiquing Victorian femininity. How does the film's sympathetic portrayal of her heartbreak alter the novel's feminist critique?

Q5. Evaluate the film's meta-narrative as an adaptation strategy. Justify whether it enhances Fowles' themes or distracts from the Victorian story.

Q6."The significance of the film's contrasting color palettes". How does this statement reflect broader themes of repression and liberation?

Q7. Justify Fowles' assertion that "the past is a fiction." How do the novel's unreliable narrator and the film's behind-the-scenes footage dismantle the illusion of historical authenticity?

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UNIT- 2

SUPPLEMENTARY UNIT ON
THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN: FROM JOHN FOWLES' NOVEL TO KAREL REISZ'S MOVIE

Unit Structure:

2.1 Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 Understanding the Author

2.4 Significance of Fowles as a Postmodern Writer

2.5 Postmodernism on Screen

2.6 Critical Reception of the Cinema

2.7 Summing Up

2.8 References and Suggested Reading

2.9 Model Question

2.1 Objectives

Through this unit, we are going to:

- *understand* Fowles and his work;
- *discuss* Fowles's importance as a postmodern writer;
- *analyse* the adaptation of postmodernism on the screen;
- *review* how the film adaptation was received by critics and audiences.

2.2 Introduction

This supplementary unit introduces John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) and Karel Reisz's 1981 film adaptation. Fowles employs several formal strategies: his postmodern, self-

conscious narrator; recurring authorial commentary; and the novel's deliberate offering of multiple endings. These devices expose the limits of omniscience and foreground fiction as an interpretive act. Reisz's film (scripted by Harold Pinter) translates to cinema those destabilizing effects. Reisz stages two intercut story-worlds: the Victorian romance and a contemporary film-production frame. Therefore, performance, mise-en-scène, and editing externalizes themes that the novel treats rhetorically. Streep's and Irons's dual roles invite discussions of embodiment, agency, and gender across eras.

The unit aims to show how Fowles's metafictional questions about authorial control and historical representation, are reframed, simplified, or amplified in cinematic medium.

2.3 Understanding the Author

John Fowles was a monumental figure in 20th-century British literature. Coming out as a writer in the 1960s, a decade marked by cultural upheaval, civil rights movements and the depletion of traditional hierarchies Fowles became a champion of postmodernism. His most famous novel which was later adapted into a movie for its successful reception, 'The French Lieutenant's Woman' twisted the notion of objective truth challenging the Victorian era's skepticism of authority both with the unconventional narration and characters. Apart from novels, Fowles also worked for other projects like series of essays, reviews, poetries and forwards to other writers' novels. In 2008, Fowles was named by *The Times* as one of the fifty greatest British writers since 1945.

2.4 Significance of Fowles as a Postmodern Writer

John Fowles can be considered a significant writer of postmodernism due to his novels' unique engagement with narrative styles and techniques. While his works initially captivate readers with compelling storylines, they also delve deeper into very nature of fiction itself. One of the chief aspects of postmodernism evident in Fowles' work is the critique of representation. In laymen's term, Postmodernism questions the idea that language and art can transparently reflect reality. Fowles' novels actively highlight the constructed nature of narratives and the inherent biases within them. For instance, his first novel '*The Collector*' presents two radically different accounts of the same events from the perspectives of Clegg and Miranda, showcasing the particularity of each individual's construction of meaning. Similarly, '*The French Lieutenant's Woman*' and '*A Maggot*', categorized as historiographic meta-fiction, represents the past from a contemporary lens. These novels do not aim for a linear and objective viewing of history but rather emphasize the role of interpretation and the influence of present-day perspectives on our understanding of bygone eras. Fowles employs various narrative techniques to underscore this critique of representation. Anachronistic elements are frequently used in his historical novels. Particularly in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles directly addresses the reader with contemporary insights into Victorian society, highlighting the distance and the interpretative work required to understand the past. He even uses modern language in the thoughts of his characters.

 Another key feature of postmodernism that Fowles engages with is the critique of meta-narratives. Jean- Francois Lyotard defines postmodernism partly through its questioning of overarching systems of belief and universal truths. Fowles' novels often subvert or expose the limitations of such meta-narratives as rationality,

progress, and unified historical understanding. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, the scientific worldview of Charles Smithson is often contrasted with the more mysterious and complex reality of Sarah Woodruff. Also Fowles' narrative style is characterized by techniques like the intrusive author. In the novel, the narrator frequently intervenes in the story, commenting on the characters, the process of writing, and even offers multiple endings. This self-conscious intrusion disrupts the illusion of a seamless narrative giving the author access as a constructor of the fictional world.

A character is either 'real' or 'imaginary'? If you think that, hypocrite lecteur, I can only smile. You do not even think of your own past as quite real; you dress it up, you gild it or blacken it, and put it away on a shelf -- your book, your romanced autobiography. We are all in flight from the real reality. That is a basic definition of Homo sapiens.

Inter-textuality is another significant postmodern strategy Fowles employ in his works. His novels are often in dialogue with other literary works, historical texts, and cultural references. For example, references to John Stuart Mill and Charles Darwin situated the novel within a Victorian intellectual landscape. Fowles' postmodernism is often characterized by a tension between complicity and critique. This concept, particularly associated with Linda Hutcheon, suggests that postmodern texts simultaneously engage with and subvert the conventions and ideologies of the dominant culture. Fowles' novels often present seemingly traditional narratives or character tropes only to question or undermine them. For instance, while the novel can be read as a Victorian love story, its postmodernist techniques challenge the very notion of a fixed narrative and its potential for conveying definitive meaning. The engagement with gender politics also reveals an awareness of male bias in representation while also exhibiting a degree of complicity with the male reader's perspective.

While some of Fowles contemporaries praised his "playful erudition" and his combination of existential philosophy with narrative experimentation, critics such as Malcolm Bradbury, questioned whether his work transcended postmodern gimmickry to achieve greater philosophical significance. Whatever the case is, we know that Fowles' combination of Victorian pastiche and postmodern skepticism through an intrusive author that addresses both the readers and the characters, defying the clear-cut distinction of traditional authors and readers, multiple endings and inter-textual references established his reputation as a writer who bridged eras and used the past to reflect the fragmented, contingent nature of modern existence.

Stop to Consider

Fowles never shy away from referencing and even critiquing his own earlier works. In *The Ebony Tower*, his own novel *The Magus* is directly mentioned and even dismissed as "nonsense" by one of the characters. This self-referential and somewhat critical engagement with his own literary legacy reveals a playful and constantly evolving approach to his unique writing.

2.5 Postmodernism on Screen

As we all know by now that John Fowles' novel is steeped in postmodern literary and translating these techniques to Karel Reisz's 1981 film adaptation required a radical reimagining, as cinematic language doesn't have the tools at disposal to replicate textual footnotes or an omniscient narrator's direct address. Screenwriter Harold Pinter's solution was to invent a '*Meta-cinematic framework*'; a parallel of modern-day storyline in which

actors Jeremy Irons and Meryl Streep are having an affair while filming the Victorian-era drama. This framing device compliments Fowles's postmodern definition of authorship and artifice but now through visual means. For instance, the film opens not in 1867 Lyme Regis but on a 1980s film set, with crew members adjusting lights and cameras which immediately exposes the constructed nature of the Victorian narrative. The camera frequently pulls back during critical scenes, such as Charles and Sarah's first intimate meeting in the barn to reveal microphones, modern crew attire or the actors breaking character. These disruptions operate similarly to Fowles's footnotes, reminding us that history, like cinema, is an orchestrated performance. The film's solid meta-cinematic moment occurs in its dual endings which is a clever rework Fowles's tripartite ending. In the Victorian storyline, Charles confronts Sarah in a misty garden, echoing the novel's ambiguous third ending, but the scene is abruptly interrupted by a crew member shouting "Cut!" The camera then shifts to a wrap party where Mike, still in costume, searches for Anna, only to find her in modern clothing, coldly rejecting him. This helps in contrasting the Victorian era's repressed emotions with the 1980s' detached irony while also questioning whether any era, past or present offers authentic human connection.

Critics have debated whether Reisz's film fully captures Fowles's postmodern tenets. While the novel's footnotes and narrator explicitly critique Victorian ideologies, the film's meta-cinema leans more on emotional contrast between the two eras. Yet Pinter's layered screenplay and Reisz's deliberate exposure of cinematic artifice achieve a parallel goal as they demystify the past not by replicating Fowles's methods, but by projecting cinematic timelines, fracture perspectives and lay bare the mechanics of storytelling itself. In doing so, the adaptation becomes less of a sincere

reproduction and more a discourse with Fowles's themes of postmodernism.

2.6 Critical Reception of the Cinema

Upon its release in 1981, Karel Reisz's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* polarized critics, many of whom grappled with Harold Pinter's innovative meta-cinematic structure. Contemporary reviewers praised its ambition as a "bold experiment" for reimagining Fowles's literary postmodernism through the parallel modern-day affair of actors Mike and Anna, which mirrored the Victorian storyline. However, others dismissed it as "narrative confusion" arguing that the fractured timelines diluted the novel's thematic depth and reduced Sarah's mysterious complexity to a mere cinematic trope. Critics like Roger Ebert questioned whether the film's self-conscious framing device like exposing cameras and crew really honored Fowles's intellectual rigor or merely trivialized his critique of authorship into a "clever gimmick". By contrast, contemporary critics who are informed by decades of postmodern film theory, praises Reisz's adaptation as a justified companion rather than a regressive oversimplified version. Scholars like Linda Hutcheon argue that the film's meta-cinema such as the cut from Charles's Victorian despair to Mike's modern-day rejection translates Fowles's destabilization of truth into visual terms which brilliantly captures the novel's spirit beyond pages. While the film undeniably streamlines the novel's three endings into two starkly contrasted conclusions, modern critics highlight how its interplay of timelines critiques both Victorian repression and 1980s emotional detachment. To this day, the adaptation is celebrated both as a perfect representation and a dialogic response that wrestles with the same existential questions but through cinema's ability to recreate

reality. Hence Reisz and Pinter prove us that loyalty to originality lies in reinvention, not replication.

2.7 Summing Up

In conclusion, we can say that the transition from John Fowles's meta-fictional novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* to Karel Reisz's cinematic adaptation offers a compelling dialogue between literary and visual storytelling, each medium dealing with the complexities of representing of its memorable characters, fractured endings and most importantly the deconstruction of Victorian rigidity. While the novel's intrusive author and multiple endings present unique challenges for film, Reisz's adaptation offers its own interpretation of Fowles's themes of existential authenticity and the politics of representation, inviting audiences to consider how our understanding of the past and its characters is shaped and reshaped through different artistic lenses. At the end of the day, both the novel and the film are the testimonials of the enduring power of narrative that seeks to explore mankind's quest for inventing and altering nature of storytelling and the thirst for truth.

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2.9 Model Questions

1) How does Harold Pinter's meta-cinematic framing device in the 1981 film adaptation reinterpret John Fowles's postmodern narrative techniques from the novel?

2) State whether the film should be viewed as a "companion piece" to the novel or a standalone postmodern work.

3) Why does the film include scenes of 'modern crew members' interrupting the Victorian story?

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UNIT- 3

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE: FROM TENNESSEE WILLIAMS'S PLAY TO ELIA KAZAN'S MOVIE

Unit Structure:

3.1 OBJECTIVES

Through this unit, you will be able to:

- *understand* how literature, including plays, is adapted for cinema;

- *recognise* the differences between Williams's play *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and its film adaptation by Elia Kazan;

- *analyse* how censorship affected the adaptation of the play onto the big screen;

- *appreciate* the impact and legacy of Kazan's cinematic adaptation.

3.2   INTRODUCTION: CONTEXTUALIZING   THE TRANSITION

Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, first performed in 1947, stands as a seminal work in American theatre, renowned for its exploration of complex themes such as desire, mental instability, and the clash between illusion and reality. The narrative centres on Blanche DuBois, a fading Southern belle who seeks refuge with her sister Stella and brother-in-law Stanley Kowalski in New Orleans. Blanche's arrival disrupts the household, leading to a tense interplay of power dynamics and psychological unraveling. Williams's play delves into the fragility of human psyche and the societal pressures that exacerbate personal downfall.

In 1951, director Elia Kazan adapted the play into a film, retaining much of the original cast from the Broadway production, including Marlon Brando as Stanley Kowalski. Vivien Leigh, who had portrayed Blanche in the London stage version, reprised her role for the film. The adaptation was notable for its intense performances and its ability to translate the play's emotional depth to the screen. However, the film also faced challenges, particularly in adhering to the Motion Picture Production Code, which necessitated alterations to certain plot elements and character portrayals.

This chapter aims to analyze the transformation of *A Streetcar Named Desire* from its theatrical origins to its cinematic rendition. The focus will be on examining the thematic, structural, and stylistic changes that occurred during this transition, considering how these modifications influenced the narrative's impact and audience reception.

One of the central themes in Williams's play is the tension between reality and illusion. Blanche's descent into madness is portrayed through her persistent retreat into a world of fantasy, a coping

mechanism against the harshness of her reality. The play also addresses issues of sexual desire, power, and the decline of the Southern aristocracy. In adapting the play for film, certain themes were either subdued or altered due to censorship constraints. For instance, the film downplays the explicit references to Blanche's past and the circumstances surrounding her husband's death, which in the play are linked to his homosexuality — a topic deemed controversial at the time.

In Tennessee Williams's original play, the narrative unfolds entirely within the confines of the Kowalski apartment, creating a claustrophobic atmosphere that mirrors Blanche DuBois's psychological entrapment. Elia Kazan's 1951 film adaptation, however, expands the setting to include various locations such as the train station, streets of the French Quarter, a bowling alley, and the factory where Stanley and Mitch work. These additions serve to contextualize the characters within the broader environment of New Orleans, providing visual relief and a more dynamic backdrop to the unfolding drama. Certain scenes underwent significant changes to comply with the Motion Picture Production Code (Hays Code). For instance, the play's explicit references to Blanche's husband's homosexuality were omitted in the film, and was replaced with vague allusions to his "sensitive nature." Similarly, the climactic rape scene is less explicit; the film concludes the scene with Blanche breaking a mirror, implying the assault without depicting it.The play concludes with Stella choosing to stay with Stanley, despite the traumatic events. In contrast, the film portrays Stella leaving Stanley, a change implemented to satisfy censors who demanded moral retribution for Stanley's actions.

Kazan employs various cinematic techniques to translate the play's emotional intensity to the screen. The use of tight framing and close-ups accentuates the characters' psychological states,

particularly Blanche's descent into madness. Lighting plays a crucial role; shadows and dimly lit scenes reflect the characters' inner turmoil and the oppressive atmosphere of the Kowalski household. Alex North's jazz-infused score adds a new dimension to the narrative, highlighting the tension and emotional volatility of the characters. The music complements the film's setting and enhances the storytelling, a feature absent in the stage production. Marlon Brando's portrayal of Stanley Kowalski introduced a naturalistic acting style that contrasted with the more theatrical performances typical of the era. His raw, visceral performance brought a new level of realism to the character, influencing acting techniques in cinema for years to come.

3.3 THEATRICAL ORIGINS: WILLIAMS'S ORIGINAL PLAY

In this section, we will discuss the central themes of the original play, and analyse the characters of the play. We will also discuss Williams's use of "plastic theatre," and analyse the importance of the setting and the structure to the impact of the play.

Central Themes:

- *Illusion vs. Reality*:At the heart of *A Streetcar Named Desire* lies the tension between illusion and reality. Blanche DuBois embodies this conflict, constructing a fragile world of illusions to escape her traumatic past and the harshness of her present circumstances. She clings to the genteel manners and appearances of her former life, despite the reality of her destitution and scandalous history. Her aversion to bright light symbolizes her desire to obscure the truth, both from others and herself. This self-deception ultimately leads to her

mental breakdown, highlighting the destructive nature of living in illusion.

- ***Decline of the Southern Belle Archetype***: Blanche represents the fading Southern belle, a symbol of the Old South's decaying grandeur. Her arrival at the Kowalski apartment, a modest dwelling in New Orleans, underscores the stark contrast between her past and present. The loss of Belle Reve, her ancestral home, signifies the collapse of her social status and the traditional values she upholds. Blanche's struggle to adapt to the new social order, dominated by the working class and embodied by Stanley, reflects the broader societal shifts in postwar America.

- ***Raw Portrayal of Human Desires***: Williams delves into the primal aspects of human nature, particularly through the character of Stanley Kowalski. Stanley's overt masculinity, sexual assertiveness, and dominance contrast sharply with Blanche's refined demeanor. The play examines the complexities of desire, power dynamics, and the often-destructive consequences of unbridled passion. Stella's attraction to Stanley, despite his brutish behavior, further illustrates the compelling force of desire and its ability to override reason and morality.

Character Analysis:

- ***Blanche DuBois***: Blanche is a multifaceted character, embodying vulnerability, pretension, and desperation. Her refined speech, delicate manners, and insistence on propriety mask a tumultuous past marked by loss, loneliness, and

scandal. Blanche's mental instability becomes increasingly apparent as she grapples with the realities of her situation, leading to her eventual psychological collapse. Her tragic trajectory elicits both sympathy and critique, as she navigates the chasm between her idealized self-image and the truth.

- *Stanley Kowalski*: Stanley serves as a foil to Blanche, representing the raw, unrefined force of the New South. His physicality, assertiveness, and lack of pretension stand in stark contrast to Blanche's affected elegance. Stanley's suspicion of Blanche's stories and his eventual uncovering of her past reflect his desire for control and truth. His actions, particularly the climactic act of violence against Blanche, underscore the destructive potential of unchecked power and masculinity.

- *Stella Kowalski*: Stella occupies a complex position between her sister and husband, embodying both the remnants of Southern gentility and the realities of working-class life. Her decision to remain with Stanley, despite his abusive behaviour, highlights the complexities of love, dependency, and denial. Stella's character raises questions about agency, complicity, and the sacrifices made for the sake of familial and romantic bonds.

Williams's Use of "Plastic Theater"

Tennessee Williams pioneered the concept of "plastic theater," a style that integrates visual and auditory elements to enhance the emotional and thematic depth of a play. In *A Streetcar Named*

Desire, Williams employs music, lighting, and stage directions not merely as background elements but as integral components of storytelling.

- *Music*: The recurring motif of the "blue piano" reflects the vibrant yet melancholic atmosphere of New Orleans and underscores moments of tension and emotion. Additionally, the haunting "Varsouviana" polka music, which Blanche hears at pivotal moments, symbolizes her traumatic memories and descent into madness.

- *Lighting*: Williams uses lighting to convey Blanche's psychological state and her aversion to reality. She avoids bright light, preferring dimness to conceal her age and past. The strategic use of shadows and soft lighting creates an atmosphere of illusion and fragility, mirroring Blanche's inner turmoil.

- *Stage Directions*: Williams's detailed stage directions provide insight into characters' emotions and the play's mood. Descriptions of sounds, such as the distant train or the vendor's call, and visual elements, like the changing colours of the set, serve to externalize internal conflicts and heighten dramatic tension.

Structure and Setting:

The play's structure and setting are meticulously crafted to reinforce its themes and character dynamics. *A Streetcar Named Desire* unfolds over eleven scenes, maintaining a linear progression that mirrors Blanche's psychological deterioration. The confined setting of the Kowalski apartment intensifies the characters' interactions, creating a pressure-cooker environment that propels the narrative

toward its tragic conclusion. Set in the working-class neighbourhood of Elysian Fields in New Orleans, the play juxtaposes the decaying grandeur of the Old South with the gritty reality of urban life. The Kowalski apartment, modest and cramped, symbolizes the collapse of traditional Southern values and the rise of a new social order. The setting's vibrancy and squalor reflect the characters' internal conflicts and the broader societal shifts of the time.

Stop to Consider:

The Evolution of Film Adaptations of Plays:

The adaptation of plays into films has been a significant facet of cinematic history, reflecting the evolving relationship between theater and film. From the earliest days of cinema, filmmakers have turned to the stage for compelling narratives, adapting theatrical works to suit the visual and auditory capabilities of the silver screen.

The practice of adapting plays for film began in the silent era. One of the earliest known stage-to-screen adaptations is the 1899 production of *King John* by the British Mutoscope and Biograph Company, based on William Shakespeare's play. These early adaptations often involved filming stage performances, capturing the theatrical experience for wider audiences. The advent of sound in cinema during the late 1920s revolutionized film adaptations of plays. Dialogue-driven narratives became more feasible, allowing for more faithful renditions of theatrical works. The 1930s and 1940s saw a surge in adaptations, with films like *Grand Hotel* (1932) and *You Can't Take It with You* (1938) achieving critical and commercial success.

The post-World War II era brought a new depth to film adaptations of plays, particularly with the rise of Method acting. Elia Kazan's 1951 adaptation of Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* exemplifies this shift, with Marlon Brando's performance bringing a raw intensity to the screen. This period also saw adaptations of other Williams plays, such as *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958) and *The Night of the Iguana* (1964), further cementing the playwright's influence on cinema.

Shakespeare's works have been a perennial source for film adaptations, with directors worldwide offering diverse interpretations. Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948) brought the Bard's tragedy to the screen with critical acclaim, winning the Academy Award for Best Picture. In Japan, Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957) reimagined *Macbeth* within a feudal Japanese context, blending Shakespearean themes with Noh theatre aesthetics.

In recent decades, filmmakers have continued to adapt plays, often updating settings to resonate with contemporary audiences. Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) transposed the classic tale to a modern urban environment while retaining the original dialogue. Similarly, *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999) reinterpreted *The Taming of the Shrew* as a high school romantic comedy.

Adapting plays to film presents unique challenges, including translating stage-bound narratives to dynamic cinematic experiences. Critics have noted that some adaptations struggle to escape their theatrical origins, resulting in films that feel static or overly verbose. However, successful adaptations often reimagine the source material, utilizing cinematic techniques to enhance

storytelling while preserving the essence of the original play. The legacy of film adaptations of plays is evident in the enduring popularity of such films and their impact on both cinema and theater. These adaptations have introduced theatrical works to broader audiences, fostering appreciation for classic and contemporary plays alike. As cinema continues to evolve, the interplay between stage and screen remains a dynamic and fruitful area of artistic exploration.

