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Writing between Borders on the Screen: The Cinematic Adaptations of Travel Literature

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Declaration

I declare that this is my original thesis and the product of my research endeavours; all rights of distribution are reserved to the University of Blida 2 and RIDILCA Laboratory (C1382000).

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my parents. Their unconditional love and support for me on this earth have been unmatched. It is because of them that I was able to write this research, and for that, I owed them everything and more.

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Abstract:

This thesis analyses the geopolitical and cultural interactions around which Western writers have built their travelling narratives. In their accounts of crossing territorial borders to explore foreign lands, these novelists have come to treat the native inhabitants as the subjects of colonial agency, comparing their relatively different lifestyles to those of their own local birthplace. At the same time, the efforts poured into their informative descriptions about the visited destinations, combined with the fictional attributes of their stories, serve as examples of alibis for casting a series of personal judgments and criticism over such cultures. While cushioning their audience's scrutiny and accusations of cultural, political, and racial disparagements by dissimulating their thoughts into figments of their imagination, these writers explore even the sacred depths of African, Eastern, and Middle Eastern landmarks. Taking an interest in such efforts, this research aims to assess how genuine and effective their strategies of objective portrayal appear to the continuously evolving generations of readers and critics. This interest also extends to the cinematic adaptations that aim to convey such a multitude of intercultural stories into an audio-visual medium.

Due to their influence and popularity, novels varying in their dependence on the factuality of their authors' documentation continue to grab the interest of Hollywood filmmakers, wooing them into the prospect of an international, lucrative sort of success. Classic beloved novels like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness (1899)*, E.M Forster's *A Passage to India (1924)*, and even the more recent science fiction epic of Frank Herbert, *Dune (1965-1985)*, have been translated into major motion pictures by taking advantage of their charismatic characters, entertaining events, and visually promising panoramic sceneries. The changes incorporated by the adapters are also vital to this study's investigation, as the decisions of omitting and adding scenes bring into question the underlying motives involved. By depending on both a close reading and distant reading of these case studies' reception and overtime

performances, my work contends that Western self-centrism and undermining comments about the racially and ethnically ambivalent 'others' continue to resurface due to the inherited imperial gaze that Western artists maintain when dealing with marginalised communities. However, diving further into the fantastical realms of science fiction, political correctness becomes easier to exercise by filmmakers. The genre offers a natural, intuitive shelter for artists to express themselves without fearing the hostile targeting of peer-pressured criticism, but because of the lengthy, self-exposing nature of writing, science fiction's effects of concealment work best on the concise and significantly more straightforward film format, as illustrated by the lightened negative reception around Villeneuve's latest two-part adaptation of *Dune (2021,2024)*. This, my work suggests, is the closest strategy of producing an un-provoking kind of cosmopolitan artistic expression.

Key Terms: travelling narratives, borders, cinematic adaptations, privileged gaze, distant reading. peer-pressured criticism.

General Introduction

This thesis studies the cultural representation of the "other" in travel narratives and their screen adaptations. It analyses the borderlines that Western artists have to face in their portrayal of marginalised societies around the world. The decisions made in regard to these physical and cultural ambits between the two worlds, West and East, are going to be the focal point of my investigation. The research's aim is to assess the possibility of achieving a harmonised, genuine portrayal of cultures in their attempt to coexist. To this end, I will rely on a select set of case studies and different post-colonial theories. By comparing popular films with the original source materials from which they were adapted, I will examine the difference in the methods used to present the world-building, storytelling, and socio-cultural interactions, all from the viewpoint of the travellers, the main characters in these works.

What lies beyond the frontiers of any land or beyond the familiar confines of any home are the mysteries that many writers have sought to discover throughout human history. To travel over the horizon is not just the recurrent theme that happens to figure in the multitude of travel logs and fictional narratives of renowned names, the likes of Marco Polo, Voltaire, Henry David Thoreau, Michael Ondaatje, or Mohsin Hamid, but it is also perceived as a unique genre of writing. Simply put, fiction or non-fiction travel writings seem to offer their readers an infinite number of possibilities when it comes to their contents. When reading especially novels belonging to this versatile genre, travel feels like having a curious tendency to devour other themes and motifs, harnessing their utilities to its own benefit, but it does not always seek to dominate the narrative. It can also serve as the mere mould that fills the cracks of some other works. In such cases, it assumes the role of a complementary sub-genre or a mere segment in a greater storyline.

Travel literature can be seen as a shapeshifter among other literary models, "an unlimited genre," as the scholar Zweder von Martels had dubbed it (Martels, p XI). His term does well to accentuate the immeasurable range in which it often operates. It is for this reason

that travel texts have found the great embrace of interdisciplinary studies. They have evolved in recent years into a cross-cultural trend that many disciplines have found too precious to miss out on. The value of such works stands out best when crossing geographical and topographical peripheries, where writers could explore the intricate geopolitical relationships between the visitor and the visited. The borders represent an isthmus in their cultural exchange; a line of contact that also separates the two parties, making them unable to coexist without the need to acknowledge the great differences that reside between them. To this end, travel stories across the world have been analysed for their great potential contribution to the understanding of this complex metaphor in many academic fields, including anthropology, sociology, psychology, politics, history, and cinematography. In a way, the element of travel serves as a window through which scholars can peer into two separate worlds.

Moreover, the flexibility that the genre seems to be so blessed with is often considered one of its most enticing and nuanced features. It has often allowed it to straddle the limitations of its literary nature by shifting from one medium to another. Migrating from literature to cinema is a common example of its constant morphing. Thus, it is no surprise to see many of these travel texts fall under the limelight of ambitious screenwriters, producers, and film directors, all combining their expertise to bring such thrilling exhibitions onto a bigger frame.