3.4 CINEMATIC NARRATION: KAZAN'S FILM ADAPTATION

Elia Kazan's 1951 film adaptation of Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* is a landmark in American cinema, notable for its expansion of the play's setting, innovative cinematic techniques, powerful performances, and navigation of censorship constraints. This analysis delves into five key aspects of Kazan's adaptation: the expansion of setting, cinematic techniques, collaboration and casting, reception, and the influence of the Motion Picture Production Code.

Expansion of Setting:

Tennessee Williams's original play is confined entirely to the Kowalski apartment, emphasizing the claustrophobic tension among characters. Kazan's film, however, expands the narrative's physical scope, incorporating locations such as the train station, bowling alley, and the streets of New Orleans's French Quarter. This expansion serves to contextualize the characters within a broader social environment, highlighting themes of displacement and societal change.For instance, the film opens with Blanche DuBois arriving at a bustling train station, immediately situating her as an outsider in a vibrant, unfamiliar world. Scenes set in the bowling

alley and on the streets further contrast Blanche's genteel past with the raw, working-class reality of her new surroundings. These settings, absent from the stage play, enrich the narrative by providing visual metaphors for Blanche's internal disorientation and the cultural clash at the story's core.

Cinematic Techniques

Kazan employs a range of cinematic techniques to translate the play's emotional intensity to the screen. Close-up shots are utilized to capture subtle facial expressions, revealing the characters' inner turmoil. For example, tight framing on Blanche's face conveys her fragility and descent into madness, while close-ups of Stanley emphasize his aggression and dominance.

Lighting plays a crucial role in reflecting Blanche's psychological state. Soft, diffused lighting often surrounds her, symbolizing her desire to obscure reality and live in illusion. In contrast, harsh lighting is used in scenes where Blanche's fantasies are shattered, such as during her confrontation with Stanley, stripping away her protective illusions.

As discussed before, Alex North's musical score further enhances the film's emotional resonance. The jazz-infused soundtrack mirrors the characters' passions and tensions, with recurring motifs complementing key emotional beats. The music not only sets the mood but also serves as an aural representation of the characters' inner lives.

Collaboration and Casting

Kazan's collaboration with Tennessee Williams was instrumental in adapting the play for the screen. Having directed the original

Broadway production, Kazan had a deep understanding of the material and worked closely with Williams to preserve the play's essence while making necessary adjustments for film.

Casting choices were pivotal to the film's success. Marlon Brando reprised his stage role as Stanley Kowalski, delivering a performance that redefined screen acting with its raw intensity and use of Method techniques. Vivien Leigh, who had portrayed Blanche in the London stage production as well, brought a nuanced portrayal of vulnerability and delusion, earning her an Academy Award for Best Actress. Their on-screen chemistry and contrasting acting styles heightened the film's dramatic tension, embodying the clash between brute reality and delicate illusion.

Reception

Upon its release, *A Streetcar Named Desire* received widespread critical acclaim and was a commercial success. The film won four Academy Awards, including Best Actress for Vivien Leigh, Best Supporting Actor for Karl Malden, and Best Supporting Actress for Kim Hunter. Brando's performance, though not awarded, was lauded and became a benchmark for future actors. Critics praised the film's powerful performances, direction, and its faithful yet innovative adaptation of the source material. The film's exploration of complex themes such as mental illness, sexual desire, and social decay resonated with audiences and contributed to its enduring legacy in American cinema.

The Motion Picture Production Code

The Motion Picture Production Code, or Hays Code, imposed strict guidelines on film content, necessitating alterations to Williams's original play for the screen. Key elements, such as the explicit references to Blanche's husband's homosexuality and the depiction

of the rape scene, were modified or implied rather than shown directly. To comply with censorship while retaining the story's impact, Kazan employed subtle visual and narrative cues. For instance, the rape scene is suggested through shadows and Blanche's reaction, rather than depicted explicitly. These creative choices allowed the film to convey the play's darker themes within the constraints of the era's moral guidelines.

3.5 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: PLAY VERSUS FILM

In this section, we will discuss the differences in the setting and scenes between the play and the film. We will also discuss the performances and character interpretations, particularly those of Vivien Leigh and Marlon Brando. Finally, we will explore the themes of sexuality and mental health.

Expanded Settings and Altered Scenes

The stage play confines its action to the Kowalski apartment, emphasizing the claustrophobic tension among characters. In contrast, Kazan's film expands the setting to include external locations such as the train station, streets of New Orleans, and the bowling alley. These additions provide a broader social context and visual dynamism, situating the characters within the vibrant yet decaying fabric of the city.

Furthermore, the film modifies certain scenes to comply with the Motion Picture Production Code. Notably, the explicit references to Blanche's husband's homosexuality and the climactic rape scene are toned down or implied rather than directly depicted. These changes, while necessary for the film's release at the time, alter the narrative's intensity and the audience's understanding of Blanche's psychological decline.

Performances and Character Interpretations

The transition from stage to screen necessitated adjustments in acting styles. Vivien Leigh, who portrayed Blanche in the London stage production, brings a nuanced, cinematic subtlety to the film. Her performance captures Blanche's fragility and descent into madness with a delicate balance of vulnerability and delusion. Her Blanche is a study in controlled disintegration. Her expressive eyes and nuanced gestures convey a woman clinging to illusions amidst a crumbling reality. Leigh's performance, enhanced by close-up shots and lighting, allows audiences to witness Blanche's internal turmoil intimately. This portrayal earned Leigh an Academy Award and remains a definitive interpretation of the character. In contrast, Jessica Tandy's stage Blanche, while acclaimed, lacked the visual intimacy afforded by film. The stage's physical distance necessitated broader expressions, potentially limiting the audience's access to Blanche's inner world. Leigh's film performance thus offers a more psychologically intricate depiction, aligning with the medium's strengths.

Marlon Brando's Stanley is a force of nature, embodying primal masculinity and emotional volatility. His method acting technique brings authenticity to Stanley's brutality and charm, making the character both repulsive and magnetic. Brando's physical presence—his slouched posture, intense gaze, and explosive movements—dominates the screen, emphasizing Stanley's dominance in the household. Brando's portrayal revolutionized acting in cinema, introducing a raw, unfiltered style that contrasted with the polished performances of the time. His Stanley is not merely a villain but a complex individual driven by insecurity and desire for control, adding depth to the character and influencing generations of actors. Brando's portrayal of Stanley Kowalski, both on stage and in film, is characterized by raw physicality and

emotional intensity. His method acting approach introduces a naturalistic and visceral energy to the character, contrasting sharply with Leigh's more classical technique. This dynamic enhances the tension between the characters, highlighting the clash of personalities and backgrounds.

Themes of Sexuality and Mental Health

Williams's play candidly addresses themes of sexuality and mental health, with Blanche's past involving a scandalous relationship and her subsequent psychological unraveling. The film, constrained by censorship, implies these aspects rather than depicting them overtly. This subtlety can lead to varied interpretations of Blanche's behaviour and the reasons behind her mental deterioration. Similarly, Stanley's aggressive sexuality is more restrained in the film. The infamous rape scene is suggested through shadows and off-screen sounds, reducing its immediate impact but still conveying the violation's significance. These limitations reflect the era's moral standards and the challenges of translating complex themes to the screen.

Check Your Progress:

1. How did the performances of Marlon Brando and Vivien Leigh in the film differ from their stage counterparts? (100 words)

2. What are the implications of the altered ending in the film, where Stella leaves Stanley, compared to the play's conclusion where she remains with him? (100-200 words)

3. How did the film's musical score contribute to the mood and themes of the story? (100 words)

3.6 THE IMPACT OF CENSORSHIP

When adapting the play for the screen in 1951, director Elia Kazan faced significant censorship challenges imposed by the Motion Picture Production Code, commonly known as the Hays Code. This censorship profoundly influenced the film's narrative, character portrayals, and thematic depth. While the original 1947 play was groundbreaking in its frank depiction of controversial subjects, stage productions were not immune to censorship pressures. In certain regions, local authorities demanded alterations or omissions of scenes they deemed inappropriate. For instance, references to Blanche's husband's homosexuality and the explicit nature of Stanley's assault were sometimes softened or implied rather than directly presented. These modifications aimed to align the play with prevailing moral standards, but they also diluted the raw emotional intensity Williams intended.

The transition from stage to screen intensified censorship constraints. The Hays Code strictly prohibited explicit references to homosexuality, sexual assault, and other "immoral" behaviors. Consequently, significant alterations were made to the screenplay:

- **Allan Grey's Homosexuality:** In the play, Blanche's husband's suicide is linked to the discovery of his homosexual affair. The film, however, omits any mention of his sexuality, instead attributing his suicide to Blanche's disdain for his sensitivity. This change not only alters character motivations but also diminishes the play's commentary on societal intolerance towards homosexuality.

- **The Rape Scene:** The climactic assault by Stanley is a pivotal moment in the play, depicted with harrowing clarity. In the film, this scene is heavily censored; the act is only

implied through suggestive imagery and abrupt scene transitions. This sanitization reduces the scene's impact and the audience's understanding of Blanche's subsequent psychological breakdown.

- **<u>Stella's Decision</u>:** In the original play, Stella remains with Stanley despite Blanche's accusations, highlighting themes of denial and dependency. The film alters this ending, showing Stella leaving Stanley, thereby providing a moral resolution more palatable to censors but less faithful to the play's complex portrayal of human relationships.

Despite these constraints, Kazan employed creative strategies to preserve the play's essence. He utilized visual metaphors, lighting, and music to convey underlying tensions and unspoken truths. For instance, shadows and close-ups were used to suggest the menace of certain interactions, while the score underscored emotional undercurrents. These techniques allowed the film to subtly address themes that censorship sought to suppress.

Over time, perceptions of the film's censorship have evolved. In 1993, a restored version of the film was released, reinstating previously cut scenes and providing audiences with a more authentic representation of Williams's vision. This restoration has been lauded for its honesty and artistic integrity, reaffirming the enduring relevance of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

3.7 IMPACT AND LEGACY

Elia Kazan's 1951 film adaptation of Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* is notably credited with introducing "Method acting" to a broader audience, primarily through Marlon

Brando's portrayal of Stanley Kowalski. Brando's raw and emotionally charged performance deviated from the theatrical norms of the time, bringing a new level of realism and intensity to the screen. His approach set a precedent for future actors and became a defining moment in cinematic history. Upon its release, the film garnered significant critical acclaim. It received 12 Academy Award nominations and won four, including Best Actress for Vivien Leigh, Best Supporting Actor for Karl Malden, and Best Supporting Actress for Kim Hunter. These accolades underscore the film's exceptional performances and its impact on audiences and critics alike.

The film delved into themes of desire, mental illness, and the decline of the Southern aristocracy, reflecting the societal tensions of the time. Despite the constraints of the Hays Code, which necessitated certain content modifications, the film managed to convey the underlying tensions and psychological complexities of its characters. This nuanced portrayal contributed to a deeper understanding of human   ehavior and societal issues. Decades after its release, *A Streetcar Named Desire* continues to be studied and revered for its artistic achievements. The film's exploration of human vulnerability and resilience resonates with contemporary audiences, and its influence is evident in modern storytelling and character development. The performances, particularly those of Brando and Leigh, remain benchmarks for actors and filmmakers.

SAQ:

1. How did the Motion Picture Production Code (Hays Code) influence the portrayal of sensitive themes such as homosexuality and sexual assault in the 1951 film adaptation? (200 words)

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2. How did censorship affect the depiction of Blanche's past and her descent into mental instability in the film? (100-150 words)

3.8 SUMMING UP

In this unit, we have discussed the transition of Tennessee Williams's play *A Streetcar Named Desire* from the stage to celluloid. For further reading, refer to the section below.

3.9 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READING

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- Cartmell, Deborah, editor. *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2014.

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UNIT- 4

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE: FROM TENNESSEE WILLIAMS'S PLAY TO ELIA KAZAN'S MOVIE (SUPPLEMENTARY UNIT)

Unit Structure:

4.1 **Objectives**

4.2 **Brief Introduction**

4.3 **Case Studies: Adaptations of Plays into Films**

4.4 **Summing Up**

4.5 **Questions and Answers on '*A Streetcar Named Desire'***

4.6 **References and Suggested Reading**

4.1 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, written as a supplement to the previous unit on Kazan's adaptation of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, we aim to:

- *discuss* questions on the previous unit;
- *analyze* case studies of plays adapted into films;
- *understand* how the studied plays were modified for the screen.

4.2 BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Tennessee Williams's play *A Streetcar Named Desire* remains iconic in the American theatrical tradition. In the previous unit, we discussed the cinematic adaptation of this play by Elia Kazan. In this unit, we will discuss other plays adapted into films; as well as

some questions on the cinematic adaptation of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

4.3 CASE STUDIES: ADAPTATIONS OF PLAYS INTO FILMS

I. KENNETH BRANAGH'S *HAMLET* (1996)

Kenneth Branagh's 1996 *Hamlet* is the only full-text, unabridged cinematic adaptation of Shakespeare's play, running four hours and using a conflated script from the First Folio and Second Quarto. Branagh—director, screenwriter, and lead—drew from his RSC and RADA background to merge theatrical fidelity with cinematic spectacle. The film features lavish sets, opulent costumes, dynamic camerawork, and an emotionally charged focus on familial drama, especially between Hamlet and Claudius.Branagh's *Hamlet*, though using Elizabethan language, is set in a lavish 19th-century world, featuring Blenheim Palace's bright vistas and 70 mm film grandeur. Critics liken its throne-room shots to "film noir with all the lights on" and epic dramas.Despite its $18 million budget and limited box office returns ($4.7 million), critics praised its ambition and faithfulness. Branagh rejected Freudian readings, portraying a conventionally masculine Hamlet with assertive agency, contrasting Laurence Olivier's introspective interpretation. He earned an Oscar nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay.

Flashbacks enrich storytelling by visualizing events only mentioned in the text—Hamlet and Ophelia's romance, his childhood with Yorick, and King Hamlet's murder—transforming internal monologue into visual memory and clarifying emotional and relational complexities. While some scholars commend these additions for bridging visual gaps, others claim they undermine

Shakespeare's intentional ambiguity. Branagh's Elsinore, lined with over thirty mirrors, highlights themes of reflection, self-awareness, and performance. Lehmann and Starks argue this spatial design diminishes Oedipal overtones, redirecting focus to male visual dominance. Lighting choices, from claustrophobic candlelit scenes to opulent ceremonies, reinforce both tragic intensity and ironic grandeur.Kenneth Branagh's Hamlet departs from introspective portrayals, presenting a volatile, energetic Prince, especially in moments like "There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow." Critics saw this as a shift to a more proactive Hamlet. Supported by a stellar cast—Jacobi, Christie, Winslet, Crystal, Heston, Lemmon, Briers—the film offers emotional depth and broad appeal through rich performances and vivid characterizations.

Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* earned critical acclaim for its visual ambition, fidelity to Shakespeare's full text, and powerful performances. Roger Ebert awarded it four stars, noting Branagh placed Hamlet in the larger context of royal politics, making him less a subject for pity than Laurence Olivier's interpretation. Film scholars such as Lehmman and Starks praised its aesthetic grandeur—describing it as "phallic" and theatrically bold—but also critiqued its sacrifice of psychological ambiguity in favour of visual and textual thoroughness. Despite being a financial disappointment, the film was nominated for four Academy Awards: Best Art Direction, Costume Design, Original Score, and Adapted Screenplay. Within Branagh's Shakespearean repertoire, it is frequently ranked just after *Much Ado About Nothing*. *Vanity Fair* observed that the climactic sword fight, featuring rappelling and thrown weapons, epitomized Branagh's theatrical bravado. While some found the performance pompous and overly dramatic, others recognized its full-text approach as groundbreaking. Even director Michael Almereyda acknowledged it as a touchstone for his own

Hamlet adaptation. Though often critiqued for favouring spectacle over psychological depth, Branagh's film remains a landmark for translating Shakespeare's drama into cinematic epic.

Adaptation from stage to screen:

- **Scale & spectacle**: Grand interiors, vibrant palettes, kinetic cinematography.

- **Textual loyalty**: No cuts from the original.

- **Theatricality on film**: Long takes and heightened performances preserved live-play energy while exploiting the language of cinema.

II. DENZEL WASHINGTON'S *FENCES* (2016)

Denzel Washington directed *Fences* (2016), adapted from August Wilson's Pulitzer Prize–winning 1987 play, with much of the 2010 Broadway cast—including Viola Davis—reprising their roles. Wilson's play premiered in 1985 and earned the Pulitzer in 1987, forming part of his Pittsburgh Cycle. The film, set in 1950s Pittsburgh, retains Wilson's dialogue almost verbatim (only about fifty added words) and expands locations minimally to serve cinematic flow, embracing a "get-out-of-the-way" philosophy: yard-bound scenes, modest interior settings, and restrained geographic shifts. Washington's Troy Maxson—a former League player turned sanitation worker—is shaped by both societal racism and personal failure. He battles to emotionally and economically support his family while emotionally coercing them in protective ways. Critics like Roger Ebert praise Washington's layered blend of charisma and domination, noting he channels frustration born from a

barred baseball dream into a hardened paternal posture. Entertainment Weekly called the film "a hurricane of powerful, intimate showdowns," while Vanity Fair described it as Washington's "most finely wrought directorial effort…one of his finest recent acting performances". NPR's Andrew Lapin observed that Washington "embodies…a masterful construct of self-delusion, a man who can wrench sympathy from his stories even once we learn they're not true".

Viola Davis as Rose provides the film's emotional centre. She tempers Troy's fury with strength and spiritual grounding. In a pivotal monologue, her restrained fury erupts in heartbreak. Their chemistry achieved what *The Guardian* likened to "a non-musical opera or secular revivalist meeting". Davis's portrayal earned her the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress, recognized as one of the most powerful performances of the year. Stephen McKinley Henderson (Bono) functions as the chorus—a moral audience surrogate—and Jovan Adepo (Cory) embodies generational conflict, their explosive confrontation with Troy showcasing emotional entrapment. Mykelti Williamson (Gabriel) infuses spiritual symbolism without caricature, grounding themes of trauma and symbolism.

Washington's direction and Charlotte Bruus Christensen's cinematography, as well as Hughes Winborne's editing, favour composed wide shots of the backyard to underscore spatial intimacy, and tight, suffocating framings during emotional pressure. These cinematic choices reflect the metaphorical fence—both psychological and physical—erected by Troy. The visual language remains deliberately minimalist—"quiet visual architecture"—eschewing flashy direction to allow Wilson's writing and the actors' craft to dominate. Critical reaction praised the film's authenticity

and performances, though many noted its theatricality. *Time* lauded the acting but critiqued its excessive reverence, stating the film "spells everything out in bold letters," feeling overly didactic and stagebound. *The New Yorker* argued the performances often feel "staged" rather than fitting naturally into the film's realistic settings, undermining cinematic intimacy. pShot on location in Pittsburgh's Hill District with period vehicles and signage, production design emphasized authenticity. Interiors—side yard, kitchen, wooden fence—complemented with measured camera movement enhance realism without sacrificing narrative intensity.

Financially successful, *Fences* grossed approximately $64 million worldwide on a $24 million budget. It earned four Academy Award nominations: Best Picture, Best Actor (Washington), Best Adapted Screenplay (Wilson), and Best Supporting Actress (Davis—winner). The film won numerous awards across guilds and critics' circles, including major acting trophies from the Screen Actors Guild and Golden Globes. As critics and scholars have concluded, *Fences* exemplifies how restraint and performance-led execution can successfully bridge stage and screen—offering one of the most faithful, emotionally intense, and enduringly powerful adaptations of a Broadway play.

Adaptation from stage to screen:

- **Minimalist fidelity**: Almost no extra cinematic flourishes.

- **Transference rather than transformation**: The play's structure and power remain intact.

- **Emphasis on performance**: The core is the emotional and linguistic exchange.

III. MIKE NICHOLS'S *WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?* (1966)

- **Background & Source Material**

Edward Albee's play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* debuted on Broadway in 1962, shocking audiences with its relentless dialogue, corrosive marital warfare, and psychological brutality. Deemed a "blood sport" by *TIME*, the play was criticized as "repetitious" yet lauded for its ferocity, even stirring controversy over its Freudian overtones. When adapting it to film, screenwriter-producer Ernest Lehpman and director Mike Nichols faced the challenge of preserving its raw theatrical energy while creating a cinematic experience. Albee's vitriolic, acerbic stage play was infamous for its profanity and intimate emotional power. Nichols's film dared to present the raw dialogue nearly verbatim, pushing boundaries of the era's censorship codes. By featuring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton in blistering, real-time confrontations, the camera penetrates—almost hungers for—the psychological intensity. Though filmed in cinematic style, the thrust remains theatrical: claustrophobic framing, extended verbal confrontations, and no expansion of setting.

- **Adaptation Philosophy & Directorial Vision**

Nichols approached this project with dual sensibilities: theatrical discipline and cinematic innovation. Having directed revues and comedy alongside Elaine May, he possessed a sensitive ear for dialogue and subtext. Yet, as a cinephile influenced by filmmakers like Jean Renoir and Billy Wilder, Nicholps was intent on avoiding "filmed play" pitfalls and instead delivering a visually compelling film. His philosophy summed up as "keep it simple," meant to

amplify the original's power through cinematic finesse rather than dilute it.

- **Screenplay & Dialogue**

Key to Nichols's success was an almost verbatim adaptation of Albee's script. Despite battles with the MPAA, Nichols insisted on retaining Albee's full-bodied profanity ("hump the hostess," etc.), which led to the creation of a restrictive "For adults only" rating. Jack Valenti later acknowledged that "dirty words" helped spark Hollywood's ratings system overhaul. This unwavering fidelity preserved the play's psychological immediacy and sustained emotional intensity.

- **Performances & Casting**

Nichols cast Hollywood icons Elizabeth Taylor (Martha) and Richard Burton (George), whose off-screen marriage enhanced their on-screen dynamics. Taylor, initially doubted for the role, gained weight and embraced Martha's ugliness—her "dowdy yet glamorous" performance earning high praise. Burton, often typecast, delivered a subdued and wounded George who transformed into a "devil-tongued" force. Supporting roles were flanked by George Segal (Nick) and Sandy Dennis (Honey), both nominated for Oscars. Dennis, in particular, won Best Supporting Actress, lending nuance to Honey's vulnerability. Critic Jennie Kermode observed how the older couple's "verbal sparring is frightening to behold because it is so decidedly intended to draw blood".

- **Visual Style & Cinematography**

Nichols worked with cinematographer Haskell Wexler to craft a cinematic style that accentuated the claustrophobic intensity of the play. Wexler's black-and-white photography—swapped from the

studio's suggestion of colour—encrypted a noirish, psychological thrust, cloaking the household horrors with aesthetic precision. From the opening moon shot to tracking shots down campus hallways, Nichols avoided static staging in favor of "tracking shots, zooms, and other visual pyrotechnics". Editor Sam O'Steen enhanced this with rapidly shifting cuts and strategically timed reaction close-ups that shaped both performance and tension.

- **Themes & Psychological Depth**

At its heart, the play examines illusion, disillusionment, and the toxic patterns that bind long-married couples. The couple's imaginary son acts as a psychological safety net until it becomes the target of their cruelty. The film probes the fragility of their academic-laced marriage, where Martha, ever tied to her unassuming status, scorns George's passive shortcomings. George's eventual unmasking culminates in a chilling "exorcism" proto-ritual that mimics a divorce from fantasy and of the self.

Psychological Realism: The alcohol-fueled environment enables raw revelations—"brutal truths"—giving audiences both insight and dread.

Freudian Undertones: The film introduced mass audiences to Freud's notion that illusions aren't necessarily false, reinforcing Albee's Freudian influences.

Socio-cultural echo: Made during cultural upheavals of the 1960s, the film subtly mirrors broader disillusionment in American society—dragging public and private mythos into scrutiny.

- **Cultural & Industrial Impact**

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf had far-reaching effects on both cinema and society:

Ratings Revolution: Its explicit language catalyzed the 1968 abolition of the restrictive Hays Code in favour of ratings.

Cinematic Adaptation Benchmark: The film remains a gold standard for theatrical adaptation due to its technical competence and reverence for source material.

Directorial & Acting Careers: Launching Nichols's film legacy, it set the stage for his subsequent directorial successes (*The Graduate*, *Silkwood*). It also silenced critics of Taylor's talent, cementing her Oscar-winning gravitas.

- **Critical Reception & Legacy**

Upon release, the film garnered thirteen Academy Award nominations — winning five, including Best Actress for Taylor and Best Supporting Actress for Dennis. Beyond awards, critics praised both Nichols's precision and the actors' electricity. *Vanity Fair* praised Nichols's direction during "comedy sequences" as "enthrallingly brilliant". *Bravo*'s Jennie Kermode wrote, "There is no sympathetic soft focus here, no forgiveness," encapsulating the film's uncompromising realism. Even decades later, it remains central in academic discussions on film adaptations for its aesthetic daring and emotional acuity.

Adaptation from stage to screen

- **Verbal honesty as defiance**: Pushing the limits of on-screen language with near-complete retention.

- **Psycho-drama on film**: Emotional claustrophobia is visually reinforced through tight shots.

- **Cinematic immediacy over gloss**: Nichols eschews sweeping cutaways for unflinching focus.

IV. PETER HALL'S *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM* (1968)

Directed by revered stage director and Royal Shakespeare Company founder Peter Hall, this film version reunites Royal Shakespeare Company stars — Diana Rigg, Judi Dench, Ian Holm, Helen Mirren— and faithfully conveys Shakespeare's comedic fantasy. Shot on location in woodlands and on stage-style sets, the adaptation balances rustic spontaneity with regal ceremonies, preserving theatrical depth while trusting film's ability to capture natural light, subtle expressions, and fairy magic.

Hall directed *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for film in 1968, adapting from his acclaimed 1959 and 1962 stage production. This was only the second full-length sound film version since Reinhardt's 1935 adaptation. It was devised for both cinema and U.S. television broadcast, debuting on CBS in February 1969. Hall's vision contrasted sharply with earlier romanticized Shakespearean films, instead offering a raw, earthy interpretation that reflected his theatrical sensibilities rooted in Shakespearean textual fidelity and performance realism.

- **Adaptation Strategy: Textual & Conceptual Anchoring**

Hall maintained near-complete fidelity to Shakespeare's text, preserving poetic structure and dialogue rhythms. As Wright notes,

the cast was coached by Hall and John Barton to enunciate "trippingly on the tongue," ensuring clarity and authenticity. Unlike mainstream adaptations, Hall opted not for abridgment but for full textual immersion, transporting theatrical integrity into cinematic form. Conceptually, Hall juxtaposed pastoral Athenian society with fairy wilderness, filming the former in the elegant Compton Verney House, and the latter in colder, muddy autumnal woods. This non-summer setting was a deliberate choice intended to reflect Oberon and Titania's emotional discord, or as Hall explained, to unsettle human expectations through weather manipulation. In this way, Hall aligned the visual landscape with thematic undercurrents of confusion, enchantment, and the erratic realm of fairy influence.

- **Visual & Aesthetic Choices**

Hall favoured naturalistic, expressionistic visuals over fantasy-driven spectacle. The film's colour palette — from the earthy tones of the manor to the silvery-green, mud-smeared fairies — is both grounded and uncanny, creating a psychological realism within the magical framework. Scholars Chaudhuri and Holland describe it as "a notable blending of the traditional with the innovative," where sentiment gave way to "rougher and muddier" tones juxtaposing earthy mortals and savage fairies. Cinematographer Peter Suschitzky and editor Jack Harris used close-ups and abrupt jump cuts to emphasize emotional intensity and the supernatural's disruptive energy. The rapid cutting in fairy scenes—with quick temporal cuts to mirror "seasons changing," enacts the motif of transformation tied to the lovers' enchantments and Oberon's spells. This hybrid cinematic design — naturalism infused with avant-garde devices — reflects the late-1960s aesthetic. Critics deemed it disorienting, yet it underscores Hall's ambition to unsettle, not soothe, the viewer's experience.

- **Performances & Characters**

The film's cast brought their refined theatrical training into the cinematic space. Judi Dench's Titania exudes maternal sensuality rather than erotic allure; her commanding speech, delivered directly to camera, is "strongly felt, passionate but not fierce". Ian Richardson's Oberon balances authority with measure, while Diana Rigg and Helen Mirren embody distinct emotional poles: Rigg's melancholic Helena offers intense fourth-wall engagement, while Mirren's vivacious Hermia brings energy and sincerity to the woodland scenes. Ian Holm's Puck is neither a cute sprite nor buffoon — he embodies quiet menace and mischievous restraint, moving woodland spirits and humans alike with subtlety. Paul Rogers avoids buffoonery in Bottom, playing the role straight, a choice noted as refreshing amid the film's heightened elements. These nuanced performances appreciate Shakespeare's complexity: each character is human, flawed, charming, and vulnerable. Hall's deployment of close-ups enhances this intimacy, allowing soliloquies to deepen emotional connection.

- **Critical Reception & Legacy**

Contemporary criticism was divided. Penelope Houston, writing for *The Spectator*, critiqued Hall's visual middle ground — neither fully cinematic nor theatrical. Others drew attention to the film's New Wave–influenced camera work and derided itsa seasonal setting and muddy visual tone, though many praised the "dream cast" and verbal fluency. Retrospectively, scholars recognize it as a bold experiment — muddy and modern, but striking in its fidelity to text and psychological realism. It remains a significant study in how stage practices — text, voice, ensemble — can be translated cinematically without losing Shakespeare's textual integrity. Its

legacy endures as a bridge between theatrical authenticity and filmic innovation.

- **Strengths and Limitations**

Strengths:

- Almost complete Shakespearean text, delivered with clarity thanks to Hall's direction and Barton's vocal coaching.

- Performances by seasoned theatre actors, imbued with emotional texture.

- Aesthetic bravery: bleak woods, winter tones, avant-garde editing, using cinema to unsettle rather than dazzle.

Limitations:

- Visual austerity and wintry setting clash with the title's promise; this jarred many early viewers.

- Technical restraints—a rushed shoot and seasonal misalignment—lead to inconsistent cinematography.

- The blend of stage and film idioms risks disorientation, placing the film in liminality without full commitment.

Adaptation from stage to screen:

- **Ensemble & credibility**: Reuniting acclaimed stage actors lends gravitas.

- **Atmosphere via location**: Wooded, diffused lighting enhances enchantment.

- **Theatrical rhythm sustained**: Scene transitions echo stage pacing.

V. MICHAEL HOFFMAN'S *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM* (1999)

Another approach to the same play, Hoffman's version transplants the action to early 19th-century Tuscany and modernizes the aesthetics. While keeping most Shakespearean dialogue, Hoffman's film introduces bicycles, valley festivals, and a romanticized Italian village atmosphere. Criticism focuses on uneven tone—shifting between pastoral romance and clownish slapstick—and dissonant comedic styles, especially in Bottom's portrayal and the fairies' characterization. Hoffman reimagines Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, shifting the setting from mythical Athens to a fictional "Monte Athena" in late 19th-century Tuscany. Filmed at Italy's Cinecittà Studios and on Tuscan locations, the film injects European rural charm, vintage bicycles, corsets, and early phonographs into the narrative. Hoffman's intention was to modernize the play's vibes while retaining Shakespeare's original language, framing the woodland interludes with Italian opera (Verdi, Donizetti, Bellini) to enhance the emotional tenor.

- **Visual Style and Mise-en-Scène**

In Tuscany, verdant hills and sun-dappled forests contrast with cardboard-like stage props in the woodland ("clunky, creaky contraptions" as noted by *Time Out*). The transition from bright villa celebrations to the shadow-drenched forest feels abrupt — an intentional clash reflecting human order dissolving into fairy chaos. Opera montages and temperamental weather serve to punctuate emotional beats amidst the romantic idyll.

- **Performance & Casting Choices**

Hoffman assembled a hybrid cast: Hollywood stars and Shakespearean actors. Kevin Kline portrays Bottom with comedic

flare and emotional vulnerability; Michelle Pfeiffer's Titania is regal but criticized as expressive only in surface glamour. Rupert Everett's Oberon is melancholic and decaffeinated mischief; Stanley Tucci's Puck is world-weary, mid-life imp. Among the lovers, Christian Bale and Dominic West bring earnest youth, but Calista Flockhart's Helena is viewed as too modern — her expressions on camera sometimes highlight stylistic dissonance. Critics also noted uneven accents — background villagers speak Italian, while main characters use Elizabethan English — creating a fragmentation in tone .

- **Adaptation Techniques & Textual Approach**

Although preserving substantial Shakespearean text, Hoffman trims certain monologues and soliloquies for pacing, adding visual and musical cues in their place. Additional scenes — such as Bottom performing for villagers, bikes in the forest, mud-wrestling — underscore the emphasis on spectacle over Shakespearean coherence. The Victorian modernization reframes thematic concerns — like parental authority in 1900s Italy — yet sometimes strains narrative logic (e.g., Hermia facing death penalty in that era).

- **Thematic Resonance & Interpretation**

Hoffman explores love's fragility via visual metaphors: optical illusions, distorted mirrors, and enchanted bicycles. Bottom is humanized more than Shakespeare intended — introducing a wife to underscore his vulnerability and social dislocation. The fairy realm is made mundane: Puck urinates behind trees; Oberon is a jaded aristocrat — busy with bureaucracy. While this decentralizes mystical enchantment, it grounds the play in comedic realism.

- **Critical & Audience Reception**

Reception was mixed. *Rotten Tomatoes* shows 67% approval; *Metacritic* rates it 61/100. Praise often centers on Kevin Kline and Stanley Tucci's standout performances. Critics deemed it without fault; charming and seductive with a delicate dream-like feel to it. Others faulted it as a watered-down, "fast-food" version of the play—heavy with gadgets, light on Shakespeare's lyricism. Negative notes cite thematic inconsistency and jarring anachronisms like bicycles and phonographs.

- **Comparative Summary**

ASPECT	HALL (1968)	HOFFMAN (1999)
Setting	Mythical, timeless Athenian setting, pastoral & stage-like.	Tuscany, late 19th-century, with Victorian props & opera.
Visual Design	Realistic woodlands and staged interiors, subtle lighting.	Rich villa scenes; stylized forest with operatic flair.
Performance Style	Ensemble Shakespeareans with consistent classical diction.	Star-driven, mixed accents; theatrical meets cinematic tones.
Adaptation Strategy	Minimal cuts, stage-to-screen fidelity.	Trimmed text, added spectacle and comic episodes.

Thematic Tone	Enchantment and myth emphasized through language and ritual.	Love's folly underscored by human comedy and realism.
Critical Response	Valued as a grounded and reverent Shakespeare performance.	Praised for energy but criticized for tonal unevenness.

Adaptation from stage to screen:

- **Temporal and locational displacement**: From ancient Athens to romantic Tuscany.

- **Visual recontextualization**: Period costumes, combined with bike-chases and village fairs.

- **Fluid tone management**: Mixing Shakespeare's verse with cinematic whimsy—unevenly received.

Stop to Consider:

The adaptation of Shakespeare's plays into film has a rich and evolving history, beginning almost simultaneously with the birth of cinema itself. The earliest known film adaptation is a silent short of *King John* from 1899, directed by William Kennedy Laurie Dickson in England. Early 20th-century filmmakers often produced silent versions of Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies, relying heavily on intertitles and exaggerated gestures to convey the complex language and emotion of the original plays. By the 1930s, with the advent of sound, Hollywood began producing more ambitious adaptations. Notably, Laurence Olivier's *Henry V* (1944) and

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Hamlet (1948) combined theatrical rigour with cinematic innovation, setting a standard for classical fidelity.

The latter half of the 20th century saw directors like Orson Welles (*Macbeth*, *Othello*) and Franco Zeffirelli (*Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*) reimagine Shakespeare with heightened realism and emotional accessibility. In more recent decades, filmmakers such as Baz Luhrmann (*Romeo + Juliet*, 1996) and Julie Taymor (*Titus*, 1999) embraced stylized, modern reinterpretations, while Kenneth Branagh committed to near-complete textual adaptations. These diverse approaches reflect the enduring adaptability of Shakespeare's works to shifting cinematic forms and audiences.

As for American literature, the first novel by an American novelist adapted into a motion picture is believed to be *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by George Aiken (adapted from Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel), which saw several silent film versions as early as 1903. Though based on a novel, Aiken's adaptation was widely recognized as a staple of 19th-century American theatre. If one considers original American plays, *The Count of Monte Cristo* (adapted for Broadway by Charles Fechter) also saw early film versions, but Eugene O'Neill's works, such as *Anna Christie* (1923), mark some of the first major original American plays adapted to film.

VI. RUPERT GOOLD'S *MACBETH* (2010)

This BBC telefilm adaptation, directed by Rupert Goold and starring Patrick Stewart, reimagines *Macbeth* in a 1960s Eastern bloc – evoking Ceausescu-era Romania. The witches are recast as clinical nurses in stark hospitals; there are minimum cuts to dialogue, and heavy use of grey, oppressive institutional sets. The movie was filmed on location at Welbeck Abbey. The reinterpretation

foregrounds political allegory — tyranny, surveillance, paranoia. Macbeth's coffee-laden offices, antiseptic lighting, and military parades mirror totalitarianism without diluting Shakespeare's voice.

Goold's Macbeth originated as a stage production at the Chichester Festival Theatre in 2007 before transferring to London's West End, Broadway, and finally being adapted into a filmed version for BBC Four and PBS's *Great Performances*, released in December 2010. The film preserves the cast led by Patrick Stewart and Kate Fleetwood, illustrating a persistent vision Goold had for this interpretation. Goold's goal was to decontextualize Shakespeare's medieval Scotland and recast the play as a political allegory reflecting the mid-20th-century Eastern Bloc — complete with its militaristic visuals, surveillance hallmarks, and cult of personality centred around Stewart's Macbeth.

- **Visual & Aesthetic Design**
- **Setting & Costume**

The production evokes Stalin-era totalitarianism—grey tile walls, Communist-style banners, and oppressive uniforms. The Macbeths' bunker-like headquarters features stylized brutalist architecture, fastidious lighting, and constant surveillance motifs (e.g., intercoms, cameras). Lady Macbeth's wardrobe shifts from muted tones to vibrant jewel hues, underlining her seductiveness and ambition.

- **Witches as Nurses**

In a particularly striking move, the Weird Sisters are recast as hospital nurses — common, medically detached figures that haunt Macbeth throughout. This visualization binds the supernatural with the psychological, suggesting the witches are projections of Macbeth's unconscious and moral decay.

- **Cinematography & Sound**

Adam Cork's sound design and Lorna Heavey's projections amplify the unease: heartbeats, fragmented war clips, and tunnels reverberate claustrophobic dread. The film, of significant length (160 minutes), is shot in high-definition at Welbeck Abbey, utilizing stark, controlled close-ups to dramatize intimacy and tyranny.

- **Performance & Power Dynamics**
- **Patrick Stewart's Macbeth**

Goold and Stewart lean into Macbeth's moral ambivalence. Stewart portrays his Macbeth with restraint initially—reserved and dignified—before spiraling into a paradoxical blend of tyranny and existential dread. The character gradually appropriates power, and Stewart's expressive restraint evolves into violent volatility, aligning with Goold's vision of a dictator in the making.

- **Kate Fleetwood's Lady Macbeth**

Fleetwood's Lady Macbeth is sexually charged, fiercely ambitious, and younger in age than Stewart's Macbeth. This age differential intensifies the power dynamics in their relationship. She commands early control, nudging him into murder, but as Macbeth becomes paramount, the dynamic inverts. Their hand-holding staging—initially her leading and later his pulling — compellingly narrates this shift of power.

- **Thematic Reinvention: Tyranny & Surveillance**
- **Modern Political Allegory**

The reimagining of Macbeth as a dictator in an unnamed Eastern Bloc establishes robust thematic parallels between Shakespeare's text and 20th-century tyranny. The visual layering of surveillance

(intercoms, propaganda banners) makes explicit Shakespeare's implicit warnings about power corruption and paranoia.

- **Unconscious Horror & Psychological Control**

The witches-as-nurses motif fuses the psychic with the external. Rather than marginal supernatural forces, they infiltrate daily scenesand hover in hospital hallways, whilesubtly manipulating Macbeth's decisions and reinforcing the idea that internal desires can manifest externally.

- **Key Scene Revisions**
- **Banquo's Ghost**

The famous banquet scene is doubled. Initially mnemonic: an overt, haunting ghost apparition causes collapse. Later, Macbeth relives it on screen with no ghost present — visually underscoring his psychological breakdown. This splitting highlights how guilt fractures reality and identity.

- **Violence & Gore**

Murders — of Duncan, Banquo, Lady Macduff and family — are relocated to modern settings such as trains and locker rooms, echoing stories of wartime atrocities. Each killing is anonymized and bureaucratic, like state-sponsored violence. Cornal banality (a locker-room saw, sanitized killing) combines with cinematic intensity to make modern murder horrific in both realistic and symbolic ways.

- **Critical Reception**

The production earned strong critical acclaim for its bold staging and thematic clarity. *New York Times* critic Ben Brantley praised Stewart's "fearsome insight and theatrical fire". *USA Today*'s Elysa

Gardner noted Stewart's portrayal as "an intelligent, rational person" driven to madness" by inner conflicts. Some viewers noted tonal inconsistencies—such as abrupt scene transitions (e.g., a dance in Banquo's ghost sequence) and overuse of lens flares—which risk disrupting immersion. Others remarked on Stewart's age, questioning its fit for the role, although most felt his gravitas served the adaptation well.

- **Scholarly & Audience Perspectives**

Scholar Graham Holderness argues that Goold's adaptation emphasizes the hunger for power itself rather than its functions — Macbeth's tyranny is self-validating, not practical governance. The film's pervasive surveillance aligns with that hunger, illustrating desire and self-authentification through domination. Community commentary, such as on *Reddit*, highlights how the modern-dress setting and intensified psychological focus bring Shakespeare's themes into clearer relief for contemporary viewers.

- **Legacy & Contribution to Shakespeare Adaptations**

Goold's *Macbeth* distinguishes itself as a case of textual reverence blended with aesthetic reinvention. It remains close to Shakespeare's language, while reframing the material in cinematic language through modern political allegory, psychological depth, and stylized violence. It contributes to the lineage of Shakespeare screen adaptations seeking to evoke relevance to modern authoritarianism, following in lines from Polanski (1971) and preceding Kurzel (2015) and Coen (2021). However, Goold's version stands out for its psychological integration and bricolage of horror imagery, war metaphors, and stage-to-screen nuance.

Adaptation from stage to screen:

- **Historical re-envisioning**: 1960s totalitarian resonance over medieval Scotland.

- **Visual metaphor**: Military drab, hospital coldness reinforce the theme.

- **Textual faithfulness with thematic overlay**: Full Shakespeare adapted into a political thriller.

COMPARATIVE INSIGHTS:

Adaptation	Fidelity to Text	Cinematic Innovation	Stage-to-screen Strategy
Hamlet (1996)	Complete	Grand sets, long takes, period world-building.	Theatrical scale, cinematic immersion.
Fences (2016)	High	Intimate yard/interior shots.	Emotional realism, minimal distraction.
Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1966)	High	Tight framing, verbal realism.	Confrontational psychological exposure.
A Midsummer Night's Dream (1968)	High	Natural settings, stage feel.	Balance of lyricism and environment.
A Midsummer Night's Dream (1999)	Moderate	Italian pastiche, tone shifts.	Mixed innovation with risk.
Macbeth (2010)	High	Political recontextualization.	Dialogue-led reconstruction with modern metaphor.