Cinematography has often served as a great ally to the field of literary studies; adapters helping authors in their quest to convey meanings by providing a higher definition to their narrative visions. If a picture is worth a thousand words, then one can only imagine what a full cinematic production is worth, but it has sometimes come to trample over the original source, ignoring the literature's core message and instead deciding to focus on creating an offspring of a visual work. This is seen in many standalone films. These last ones have demonstrated a common proclivity to change courses from the original source and to offer an entirely different audio-visual experience, promoting a separate substance from the book. This type of transition

has been mainly criticised for its lack of loyalty to the books, but at the same time, it has also been praised by many others for its daring departure from the textual restraints imposed by its incipient literature, favouring creativity over conformity. Nevertheless, if the lack of the consumers' approval of the new product becomes too overwhelming from either side of the spectrum, book loyalists, or film enthusiasts, the prospect of the audience's galling backlash can, at times, be enough to condemn the adaptation's exaggerations of compliance to the novel, or its reckless plot deviations before even its release. The thought of failure alone can weigh heavily on the vision of the filmmaker and even put him at the mercy of compromise. As a result, the objective of striking a balance between the two bordering art forms almost seems to quadruple the burden that the artist/adapter might experience while filming their project. This research will not only focus on analysing the borders that separate these two media, but it will also concern itself with the geopolitical and cultural differences that filmmakers have to face in the process of transforming travel narratives into high-budget motion pictures.

When bringing travel literature into the world of cinema, the decision to shy away from or dive further into the representations of foreign cultures depends, among many things, on both the reception and the targeted audience for the film. Many scholars, such as Ileana Jitaru, argue that screen adaptations often seem to betray the impression of trying to adhere to a form of political correctness: "[Cinematic adaptations] must intend to provide no, or a minimum of, offence to racial, cultural, or other identity groups" (Jitaru, p 90). It can also be achieved by filling the quota of racial and gender diversity in casting and screenwriting. In other words, the filmmakers' intentions to adapt a book no longer simply emerge from a mere desire to please the original material's fandom but also to appeal to a larger audience, even if that means going against the author's strongly memorable narrative threads. Many people would consider this a necessary and even natural course of action since the adaptations would only then be able to give marginalised cultures and identity groups the voice they have long been deprived of.

Moreover, they believe that this form of change is a way to both celebrate and redeem these cultures against the racially motivated scenes originally interpreted in the novels. Jitaru, alongside others, disagree with such statements, arguing that the intention to focus on the ostracized's redemption arc in both the casting and filming of scenes always tends to be a dishonest form of portrayal manifested in Western adaptations. It guilt-trips the audience into liking the film and stifles the artistic visions of both the original creator of the story and the adapter. The debate about the importance of cultural representation in both literature and cinema has been growing in intensity over the years. This research will attempt to weigh in on this debate by examining the two sides advocating for these opinions up close.

In order to shed light on the role of cultural representations in films, this research will focus its investigation on a selected set of literary works and their movie versions. It will examine the work process of a number of Western authors and filmmakers, especially those who are prone to fall into the mistake of orientalisation and misrepresentation, in light of the already existing large body of stereotyped works.

The novels that my thesis is going to concentrate on will include *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad, *A Passage to India* by E.M. Forster, and *Dune* by Frank Herbert. From Conrad's semi-biographical story to Herbert's absurd sci-fi world, the choice for these titles was made on the basis of the colonial discourse they sparked, either before or after the release of their adaptations in film theatres. I also chose to work on these narratives due to the common theme they share, that of having Western, Caucasian main characters deciding to cross borders while putting aside their preconceived notions about foreign societies. With presumably open mindsets and a desire to learn more about the lifestyles of the destinations' native populations, these characters are often placed into unfamiliar territories to experience the foreign culture first-hand and formulate their own personal ideas about it. Through this research, I will attempt to investigate, more specifically, the position that African, Eastern and Middle Eastern societies

are made to assume in the large frameworks of these European and American characters' centralised stories, and try to determine the level of exoticism that is used to highlight the disparities between such social dichotomies. My research will also take a special interest in inspecting the degree of fidelity that is dedicated to the original novels' representation in the screen adaptations to identify the points at which the two mediums[1] decide to part ways.

In order to examine the claims stated previously on the topic, my thesis seeks to provide answers to the following main question:

- Does the intent behind crossing borders in the cinematic adaptations of travel literature come from a genuine impulse to explore and understand foreign, marginalised cultures, or is it a way to reinforce prejudice and stereotypical representations?

In order to answer this question, this thesis will attempt to construe the following sub-questions:

- What strategies do Western authors and filmmakers depend upon to avoid the backlash of their audiences when dealing with foreign cultures in their stories?
- How do filmmakers navigate the balance between staying true to the original literary work and creating a unique cinematic experience in the adaptations of travel literature?
- What role do borders, both physical and metaphorical, play in the representation of cultural differences in travel novels and their adaptations?

In an attempt to find answers to these questions, I hope to achieve the following in my research:

- To develop a better understanding of the relationship that exists between travel texts and their cinematic adaptations.

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[1] I use the word 'mediums' instead of 'media' throughout my research when referring to the plural modes of conveyance, and more specifically to the different forms of artistic expression, instead of the latter term that harbours a larger body of channelling outlets, both in the field of art and journalism.

- To assess the level of authority the main Western characters exercise in their cultural exchange with the other foreign parties.
- To determine the possibilities of reaching a cosmopolitan, universal form of expression in either literature or filmography by harnessing travel narratives.

My thesis will be conducted within the framework of comparative literature and film studies. The principal methods that will be applied to conduct this research are the descriptive and analytical ones. I will use the latter while comparing each adaptation to its original novel. In doing so, the thesis will attempt to answer the research question in both theoretical and practical terms. While the theoretical part will deal with the aforementioned theories and concepts in the abstract, the practical part will apply the same theories to the selected set of works in an attempt to convey an accurate understanding of both books and adaptations.