These six films exemplify three predominant adaptation modes:

1. **Fidelity-first transference** (*Fences*; *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*; *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1968): Keeping most text while adjusting cinematography and performance style.

2. **Contextual reinvention** (*Macbeth*): Retains text intimately but relocates narrative for modern political meaning.

3. **Hybrid reimagination** (*Hamlet*; *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1999): Full-scale theatrical infusion with stylistic or narrative transpositions that test Shakespeare's elasticity on screen.

4.4 SUMMING UP

In this unit, we have supplemented the discussion of Elia Kazan's adaptation of Tennessee Williams's play *A Streetcar Named Desire* with some case studies of plays being adapted for the screen. Within these case studies, we have also compared two adaptations of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. For further reading, refer to the section below.

4.5 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON *A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE*

1. How does Kazan use cinematic space to amplify the themes of confinement and tension?

Elia Kazan expands the play's claustrophobic setting through cinematic space, transitioning from the stage's single-room design

to varied New Orleans locations — such as the streetcar, bowling alley, and French Quarter streets. These added environments reinforce Blanche's isolation — amid the sprawling city, her inner world feels even more trapped. Kazan contrasts the cramped Kowalski apartment with the openness of streets and public spaces, yet uses close-ups and tight shots to maintain emotional claustrophobia inside the home. The cramped apartment becomes a pressure cooker, magnifying tension and exposing character vulnerabilities. Expanding the spatial dimension also underscores social mobility: Blanche arrives dreaming of genteel pasts, but New Orleans confronts her with gritty reality. Meanwhile, Stanley's world extends beyond — his bowling alley and factory — representing working-class agency. The film thus enhances the play's tension through spatial storytelling—physical settings reflect and intensify psychological states. Kazan's careful cinematography — like spotlighting confined interiors in shadows — visually embodies the collision between Blanche's fragile illusions and Stanley's earthy power.

2. In what ways did censorship impact key narrative elements, particularly Blanche's husband's homosexuality?

The 1951 film faced heavy censorship under the Hays Code, sanitizing or omitting explicit references to Blanche's husband's homosexuality. On stage, Williams was explicit: Allan Grey died by suicide following exposure of his homosexual affair. The film replaces "homosexual affair" with Blanche criticizing him for being "too tender," a euphemism meant to skirt code restrictions. Kazan, Williams, and Saul rely on subtext — Vivien Leigh's performance, tone, and body language imply more than dialogue reveals. Viewers infer Allan's sexuality through Blanche's guilt and shame, preserving the psychological impact without direct mention. While

this approach softens the narrative, it also deepens it — forcing audiences to read between lines, heightening Blanche's isolation and internalized shame. Scholars argue that the constraints inadvertently intensified the subtextual power; some even feel the film becomes more "tawdry" as viewers fill in missing pieces. Ultimately, censorship reshaped but did not erase this pivotal backstory, turning omission into an interpretive challenge and preserving thematic depth through implication.

3. How does Marlon Brando's naturalistic acting style change the portrayal of Stanley?

Marlon Brando's performance marked a dramatic shift in acting style — ushering in Method-influenced naturalism. His portrayal of Stanley is raw, unscripted, and visceral. Unlike the more formalized stage style, Brando mumbles, slurs, and even eats on camera — he famously stuffs a chicken wing into his mouth mid-scene. This realism, captured through close-range microphones, added layers of intimidation and unpredictability, making Stanley feel immediate and animalistic. This choice amplifies social contrasts: Stanley as the earthy, working-class brute, and Blanche as the genteel, fragile outsider. Brando's method acting also invites deeper emotional ambiguity. His Stanley is not flatly villainous — his charm, possessiveness, even vulnerability appear through subtle gestures, breaths, and glances. The result is a multi-faceted antagonist whose cruelty is both ruled by primal instincts and born from social resentment. Brando's approach revolutionized onscreen masculinity, grounding the character in the tactile, often uncomfortable texture of lived experience, and forever transforming cinematic realism.

4. Does Kazan's film retain Blanche DuBois's tragic dimensions effectively?

Yes — and not just through script fidelity but through Leigh's luminous performance. When adapting the play, Kazan retained Blanche's core arc — her decline from genteel pretenses to mental collapse — but softened some scenes for censorship. Vivien Leigh portrays Blanche's fragility: the paper lantern concealing light symbolizes her attempt to mask reality — Leigh's trembling expressions convey deep terror beneath poise. Leigh brings a vulnerability laced with desperation; in private moments, moments of silence speak louder than dialogue. Even without explicit mention of her husband's sexuality, her pain resonates through her eyes and posture. Critics acknowledge that Leigh's Blanche is tragic — a moth to the flame—and her downfall is palpable. The film ends with Blanche off-screen, taken away — her fate affirmed yet emotionally haunting. Audience and critics alike agree — the film preserves Blanche's emotional crisis through performance, atmosphere, and tonal shifts. It may censor explicit material, but Leigh and Kazan ensure Blanche's tragic dimensions remain intact and unforgettable.

5. Analyze how Kazan's adaptation reflects or diverges from the Southern Gothic atmosphere of the original play.

Kazan's film masterfully preserves the Southern Gothic soul of Williams's play while subtly transforming its aesthetic through cinematic means. The original text thrives on dualities: decaying aristocracy versus emerging modernity, illusion versus stark reality. Kazan retains these through mise-en-scène and cinematography. The Kowalski apartment, cramped and dilapidated, is shot in tight compositions, maintaining a sense of suffocating confinement that reflects Blanche's psychological state. He expands the play's geography — showing the French Quarter, streetcar lines, a boxing alley, even the factory. These external settings reveal layers of New Orleans society: its noise, heat, hustle, and cultural vibrancy. The

city becomes a living entity in opposition to Blanche's fragile nostalgia.

The Southern Gothic hallmark of grotesque realism appears in how mundane life intersects with decay. Kazan's stark black-and-white photography enhances this, using deep shadows and harsh light to echo Blanche's mania and Stanley's aggression. At night, the city's jazz threads into the score, conjuring broken dreams and sensual tension. Yet Kazan introduces a more fluid narrative structure than the play — cross-cutting between exterior and interior, using close-ups to extract intimate truth. This visual style contrasts with the play's static intensity, with its single setting and heavy dialogue.

However, certain Gothic elements are muted due to censorship. Blanche's tragic past — her husband's homosexuality and her own sexuality — is coded, the rape scene truncated. These omissions could weaken the Gothic horror of moral decay and existential trauma. But Kazan adapts by using subtextual performance and imagery: Leigh's glances, shifts in posture, the broken mirror, and the shadowy apartment dissolve illusion subtly yet powerfully. Thus, the film remains Gothic in tone — its tragedy rooted in social decay, human cruelty, and mental disintegration — even if explicit transgressive elements are tempered. It proves cinematic Gothic can thrive through suggestion, performance, and visual mood.

6. Discuss the thematic significance of light and shadows in the film as visual metaphors.

Light and shadow in Kazan's film form a rich visual vocabulary — linked to truth, illusion, and mental collapse. Adapted from Williams's stage directions, the film uses chiaroscuro to reflect Blanche's psyche and Stanley's domineering presence. Blanche's fear of bright light drives her to hang a paper lantern over the

apartment's single bulb — literally dimming reality. In the film, Kazan lingers on the lantern, its gauzy glow falls over Blanche's face, transforming it from elegant to haunted. Each time the light dims or flickers, we sense her illusions cracking.

In contrast, Stanley's scenes are brightly lit, exposing everything — his sweat, his movement, his aggression. When Stanley tears off the lantern — literally pulling down Blanche's fantasy — the apartment is flooded with harsh light, signaling her world dismantled. Shadow becomes Blanche's refuge; in scenes of crisis, she retreats into darkness or shadows, visually communicating psychological collapse.

Kazan also uses nighttime exterior shots — cool moonlight, darkened streets — to mirror Blanche's loneliness and desperation. The play's internal Gothic tension translates into external darkness. Shadows envelop characters not just spatially, but psychologically. Information is revealed and hidden through light, echoing larger themes of truth versus illusion. Yet Kazan's use of shadows isn't just symbolic; it's cinematic realism. He uses practical lighting to reflect the cramped apartment: thin curtains cast muted sunlight, overhead fixtures create oppressive angles. Light and shadow become tools of isolation, oppression, and exposure — visually transporting Williams's poetic imagery into layered film language. The result: every frame carries metaphor — in darkness, secrets fester; in light, truth, no matter how brutal, cannot be hidden.

7. How does the film's treatment of Stella's character differ from the play, especially in the final resolution?

In Tennessee Williams's stage play, Stella makes a deeply ambiguous choice — staying with Stanley while sending Blanche away, without explicit condemnation. The film adaptation alters

this, giving Stella more voice and narrative agency. Kazan adds scenes and dialogue — absent from the play — where Stella confronts Stanley, blaming him directly for Blanche's breakdown. This change transforms Stella from passive to morally engaged; she becomes a more empathetic figure who challenges Stanley rather than merely enabling him.

In the play, words are sparse: Stella simply stays. The film has her utter lines conveying guilt — "I couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley" — mirroring the play but with greater emotional clarity. Kim Hunter portrays Stella as torn: she loves Stanley but also feels sisterly loss and guilt. Film close-ups capture her tear-streaked face and conflicted gaze, providing emotional nuance missing from stage directions.

The film's ending is subtly adjusted. In the play, Stella allows Stanley to take Blanche — remaining silent. Kazan gives Stella a final confrontation off-screen, but audible. This change shifts the thematic weight: the film suggests society's complicity in violence and mental breakdown is not always passive — it can involve denial and betrayal. Stella becomes emblematic of moral compromise — a witness torn between duty and conscience. Kazan's decision creates more empathy for Stella, while underscoring tragedy: not only is Blanche destroyed, but Stella is fractured too. Her voice in the final scenes reminds us that sisterhood can fail under oppressive social structures. This adaptation deepens the emotional stakes — Blanche's tragedy becomes a familial rupture, and Stella's character becomes more than a footnote — she is a survivor, but at what cost?

8. Evaluate Kazan's directorial choices in adapting the play's structure and pacing for film.

Adapting a tightly structured stage play to film can be challenging, yet Kazan preserves the narrative momentum while strategically using cinematic tools to enhance emotional impact. The play's linear, scene-to-scene structure is largely maintained; key confrontations — Napoleonic Code scene, Mitch's confrontation, Stanley's assault — remain intact. But Kazan subtly reorders and trims dialogue to maintain pacing more suitable for film audiences while retaining dramatic tension. The Napoleonic Code scene exemplifies Kazan's pacing genius: a single, static take captures Stella's defending of Blanche's trunk, Stanley's aggression, and simmering tension. Cinematic close-ups amplify emotional tenor — Stanley's sweaty face, Stella's sudden defence, the suppressed rage. Cuts between their faces, without additional camera movement, retain theatrical immediacy yet feel cinematic.

Elsewhere, Kazan uses interwoven external scenes — train station, streetcar, alley — to create transitions between character moments. This contrasts with the confined apartment; the cuts — often dissolve or fade — allowing emotional transitions to breathe, and easing viewers into new scenes or mental spaces.

Editing also heightens emotional climax: Blanche's breakdown is presented through rapid cuts, close-ups, and anguished score, creating a crescendo absent in the play, where dialogue and monologue carry weight. Music and pacing here create psychological immersion. Yet pacing is deliberate: early scenes unfold slowly — Stanley's introduction, Blanche's arrival — to build atmosphere. Kazan trusts audience patience, letting mood settle. Only when power shifts (Stanley's assault) does the pace tighten, dialogue snaps, movement accelerates.

Kazan's directorial method adroitly fuses theatrical fidelity and cinematic expression. He overlays dynamic visuals, carefully-timed

edits, and carefully placed external settings onto Williams's structure, preserving emotional arcs while intensifying tension through film-specific tools.

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UNIT- 5

FROM CHARLES PERRAULT'S AND BROTHERS GRIMM'S FAIRY TALE *SLEEPING BEAUTY* TO ROBERT STROMBERG'S MOVIE *MALEFICENT*

Unit Structure:

5.1 Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 Comparative Narrative Analysis

5.4 Character Development and Reinterpretation

5.5 Thematic Exploration

5.6 Feminist and Cultural Perspectives

5.7 Adaptation Theory Application

5.8 Summing Up

5.9 References and Suggested Reading

5.1 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this chapter is to analyze the transformation of the classic fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty*, as told by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, into the 2014 film *Maleficent* directed by Robert Stromberg. This analysis will focus on the narrative shifts, character development, thematic changes, and cultural implications that arise from this adaptation. Through this chapter, you will be able to:

- *understand* the differences between the original story *Sleeping Beauty*, and the movie *Maleficent*;

- *compare* the narratives of the two works;

- *analyze* the character reinterpretation and development in both works;

- *apply* feminist and cultural theories, as well as adaptation theory, to analyze the texts.

5.2 INTRODUCTION

Charles Perrault's version, titled "La Belle au bois dormant" (*The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood*), was published in 1697 as part of his collection *Histoiresoucontes du temps passé*. The tale begins with a long-awaited birth: a king and queen, after years of childlessness, are blessed with a daughter. To celebrate, they invite seven fairies to be her godmothers, each bestowing a gift upon the infant princess. An eighth fairy, who had been forgotten due to her long absence from society, arrives uninvited and, feeling slighted, curses the princess to die by pricking her finger on a spindle. Fortunately, one of the invited fairies had not yet presented her gift and mitigates the curse, declaring that the princess will not die but instead fall into a deep sleep for a hundred years, after which a prince will awaken her. As the princess grows, she embodies the virtues granted by the fairies. However, on her fifteenth birthday, she encounters an old woman spinning and, intrigued, pricks her finger on the spindle, fulfilling the curse. The princess falls into a deep sleep, and the good fairy, anticipating this event, casts a spell causing everyone in the castle to sleep as well. A thick forest grows around the castle, hiding it from view. After a century, a prince hears tales of the sleeping princess and ventures to find her. The forest parts for him, allowing entry. He discovers the sleeping court and eventually finds the princess, awakening her with a kiss. The entire castle awakens, and the prince and princess marry.

Perrault's version extends beyond the awakening, introducing a second part where the princess and prince have children. The prince's mother, an ogress, attempts to eat her grandchildren, but the prince intervenes, leading to the ogress's demise. This addition introduces themes of maternal jealousy and cannibalism, adding complexity to the narrative. Perrault's tale emphasizes themes of fate, the power of benevolence, and the triumph of good over evil. The story reflects the societal norms and values of 17th-century France, particularly regarding the roles and expectations of women.

The Brothers Grimm included their version, "Dornröschen" ("Little Briar Rose"), in their 1812 collection *Kinder-und Hausmärchen*. Similar to Perrault's narrative, a king and queen are blessed with a daughter. At her christening, twelve wise women bestow gifts upon her, but a thirteenth, who was not invited, curses the princess to die upon pricking her finger on a spindle. One of the wise women softens the curse, ensuring that the princess will sleep for a hundred years instead of dying. After a century, a prince arrives, awakens her with a kiss, and they marry. This version introduces darker elements, such as the thorny hedge surrounding the castle and the deaths of princes who attempt to penetrate it. This rendition explores the themes of destiny, the passage of time, and the inevitability of fate.

The Brothers Grimm's *Little Briar Rose* is a more concise version of the *Sleeping Beauty* tale, focusing primarily on the curse and its eventual lifting. It underscores themes of fate and the inevitability of destiny. The tale reflects 19th-century German values, emphasizing obedience and the consequences of defying societal norms. The concise narrative focuses on the romantic ideal of a destined union, with less emphasis on the complexities found in Perrault's extended version.

Robert Stromberg's 2014 film *Maleficent* offers a compelling reimagining of the classic *Sleeping Beauty* tale by shifting the narrative focus to its traditional antagonist. This reinterpretation delves into Maleficent's backstory, transforming her from a one-dimensional villain into a multifaceted character shaped by betrayal, loss, and a quest for justice. In contrast to the 1959 animated version, where Maleficent embodies pure malevolence, the 2014 film presents her as a multifaceted character. The film begins by introducing Maleficent as a powerful fairy who protects the Moors, a magical realm threatened by human greed. Her trust is shattered when Stefan, a human she once loved, betrays her to ascend the throne, severing her wings in a symbolic act of violation. This traumatic event, described by Maleficent's actress Angelina Jolie as a metaphor for rape, catalyses Maleficent's transformation into a vengeful figure.

Maleficent's curse on Stefan's daughter, Aurora, is initially an act of retribution. However, as she observes Aurora's growth, Maleficent's feelings evolve from resentment to affection, culminating in a maternal bond that challenges traditional notions of villainy and heroism. This relationship subverts the "true love's kiss" trope, as it is Maleficent's remorseful kiss that awakens Aurora, emphasizing themes of redemption and the complexity of human emotions. Visually, *Maleficent* employs a rich, fantastical aesthetic that contrasts the natural, harmonious Moors with the rigid, oppressive human kingdom. This dichotomy reinforces the film's themes of otherness and the consequences of unchecked ambition. The use of CGI and elaborate set designs enhances the mythical atmosphere, immersing viewers in a world where magic and reality intertwine. However, critics have noted that while *Maleficent* attempts to present a nuanced portrayal of its titular character, it sometimes falls short in fully exploring the moral ambiguities it introduces. The

film's reliance on CGI and a predictable plot have been points of contention, suggesting that despite its progressive intentions, it may not fully escape the confines of traditional storytelling.

Stop to Consider:

Fairy tales have been a vital source of inspiration for filmmakers since the dawn of cinema. This rich legacy stretches from early trick films to modern high-budget blockbusters, reflecting evolving storytelling styles, technological innovations, and cultural shifts. From the earliest days of film, directors gravitated toward fairy tales because of their visual spectacle and familiar narratives. Georges Méliès, often called the "father of cinematic fantasy," was among the first to harness this appeal. His 1899 film *Cinderella* featured multiple tableaux, dissolves, and substitution splices — innovative techniques that captivated audiences and established film's magical potential. His 1906 film *The Witch* and 1903's *The Enchanted Well* similarly employed stagecraft-inspired spectacle to bring magical folklore to life. These early adaptations emphasized the visual wonder of fairy tales, laying the groundwork for cinema's enchantment with the genre.

The 1920s and 1930s sustained this trend, particularly in animation and avant-garde styles. Lotte Reiniger's silhouette animation in *The Adventures of Prince Achmed* (1926) — considered the oldest surviving feature animation — featured intricate cut-outs and colour tinting, showcasing film's capacity for artistic expression beyond dialogue. European directors like the Vasilyev brothers (1930) and others across Germany and Italy continued adapting stories like "Sleeping Beauty," often experimenting with puppet animation and shadow techniques. The release of Walt Disney's *Snow White and*

the Seven Dwarfs (1937) marked the beginning of a golden era. It was a critical and commercial success that ushered in a suite of animated features — *Pinocchio* (1940), *Cinderella* (1950), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) — that would define the fairy-tale genre for generations. These films maintained the moral clarity of the originals but softened darker elements, censoring violence and adding musical interludes to suit family audiences.

Parallel to the mainstream, European filmmakers embraced subversive and stylistically daring versions. Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête* (1946) exemplified this, using surreal effects — such as floating candelabras — to evoke poetic fantasy. These adaptations retained adult appeal and explored emotional or psychological depths often omitted from Disney films. From the 1980s onward, filmmakers began revisiting fairy tales through darker or more mature lenses. Neil Jordan's *The Company of Wolves* (1984) and *Snow White: A Tale of Terror* (1997) approached the material from horror and psychological angles. Meanwhile, *Ever After* (1998) grounded the Cinderella story in Renaissance-era realism, trading magic for human agency.

Disney's Renaissance — exemplified by *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), and *Tangled* (2010) — reasserted fairy tales as mainstream animated musicals enriched with updated humor, gender dynamics, and visual sophistication. Recently, live-action reimaginings (*Snow White and the Huntsman*, *Maleficent*, *Beauty and the Beast*) have merged spectacle with narrative revision, expanding perspectives (especially of female antagonists) and emphasizing character complexity.

5.3 COMPARATIVE NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

- **From Fate-Driven Plot to Character-Driven Arc**

Perrault's *La Belle au bois dormant* and the Brothers Grimm's *Little Briar Rose* both follow a classical, fate-driven structure. Their narratives revolve around a sequence of predestined events: birth, the curse, a century-long sleep, and awakening via a prince's kiss. These tales emphasize inevitability — forming a compact arc centred on destiny. Key scenes — the christening's interrupted blessing, the prick of the spindle, and a prince drawn by rumour to awaken a sleeping princess — reflect traditional fairy tale conventions. Perrault even extends the story to introduce maternal jealousy and violence post-marriage, reinforcing themes of fate and inherited malice.

By contrast, *Maleficent* (2014) shifts to a character-centric narrative. Maleficent's arc — beginning as a young fairy, turning to villainy after betrayal, then evolving into a protective figure — drives the story forward. The film's structure mirrors her internal journey rather than external inevitability. The curse on Aurora becomes an emotional response, not a random act of destiny. As Maleficent observes Aurora growing up, her motivations shift, causing her to intervene repeatedly. This transformation probes psychological depth over narrative inevitability.

This character focus invites the audience to empathize with Maleficent's choices. The film explores themes like trauma, revenge, and maternal love, contrasting sharply with the fairy tales' emphasis on prophecy and romantic destiny. In *Maleficent*, agency replaces fate — actions matter more than curses, and characters shape their destinies. The result is a narrative reoriented around character psychology rather than predetermined plot points.

- **Rewriting the Villain: Maleficent's Perspective**

In Perrault and Grimm, the fairy figure — an offended godmother — falls into archetypal villainy without explanation. She curses the princess out of spite, remains a static antagonist, and is defeated or sidelined by the end. The audience has no insight into her motivations beyond malice.