There has been an abundance of literature written about travelling across borders. Frontier travellers, as early as Marco Polo, Ibn Battuta, and even the Syrian satirist Lucian of Samosata, had realised the importance of recording their journeys across the earth, anticipating the impact of their experiences on the future of human history. Since then, travel logs have shaped and re-shaped people's perceptions of the outside world, but they have also inspired the imagination of another type of writer, who would go on to enrich the genre even further by talking about their wildest journeying fantasies and dreamscapes. Despite the fact that this research does not focus on fantasy novels, it is necessary to recognise the significant contributions that were brought to travel fiction by the heroic epics of *Gilgamesh*, Homer's *Odyssey*, and the adventures of Sinbad in the *One Thousand and One Nights* collection. Not only did such classics help bolster up the myth of the hero's journey and his insurmountable spirit in the face of the unknown, but they also encouraged travel literature to look beyond the historical and cultural constraints of reality. In addition to that, the visceral delights that these imaginary stories were able to produce have inspired more recent, modern fantasy epics like J.

R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time* to continue this tradition of imagining heroic feats. Not to mention, the latter two series have both become great, lucrative source materials for an even wider range of popular subsequent travel fantasies and an abundant well for both translated adaptations and spin-offs.

It is also important to mention some of the most influential researchers in the field of travel writing, who have sought to capture the thrill and versatility that travelling has brought to literature. Tim Youngs, Percy J Adams, and Jennifer Speake have all published a number of books that provide an in-depth history of the evolution of the genre and the shift it has hitherto gone through to transcend its previous fixations on mere travel logs and memoirs. Moreover, the fundamental works of comparative researchers such as James J. Griffith, Linda Hutcheon, and Thomas Leitch on the theories of adaptations must also be given due credit since they have opened their audiences' eyes to the greater possibilities of portraying these expeditions through other modes of expression. Such theories have helped the genre make another big leap by breaking through its linear, two-dimensional nature of textual publication.

Despite the rich panorama of adaptations that voyage narratives have thrived on over the years, ranging from films and modern theatre to music and even to video games, my research will take on a more in-depth look at the cinematic adaptations of border-crossing published works. It will study the interactions between fictional narratives and films in their quest to blur out both the physical and metaphorical borders that exist between cultures. Because of this, it is crucial to acknowledge the importance of certain post-colonial theories, Edward Said's ideas on Orientalism, Joseph Nye's illustrations of soft power's use and Debbie Lisle's concept of the 'traveller privileged gaze'. They are all equally vital to my assessment of the possibility of achieving a ubiquitous, multicultural coexistence through storytelling. I must also mention the quintessential works of Thomas Leitch about breaching artistic boundaries, Marie Louis Pratt's research on attempting to preserve the cultural contact zones that exist

between human societies, and Thomas Disch's ideas on science fiction's role in concealing the artists' true thoughts while immersed in alien storytelling. My research will study their impact on communications between nations, looking at both the differences and similarities that connect them.

While visiting the extensive research of Nawal Kechida on the conquering imagination expressed by European authors in the form of classic utopian travel writings, "*The Intertextual Reading of the Utopian Discourse in English Travel Literature*", the reader realises how the colonial discourse has been incrementally developed through such narrative intertextual implications. The subverted lines of thought that invisibly encapsulate the nations outside of Western peripheries are found in the stories of none other than celebrated European writers like Daniel Defoe, Robinson Crusoe, and Rudyard Kipling, among others. Their stereotyped depictions are at times difficult to discern from the mush of creative, fictional storytelling and ideal, personal havens of microcosmic world-buildings. Through their books, they attempted to seduce their readers with the feeling of permanent and unsullied settlements.

Nevertheless, the body of post-colonial criticism and modern readers' responses has eventually brought to the public's awareness the great, elusive propaganda that such classic works allude to as they brush over segments of power-driven gestures. This has also been reaffirmed in the abridged study of Bill Ashcroft on the *Spaces of Utopia (2012),* and the more recent thesis of Christopher Lund Lukasen and Isabella Jensen Steinicke on the "*Imperialist Discourse in Travel Writing*" (2019).

The one-sided accounts of these past Western travellers have become a justified subject for public scrutiny. However, in their overly passionate and at times spite-driven quest to expose these imperialistic tendencies, the essentialists of post-colonial criticism construct an irredeemable image of these types of publications. The result of this rallying is the loss of the

creative and even of the thematic attributes that travel fiction was once known for when authored from a Eurocentric point of view. Such stories have become less celebrated in the wake of their misconceptions of other cultures. This harm is also transferred to the later cinematic adaptation of these cast controversial journeys. In an extension of the accusatory blame that follows what some would call a sinking ship of a story, the film adaptation struggles at times to impose its originality. Souhali Hichem's research, *"Cognitive Dissonance in Robert A. Heinlein's Starship Troopers: The Fascist Utopia"*, for instance, highlights the audience's cognitive tracking of the transformed work as the contrast in the novels of science fiction published by Robert A. Heinlein shows the pre-indicative judgment that follows some of his novels. The different forms of high-minded American fascism are criticised in *Starship Troopers,* and despite the film adaptation taking a more satirical approach to capture the patriotism and sense of duty the characters express, some critics remained stern in their opinion of the story's underlying promotion of military control.

In a similar vein, my study attempts to continue the comparison of forms, between novels and films, in the hopes of exploring both the redactive and corrective approaches that adaptations come up with to deviate from the highly criticised scenes featured in the novels. Despite what some critics have labelled as an outdated debate over high and low forms of expression; the film passing off in the past as a low form because of its much shorter lifetime of contribution to storytelling (Bluestone, p. VII), but eventually having gained ground to separate itself from text, there remains a competitive spirit between the two mediums. In exploring their different properties of narratology, a socio-cultural exhibition within the multi-cultural fictive worlds captured differently on screen than on page, there lies a contest of primordial structural superiority. This one is partially decided based on the audience's rating and approval of the two versions, an argument that is expressed by modern critics and writers like Jeremy Berg and M. Jordan Raddick, Karen E. Kline, whose quantitative theories on

measuring the appeal and success of motion pictures have come to introduce a more numerical understanding of the adaptation process.

By shifting from a close analysis of the selected novels and their adaptations to a distant reading where the focus is set on the external success (or failure) manifested in the contriving symptoms of published texts and released films, my work attempts to reach an accord between proposed theories and observable findings. The purpose behind combining the two approaches is the concrete value that this merger adds to research in general, as Franco Moretti suggests: [D]istant reading, where distance (…) is a condition of know (…) allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text (…). The beauty [of this model] [when combined with the close reading of] world literature is its dialogue between fact and fancy, as Peter Medwar calls it "between what could be true and what is, in fact, the case" (Moretti, p 54). Without dismissing the importance of either approach and depending on the logical association that concretises one's personal rhetorical arguments, Moretti advocates for a more thoroughgoing organic investigation in the field of Humanities and Sciences. This combination thus constitutes the foundation of my research in its quest to reach a set of more pronounced conclusions that hopefully can enrich the readers' epistemological knowledge about which of the selected case studies accomplishes the transition from novel to film the best, while proving a seamless formal transgression from both the perspective of the adapter and the viewers.

With the assistance of the existing body of socio-cultural material that has accumulated around the controversial travel narratives and selected data-collecting theories pertaining to film reception, I will try to cover the different ways through which film directors cater to their audience's expectations of an ideal cinematic adaptation. For this, my investigation takes an interest in what makes a film adaptation gratifying to watch for most viewers, and consider these standards as the potential solution to the cosmopolitan question of whether universal artistic expression is a possible outcome.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is structured into two parts. Part one explores the interactive facets of travel writing by referring to past studies and artistic works, both novels and films, which contributed to the evolution of the travel genre. It includes, therefore, two theoretical chapters that attempt to define the most relevant concepts and theories to the ensuing analyses of my case studies, including the difference between travel fiction and writing, the main types of crossing borders, the art adaptation as a cross-cultural form of expression, and the continuous developmental state of film reception. It also explains the importance of the methodological shift that my research opts for, expanding upon the impact that the cinematic adaptations owe not only to their filmmakers' distinguished visions but also to their audiences' response.

Part two includes three close reading chapters and one distant analysis that constitute the synthesis chapter of my dissertation, and takes a more external look at the factors that define these case studies' imprint outside of their analysed canon contents. This part, therefore, starts with chapter three, highlighting the seemingly growing empathic European travel accounts to the rest of the world, and illustrated in Joseph Conrad's late 19th-century novel *Heart of Darkness,* a work that in later years has sparked a post-colonial debate over the story's racial connotations. These have been argued to be presumably conveyed through the words of Conrad's alter ego, Marlow, and might have intentionally been a true reflection of the author's support of European colonisations. This chapter compares how the two cinematic adaptations of this classic story have dealt with these potential manifestations of imperialism in both Francis Coppola's *Apocalypse Now (1979)* and Nicholas Roeg's *Heart of Darkness (1993)*.

In chapter four, the research takes an interest in a subsequent novel, a lot more fictional in terms of storytelling, but equally controversial in its depiction of another alienated nation. E.M Forster's *A Passage to India,* therefore, is an additional selected case of an attempt at

defending the rights of the colonised that has been met with the doubtful reactions of its critics, who have yet again called out the potential signs of hubris, Eurocentricism, and exotic fashioning of a country as nuanced and as diverse as India. David Lean's adaptation (1984) has also been the subject of comparison due to its noticeable disagreement with the route that the original work had taken in portraying the popular journey to the city of Chandrapore.

The fifth chapter brings to the readers' attention an even more reality-detached journey set in a far future, desolate, Earth-like planet called *Dune*. Frank Herbert's science fiction saga of books is the most fictively fashioned, personal take on transnational travel among these three cases. The series takes inspiration from the author's expeditions to Oregon's desert and his deep interest in the Arabic and Islamic culture. Herbert discusses with his audience the potential idea of a world ridden with political conflicts in a futuristic, imperially stagnant millennia. Some critics here, too, have taken notice of the more obvious personal judgment cast by the author around the Middle East, mainly manifested through the changes made to the religion and language spoken by the natives of the imagined planet. Denis Villeneuve's 2021 and 2024 films focus on a less culturally or religiously outspoken version of the story captured on screen while attempting to stay faithful to the original first novel. In this research, I hope to find out if such objectives have been met.

The Sixth chapter in my study tries to outline the quantitative achievements reached by the previously analysed film adaptations. The chapter, therefore, compares the different levels of success that each film has reached after its release, including review ratings and financial profits. These comparisons are sought in the hopes of finding which aspects of the filming process take a higher priority when pursuing perfection in the process of adaptation. The consumers' opinions are therefore the focal subject of this final chapter, as they have been known to take part in the general, colloquial discussions with the adapters over the artistically

refurbished stories that they have concocted behind the scenes, affecting their performance in the process after their release.

Part One: The Growth of Travel Literature and the Art of Adaptation in Concept and Theory

Introduction to Part One

The relationship between travel literature and cinematography has grown to such prominent heights that it is no longer possible to ignore the significant impact many travel texts and their screen adaptations have had on the attached labels of intercultural communications. As our reality often nourishes itself from the fictitious ideas that art continuously provides without perceptible signs of slowing down any time soon, crossing the boundaries of authenticity usually goes along well with how artists portray their journeys across geographical frontiers. Such parallel equations have come to intersect at a plethora of research crossroads. From the investigations of travel narratives, the latest developmental changes in foreign landscapes, especially pertaining to the hybrid forms of human coexistence, to the levels of devotion and curation in converting these narratives into a watchable transfiguration where travel stories come to life, the interdisciplinary study of crossing borders is far from being a simple anthropological linear examination.

In Part One, I explore the complex layering of such a research field by looking at the major affinities that define the medial relationships between journeying novels and the films that travel in turn outside those novels, but more importantly, I discuss the socio-cultural theories that characterise such narratives after having been retold under Hollywood's shining limelight. In their construction and breach of international borders, these stories offer relatively different versions of the same tale using two separate outlets. As travel literature has evolved over human centuries, so has the art of adaptation. This entails a better comprehension of the objectives Western movies seek to achieve when tackling unfamiliar territories. Therefore, in chapter one, I attempt to track the traditional forms of Western geographical and cultural portrayals of other nations while comparing them to the new, contemporary approaches of colonised and post-colonised societies' representations in travel literature in the hopes of better understanding the current state of the genre. In chapter two, I examine the nature of audits,

corrections, and re-evaluations that filmmakers try to implement while reframing texts into moving images. Considering that, film reception is also a decisive element in this reframing process; this chapter also explores the extent of power viewers have on the decisions implemented in the cinematic adaptation and the overall impact of their post-release verdicts.