Maleficent, however, centres the narrative on her point of view, fundamentally altering the character's role. The film establishes an origin story: Maleficent is a protector of the Moors, betrayed and mutilated by Stefan, causing her transformation into a "villain" — a moment interpreted by many, including Angelina Jolie, as a metaphor for sexual violence (rape or symbolic clitoridectomy). The audience is made complicit in her emotional journey, understanding her actions as shaped by trauma and loss. This perspective shift engenders empathy. As Maleficent develops genuine maternal affection for Aurora, the audience witnesses her redemption arc. Her curse becomes a complex act propelled by grief and broken bonds. Her attempts to revoke it — albeit unsuccessfully — highlight her evolving morality. The narrative questions conventional definitions of villainy and heroism.

Critics argue this moral complexity may be superficial, pointing out the redemption is tidy and familiar. Nonetheless, *Maleficent* significantly transforms the archetype, inviting viewers to reconsider empathy, moral complexity, and narrative authority.

- **Cursing and Kissing Anew: Transforming Key Tropes**

The traditional *Sleeping Beauty* narrative uses the curse and "true love's kiss" as archetypes of fate and heterosexual romance. Fate is imposed without deeper motivation, and the prince's kiss is the agent of salvation.

In *Maleficent*, both tropes are reinterpreted. The curse originates from personal betrayal rather than random disdain. She curses Aurora not out of spite but in response to the trauma inflicted by Stefan. The curse—made so that Aurora will fall asleep rather than die — is an emotional statement that echoes "La Belle au bois dormant" and "Little Briar Rose," yet becomes deeply personal and intimate.

"True love's kiss," meanwhile, undergoes a radical transformation. Rather than a prince's kiss reviving Aurora, the trope is reframed as a maternal act. In a key scene, Philip's kiss fails to awaken Aurora. Instead, Maleficent's corrective, remorseful kiss succeeds. This subversion speaks volumes: love transcends romance; healing often stems from protective care, not fairy tale idealizations. Critics have observed this choice reframes gender expectations and the dynamics of salvation, making it less about fairy-tale romance and more about self-realization and emotional accountability.

This reworking reinforces *Maleficent*'s thematic aims: to dismantle inherited tropes and suggest that true love can manifest in diverse, unconventional forms — particularly maternal love, which proves more powerful than romantic closure. Here, the film intentionally elevates emotional agency over fate or normative romance, redefining classic fairytale elements through a contemporary lens.

5.4 CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AND REINTERPRETATION

Stromberg's *Maleficent* reimagines the legendary antagonist as a complex protagonist whose path from villainy to empathy is paved by trauma and betrayal. Initially, Maleficent is introduced as the benevolent protector of the Moors, with her majestic wings symbolizing freedom and power. Her life takes a devastating turn

when Stefan — her childhood love — betrays her, drugging her to strip her of her wings and presenting them to the king as proof of her death. This act of brutal treachery, depicted as a metaphor for sexual violence, transforms her fundamentally: her identity, security, and worldview are shattered. Post-betrayal, Maleficent assumes the role of a vengeful sorceress. The trauma fuels her, shifting her from protector to curse-giver as a means of asserting agency and control over her shattered life. Psychologically, she inhabits a state of moral and emotional turmoil — marked by depression, anger, and existential injury. This culminates in her placing a curse on baby Aurora, an act of calculated retribution draped in pain.

Yet Maleficent's arc does not end at vengeance. When she observes Aurora growing — innocent and untainted by Stefan's cruelty — she experiences a profound shift. The maternal bond that forms marks a metamorphosis: empathy overrides vengeance. Maleficent attempts to undo the curse, signifying her moral resurrection. Her poignant act of true love's kiss — her own, not a prince's — breaks the curse and affirms a transformation rooted in remorse and redemption. Ultimately, Maleficent emerges as a fully humanized figure — once powerful, then broken, and finally reconciled by love. Her journey reflects a reclamation of identity and autonomy, breaking free from narrative archetypes and challenging viewers to reconsider the myth of good versus evil.

In the classic *Sleeping Beauty* narratives by Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, Aurora is largely passive — a plot device whose role centres around fate and romance. Yet in *Maleficent*, Aurora evolves into a character of agency, depth, and interpersonal significance. Traditionally, Aurora sleeps for most of the tale, awaiting a prince's kiss to awaken her. She is often criticized for her

lack of dialogue and minimal screen presence. But *Maleficent* recasts her as a vibrant young girl whose personality and agency gradually emerge. Raised in the forest by incompetent pixies, she befriends creatures of the Moors, implying resilience and openness. Stromberg even revisits this contrast by describing Aurora as the "beacon of light" versus Maleficent's "darkness," emphasizing thematic agency. Despite her initial innocence, Aurora makes active choices: she steps into social and emotional challenges, and performs daily acts of kindness. As she grows, she displays emotional intelligence — affirmed when she recognizes Stefan's cruelty and saves Maleficent by restoring her wings. Her decision to free Maleficent, rather than maintain animosity, demonstrates moral courage and depth. Through Aurora, *Maleficent* reframes love not just as romance, but as conscious, redemptive action. Her final act of saving both realms signals empowerment rather than passivity. Thus, her portrayal marks a departure from earlier versions: she is no longer a passive sleeping figure, but a catalyst for reconciliation and unity — a moral and narrative anchor beyond her traditional role.

Originally a conventional prince-hero, Stefan is recast in *Maleficent* as a driven antagonist whose ambition sidelines earlier affections. His regicide and betrayal — replacing love with power — reduces him to cold ambition, lacking remorse even as he murders his friend and usurps her power. In later scenes, Stefan emerges as a tragic figure consumed by revenge — a human foil to Maleficent's moral rebirth. The good fairies of lore — Flora, Fauna, and Merry weather — become misfit caretakers Knotgrass, Thistletwit, and Flittle. Their comic ineptitude provides narrative levity but also reaffirms Maleficent's emerging maternal role. Where the original tales present idealized, distant magic-wielders, *Maleficent* humanizes

these figures, foregrounding fallibility and highlighting their bond with Aurora under Maleficent's protective gaze.

Supporting characters like Diaval undergo transformation too: once a raven, he becomes human guides Maleficent's redemption, signifying loyalty and internal morality. Though less prominent, his role underscores the theme of choice — beings align not by destiny, but by conscience.

Together, these reinterpreted characters reinforce *Maleficent*'s reworking of narrative relationships. Stefan personifies ambition unchecked by morality; the pixies represent flawed guardianship and familial imperfection; and loyalty from unexpected quarters underlines the film's emphasis on voluntary bonds.

Check Your Progress:

1. In what ways does *Maleficent* reconstruct traditional villain archetypes? (100 words)

2. In both *Sleeping Beauty* and *Maleficent*, how are the fairies depicted—and what does this say about evolving attitudes toward female agency and competence? (100+150 words)

3. What new dynamics emerge from presenting love as maternal rather than romantic? (100 words)

5.5 THEMATIC EXPLORATION

- **The Nuance in Motivations**:

Disney's *Maleficent* (2014) fundamentally dismantles the traditional dichotomy of good versus evil by granting its titular character depth

and emotional complexity. Rather than presenting Maleficent as a purely villainous figure — echoing the animated 1959 *Sleeping Beauty* — the film explores her as a multilayered character shaped by experience and trauma. Maleficent's narrative arc is compared to that of the Evil Queen, both being isolated figures driven by vengeance, underscoring shared dynamics of betrayal and magical retribution. By rooting her actions in betrayal and loss, the film invites empathy rather than condemnation. The story positions Maleficent not as a classic fairy-tale antagonist but as an antihero who challenges the moral simplifications of earlier adaptations.

This narrative reinterpretation reflects broader cultural shifts in storytelling. Critics highlight that *Maleficent* aligns with the "post-*Wicked* genre", where villains are given backstories that humanize them. For instance, Maleficent's initial portrayal as a protector of the Moors contrasts sharply with her later curse on Aurora, which becomes understandable — even if not fully excused — upon learning the context. Her evolving motivations reveal emotional truth rather than moral clarity. Visually, the film adds shades of gray using costume, lighting, and effects: Maleficent's wildlife-inspired attire and green magic represent connection to nature and inner turmoil. Critics note how her magic shifts in hue — from golden to green — symbolizing her emotional transformation from benevolence to embittered rage, and eventually to tenderness.

By integrating motivations rooted in betrayal and survival, the film cultivates ambiguity rather than moral absolutism. This approach challenges audiences to reconsider their assumptions about heroism and villainy and reflects modern storytelling's embrace of character complexity.

- **Personal Trauma**:

At the heart of *Maleficent* lies a pivotal betrayal that transforms its central character. Early in the film, Maleficent — formerly a protector of the Moors — places trust in Stefan, a human prince who becomes a close companion and romantic interest. This bond, however, is shattered when Stefan offers her a drink laced with a sleeping potion, then gleefully cuts off her wings to present them as proof of her "death" to the human king. Angelina Jolie and screenwriter Linda Woolverton have confirmed this metamorphosis — symbolized by wing removal — as a metaphorical depiction of rape or personal violation. Scholars, through the lens of ecofeminism, describe this betrayal as Stefan violating both Maleficent's body and her surrounding ecosystem. As a result, the harmony between magical beings and humans collapses, and Maleficent becomes a figure both terrifying and sympathetic, fueled by rage and a need for retribution.

This personal wound sets the narrative in motion: her curse on newborn Aurora is a direct result of Stefan's treachery. Rather than a random act of malice, the curse is portrayed as an emotional response to abandonment and violation. Attachment theory researchers have noted how this shift — from attachment to betrayal— governs Maleficent's emotional trajectory.

Critics argue that this reframing adds psychological richness. Stefan's ambition leads to an extreme act of violence, now seen as socially and morally indefensible. This deepens Maleficent's motivations: she is not evil by nature but wounded and seeking redress. Even secondary characters reflect this theme. Stefan's ambition-driven betrayal is shown through his climb to power — using Maleficent's wings as proof of his conquest — while Aurora becomes the unwitting proxy in his vendetta.

Through narrative and metaphor, the film explores how profound breaches of trust can warp beings—human or otherwise—into agents of destruction. Yet, in this exploration lies the possibility of redemption, highlighting betrayal's role not only in damage but in the necessity for healing.

- **Maternal Redemption**:

Maleficent redefines love's redemptive power by transitioning from romantic love to maternal love — a profound inversion of fairy-tale expectations. In the 1959 animated *Sleeping Beauty*, Prince Phillip's "true love's kiss" acts as the catalyst for Aurora's revival. In contrast, the 2014 film empowers Maleficent, whose final act of maternal affection — not romantic passion — breaks the curse. Following her betrayal-fueled curse, Maleficent secretly watches over Aurora and gradually forms a protective bond with her. Maleficent shifts from being "the eponymous villain" to a "compassionate mother figure". This relationship deepens the emotional resonance of the narrative, especially when Maleficent kisses Aurora awake. The film thus rejects traditional heteronormative cues, redefining love as a selfless, nurturing connection that does not depend on romantic intent.

Reviewers highlight how this shift criticizes outdated tropes of romantic dependency. *New Yorker* emphasizes the subversion involved: Aurora awakens only after "Maleficent gives up" on Phillip's kiss and instead receives Maleficent's affectionate gesture. This moment reframes matriarchal care as more authentic and powerful. Feminist scholars argue that this change empowers female agency by centring motherhood as an active, protective role. Unlike passive fairy-tale mothers, Maleficent is deeply involved — both emotionally and physically — in Aurora's protection and rescue.

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This expansion of maternal representation suggests modern feminism's embrace of diverse female identities.

Maleficent reclaiming her wings is symbolic of reclaiming both selfhood and maternal agency. Her healing and Aurora's welfare become the film's emotional core, laying a foundation for reconciliation between human and magical realms. Maternal love transcends romantic formulas to become an agent of redemption. Maleficent's transformation — from isolated guardian to devoted mother — underscores the film's central message: love's true magic lies in care, sacrifice, and resilience, not in fleeting romantic idealism.

5.6 FEMINIST AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

- **Female Empowerment and Patriarchal Resistance**

Maleficent reclaims the fairy-tale genre by presenting a powerful, independent female protagonist who defies traditional patriarchal norms. Maleficent begins as the guardian of the enchanted Moors— a community directly threatened by human encroachment. When King Stefan betrays her to seize power — drugging her and ripping off her wings — it emerges as an act of symbolic gendered violence. This scene has been interpreted as a metaphor for sexual assault, emphasizing how her autonomy is violated and stripped away.

By centering retaliation for this betrayal, the narrative redefines female agency. Maleficent's actions, often deemed villainous, stem from a justifiable response to trauma. As feminist critics note, the film shifts the locus of moral agency from male-driven romance to female survival and strength — Maleficent is not empowered by a prince, she reclaims power on her own terms. Interviewed

screenwriter Linda Woolverton emphasized that *Maleficent* would have been impossible a decade earlier, illustrating Disney's growing commitment to progressive female narratives.

Thus, the film challenges entrenched patriarchal fairy-tale conventions by making its female lead self-reliant, complex, and morally ambiguous. Instead of male approval, Maleficent seeks reconciliation with her broken self and world. Audiences watched as an empowered female figure reclaimed not only her wings, but also her narrative — and in doing so became a template for postmodern, feminist storytelling.

- **Wings as A Symbol of Trauma and Recovery**

The loss and restoration of Maleficent's wings exemplify a powerful visual metaphor for trauma, identity, and healing. Wings symbolize her independence, magical identity, and connection to nature. When Stefan physically removes them, he enacts both political conquest and intimate violation — her wings are forcibly taken while she's unconscious, mirroring sexual assault and bodily autonomy violations. Critics draw parallels between wing removal and rape culture, noting its brutality and violation of consent. This trauma propels Maleficent into isolation and vengefulness, reinforcing the narrative that trauma shapes her moral compass. Yet, her eventual recovery and reclamation of wings symbolize self-possession and reconnecting with her authentic identity.

Academic analysis highlights that the wings are more than magical appendages — they are central to Maleficent's selfhood. Their return is not only physical but deeply emotional — a metaphorical rebirth validating her emotional journey from betrayal to self-recovery and reconnecting with maternal purpose. Maleficent's wings thus function as visual shorthand for bodily and emotional

integrity. Disney uses them to convey the impact of violence on women and the possibility of healing through agency. The film highlights that true empowerment lies in reclaiming voice, sovereignty, and identity — all embodied through Maleficent's literal and symbolic flight.

- **Cultural Impact and Shaping Modern Fairy-Tale Narratives**

Maleficent marked a significant cultural shift in fairy-tale adaptations by transforming the villain into a sympathetic hero, reflecting evolving values around gender and storytelling. The film joins contemporary reimaginings like *Frozen* and *Brave*, which prioritize self-empowerment and family bonds over heterosexual romance. In *Maleficent*, a woman's personal evolution and maternal love replace romantic love as the story's emotional core — a radical move in Disney's fairytale universe.

Critically, the film received mixed responses. *Wired* praised its potential to challenge villain archetypes and uplift female power, but also cautioned that it occasionally slides into conventional redemption tropes, softening its radical edge. Meanwhile, feminist readings praised its reshaping of narrative agency and its reclaiming of villain origins, while critiques pointed out its reliance on traditional structures — a compromise between innovation and market expectations.

Financially, *Maleficent* was a blockbuster, grossing over 758 million dollars globally, making it one of Disney's most successful live-action remakes. Its success demonstrated the mainstream appetite for complex female-led fantasy reboots. The film has since influenced subsequent adaptations, such as *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil*, and signalled a broader cultural shift — fairy tales can centre

female pain, agency, and redemption rather than male rescue narratives. In this way, *Maleficent* reshapes the template for modern fairy-tale storytelling, highlighting the evolving cultural expectation for nuanced female narratives. It invites both creators and audiences to reconsider the stories we tell — and whom we believe deserves to be at the centre of them.

Stop to Consider:

Adaptation Frameworks: Definitions & Key Proponents:

Adaptation frameworks serve as analytical tools for understanding how narratives shift from one medium — such as literature, theatre, or folklore — to another, like film or television. These frameworks evaluate relationships between texts, the preservation or transformation of narrative elements, and the interplay between form and content. Two prominent lenses in adaptation studies are:

1. Fidelity vs. Intertextuality: Early adaptation critics emphasized fidelity — how closely a film adheres to its source. Critics like George Bluestone (*Novels into Film*, 1957) prioritized emotional tone over literal plotting, arguing that film can reinterpret rather than replicate literary sources. Yet, scholars such as Linda Hutcheon and Robert Stam have shifted focus away from fidelity toward intertextuality, where adaptations engage in dialogue with multiple texts, authors, traditions, and audiences. Here, an adaptation does not merely retell — it resonates within a network of meanings, layers, and cultural contexts.

2. Intermediality and Transmediality: Beyond mere textual fidelity, adaptation theories like intermediality explore how a work migrates across media forms, with the new medium contributing

unique affordances. Henry Jenkins's concept of "transmedia storytelling" takes this further, considering how narratives can "unfold across multiple media platforms" with each installment making its distinctive and valuable contribution to a cohesive world. While Jenkins originally differentiated between "adaptation" (same story, different medium) and "extension" (new but related content), later scholarship (e.g., Dena, Scolari) sees this as a continuum, asserting that even adaptations contribute to a broader narrative ecosystem via intertextual layers.

Other theorists such as Robert Stam and Kamilla Elliott advanced the "transtextual turn," advocating a more fluid notion of adaptation that privileges the interplay of texts over hierarchical faithfulness. Their work encourages us to see adaptations not as lesser copies but as creative acts that expand and reinterpret existing storyworlds.

Henry Jenkins: Intertextuality, Transmedia Storytelling, and Adaptation

Henry Jenkins, a pioneering media scholar at the University of Southern California, is best known for conceptual frameworks that explore how stories traverse across media layers. He first coined the term "transmedia storytelling" in *Convergence Culture* (2006), defining it as the systematic dispersal of narrative elements across multiple platforms — films, comics, games — where each medium contributes uniquely to a unified story world.

1. Intertextuality & Radical Intertextuality: Jenkins builds on Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextuality, extending it to "radical intertextuality" — where characters, themes, and plots cross over multiple texts and media. He cites examples like *Marvel Comics* and *The Matrix* franchise, where story arcs unfold not just in films but across games (*The Animatrix*), comics, and animated shorts. In this

context, adaptation becomes part of a vast web of cultural references rather than a stand-alone cultural product. Each retelling — whether a literal remake, prequel, or parallel narrative — adds layers of meaning, enriching audience engagement by supplying alternate viewpoints and thematic depth.

2. Adaptation vs. Extension: A Continuum: Initially, Jenkins differentiated between adaptations (transfers from one medium to another) and extensions (expansions of the storyworld). He later acknowledged the fluidity between these forms, embracing Christy Dena's view of a continuum where even traditional adaptations can offer additional comprehension—new insights, contextual backstory, or unexplored perspectives. Under this more nuanced framework, Maleficent — though borrowing its narrative from the original "Sleeping Beauty" story — counts as a meaningful expansion, because it reframes the legend with new psychological and cultural dimensions. This shift is emblematic of Jenkins's assertion that every form of adaptation is inherently transformative.

3. Collective Intelligence & Participatory Culture: Jenkins's broader theories about convergence culture and participatory fandom also apply to adaptation. He articulates how audiences actively construct understanding across media, employing collective intelligence to parse fragmented narratives into coherent meanings. This collaborative interpretation enriches the cultural significance of stories like *Maleficent*, as viewers engage with source texts, variants, and critical discourse.

4. Jenkins's Legacy in Adaptation Studies: Henry Jenkins's influence extends beyond theory into real-world applications in media production, education, and marketing. His principle — "Each medium should play to its strengths" — guides adaptations to

capitalize on the unique expressive capabilities of each format—whether film, book, game, or theme park. In academic terms, Jenkins's frameworks encourage adaptation scholars to move beyond simplistic comparisons and evaluate adaptations as part of expansive, interactive story worlds. His ideas place adaptation at the convergence of textual analysis, media studies, and fan studies, shaping a field that today sees narratives as open systems — ever-evolving, deeply interwoven, and culturally resonant. Henry Jenkins's theories — spanning convergence culture, radical intertextuality, and the adaptation–extension continuum — offer powerful tools for analyzing how adaptations work and why some succeed. In bridging stringent literary theory with insights into fan communities and transmedia ecosystems, Jenkins has shaped adaptation studies into a dynamic and forward-looking discipline.

7. ADAPTATION THEORY APPLICATION

1. Adaptation Theory: Dialogue with Source Texts and Previous Versions

Maleficent engages in a sophisticated dialogue with Charles Perrault's "La Belle au bois dormant," the Brothers Grimm's "Little Briar Rose," and Disney's 1959 animated *Sleeping Beauty*. Drawing on adaptation frameworks — especially intertextuality and transfictionality as shaped by Henry Jenkins — the narrative does more than retell; it reframes. According to Edgar, Marland and Rawle, *Maleficent* functions as a transmedia re-narration, repurposing core elements in a live-action context that emphasizes emotional complexity over static archetypes. Rather than depicting Maleficent as merely the "Mistress of Evil," the film repositions her as a tragic heroine shaped by betrayal. This humanizing trend aligns

with contemporary storytelling, which often recasts traditional villains in sympathetic roles — a hallmark of the "post-*Wicked*" genre. Where Disney's 1959 version relied on romantic reawakening, *Maleficent* explores psychological motivations, reclamation of agency, and moral ambiguity bereft of strict fairy tale binaries.

This adaptation also represents Jenkins's notion that each medium should exploit its unique strengths: animation's colour and abstraction is replaced by live-action's embodiment of emotion and texture. Robert Stromberg's film uses live performance to deepen character engagement, foregrounding Maleficent's emotional journey rather than relying exclusively on enchantment or external plot mechanics. Through selective retention (e.g., the curse, Aurora's sleep) and reimagination (e.g., maternal bond, wing symbolism), *Maleficent* demonstrates how adaptive fidelity need not be literal. Instead, the film is an exercise in reinterpretation — an adaptation that reclaims narrative authority by granting voice and depth to a once-marginalized figure.