Chapter One: Crossing Borders by Travelling through Physical and Abstract Landscapes

Introduction:

This first chapter studies the evolution of travel texts through different periods and academic fields in an attempt to define the current state of the literary genre as it stands. It takes, therefore, a particular interest in tracking the history of physical and intrinsic borders, which are often crossed in the textual Western publications relevant to the theme of travel, especially the ones that helped elevate and expand its horizons. The chapter also introduces a set of theories and approaches of interest to the study of interactions and mannerisms of Western travellers in their foreign settings. Artistic focalization and diegetic narratology are among the strategies used by these authors to control the course of their narratives, allowing them to depict the personalities and identities of the locals in the visited destinations in the images they desire. Over the years, these theatrical methods contributed in turn to blurring the boundaries between authenticity and hyperbole in their storytelling.

By highlighting the differences in perspective between the Eurocentric past ambitions of territorial conquest and the post-colonial criticism that was produced in response to their past narratives, this section of research attempts to cover the diverse sources of influence known to affect the opinions of the genre's readers over the history of its development. It tracks, therefore, the changing relationship of travel writers with their audiences in the hopes of better understanding the trajectory of travel narratives and their purpose in relation to other literary genres and artistic fields.

I.1. From Writing about Travel to Travelling in Writing

The re-enactments of travel journeys in books over the last few centuries have gone through great lengths to reach their current quasi-fictional status. That is not to say that

"authenticity" and "truth" are no longer sought out in contemporary travel writings, but one has to admit that these two long-time preserved standards have lost their magnetic pull in the eyes of the modern public. A case could even be made that such old and once-sacred beliefs have instead assumed the role of subsidiary consorts to other aspects that take priority in today's publications. What Percy G. Adams describes as "an amalgam of historical, antiquarian and aesthetic jotting" (Adams, p 12) denotes just how much scepticism and mistrust were cast upon the works of previous travellers and historians alike. Adams illustrates this by using Pausanias's second-century travel guidebook, "*Descriptions of Greece*", which is considered to be one of the earliest records to have ever been preserved in modern times. Despite providing a fair share of information about the topography of ancient Greece, this travelogue also compiles interviews and second-hand accounts that the Greek traveller had collected during his journey. This opens up room for a significant length of speculations about the authenticity of his work. His records might have blended factual elements with myth to an indistinguishable point; Adams even contends that his descriptions are riddled with plagiarised details and hearsay taken from other fellow writers (p 38), but as far as traditional travelogues go, Pausanias's book was treated as a formal informative map by many explorers and avid folktale believers of the time.

"[People can] travel the entire world by looking at a map", delivers Miguel De Cervantes in his classical epic, *Don Quixote*, "without leaving their chambers or passing beyond the threshold of [their house], not spending a [dime] or suffering heat or cold, hunger or thirst…" (Cervantes, p 470). This dissonant human desire to travel without moving outside a place of personal comfort and convenience is partly why many past travel guidebooks were taken at face value. A reluctance on the part of those who often opted to read about the travels of others instead of doing the travelling themselves could be interpreted as one of the major causes of this gradual shift in audiences' interest from travel writing to travel literature. As a

result, readers have gradually become amenable when questioning these texts' claims of factuality.

It is an understandable change of attitude, owing to the great excitement that can often be extracted from the voyages read in books. Unlike a first-hand touring experience, many travelogues were known for cutting down corners in their reports of long-distance expeditions, omitting the laborious, dull details of movement, and often jumping straight into more engaging and gripping cues of such accounts. These descriptions usually include panoramic renderings of beautiful destinations, sometimes made even more glittering and appealing to the visceral perception of the audience by the writer's strategically posited moments of imagination. The back-seated experience through which readers accompany the voyager assures an enchanting image of sightseeing that could sell them on the idea of visiting any worldly location. Moreover, if they prefer to marvel at the possibility of a personal expedition through metonymical descriptions while sitting comfortably in the warmth of their couches instead, armchair travellers, daydreamers, and closeted explorers have often found that these textbooks are able to suggest an enticing adventure all the same; padded with promises of great enjoyment and perhaps even some sense of life fulfilment.

Much like a promotional voyage brochure, Pausanias's work and many other texts that followed suit in that same fashion intended to attract as many fanatic hitchhikers and travel readers as possible, especially when the descriptions of landscapes are highlighted under a majestic light. In such cases, they serve as a fitting background for fantastic imaginings of heroic conquests that either put their writers at the frontlines or set the stage for more memorable, imaginary characters. What starts as a simple, dull guide for tourists can quickly become an appealing sort of storytelling. The *Travels of Marco Polo* is a prime example of that. The thirteenth-century popular Odyssey is often praised as the first bestselling travelogue to have ever been published, aside from the Greek prime one, *Homer's Odyssey* (Ratti). The

interactions with the Eastern other in his book provided a fresh outlook for European readers who wished to get a glimpse of what the world looks like on the opposite side of the globe. Their palpable interest in Chinese people's mysterious, foreign traditions made Marco Polo's great, long adventure across seas even more popular during its publication period. "It is true that Marco Polo was born in Venice, but the whole of Europe claims him" (Islam, p 121). His explorations, which had reached the vicinity of Kubla Khan, have been translated into so many languages and rewritten by a great number of European writers that the work has eventually become recognised as a monumental European achievement.