2.   Cinematic Techniques: Visual Effects, Score, and Performance

Stromberg's *Maleficent* capitalizes on cinematic tools to enrich narrative and thematic exploration. Through calculated visual and auditory choices, the film recontextualizes familiar elements into a more textured and emotionally resonant story.

Visual Effects &Mise-en-Scène:

Balancing practical elements (e.g., Rick Baker's prosthetics for Maleficent's horns and cheekbones) with digital production-quality effects (CG pixies, CGI wings) developed by Disney Research

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Zürich, the film keeps its tone magical yet grounded. The deliberate restraint in surreal visual design supports authenticity, while colour symbolism — green for rage, gold for love — reinforces Maleficent's emotional states. Spatially, the Moors and the castle are deeply contrasted: lush, organic environments vs. controlled, human architecture, reflecting ideological division.

Score & Sound Design:

James Newton Howard's orchestral score departs from legacy Disney themes, instead creating fresh motifs interwoven with live-action drama. Music punctuates mood: heavy percussion for power sequences, light woodwinds for sorrowful or tender moments. Soundscapes echo these tonal shifts, amplifying narrative tension and emotional payoff.

Performance & Cinematography:

Angelina Jolie's physical embodiment of Maleficent — accentuated by minimal blinking and powerful posture in key scenes — articulates emotional resilience and controlled intensity. Strategic shot composition supports this: close-ups of the Prince's kiss vs. wider shots for Maleficent's revelatory kiss create subtle narrative cues, encouraging active viewer engagement. Editing techniques like cross-cutting and slow dissolves maintain narrative flow and emotional pacing.

Together, these cinematic tools — visual design, music, physicality, and shot craft — work in harmony to translate adaptation theory into embodied storytelling. This gives *Maleficent* both its emotional impact and narrative depth, turning a familiar tale into a richly modern reinterpretation.

SAQ:

1. What does the film's emphasis on Maleficent's betrayal by Stefan — symbolized through the loss of her wings — reveal about themes of violation, trauma, and revenge? (200 words)

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2. How does framing the story from Maleficent's perspective versus the prince's in the original fairy tale alter audience empathy, moral alignment, and narrative sympathy? (200 words)

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3. To what extent does *Maleficent* subvert the "true love's kiss" trope by attributing Aurora's awakening to maternal affection rather than romantic love? (100 words)

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5.8 SUMMING UP

In this unit, we have discussed Robert Stromberg's *Maleficent*, a cinematic adaptation of "Sleeping Beauty," versions of which were written by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm. In the supplementary unit for this chapter, we will discuss questions on this chapter, and analyse different cinematic adaptations of fairy tales. For further reading, refer to the section below.

5.9 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READING

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UNIT- 6

FROM CHARLES PERRAULT'S AND BROTHERS GRIMM'S FAIRY TALE *SLEEPING BEAUTY* TO ROBERT STROMBERG'S MOVIE *MALEFICENT* (SUPPLEMENTARY UNIT)

Unit Structure:

6.1 **Objectives**

6.2 **Brief Introduction**

6.3 **Adaptations of "Sleeping Beauty"**

6.4 **Adaptations of Fairy Tales**

6.5 **Questions and Answers on "Sleeping Beauty" and** *Maleficent*

6.6 **Summing Up**

6.7 **References and Suggested Reading**

6.1 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we will:

- *discuss* questions and answers on Robert Stromberg's adaptation of "Sleeping Beauty," *Maleficent*;
- *analyse* adaptations of "Sleeping Beauty" into cinema and the stage;
- *understand* adaptations of diverse fairy tales into audio-visual media.

6.2 BRIEF INTRODUCTION

The fairy tale "Sleeping Beauty" has been adapted several times over the years. In the previous unit, we discussed the cinematic adaptation of this tale by Robert Stromberg into *Maleficent*. In this unit, we will discuss other fairy tales adapted into films; as well as some questions on the cinematic adaptation of "Sleeping Beauty," *Maleficent*.

6.3 CASE STUDIES: ADAPTATIONS OF "SLEEPING BEAUTY"

1. ***SLEEPING BEAUTY*** (1959; Disney Animated)

Disney's classic takes its inspiration from Perrault and Tchaikovsky's ballet, marking a major visual departure from earlier Disney works. Drawing on medieval tapestry aesthetics, Eyvind Earle's flat, angular backgrounds contribute to a highly stylized, almost storybook look, complemented by widescreen Super Technirama visuals and lush colour design. The score adapts Tchaikovsky's ballet, lending both grandeur and emotional resonance. This version retains the core fairy-tale beats: christening, curse, 100-year sleep, Prince Philip's heroism, and Maleficent's dragon form. However, Aurora remains largely passive, a classic "sleeping beauty" awaiting rescue. Critics praised its artistry and score, although some felt the narrative lacked depth.

Audio-Visual Strengths

- **Animation**: Precise, painterly composition capturing medieval artistry.
- **Music**: Iconic orchestration fusing fairy-tale charm with ballet grandeur.

- **Voice and Sound**: Narrator framing, elegant simplicity, and magical pacing.

2. *MALEFICENT* (2014 Live‑Action)

This reimagining shifts focus from Aurora to Maleficent, played by Angelina Jolie. It explores themes of betrayal, maternal love, and redemption, and critiques the traditional "true love's kiss" trope by having Maleficent save Aurora.

Audio-Visual Design

- **Visuals:** Gothic, richly textured landscapes, mood lighting to reflect emotional arcs.
- **CGI & Performance:** CGI forest creatures, Jolie's nuanced non-verbal acting backed by subtle score.

Maleficent becomes a sympathetic antagonist rather than a villainous one. The movie also discusses trauma, power, and agency; rejects patriarchal "male saviour" in favour of maternal love. The film was a box-office success, but received mixed critical reception—Jolie's performance was praised, while the script and the CGI was critiqued.

3. *MALEFICENT: MISTRESS OF EVIL* (2019 Sequel)

This sequel expands the universe: Aurora is more active, the fairy-human tensions deepen, and Maleficent steps into diplomacy and mercy. Visually, it ups the spectacle with larger set pieces and fantastical elements. Critics and fans have mixed reactions—some feel it dilutes Maleficent's mythic power.

4. *SLEEPING BEAUTY* (2011, Julia Leigh)

An arthouse, psychologically dark reinterpretation focused on eroticism, identity, and vulnerability. Minimalist, symbolic visuals and lingering pacing emphasize psychological states over narrative fidelity. This adaptation rejects romanticism, using ambiguity and tension to unsettle audiences.

5. MATTHEW BOURNE'S *SLEEPING BEAUTY* (2012 Ballet)

As a modern, dance-based retelling, Bourne draws on Perrault, Grimm, and Disney, setting it in a turn-of-the-century timeframe. This is a symbolic, movement-heavy interpretation, evoking Aurora's transformation through choreography rather than dialogue.

Comparison:

Adaptation	Format	Visual Style	Focus and Themes	Aurora's Role	Maleficent/ Villain	Music/ Sound
Sleeping Beauty (1959)	Animated feature.	Stylized medieval paintings; widescreen.	Classic fairy tale, romance, good versus evil.	Passive heroine.	One-dimensional.	Tchaikovsky-based score.
Maleficent (2014)	Live-action film.	Gothic fantasy with CGI and mood lighting.	Trauma, betrayal, maternal love.	Secondary but improved.	Anti-hero, nuanced.	Dark orchestral, minimal.
Maleficent: Mistress of Evil (2019)	Live-action sequel.	Epic fantasy visuals.	Peace, power dynamics, legacy.	More active, diplomatic.	Complex but softer.	Epic cinematic score.
Sleeping Beauty (2011)	Arthouse film.	Minimal, symbolic, psychological imagery.	Eroticism, identity, psychological tension.	Central.	Abstract, symbolic.	Ambient, symbolic sound.
Bourne's *Sleeping Beauty* (2012)	Ballet performance.	Period choreography, symbolic settings.	Rite of passage, transformation.	Expressive dancer.	Symbolic / allegorical.	Dance and classical mix.

From Disney's pristine, technically ambitious 1959 animation, through the subversive and emotional reimagination of *Maleficent*, to the avant-garde psychological take of Leigh's indie film, and Bourne's physical, dance-based retelling— the "Sleeping Beauty" tale proves endlessly malleable. Each version foregrounds different relationships (romantic, maternal, psychological), visual aesthetics (medieval art, gothic fantasy, minimalism, choreography), and cultural concerns—ranging from idealized romance to trauma and identity. Together, they illustrate how a timeless fairy tale can be continuously reframed to reflect evolving artistic sensibilities and societal values.

6.4 CASE STUDIES: ADAPTATIONS OF FAIRY TALES INTO FILMS

1. *Beauty and the Beast* (2017, dir. Bill Condon)

Originating from the 18th‑century French tale by Jeanne‑Marie Leprince de Beaumont (with earlier variants by Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve), "Beauty and the Beast" is a story about inner virtue overcoming outer appearance. Belle trades her freedom to save her father and learns to love the Beast, ultimately redeeming him through compassion.

Bill Condon's 2017 live-action retelling leans heavily on visual spectacle and emotional texture. Belle is a more assertive intellectual; she is an inventor and avid reader, while the Beast's backstory is expanded: his mother's curse, his journey into isolation, his fear of hope. Supporting characters like Lumière, Cogsworth, Mrs. Potts are fully realized via voice performances and CGI integration. The film introduces Belle's mother as a minor crusader for women's rights, reinforcing Belle's feminist arc.

Cinematographer Tobias A. Schliessler crafted a dynamic colour palette: warm, golden interiors contrasting Beast's shadowy castle and cold exterior. CGI is central: enchanted objects like Lumière and Mrs. Potts are injected with personality through animation and Ewan McGregor's performance. The Beast is a sophisticated CG-human hybrid, expressive in motion capture. Costume design by Jacqueline Durran emphasizes symbolism: Belle's modernized blue dress, the iconic golden ball gown with deep texture, and Beast's ornate coat. Alan Menken's original compositions are given weight through immersive orchestration, and the iconic ballroom sequence becomes a visual centerpiece.

The core redemption narrative, "love sees beyond external form," remains intact. However, the Beast's inner struggle and Belle's independence are heightened significantly. Where the 18th-century source featured a moral and Christian moralizing tone, the film reframes it as a feminist-tinged romance. The thematic weight of intellectual curiosity, self-acceptance, and emotional restoration builds a more emotionally rounded film than the archetypal morality play.

2. *Jack and the Beanstalk* (2009, dir. Gary J. Tunnicliffe)

A Brothers Grimm or English folklore story featuring a poor boy, magic beans, a giant, and a golden harp, "Jack and the Beanstalk" explores themes of chance, transgression, and reward. The 2009 family-friendly version casts Colin Ford as Jack, who attends a "fairy-tale school" and seeks redemption for past missteps. The narrative introduces modern additions: a beanstalk-school premise, comedic sidekicks like a goose partially transformed into a man (voiced by Gilbert Gottfried), and a kidnapped child-turned-harp.

The cinematography embraces vibrant green and gold hues to present the beanstalk realm and giant's castle. Matte sets and digital backdrops extend sense of scale. Practical costumes and CG effects are balanced to depict flora, fauna, and the giant. Sound design includes whimsical musical scoring (composer Randy Miller), comedic voice work, and richly layered ambient sound: leaf rustling, echoing castle halls. Editing incorporates humour via quick cuts and montage-heavy pacing.

The plot retains the magical bean-to-beanstalk incident and the encounter with the giant, but significantly alters motivation: Jack seeks heroism, not just survival. Narrative embellishments, such as ensemble casts and schoolyard framing, replace the story's cautionary moral. The film turns an episodic folk tale into a character-driven, redemptive arc aligned with modern family films.

3. *Little Red Riding Hood* (2011, dir. Catherine Hardwicke)

The Charles Perrault and Grimm iterations caution about naiveté, transformation, and predator-prey metaphors. The tale often ends with death or rescue; moral warnings abound. Hardwicke's version reimagines the story as a mystery-horror romance: teenage Valerie (Amanda Seyfried) lives in a village terrorized by a werewolf. Unlike the usual predator, Valerie is torn between suitors and struggling to identify the wolf among them. The wolf is real, not allegorical, and the village imbues religious superstition with lyrical narrative weight. DP Mandy Walker uses fog, moonlight, and muted color to evoke gothic horror. Long lens shots and breathy close-ups craft an eerie intimacy. CG is employed for werewolf transformations that favour shadowy, practical build-ups. Costumes echo 19th-century Europe. Alex Heffes and Brian Reitzell's score uses slow strings and thudding beats to build suspense. Sound

design emphasizes wolf sounds (growls, howls), creaking woods, scuffed footsteps, and close-breathing atmosphere. The film's editing fosters tension with pacing that highlights suspense over action.

Where the fairy tale is a cautionary allegory, the film becomes a full-fledged werewolf mystery with romantic intrigue. It shifts "don't talk to strangers" into "trust sparks danger." Red Riding Hood picks horror stylistics and subverts innocence into agency: Valerie makes decisive choices. The wolf becomes both threat and romantic metaphor.

4. *Cinderella* (2015, dir. Kenneth Branagh)

Drawing from Charles Perrault and Grimm, "Cinderella" centers on virtue rewarded: kindness, resilience, magic, and royal recognition. Branagh's version expands the 1950 Disney template, retaining the classic storyline: Ella's mistreatment, Fairy Godmother, the ball, the slipper, but deepens character psychology. Cate Blanchett's Lady Tremaine has motivations rooted in loss; Ella (Lily James) expresses her dreams orally and emotionally, not silently.

DP Haris Zambarloukos frames lush, warm pastoral sequences for Ella's life with her father; the stepmother's scenes are cooler and greyer. CGI is used for the Fairy Godmother and magical dress transformations. Costume designer Sandy Powell created eight transformations of Ella's dress with changing colour shifts celebrated in cinematography. Patrick Doyle's score is sweeping and thematic. Editing allows emotional beats to breathe: songs are diegetically placed, the refrains echo emotional tone (Ella's song to her mother).

Branagh maintains moral lessons, i.e., kindness conquers hardship, but adds emotional realism. Ella is articulate, actively engaging with her world rather than passively bearing. The moral is softened: forgiveness is emphasized more than triumph. The film balances classic enchantment with psychological nuance.

5. *The Little Mermaid* (1989, Disney Animated)

Hans Christian Andersen's 1837 tale is a tragic morality fable: the mermaid trades voice and life, succumbing to death rather than winning love, a morally and spiritually rich, yet cruel, story with poignant self-sacrifice.

Disney's 1989 animation transforms tragedy into triumph: Ariel (Jodi Benson) makes a deal with Ursula, loses voice, hopes for love, but with support, rescues Prince Eric, defeats Ursula, and attains humanity. The ending is happy and self-determined. The film is vibrant: colourful underwater sequences contrast with Ursula's darker castle. Backgrounds are fluid and organic; character animation is expressive. Alan Menken and Howard Ashman deliver Broadway-style musical numbers, peppy choruses, and emotional songs that drive story. Sound design enhances water movement, bubble effects, and magical motifs. The film also initiated Disney's "Renaissance."

Andersen's mermaid in the story drowns, regrets, then becomes sea foam; Disney gives Ariel agency, love, and resolution. The moral shifts from selflessness and suffering to achieving dreams through self-determination. The film prioritizes entertainment and optimism but sacrifices the source's spiritual and moral complexity.

6. *Hansel and Gretel: An Opera Fantasy* (1954 stop-motion)

Grimm's tale about sibling abandonment, cannibalism, and escape explores poverty, survival, and cunning. This 1954 stop-motion film converts Engelbert Humperdinck's opera into visually stunning animation. Hansel and Gretel are children journeying into a forest, encountering a candy-laced house, and defeating a witch — all set to operatic vocals. Stop-motion animation employs puppets with expressive features. Forest sets are stylized and organic. The witch design is Gothic and exaggerated. Sound includes a full operatic score, powerful soprano, tenor and chorus, creating emotional texture. Editing is paced to compliment music, with movements tied to musical phrasing.

The adaptation remains faithful: tapping into the grim and macabre, but softens violence through music and aesthetic beauty. The moral of cleverness and kinship stands. The opera-musical form adds depth, transforming narrative simplicity into lyrical journey.

Comparative Overview:

Film	Format	Tone and Narrative	Visual Style	Character Agency	Thematic Emphasis
Beauty and the Beast (2017)	Live-action musical.	Feminist Belle, expansion of romance.	Rich CGI + golden interiors.	Belle active, Beast refined.	Redemption, equality.
Jack and the Beanstalk (2009)	Family adventure.	Hero's journey, modern setting.	CG + vibrant fantasy.	Jack as a hero in a learning curve.	Courage, redemption.
Little Red Riding Hood (2011)	Romantic horror.	Mystery twist and romance.	Gothic, moody.	Valerie is a decisive survivor.	Trust, identity.

Cinderella (2015)	Live-action musical.	Emotionally deep, nuanced characters.	Elegant period costumes.	Ella articulate and strong.	Forgiveness, empathy.
The Little Mermaid(1989)	Animated musical.	Happy ending, fulfillment of dreams.	Lush animation, underwater design.	Ariel is a proactive rebel.	Self-discovery, love.
Hansel and Gretel Opera (1954)	Stop-motion opera.	Grim fairy fantasy.	Gothic sets, puppetry.	Siblings become cunning survivors.	Family bond, survival.

Stop to Consider:

The adaptation of fairy tales into cinema has often relied on various forms of animation to bring magical narratives to life. From early hand-drawn classics to modern digital reimaginings, animation has evolved into a sophisticated art form that both preserves and transforms fairy tale traditions. Several distinct types of animation have played a pivotal role in this process.

1. **Traditional Hand-Drawn Animation:**
   This form, also known as cel animation, dominated the 20th century. Studios like Disney popularized it through films such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). Artists painstakingly illustrated each frame by hand, layering characters and backgrounds on transparent cels. This method offered a warm, painterly aesthetic, ideal for the dreamlike quality of fairy tales. Traditional animation allowed for stylistic flourishes rooted in storybook illustration, aligning well with the origins of these tales.

2. **Stop-Motion Animation:**

This technique involves photographing physical models frame by frame to simulate movement. Fairy tale adaptations such as *Corpse Bride* (2005) or *Coraline* (2009), though not direct retellings of classic tales, borrow heavily from fairy tale motifs and use stop-motion to evoke a tactile, uncanny atmosphere. The handcrafted quality of stop-motion suits darker, gothic interpretations, often embracing the eerie undertones of folk narratives.

3. **Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI):**

CGI revolutionized fairy tale animation, allowing for hyper-realistic visuals and complex fantastical environments. Films like *Shrek* (2001) and *Frozen* (2013) use CGI not only for spectacle but also to deconstruct or modernize traditional narratives. CGI supports fluid motion, detailed textures, and dynamic lighting, enabling a new level of immersion. This approach often integrates contemporary humor and character psychology, moving away from the moralistic tone of older versions.

4. **2.5D and Hybrid Animation:**

Recent adaptations often blend 2D and 3D elements for stylistic innovation. Examples include *Tangled* (2010), which merges painterly textures with 3D modeling, and *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya* (2013), which revives Japanese brush painting aesthetics in a digitally assisted form. Hybrid methods offer a bridge between tradition and technology, capturing the charm of illustrated fairy tales while harnessing digital flexibility.

6.5 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON "SLEEPING BEAUTY" AND *MALEFICENT*

1. How does the film subvert the traditional villain archetype?

Maleficent re-centres the story on the titular villain, turning her into a sympathetic anti-hero. By giving her a detailed backstory — childhood friendship with Stefan, betrayal, loss of wings — the film humanizes her motives. Rather than a one-dimensional fairy-godmother, she embodies both protector and aggressor, driven by trauma and devotion. This inversion aligns with contemporary narratives that blur moral lines, challenging viewers' expectations about who deserves empathy.

2. What symbolism is embedded in the wing-cutting scene?

The removal of Maleficent's wings (a potent metaphor for rape and disempowerment) serves as a catalyst for her descent into fury. Creatively drugged and mutilated while incapacitated, the scene echoes the writer's intent to evoke sexual violence. Stromberg also links masculinity and brutality through iron motifs like chains and nets, representing patriarchal violence against her autonomy.

3. How is the theme of motherhood redefined in the film?

Although Aurora is Stefan's daughter, she forms a maternal bond with Maleficent. This replaces the romantic "true love" trope with maternal love, culminating in Aurora's awakening by Maleficent, not Philip, signifying an emotional return rather than patriarchal rescue. The nurturing dynamic deepens Aurora's and Maleficent's emotional arcs and enhances feminist resonance.

4. What role does nature imagery play in Maleficent's character arc?

Nature, including forests, animals, thorns, symbolizes Maleficent's power and identity. Stromberg studied Hudson River School paintings to depict lush realism and magical elements, reinforcing a natural bond between character and environment. As understanding and love grow, the Moors' color and vibrancy mirror Maleficent's emotional restoration.

5. In what ways does the film reframe agency and power within patriarchal structures?

Stromberg's *Maleficent* reframes Sleeping Beauty through a feminist lens by critiquing male-centric power dynamics and promoting female agency. It begins by portraying Maleficent as Moors' protector and sovereign, a potent figure until male aggression intrudes. Stefan's betrayal, expressed through the wing-cutting scene, is not just personal; it symbolizes patriarchal violence. Multiple scenes associate iron (a traditionally "masculine" material) with his brutality — chains, swords, thorns — all reinforcing masculine oppression.

Aurora is initially passive, but steps into agency as she grows. Protected not by conventional paternal figures but by Maleficent's maternal presence, she learns autonomy and compassion from female role models. In a reversal of typical fairy-tale endings, Aurora ultimately crowns Maleficent Queen and reclaims her power, symbolizing female leadership over patriarchal rule. Stromberg crafts visual and thematic symmetry: male ambition (Stefan) contrasts with Maleficent's empowerment forged from pain. He describes their split as "two characters going down separate paths" of obsession and betrayal versus loyalty and love. Importantly, the film doesn't merely invert roles; it questions the

narrative tradition mandating male-led salvation. Even Stefan's demise is framed as consequence, not righteous intervention. The kingdoms unite under queens, not kings.

What emerges is a deconstruction of archetypes: Maleficent is not tamed by love but shaped into a leader through pain and resilience. Aurora's awakening is an act of empathetic defiance; she chooses female love over forced heterosexual conventions.

6. Analyze the use of visual style in expressing emotional narrative.

Stromberg leverages visual contrast — light vs. dark, warm vs. cold— to parallel emotional changes. As Stromberg researched landscape content in Hudson River School art, the Moors are painted in vivid, dreamlike hues — emeralds, purples, golds— signifying Maleficent's peace and authenticity. The human realm is muted: grays, browns, sepia, reflecting ambition, bereft of empathy.

Cinematographer Dean Semler uses lighting to articulate psychological states: cold fog during betrayal, warm luminescence as Aurora's trust grows. When Maleficent kisses Aurora awake, the light blooms, reflecting emotional healing. The wing motif is central: Maleficent's dark wings reflect her broken heart; they are absent until she rebuilds identity. At the film's climax, she ascends with wings restored, symbolizing transcendence. The dragon-like wings and horns visually evoke both angelic and demonic duality, a creature outside binary definitions.

Design-wise, the thorns, castles of iron, and forests each manifest emotional tone. The contrast of organic curves in Moors with straight, metallic lines in the castle emphasizes nature vs. industry, emotion vs. control. It is not only fantasy, it is allegorical emotion in scene composition.

7. How does *Maleficent* navigate trauma, revenge, and redemption arcs?

The core tension in *Maleficent* is rooted in trauma: Stefan's betrayal is physical and emotional, and cuts deeply into identity. The film doesn't shy from rendering it severe: graphic, brutal, emotionally scarring; which is an intentional deviation from sanitized Disney violence. Maleficent's revenge is not arbitrary but structured: she curses Aurora's fate, aimed at Stefan's lineage. As critics note, this is "rape-revenge" fantasy tone, triggering trauma without glorification. Yet, this choice problematizes her: Aurora suffers for Stefan's actions, raising questions about victimization and collective punishment. Redemption arrives gradually through maternal connection. Maleficent distances herself emotionally until witnessing Aurora's innocence. Critics note that her "steady, daily love" becomes arguably more powerful than romantic kisses. The narrative resistance to "true love's kiss" reinforces agency and healing through self-realization rather than romantic norms.

Ultimately, Maleficent overturns the curse herself, symbolizing redemption achieved through action and empathy — not through romantic male intervention. Stefan's death is consequence, not heroic act — a moral reckoning. The final act is about reconciliation of self, restoration of power, and unity under female rule — redemption through transformation, not erasure of trauma.

8. Evaluate controversies surrounding the film's feminist intentions and feminist criticism.

While *Maleficent* is often praised for centring female empowerment and recontextualizing masculinity as oppressive, it has faced critiques. Some argue it "neuters" the original villain, turning her into another sanitized heroine, diluting her mystique. Critics on

Reddit say that transforming Maleficent into a tragic anti-hero diminishes what made her iconic: her unapologetic evil.

Academically, feminist readings commend her transformation into active protagonist, not passive archetype. She reclaims her wings and power, restores matriarchal leadership, and in Aurora's crowning, subverts the patriarchal lineage. Stefan's betrayal is read as patriarchal oppression, and Maleficent's agency is a direct resistance.

Nonetheless, some argue Aurora remains underdeveloped; Maleficent uses her as a vehicle for redemption, reducing Aurora to a narrative instrument. Additionally, the violence inflicted upon Maleficent, while symbolic, may problematically mirror sexual violence for entertainment. Some critics question the film's ability to balance trauma without sensationalizing it.

6.6 SUMMING UP

In this supplementary unit, we have discussed Robert Stromberg's *Maleficent*, the cinematic adaptation of "Sleeping Beauty." For further reading, refer to the next section.

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UNIT- 7

FROM LAKSHMINATH BEZBAROAH'S TALES TO BHASKAR HAZARIKA'S *KATHANODI* INTRODUCTORY UNIT

Unit Structure:

7.1 Objectives:

After going through thisunit, the learner will be able to

- *identify* the original stories adapted in *'Kathanodi';*
- *develop* an understanding of the plot of these folk-tales;
- *perceive* the reworkig of these stories in the film Kathanodi;
- *learn* the issues of adaptation involved in the film.

7.2 Introduction:

Lakshminath Bezbarua's *Burhi Air Sadhu* was the first anthology of Assamese folk tales, published in 1912. Bhaskar Hazarika's debut

film *Kathanodi* was released in 2015. A gap of over a century exists between the original texts of Bezbarua and the adapted work of Hazarika, suggesting a massive shift in contexts—cultural, political, artistic, and economic. The study of adaptation is never limited to mere shifts in plot or reworking of character, or be in dogged questions of whether the film remains true to the original. It is better to mention that the tales related in *Burhi Air Sadhu* are not Bezbarua's own creations. In the preface to the anthology, he acknowledges his indebtedness to persons from whom he collected the stories. It is important that, Bezbarua re-wrote them according to his own artistic taste and moral framework, but these tales are basically stories widely circulated in Assamese society in oral forms.

Hence, beyond the question of fidelity, *Kathanodi* presents for us a variety of problems that require deep consideration and critical thought: the problem of choice of stories, the problem of orchestrating them within a single cinematic narrative, the question of possible shift in genre, the problem of reworking the elements in terms of exclusion, inclusion, extension/expansion, foregrounding, and marginalisation, and so on. We have already dwelt on some of these issues in the unit on adaptation.

This unit does not plunge you into these core issues of adaptation outright; rather, it would prepare you here for a more detailed analysis of the film within the framework of adaptation that is presented in the next unit. It means that you will acquaint yourselves with the specific stories of Bezbarua and the narrative of *Kathanodi* in general in this unit.

7.3 Lakshminath Bezbarua and *Burhi Air Sadhu*

Lakshminath Bezbarua (1864–1938), often hailed as the Father of Assamese short stories, was a towering figure of the Jonaki Era—a period that marked the romantic awakening of Assamese literature. A poet, playwright, essayist, and novelist, Bezbarua revitalized the Assamese literary landscape with his rich and varied contributions. His sharp satires, thoughtful essays, compelling fiction, and lyrical poetry captured the social realities of his time while inspiring cultural renewal. Works such as *Kodom Koli*, *Podum Kunwori*, *Surobhi*, and *Litikai* reflect his literary prowess and deep engagement with Assamese society.

Among his many achievements, Bezbarua's contributions to children's literature and folk tales stand out as enduring efforts to preserve and popularize Assamese oral traditions. Collections like *Burhi Aair Xadhu*, *Junuka*, and *Kokadeuta Aaru Nati Lora* not only entertained young readers but also played a key role in sustaining the region's rich folkloric heritage.

Burhi Aair Xadhu (translated as *Grandmother's Tales*) is a landmark collection of Assamese folk tales compiled and retold by Lakshminath Bezbarua. First published in 1912, the book has become a beloved classic in Assamese literature and remains an integral part of childhood reading in Assam to this day. The collection consists of traditional oral tales that had been passed down through generations, often narrated by elders in the household. Bezbarua, with his keen literary sensibility, preserved these stories by giving them written form without losing their simplicity, humour, and moral underpinnings. The tales feature talking animals, clever tricksters, magical elements, and everyday wisdom, reflecting the worldview and cultural ethos of Assamese rural life.

By compiling *Burhi Aair Xadhu*, Bezbarua not only entertained young readers but also played a crucial role in safeguarding Assam's oral heritage. His engaging storytelling style and deep affection for folk culture helped elevate these tales to literary status. The collection continues to be celebrated for its charm, narrative brilliance, and cultural significance, making it a cornerstone of Assamese children's literature. Comprising thirty tales, *Burhi Aair Xadhu* demonstrates qualities such as spontaneity, lucidity, a ballad-like aura, and the author's empathetic oneness with the folk spirit. The stories show remarkable use of syntax, descriptive art, fresh imagery, and an internal harmony between thought and language. Furthermore, the tales are interspersed with lyrical songs replete with internal rhythm and repetition. These songs heighten the mood of the moment and dramatize emotions such as pity, remorse, apprehension, anguish, and aspiration. In Bezbarua's narratives, songs are not mere stylistic embellishments—they serve as vital devices for unfolding the plot.

It was a means to reach the heart of the Assamese community and formed part of a larger cultural project to retrieve a nation's heritage from the threat of colonial amnesia. Bezbarua's preface to the collection is especially revealing, where he contends that folk tales are the autobiography of a nation, that preserve the conduct, rituals, thoughts, and imaginations of all classes within society.

Check Your Progress:

Identify and explain the key literary features of the stories in *Burhi Aair Xadhu.* Why does Bezbarua call the folk tales as *'the autobiography of a nation'*? (60 words)

7.4 The Tales: Tejimola, Tawoiyekar Sadhu, OuKuwari, Sampawati.

Here is a brief summary of each of the four tales of Bezbarua that inspired Bhaskar Hazarika's film *Kathanodi*.

- "Tejimola" tells the poignant tale of a merchant's daughter who endures cruelty at the hands of her stepmother, dies a tragic death, is reborn in various forms of nature, and ultimately regains her human life to reunite with her father. Tejimola loses her mother in infancy and grows up under the harsh treatment of her stepmother. When her father leaves for trade abroad, he entrusts his daughter to his wife's care. The stepmother, seizing the opportunity, takes out her resentment on the helpless girl. She sends Tejimola to a friend's wedding with new clothes packed in a bag, secretly placing a mouse and an ember inside. The mouse gnaws holes in the clothes, while the ember singes them. Upon returning home, Tejimola is met with her stepmother's fury over the damaged garments. Using this as a pretext, the stepmother beats her severely and, in a final act of cruelty, smashes her hands, legs, and head against the rice-husking mill (*dhekishal*) until she dies. She then buries the girl's body at the edge of the husking shed. Soon, a gourd plant miraculously grows on the burial spot, bearing fruit. One day, a beggar woman asks the stepmother for a gourd. As she reaches to pluck it, the plant begins to sing a sorrowful song, revealing it is Tejimola herself, who was pounded to death by her stepmother. Alarmed, the stepmother cuts down the plant and discards it in the backyard. In a few days, a citron plant sprouts there, also bearing fruit. When some cowherds attempt to pluck the fruit, the plant again sings a plaintive song, exposing the

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same tragic truth. Frightened, the cowherds back away, and the stepmother again destroys the plant, throwing it into a river.

As the plant drifts away, it transforms into a lotus with a beautiful bloom. By chance, Tejimola's father returns from his journey and sees the flower. As he approaches to pluck it, he hears a sorrowful voice pleading with him not to do so. The voice reveals itself as his daughter's and recounts the events of her death. To prove her identity, he asks her to transform into a bird. The bird returns home with the father, who questions his wife about Tejimola's whereabouts. The stepmother lies, but when the bird transforms back into Tejimola before his eyes, the truth is revealed. The father, overwhelmed with grief and anger, drives his wife away and is joyfully reunited with his daughter.

- "Tawoiyekor Sadhu" is a tiny tale about human bond between two bosom friends and about the values of trust and obedience. One of the aged friends dies, leaving his son under the guidance of his friend, and advising the son to seek advice from him. As the son grows up and marries, he sures a male child from his wife, and seeks advice from his uncle, as his father bids him to do so. His father's friend ("Tawoi", as addressed in Assamese) tells him to bury the infant at the filled-up tank in the backyard. The man carries out the advice in great agony. The next year he has another baby boy, and buries him at the same spot with a heavy heart, as per his uncle's advice. The third time he had a baby girl, and expects his uncle to let it live, but has to bury the infant this time too. In the fourth time, the man is resolved to save his baby—this time a boy—whatever be his uncle's recommendation. However, his uncle now lets him bring up the offspring. His uncle also advises him to wat the whole night installing a pol (a bamboo-made fish-catching device) in the

backyard tank where the three infants were buried. The man does as advised. At night, he hears the clamour of his buried children. As he listens to their words, he is shocked to learn a cruel fact. Had they been alive, they would have torturned their father to death. His buried children's spiteful conversation makes him intuitively realize the value of the apparently cruel suggestions of his father's friend.

After a few days, when he plans to sell his paddy, the man seeks advice from his uncle, now that his trust on the old man is deeper. The uncle asks him to wait for some days. Later, when the price of paddy falls, his uncle tells him to sell the paddy. Further, with the money he gets from the sale, he buys some gold, and makes it into a ball at the goldsmith's, all as advised by his uncle. But he is told to drop the gold ball at the river. He does accordingly. One day a fisherman brings a big fish for sale to the man. As the fish is cut open, the gold balls shows up. When he shows the ball to his uncle, the latter declares that it is now his real asset and he must preserve it. At the penultimate moment of the story, the old man expresses happiness to see that he has been able to dispel doubt from the mind of his friend's son.

- "Ou Kuwari": This is also a tiny story. It revolves around a wonder elephant's apple (outenga). A king's elder queen gives birth to a baby boy and his younger queen bears an elephant's apple. In great agony, she discards the fruit, but everyday the fruit rolls back to its mother during bed time. One day the rolling fruit halts at the bank of a river. A prince is angling at the river, when he notices a young woman of exquisite beauty emerge out of the fruit, bathe in the river and squeeze back into the fruit. Enamoured of the young woman, the prince back home stubbornly insists that he marry the elephant apple. Unable to

dissuade, the kind marries him off to the fruit. Every night, the prince eats a portion of his rise and spares the rest at the dish before he sleeps. As he is asleep the young woman would sneak out of the fruit, eats off the remaining portion of the rise, and returns to her little fruity abode. One day a beggar woman inquires about the newlywed bride, and the prince tells her everything. She then advises him to pretend to sleep, and burn ablaze the elephant apple shell when she eats her left-over meal. The bride would swoon, as the beggar woman says, and the prince must smear curd and banana paste over her face. The price performs all this as advised, and achieves his beautiful bride.

- "Sampawati" relates the story of a young woman's fabulous marriage with a python. Like Tejimola, Sampawati too suffers her stepmother's contempt, and later narrowly escapes her demonic mother-in-law's plotting after marrying the serpent. The story starts with Sampawati protecting her paddy fields from the birds , as she chases away the birds in the fields with a song, she would hears an unknown voice proclaiming its resolve to marry her. As she hears repeated assertions each day in the fields, she is shocked,and her family steps in, promising to marry their daughter to her unknown suitor if he shows up. The suitor turns out to be a big python. As promised, Sampawati is married to the serpent. Amid fear and apprehension she spends her first night with the python. Next morning people discover that the python has disappeared and Sampawati glitters with lavish ornaments all over. Tormented by jealousy at such miracle of the girl being so amply rewarded, Sampawati's stepmother makes a similar arrangement with her daughter in anticipation of a similar miracle. She fetches another python and marries her daughter off to it. However, frustrating such fulfillment of

expectations, the python swallows up the bride. Agonised by the event and in utter desperation, Sampawati's stepdaughter and father attemps to kill the mother-daughter duo with a sword. Sampawati's python-husband intervenes at this point and relocates them to a distant abode amid a forest. As time passes, Sampawati's mother dies from fever. One day an old woman visits her and reveals that her husband is indeed an angel, not a python. On another day the old woman shows up, suggesting her to share the same dish of meal with her husband and to request him to show her the entire world. When she does accordingly, her husband reveals that the old woman is indeed his demonic mother planning to devour her alienating her from him for six years. He then gives her a ring that would protect her from his predatory mother. In the five years that follow, her husband remains away from her but the ring protects her from the demonic woman's predatory moves. In the sixth year Sampawati is reunited with her husband. Even so, the old woman hatches a plan to kill her: she sends her for an errand to the neighbourhood with a letter. The message in the letter signals the letter's receiver to kill the messenger instantly. Coincidentally her husband shows up; as he reads the message, he instantly learns the plot hatched by his mother. Finally he slays his demonic mother and shifts with Sampawati to a peaceful town where they live happily thereafter.

Check Your Progress:

- Do you see any common elements running through these tales? (60 words)
- Write a note on the plots of these stories. (80 words)
- Mention the themes of these stories. (40 words)

7.5 Bhaskar Hazarika: An Introduction

Bhaskar Hazarika: An Introduction

Born in 1975 in Dergaon, Assam, Bhaskar Hazarika is one of the most original voices in contemporary Indian cinema. He studied at St. Stephen's College, University of Delhi, and later pursued a Master's degree in Film & Drama from the University of Reading, England.

A key figure in the new wave of Assamese cinema that emerged with the new millennium, Hazarika has directed two critically acclaimed feature films—*Kathanodi* (2015) and *Aamis* (Ravening) (2019)—and produced the film *Emuthi Puthi* in 2022. Beyond direction, he has contributed as a screenwriter to various projects, notably co-writing the screenplay for Abbas-Mustan's *Players* (2012). He also directed the short film *The Missing Cow* (2024) and has made several documentaries through his independent film studio, Metanormal.

Hazarika's debut feature, *Kathanodi*, won the Best Feature Film in Assamese at the 63rd National Film Awards. It also received the Asian Cine Fund's Post Production Award in 2015 and earned him the Best Screenplay award at the Prag Cine Awards North East, 2016. His second film, *Aamis*, brought him the Best Director award at the Singapore South Asian International Film Festival (2019), as well as both Best Director and Best Screenplay awards at the Assam State Film Awards the same year.

Hazarika stands out for his quiet yet powerful storytelling that blends folklore, fantasy, and psychological depth. *Kathanodi* is known for its bold reinterpretation of Assamese folktales, while *Aamis* pushes thematic boundaries further. In *Aamis*, a practicing female doctor and a young man bond over a shared passion for

food—an exploration that gradually transforms into a transgressive journey of desire. Remarkably, Hazarika handles this unsettling theme with subtlety and restraint, using allegory—specifically the metaphor of consuming human flesh—to avoid sensationalism. What makes Hazarika a distinctive filmmaker is not merely the themes he chooses, but the way he narrates them—quietly, hauntingly, and suggestively. His films do not shout; they whisper—and in doing so, leave a lasting impact.

7.6 The Narrative of *Kathanodi*

The four tales from Bezbarua's text are not merely strung together but blended into a complex and unified narrative in *Kathanodi*. The film starts with scenes from each of these 'tales', in the mode of parallel unfolding of a complex story. Ponai, under the advice of his uncle, buries his son in the darkness of the night; Tejimola is tortured by her stepmother; Keteki, ostracised by society for giving birth to an *outenga* (elephant apple), is followed by the fruit wherever she goes; and, at the behest of Dhaneswari, her husband Jagannath catches a python to whom they arrange to marry their daughter Banalatika. The news of the marriage spreads in the neighbourhood, and the idea is conceived by Dhaneswari, who believes that the marriage will bring fortune to them. Tejimola's father leaves for trade, allowing her stepmother to fulfil her grudge on her. She is asked to go for Banalatika's wedding, and her stepmother secretly keeps a mouse in her cloth bag. The stepmother carries on her illicit love affair with a water-demon in the night, and her intent to kill Tejimola before her father's arrival is known to the audience. Now, Tejimola's father Debinath eventually meets, during his trading, the woman named Keteki, and is curiously attracted by the amazing rolling fruit at her home. Debinath turns more

concerned for the wretched woman who is abandoned by her husband, and eventually, she shares her story with him. The fruit to her was something of a nuisance initially, while later she recognizes it as her true offspring and feels an emotional bond with it.

This is how Bhaskar Hazarika weaves together the various plots of the tales and makes the incidents and characters part of the same diegetic world:

- Debinath, during his trade, comes into contact with Keteki, the mother of the *outenga*-maiden. He plays the crucial role in unravelling the mystery of the *outenga* and resolving the predicament of Keteki.
- Poonai, the fisherman-householder who keeps burying his children despite his wife Malati's dissuasion, as per the advice of his uncle—his deceased father's close friend—is a person living in the neighbourhood of Dhaneswari and is known to Jagannath.
- The Tejimolas are known to the family of Jagannath, and both daughters—Tejimola and Banalatika—are good friends. She visits Banalatika's home during the wedding, when her stepmother plans to incriminate her by having the ancestral silk cloth torn by a mouse.
- It is the river that connects all these families (with their own troubled stories) in a sort of contiguous space.

This is how the narrative unfolds and culminates: despite repeated requests by Malati, Poonai abides by his uncle's advice and buries their first three children. The fourth time, after great conflict between the married couple, they come to seek advice from the uncle (*tawoi*). Almost confirmed of the fatal advice from the old man, Malati comes prepared to kill the hated man, while surprise comes in the form of a most unexpected recommendation: the old

man declares the baby as their true offspring and asks them to bring up the infant with love and care. He also asks them to visit the burial spot of their former children. They do accordingly, and they confront a shocking revelation, realizing the worth of their uncle's advice. The dead children, in utter spite and dark criminal malice, reveal that they would have ruined and killed their father had they lived. In the Tejimola story, on the pretext of the ancestral dress being torn by the mouse, the stepmother ruthlessly kills Tejimola by pounding her with a wooden rice pounder. Having killed the girl, the woman drags the corpse and buries it under earth. Meanwhile, the elephant apple goes missing, and, incidentally finding it, Debinath brings it back to Keteki's. He advises Keteki to cook a delicious dish for the fruit as part of a plan to achieve her child cocooned within the fruit. Keteki does so, and with Debinath's assistance, she discovers her offspring—a female child. Having accomplished this task of reconciliation between mother and daughter, Debinath wishes to go back home as he feels that his daughter needs him. In the Banalatika story, the python turns out to be a real one, unlike an angel as in the case of Sampawati, her step-sister. The next day, people discover that the python has swallowed up Banalatika. As the serpent's belly is cut open, Banalatika's hand appears as a testimony of what it has done to the girl, in shocking contrast to Dhaneswari's expectations.