There is no denying that the Venetian sailor's tales conveyed during his stay in prison to his fellow writer Rustichello da Pisa were considered to be most likely imbued with the common hyperbolic form of narration known during that time, either by the narrator or the writer himself. Some scholars even question the occurrence of the entire journey, believing that a young Polo might have merely heard the stories from other travellers, borrowed them, and later collected enough courage to adopt them as his own (Vogel, p 70). However, to claim this is to question all of the economic and cultural information mentioned in his work, and, therefore, it means going against the current research tide that supports a significant number of details mentioned in his work. Moreover, we cannot dismiss everything pertaining to this renowned European expedition, for that would mean discrediting other historical explorations that portrayed similar accounts of Southern Chinese culture during his time. As much as the human imagination depends on reality in its fabrication of facts, a younger Polo could not have possibly made up an entire set of journals that share similar experiences with other writers. What is clear is that the success of his story remains an undisputable fact as opposed to the possibility of fact-checking the veracity of this historical figure's accounts.

For scholars like Tim Youngs, criticising the fictional work's touring value only because of the heavy scrutiny imposed over the authenticity of the physical trip and the

characters' heroic actions often distracts people from the other, more central aspects of the journey. “It is not just individuals that travel: cultures travel with them (…), Yet travel writing criticism often lets this drift out of view” (Youngs, p 179). In the case of the Venetian trader’s trip, Mark Elvin and Hans Ulrich Vogel argue that much of the Mongolian lifestyle and cultural representation depicted in the many versions of Polo’s story are well-supported by recent historical and anthropological investigations[2]. Even if the work is veiled by the ambiguity of its waxed and beautified sketching of Eastern territories, it still does a good job of capturing the readers’ interest in exploring unfamiliar landscapes. The travelogue’s appeal urges its audiences to read more about the prosperous facets of the Chinese empire and the progress of Asian cultures over the following centuries. In that respect, similar popular adventures that are able to cross their initial local acclaim are more likely to draw in a wider audience, even if it is through a set of semi-factual narratives.

Indoctrinated with this new potential superpower to transcend the borders of reality, travel writing may be praised for its experimental attempts to preserve the element of travel as its main imposing theme while also tugging on the different protruding genres that can be explored in such writings. Admittedly, this makes the job of defining travel literature as an educational discipline the more complicated in the academic sphere. There have been plenty of attempts at rounding up the sum of travel storytelling in the past, but none seem to hit the mark of overall agreement among scholars. From Paul Fussell's categorisation of travel writing as just another “…sub-species of memoir[s] in which the autobiographical narrative arises from the speaker's encounter with (…) unfamiliar data” (Fussell, p 203), to Nicholas Delbanco’s more open take of a definition, in which he suggests that all stories, whether fictional or real,

[2] In Vogel’s *Marco Polo Was in China (2012),* the writer probes different existing records of the Mongol Yuan Empire while comparing them to Polo’s descriptions. He confirms some of the most important claims the traveller makes including provided information about currencies, salts, and revenues. (Qtd.in Magone, p 788-789)

can be interpreted as travel writing (Delbanco, p 57), it is clear that travel texts have always served as a great subject of intrigue, especially for researchers keen on setting fixed definitions.

However, among the most notable of efforts in defining travel literature, many researchers surmised that Hans Robert Jauss's suggestion stands out the most for its rational reasoning. Jauss offered that the dominance of a certain theme [like that of travel] is what allows the writer to organise the subplots within a certain text (Jauss, p 44). It is like marking a hierarchy of categories in literature by using travel as the main tool to recount the narrative. Many scholars also choose to separate *the literature of travel* or *la littérature du voyage* from *travel writing or l'écriture du voyage* by adopting a similar Jaussian approach. If the non-fictional elements in the text exceed those that are fictional, then it is better to treat the text as a formal, non-fictional recording of the journey(s). By opting for this scale of definition, it is possible to generally exclude all memoirs, diaries, brochures, and maps from the category of travel fiction and approach them instead as historical documents. This could even be used as the primordial way of separating fictional travels from those presented as realistic ones. However, as we have established previously with the example of Marco Polo, we cannot fully dismiss the presence of artificiality even in some of the old diaries and maps of past cartographers and memorialists. Their intentions of objective conveyance are never entirely genuine, despite what they claim.

Instead of masquerading their fictional stories under a coat of historical recording, other, more modern writers have come to embrace the marriage of authenticity and personal imagination. William Golding's *Rites of Passage (1980)* openly indulges in this style of writing. The work has both the characteristics of a travelogue recounting a real 19th-century expedition to Australia recorded by a group of British migrants and that of a novel, the first in his popular fictional trilogy *To the Ends of the Earth (1980-1987)*. While Golding kept a faithful description of the journey's course, the author still used a familiar formula of narration

that he had become renowned for after the success of his previous novels, including his dystopian children's survival novel, *Lord of the Flies (1954).* In *Rites*, Golding focuses on exploring the tension of social demarcations, which he created by setting up a class hierarchy between his characters. The uncoordinated passengers aboard the ship named 'Britannia' find themselves cloistered up together on a precarious journey to Australian lands. Because of this, they are forced to tolerate one another to reach their destination safely (Proulx). While the sailing of the British ship was recorded as a historical event that had happened by the end of the Napoleonic conquest, the use of the trip as an opportunity to describe a potential dispute of classes aboard the Britannia is Golding's imaginary contribution. It allowed him to open up room for a personal speculative narrative to be born.

There is also the case for William Faulkner's *Yoknapatawpha County* map, which he had personally drawn and shared in many of his stories, including his 1936 novel *Absalom, Absalom!* The book consists of a collection of stories that heavily rely on imaginary settings revolving around real-life inspired European settlements in the native lands of Mississippi. According to Charles S. Aiken, there are so many similarities between Faulkner's imaginary map and the history and geography of Lafayette County that his outline of the region could have fooled anyone if presented as an older map of the county (Aiken 1-2). These factual details, however, are what inspired the writer to pursue fictional territories in the first place. They represent an important cornerstone in his stories. The connection between what is recorded to be real and what is fashioned as unreal has made his Southern Gothic works more fascinating to read while preserving just enough compelling possibility for their happening.

The morbid fate of Indian tribes at the hands of the settlers makes his audience question the unfolding of American history, which has often been known for being tampered with by many previous American writers. The extent of bloodshed and sacrifices committed to the foundation of an independent, great, new nation was often laced with euphemistic cuts and

expressions pertaining to a natural, historical course of changing tides. While some American writers chose to straddle over the past of Indian natives carefully, Faulkner, on the other hand, pulled the rug out right from under their feet, revealing the traces of a darker history that is often avoided as one of the greatest taboos of the United States' development. His map, although heavily inspired by a real-life location, is not excluded from the category of travel fiction.