SAQ:

- Do you think that the borrowing of four stories from *Burhi Air Sadhu* lends the narrative of *Kathanodi* its episodic character? (60 words)

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> - From the discussions given so far, analyse the plots of tales from *Burhi Air Sadhu* and show how they are connected in the narrative of *Kathanodi*. (100 words)
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7.7 Summing Up

Lakshminath Bezbarua's folk tales contained in *Burhi Air Sadhu* are immensely popular among the Assamese. These stories have been translated into several Indian languages, including Bengali and English. They vividly demonstrate the rich heritage of Assamese storytelling tradition. The period during which Bezbarua re-wrote these tales and gave them a printed life was significant. Always vigilant of the cultural hegemony of the British and conscious of the need to protect Assamese traditions, Bezbarua's tales were part of a broader project to rejuvenate and preserve the heritage of the Assamese nation. The stories themselves form a rich compendium of imagination, linguistic subtlety, and moral values. The four tales—*Tejimola*, *Tawoiyekar Sadhu*, *Sampawati*, and *OuKuwari*—depict diverse themes and convey distinct moral lessons.

Bhaskar Hazarika's *Kathanodi* weaves these tales together to construct a composite narrative text where characters and actions are part of the same diegetic plane. The river serves as a connecting motif, linking the families and, thereby, the separate stories they belong to. In terms of plot reworking, this is the first significant creative move introduced by the filmmaker. Beyond the adaptation of the tales at the level of plot and character, however, there are other important aspects of adaptation that *Kathanodi* explores. We will return to these issues in the next unit.

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UNIT- 8

FROM LAKSHMINATH BEZBARUA'S *TALES* TO BHASKAR HAZARIKA'S *KATHANODI*

Unit Structure:

8.1 Objectives:

After going through this unit, the learner will be able to—

- *understand* how the four folktales are intricately intertwined in *Kathanodi;*
- *identify* the presence or absence of ambiguity in both the oral-literary narratives and their cinematic adaptation;
- *critically* assess the representation of morality in the original tales and in the film;
- *reflect* on the theme of motherhood as depicted across the narratives;
- *explore* how a Gothic and supernatural atmosphere is created in *Kathanodi.*

8.2 Introduction

Bhaskar Hazarika's *Kathanodi* ("The River of Fables") is a striking example of cinematic adaptation. The film weaves together four traditional Assamese folktales into a single narrative tapestry. Drawing from *Burhi Aair Sadhu* (*Grandmother's Tales*), a compendium of Assamese folk stories by Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Hazarika revisits tales and refashions them for a modern audience.. The film adapts the stories of *Tejimola*, *Champawati*, *OuKuwori* (the Outenga or Elephant Apple Maiden), and *Tawoir Xadhu* (the Tale of Tawoi), which were originally intended for children. In terms of adaptation theory, *Kothanodi* illustrates both aspects of fidelity to source material as well as their creative transformation in cinema. The core elements of the storyline of the four tales by Bezbarua are retained in the film, the Assamese cultural ambience was also retained. But in weaving these tales into a composite cinematic narrative, Bhaskar Hazarika also transforms the materials so as to serve a new vision.

8.3 How the Four Tales Get Intertwined in *Kathanodi*

As discussed in the previous unit, the film situates all four stories within a shared diegetic world, where the characters and their experiences are subtly interwoven. We have seen how Poonai, under his uncle's influence, buries his children in secret; how Tejimola suffers at the hands of her cruel stepmother; how Keteki, shunned for giving birth to an outenga (elephant apple), comes to form a maternal bond with the fruit; and how Dhaneswari arranges her daughter Banalatika's marriage to a python, hoping for fortune. Let us briefly recall the points we discussed earlier. Debinath, while travelling for trade, encounters Keteki and becomes intrigued by her mysterious connection with the rolling outenga fruit, gradually

emerging as a figure of understanding and support in her life. Poonai, a man burdened by a grim familial ritual, lives in the same locality as Dhaneswari and Jagannath, linking his narrative to theirs through spatial proximity and social acquaintance. Meanwhile, the friendship between Tejimola and Banalatika brings the two families together, allowing Tejimola's visit during the latter's wedding to become the occasion for her stepmother's malicious scheme. Running through these individual threads is the river—a symbolic presence that connects the various households, binding their sorrows, superstitions, and fates within a single cultural and narrative space. This brief reminder prepares us to now explore in greater depth how these intertwined tales contribute to the film's larger thematic and aesthetic vision.

At first glance, *Kothanodi* may appear to follow the structure of an anthology film, presenting four distinct folktales. However, as discussed in the previous unit, it unfolds instead as a single, integrated narrative. The tales are reimagined within a shared story world composed of two villages, bound together geographically and thematically by a river. Characters traverse the boundaries of their individual stories, linking the tales and allowing their plotlines to intersect in meaningful ways. Through this narrative intertwining, Bhaskar Hazarika foregrounds themes such as motherhood and the complexities of the parent-child relationship. The film captures a range of maternal figures—protective, indifferent, cruel, and redemptive—thus reflecting varied emotional textures of motherhood across the tales.

Notably, Hazarika does not unify these stories under a binary of tradition versus modernity. Rationality in one narrative fails to function in another. For instance, the plan to marry a daughter to a python, central to one tale, is dismissed as absurd even by

Tejimola's stepmother—echoing a line delivered most firmly by Sampawati's mother. Yet, in the *OuKuwari* tale, the supernatural—embodied in a rolling, living elephant apple—is accepted with minimal resistance. Here, the mythical is not allegorical but a lived reality. Debinath, when speaking to Keteki, affirms this reality in a way that moves her: "In Maibong, they say a woman once gave birth to a kitten.In the far banks of the Bhoroli river, I met a waman who was raised by a bird. And in a village east of Sadiya a duck egg cracked one morning and a a girl hatched out of it."In *Tawoir Sadhu*, the act of infanticide committed under the guidance of an elder generates ethical shockwaves, culminating in the spectral return of the buried children—an event that violently disrupts any inherited sense of reason. Rather than staging a conflict between superstition and modernity, *Kothanodi* reveals a world suffused with magical realism, where the fantastic is seamlessly woven into the fabric of the everyday.

This synthesis of realism and the fantastic is a hallmark of Hazarika's visual storytelling. Implausible events—such as a fruit following its mother, a girl emerging from within it, a python marrying a girl and bestowing her with ornaments, or ghosts seeking vengeance—are rendered in a matter-of-fact cinematic style. Through restrained performances, atmospheric sound design, and meticulous cinematography, the film cultivates an eerie believability. The narrative is grounded in a historical precolonial setting, which further enhances the plausibility of the implausible.

Camerawork plays a critical role in merging fantasy with realism. Low-angle shots offer disorienting perspectives, and in the *OuKuwari* sequence, the camera often privileges the movement of the elephant apple over human characters. The fruit's trailing along dusty village roads is depicted with a subtle realism that makes it

eerily credible. The villagers do not react with awe but with ridicule—only Debinath registers a sense of wonder. His response, however, is not to seek rational explanations but to connect the unexplained with his broader understanding of transformation. Having encountered strange possibilities as a trader and traveller, Debinath embraces the fantastic to enact real change in Keteki's life, thus uniting the threads of belief, empathy, and renewal.

Check Your Progress:

- Is *Kathanodi* an anthology of four separate narratives that have similar themes, or a composite narrative where the tales are interwoven to create a single diegetic world? (100 words)
- How is the folkloric aura of Bezbarua's tales re-created by Bhaskar Hazarika in Kathanodi? (100 words)

8.4 Finality Versus Ambiguity

All four folktales that form the basis of *Kothanodi* possess clear narrative closures in their original versions. These endings typically resolve the narrative contradictions or, where resolution is not possible, offer a moral statement—as in the case of *Sampawati*, where the consequences of maternal greed are explicitly condemned. Bhaskar Hazarika, however, alters the endings in significant ways. He discards happy resolutions in favour of ambiguity, emotional unrest, and open-endedness. This shift intensifies the darker undertones of the narratives and foregrounds their critique of social and familial structures.

For instance, the tale of *OuKuwari* originally centers on a king and his seven queens, one of whom gives birth to an elephant apple. The story concludes with a prince rescuing the hidden princess within

the fruit, culminating in a joyful union. In Hazarika's adaptation, the setting shifts from the palace to the village, transforming the narrative into that of a common woman—Keteki, a weaver—abandoned by her husband and forced to survive by selling handwoven clothes. The focus thus moves from royalty to the everyday life of marginalized rural women. Moreover, the prince is replaced by Debinath, a compassionate traveler and merchant who becomes involved in Keteki's life. The tale's romantic resolution is replaced with a surreal scene of transfiguration, where Keteki is reunited with her now-human daughter. Yet, even this moment of reconciliation is not triumphant—the mother and daughter remain on the fringes of society. By denying the viewer a comforting closure, the film underscores the persistent social stigmas faced by women like Keteki and critiques the very structures that exclude and ostracize them.

In the folktale of *Tejimola*, the cruel stepmother's violence is ultimately counterbalanced by the mythical rebirth of the murdered girl as a series of objects—fruit, gourd, and finally a lotus. These magical elements imbue the tale with hope and symbolic restitution. In contrast, Hazarika's film eschews mythic regeneration, except at the final moment of the film, and the focus remains firmly on the psychological and physical cruelty inflicted by Senehi. The film ends with an abrupt and eerie image a plant growing from Tejimola's burial site reminds one of the apparitions of the buried infants of Malati and Ponai sprouting from dark soil. It is an unmistakeable gesture of a revelation, but its message remains unknown to a spectator. However, its message to an Assamese audience steeped in Assamese myths and folk-tales is not that ambiguous. Tejimola is reborn as a plant, according to Bazbarua's tale, and finally a poetic justice would be served after the return of her father Debinath from distant trade. But these is little ground to

believe that penultimate image of regeneration would gesrue towards reconciliation for a global viewer.

Similarly, the tale of *Sampawati* is radically altered. In the original, a python willingly arrives to marry the heroine, and its transformation into a prince serves as a fantastical resolution. Hazarika discards this magical motif. Instead, Dhaneswari actively captures a python from the forest, driven by greed and jealousy, and marries it off to her stepdaughter Bonlotika. The consequences are grotesque and tragic—the python devours Bonlotika on the wedding night. The horror of this act is heightened through detailed visual imagery: the python's belly is cut open, and only the girl's bangled hand is recovered. The magical redemption of the original tale is replaced with a grim visual narrative that resists moral finality. The viewer is left with a disturbing sense of unresolved trauma and a critique of unchecked maternal avarice.

The folktale of *Tawoir Sadhu* features a couple who, at the urging of the shamanic figure Tawoi, sacrifice three consecutive infants in order to avert a greater curse. The original tale hinges on blind belief in ritual and prophetic authority. In Hazarika's version, the character of Malati, the mother, becomes central to the narrative transformation. No longer passive, Malati gradually emerges as a figure of resistance. When the fourth child is born, she refuses to blindly accept Tawoi's authority and even contemplates killing him. The emotional climax comes when Tawoi unexpectedly advises the couple to raise the child. Malati's joy at this moment is cathartic— her tears of happiness speak to the relief of having her maternal agency affirmed. Yet the catharsis is quickly complicated: the couple then hears the ghosts of their buried children, who describe the horrors they would have inflicted had they lived. This chilling prophecy functions not as a justification for past murders, but as a

disturbing mirror of human cruelty already depicted elsewhere in the film—in the murder of Tejimola, or Dhaneswari's sacrifice of Bonlotika. The supernatural revelation, then, draws on a deeper psychological realism, suggesting that monstrous behaviour is not confined to myth—it exists within the everyday family.

Through these altered closures, *Kothanodi* replaces folktale finality with moral and emotional ambiguity. It denies viewers the solace of poetic justice or magical resolution. Instead, it constructs a world in which cruelty, greed, and trauma are not easily undone, and where the legacies of violence reverberate across generations. In doing so, the film deepens the critical function of folktales, moving them from moral allegory to psychological and social inquiry.

SAQ:

How does Bhaskar Hazarika deal with the 'happy ending' structure of Bezbarua's tales? (100 words)

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8.5 Moral Complexity in *Kothanodi*

In the folk tales recounted by Lakshminath Bezbarua, curses are fulfilled and prophecies often come true. In "Mekurir Jiyekar Sadhu," for instance, the mother-cat tells her human daughter that the basil plant will wither and milk will turn black as omens of her death. Yet, not all advice from elders in these tales is benevolent. In "Sampawati," the python's demonic mother, disguised as an old woman, gives malicious counsel designed to separate Sampawati

from her husband and ultimately kill her. In this context, belief in the elder's words becomes dangerous, even fatal.

This tension between truth and deception in the speech of authority figures comes to a disturbing height in "Tawoir Sadhu," where the sage's advice to a householder to bury his own children is morally unsettling. The buried children later return as apparitions, revealing their intent to kill their father—a revelation that, while not shown to materialize, is nonetheless taken seriously within the logic of the tale. The belief in the veracity of these ghostly revelations hinges on a suspension of disbelief: a readiness to accept the supernatural as real, guided by the emotional and visual power of the apparitions.

When this episode is transposed into Bhaskar Hazarika's *Kothanodi*, the emotional and ethical resonance of supernatural revelation changes. The film offers little justification for why such visions should hold emotional weight for the viewer or inspire identification with the bereaved parents. The act of parricide is portrayed with disturbing visual detail, already unsettling the spectator. In this context, the rationale behind the infanticide cannot rely solely on the authority of supernatural revelation—it must be sought elsewhere.

This opens up a path to reinterpret the moral logic of *Tawoir Sadhu* in light of the other intertwined tales within *Kothanodi*, especially "Sampawati" and "Tejimola." In the former, Dhaneswari sacrifices her daughter by marrying her off to a python for material gain. In the latter, an even more gruesome act of domestic violence unfolds as a stepmother tortures and kills her stepdaughter. In both cases, the perpetrators are parents and the victims their children, suggesting a grim truth about familial violence rooted in human greed and cruelty.

Against this backdrop, the idea that children could also bear murderous intentions toward their parents, as revealed in "Tawoir Sadhu," becomes less implausible. The viewer's belief in the apparitions' warning is reinforced not just by supernatural logic, but by the contextual reality of domestic horrors taking place in the narrative present. The suspension of disbelief is thus not merely a narrative device—it is catalyzed by the gruesome visual and thematic evidence of familial breakdown presented across the film. But in any case, the treatment of the horrid act of infanticide as a shamanistic ritual is itself problematic in a society where witch-hunting still persists.

SAQ:

How does Kathanodi depicts the moral complexity absent in the world of folk tales? Give a reasoned answer focusing on "Tawoir Sadhu". (100 words)

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8.6 The Theme of Motherhood

All four narratives in *Kothanodi* revolve around mothers (or mother figures) grappling with extraordinary challenges: Senehi, the stepmother driven to violence; Keteki, the outcast mother of a fruit-child; Dhoneshwari, the mother blinded by greed; and Malati, the bereaved mother determined to protect her newborn. By intercutting their experiences, Bhaskar Hazarika invites the viewer to compare and contrast these varied dimensions of motherhood. Each character

embodies a distinct facet of maternal existence, revealing what cripples, motivates, or redeems them.

Senehi's cruelty towards Tejimola arises from her stepdaughter's status, breeding jealousy and resentment. However, a deeper motive lies in her secret relationship with a demonic figure—one that transgresses the boundaries of socially sanctioned marriage—unveiling a hidden layer of marital disquiet beneath an apparently stable domestic life. Dhoneshwari, in contrast, is driven by overt greed. Her decision to marry off her daughter Bonlotika to a forest-dwelling python is fuelled by jealousy and the desire for material wealth, making her one of the most morally corrupt characters in the narrative.

At the other end of the moral spectrum is Malati, who has reluctantly conformed to her husband's gruesome decision to bury their previous infants. However, with the birth of her fourth child, she resolves to resist. She expresses her intent to defy her husband and even contemplates murdering the old man whose advice had previously led to the children's deaths. Her defiance marks a crucial turning point: the emergence of maternal agency in the face of patriarchal coercion.

In depicting motherhood, Hazarika diverges significantly from the archetypes found in the original folk tales. While Bezbarua's version of Tejimola presents the stepmother as a stock figure of evil, *Kothanodi* renders Senehi as a psychologically complex, schizophrenic, and deeply lonely woman. Scenes of her solitary drinking and emotional instability must be read alongside the narrative of her husband, who forms an affectionate bond with Keteki on the opposite bank of the river, sharing her domestic space and emotional life. Senehi, meanwhile, is left to care for a daughter

who is not her own, while her husband builds an emotional life elsewhere. This isolation and frustration lend nuance to her character. Her illicit relationship with a demon becomes symbolic of her yearning for fulfilment, suggesting that her cruelty is not innate but shaped by emotional neglect, domestic marginalization, and repressed desires.

Keteki's story dramatizes society's rejection of women who fail to fulfill patriarchal expectations. When she gives birth to a fruit, she is accused of witchcraft and cast out by her husband. Driven to the fringes of society, she survives by weaving and selling clothes. Even after reconciliation with her human child—thanks to Debinath's intervention and her own persistence — Keteki remains an outsider. She asserts her independence, at one point even asking Debinath to leave when his words fail to comfort her.

However, the most poignant aspect of Keteki's journey lies in her evolving relationship with the elephant apple—her fruit-child. Though she initially abandons it, the fruit persistently follows her. Over time, Keteki grows emotionally attached to it. The rolling fruit dramatizes the journey of a forsaken child yearning for its mother's warmth and acceptance. In a striking sequence, the fruit rolls across a field to an elephant apple tree and tries in vain to climb it—an emotionally resonant image of a child's desire to return to an embryonic or origin point after experiencing rejection. In a later scene, Keteki expresses her affection for the fruit-child with profound tenderness, evoking strong emotional engagement from the viewer.

The most subversive act of motherhood, however, belongs to Malati. Quiet, distressed, and seemingly incapable of violent action, she ultimately defies her husband's authority. She reveals to a

neighbour that she will no longer submit and will fight for her child. Played with restraint by Asha Bordoloi, Malati hides a knife, prepared to kill the old man who once advised the murder of her children. Her quiet rebellion becomes a powerful assertion of maternal will, turning a passive figure of grief into an agent of protection and justice.

Check Your Progress:

Do you think that *Kathanodi* resists easy categorization of the woman characters into good and evil, but depicts them in their complexity unknown in the original folk-tales? (100 words)

8.7 The Gothic and the Supernatural

Hazarika creates an atmosphere steeped in the Gothic and the supernatural through images that are often dark, gruesome, and uncanny. These images, while deeply unsettling, at times carry symbolic undertones. In the story of the *Outenga* (elephant apple), after Keteki reproduces the fruit, she is banished from her home by her husband. The eerie image of the fruit rolling after her wherever she goes builds an atmosphere of quiet dread. Village children begin to perceive her as a witch, while adults subject her to relentless verbal harassment. The climax of this tale—marked by the recovery of the child from within the shell of the fruit, the flickering of lights, the burning of fruit shells, and the resultant shrieks—intensifies the mysticism of the scene (*Gothic Folklore* 3).

In *Tawoiyekar Sadhu*, the moral dilemma is more complex. Tawoi—the uncle—initially appears to be a villain, especially from

the perspective of Malati, with whom the spectator tends to align morally. However, as the narrative unfolds, Tawoi ultimately emerges as the saviour of the family. This transformation from villain to hero, as Ghatak notes, is a significant aspect of the Gothic tradition ("Gothic Folklore" 3). Gothic literature often hinges on ambiguity, mistaken identities, and revelations that challenge surface appearances. The supernatural apparitions of the children on the burial ground, who reveal their intention to kill their father if allowed to live, add another layer of unease. Tawoi's premonition of this horror lends the story a distinctly shamanistic quality ("*Gothic Folklore*" 3).

In the tale of Tejimola, the stepmother Senehi suffers from isolation and loneliness. Her desire for material fulfilment through marriage into wealth is thwarted, and she is relegated to the role of caregiver to her stepdaughter. She constructs a darker, imagined world of fulfilment involving a demonic lover and eventually kills Tejimola. The gradual transformation of her character—from an innocuous-seeming housewife in the opening scenes to a cruel torturer—is a chilling portrayal of the demon within.

What lends *Kathanodi* its narrative power is its ability to render the most implausible images and events with a startling realism, thereby transforming familiar bedtime stories into tales of folk horror. The film weaves together Gothic elements, supernatural occurrences, and folkloric structures, turning the ordinary into the eerily extraordinary.

Check Your Progress:

Comment on the use of supernatural elements in Kathanodi. (100 words)

8.8 Summing Up:

Kathanodi reimagines four Assamese folktales within a single, interconnected narrative, using a shared setting and recurring characters to weave the tales together. The film avoids simple resolutions, instead embracing ambiguity, emotional complexity, and moral uncertainty. Themes like motherhood, familial violence, and social exclusion are explored through richly layered female characters—some nurturing, others cruel, but all shaped by their circumstances.

Bhaskar Hazarika transforms familiar folk stories into a form of folk horror, blending the fantastic with everyday reality. Supernatural elements like talking fruits, ghostly children, and mythical creatures are treated with a matter-of-fact realism, creating a haunting and believable world. The film replaces the comforting endings of traditional tales with unsettling images and open-ended conclusions, prompting viewers to reflect on deep psychological and social truths.

Through its Gothic tone, symbolic imagery, and emotional depth, *Kothanodi* reveals how folklore can speak to contemporary concerns, challenging our understanding of morality, tradition, and human relationships.

8.9 References and Suggested Reading

Ghatak, Sanghamitra. "Gothic Folklore as a Primordial Stimulation: Understanding of Cultural Inferences of North-East India Prevalent in Bhaskar Hazarika's *Kothanodi*." *Journal of South Asian Exchanges*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2024, https://saexchanges.com/v1n1/v1n113.

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