Thus, to depend solely on detecting the prevailing qualities of a work cannot always be the solution in defining a text, and certainly not in defining a travel text, especially with how mouldable the element of travel has become over the last few centuries. Despite what many might have considered to be a nail in the coffin of past journeying guidebooks and journals that build themselves upon the reputation of providing their readers with an authentic, real view of the world, travel literature would persist and eventually grow into an important part of the *literature of the world*. Jennifer Speake puts this in more befitting terms as she states:

> The theme of travel runs through all the great literatures of the world—predictably so, since the metaphor of life as a journey is a powerful one that resonates across time and across cultures (…). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that travellers who write about actual journeys they have undertaken are often in some way influenced by that fictitious writing, and indeed the boundaries between fact and fiction in what we shall call the genre of travel writing are often hard to discern." (Speake, p XI)

The need to distinguish this kind of literature from travelogues or any other genres that depend on the element of mobility in their plot-building is, according to Speake, a futile task at this point. Instead, she encourages the embrace of all hybrid *f*orms of travel as a general theme that constantly crosses the thresholds set out by the rigidness of traditional academic rules. In this way, it can establish its own purpose. It may not survive on its own as an academic discipline,

but when paired up with other research subjects, it can quickly find its footing in the form of a rich and sometimes even vital area of study.

If a definition of travel fiction as a genre of literature is still sought out, I would label it as the culmination of various social, political, cultural, and even psychological concerns tackled over the course of a journey (or multiple ones), which greatly impacts the progress of the narrative. Feeding themselves on these concerns and morphing alongside them, the features of travel become an essential running mechanical cog that allows for the advancement of the story. Travel in such narratives is more than just an aesthetic device used to describe the settings of a text or the movements of the characters; it is also an important indicator that reflects the changing tides in people's relationships around the world. Between enmity and friendship, travel often captures the developing tensions and ententes among its characters in their continuous motions across time and space. Furthermore, the stages of a travel journey gradually impact the psychological and physiological state of its traveller, which highlights the importance of the component of solo-expedition narratives.

I.1.1. Resolving the Crisis of Travel Writing by Breaking Its Stagnation

While the embellished details of Western travelogues were frequently used to keep readers at the edge of their seats, there have been a number of critics over the years who denounced the value audiences get from reading them. After all, Western writers, who also claimed to be travellers, sought to make of their works, first and foremost, a solid source of personal revenue. The achievements they would credit to themselves in the foreign landscapes they so happen to come across, delineated a great deal of Western virtuousness and gallantry, devoid of what is now deemed as covert imperialistic tendencies. In addition to this, the thin line that separates aesthetic exaggerations in their descriptions, which are often used to generate a level of attraction and the ostentatious portrayal of entire fictional heroic conquests over

unfamiliar lands, was constantly being crossed by writers who dabbled in the genre. As European narratives grew in their grandiose obsessions with domesticating the outside world, so did the writers' pretence of prowess when fantasising about facing the unknown.

Jonathan Swift even satirised this trend in his famous parody of adventure tales, *Gulliver's Travels (1726).* He expressed —if not echoed— a clear annoyance with the genre's course of development during his time. "We were already overstocked with books of travels; that nothing could now pass which was not extraordinary; wherein I doubted some authors less consulted truth than their own vanity or interest, or the diversion of ignorant readers" (Swift, p 153). By describing these texts as a strike of vanity, Swift attempted to point accusatory fingers at the period's laid-back reception as well. Readers who continued to praise these romanticised accounts of overseas encounters, attributing great value to the entertainment that their exoticised accounts brought, over the legitimacy of the trips taken, were, according to the British author, to be blamed for integrating the more egomaniacal fabrication of these writings into the historical mainstream wave of travel records.

A couple of centuries later. The audience was still too quick to applaud the following generations of "self-proclaimed" Western travelling icons; most of their local adventures continued to be idolised without scrutiny, which contributed greatly to the linearising of travel literature. Claude Levi Strauss would reiterate similar complaints in his 1955 critical book *'Tristes Tropiques'* by stating the following:

> "Amazonia, Tibet, and Africa fill the bookshops in the form of travelogues, accounts of expeditions and collections of photographs, in all of which the desire to impress is so dominant as to make it impossible for the reader to assess the value of the evidence put before him." (Qtd. in HOLLAND and HUGGAN, preface)

This fostering of fabrications, especially around African and Eastern Cultures, often depicting them as an evil looming threat that needs to be exorcised, had set such narratives on a binary path over which Western writers would revel for centuries. From the survival conquest of Daniel Defoe's *Robison Crusoe* (1719) on the Island of *Despair* (Crusoe's choice of name for an off-coast Venezuelan island), to the safe return of Captain Marlow from the grasps of the Congo in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness (1899)*, many more would continue to join their precedents in parading the achievements of their travellers. While doing so, they also constantly depicted their settings as indigenous and savage lands. Adventure stories and voyage essays recounted the same pattern of whitewashed expeditions with little concern for their stereotypical reinforcement of other cultures' inferiority. Consequently, mainstream stories were plagued with a generic overview of the world in which a dominant, imperial perspective is forced upon a universal range of readers.

In addition to this stagnant state ushered in by past incessant, self-proclaimed bravery and altruism, the genre's halt seemed to prolong after the ill-fated annihilation of the Second World War. It was no surprise to witness an increasing absence of travelogues and touristic guidebooks as they gradually dwindled out of view during the interwar period and after the entire world was thrown into this horrific frenzy. Paul Fussell went even further by mourning what he predicted would be a fated, unsalvageable death of the entire genre; both fiction and non-fiction would simply cease to put an emphasis on the journey segments of the work, claiming that "travel is hardly possible anymore. An inquiry into the nature of (…) travel writing between wars will resemble a threnody" (p 37). Fussell's opinion was most likely formulated in alignment with the psychological despair the two wars have created. As much as public disheartenment and fear that these two tragic events brought, however, the wars, in their aftermath, did not serve as a deterrent factor for travellers but rather as a fuel used by many modernist writers in their passionate desire to capture the turmoil of the period.

T.S. Eliot's *"The Waste Land"* (1922) and Aimé Césaire's "*Notebook of a Return to the Native Land"* (1947) are two of the most noticeable, well-known poems that attempt to encapsulate that universal, human urge to vent out about the overwhelming restlessness and estrangement that survivors were trying to cope with. Through their explorations of wreckage, the two poets conveyed some of the most salient symptoms of the wars' ramifications by stepping into a post-war setting. The fragmented descriptions that many other modernist writers depended on, the similar tracking of gradual cultural frictions, and the intermingling of people from different backgrounds that was happening around the world—in Césaire's work, taking on stronger racial and postcolonial overtones— were greatly supported and influenced by their travelling experiences.

After the war's dust had settled, travel writing, especially travel literature, had grown astronomically in terms of popularity. The overall state of human mobility was made faster and more comfortable, and this was only increased by the astounding breakthroughs that were achieved in the field of transportation, but it was also thanks to the great metropolitan renovation of what is now looked back upon as past arid lands. Tourism has flourished and expanded among the masses, and so has communication, which helped further unlock the potential of effortless navigation and homestead travel by creating a global network of intercultural sharing. It was now possible to go sightseeing by just staring at motion pictures displayed on people's home monitors. The map that Cervantes once described as an economic, alternative tool for people who could only afford to fantasise about their expeditions, grew exponentially in its dimensions and now offered a higher-definition, visual perception of such aspired destinations.

Both mechanisation and digitalisation helped promote tourism by embracing an international expansion of relationships. People were growing keener to the idea of visiting the

world without worrying about the political vendetta that once defined the geographical thresholds of public travel. These factors seemed to bring a torrent of endless future prospects for human mobility. The overall increasing development of the late twentieth century was what Carl Thompson described as "laudable democratisation of travel" (Thompson, p 57). Albeit, not everyone was as optimistic about the pace of this progress. The general complaints of writers and scholars who did not appreciate this increasing dependence on machines amounted to an overwhelming concern for the sanctity of physical travel. The comfort these motor vehicles have brought into the lives of people was also considered to be an obscene and vulgar attack against the natural state of human movement. The panoramic depictions of landscapes captured from vehicles were, simply put, far different from the ones recorded by old-fashioned excursionists and earth trotters.

The future of travel writing was, thus, again, put to the test of time under more punishing criticism. Many writers, including George Orwell and Eric Newby, argued that, unlike a direct experience of physical mobility, the assistance of vehicles significantly devalued the original thrill that is intended to be experienced in a personal journey. Newby even bashed the concept of being sheltered by a moving machine while looking at the outside world through a narrow glass window, saying, "If there is any way of seeing less of a country than from a motor car [he has] yet to experience it" (Newby, p 63-64). Adding to this, the affordability of tourism in the modern day and age seemed, for many of these opposing critics, to make the existence of travelogues obsolete. They believed that the rise of transportation machines could replace the age-old question of 'Why travel when you can read about travel?' with its oxymoronic slogan 'Why read about travel when you can travel yourself?' especially when you can rely on various available engine-powered hauliers to do so. The sum of assumptions that many sceptical writers held about the survival of the travel genre was wrapped around a

shared feeling of their physical impending discontinuity that would put an end to physical travel as a whole.

One would think that travel writing would eventually fall apart under the increasing weight of its paradoxes; while transportation machines offered panoramic rides around the world, this new docile form of mobility was felt to be too much of an artificial intrusion on humans' God-given ability to walk and run, and a sacrilegious bargain that exploited people's longings for comfort. Fortunately enough, contemporary travel literature proved otherwise. The technological development with which travel quickly became associated has brought a great deal of versatility in recounting futuristic and mythical narratives. Transportation in both science fiction and fantasy novels assumed the role of a core creative element of mobility. The shift of characters from one location to another turned into prolific sections of literary, innovative segways of storytelling. From using flying cars and spaceships, magical broomsticks and even teleportation closets in renowned series such as Douglas Adams's *Hitchhiker's Guide to Another Galaxy (1979–1992)*, J.K Rowling's *Harry Potter series (1997-2007)*, C. S. *Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia (1950-1956)*, and Eric Frank's *Sinister Barrier (1943)*, to the virtual types of cerebral voyages described in William Gilbert's *Necromancer (1984)* and Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One (2011)*, the endeavour to re-invent travel in these stories was and still is constantly being inspired and pushed forward by real-time progress.

In addition to the fresh breath of air that these transportation means have infused into contemporary fictional works, their distance-closing capabilities have brought into such stories an increasingly diversified set of backgrounds and characters. Despite the past rough patches that Western accounts have gone through, especially in their flat attempts to include and describe encounters with unfamiliar cultures, the universal state to which the world was pivoting was gradually being embraced and even recognised by different novels. The works of writers like Salman Rushdie, Mohsin Hamid, Frank Herbert, and Nnedi Okorafor have

incorporated original means of mobility in their fictional worlds that resulted in similar unavoidable diasporic conjunctions. In the midst of their interactions, their characters are often forced to find accord amongst each other in order to reach a harmonious state of parallel being. Through their futuristic and fantastical worlds, these writers choose to believe, and even defend, the potential future of a cosmopolitan human society, where conflict could end by crossing through some *'golden path'*[3] to an ultimate state of hegemonic peace.

I.1.2. Comfort and Urgency in Travel Literature

Travel versatility is mostly associated with the circumstances of the traveller. If this one enjoys some level of wealth, strength and an upper social ranking that allows him to traverse any corner of his region without feeling the unease of danger lurking around him, then his voyage would take on the colour of a local touristic narrative. This kind of exploration is opposed to the ordinary, working/middle-class citizen's promenade, whose objective is often to gain a sense of relief through a stroll around the city or within some rural area. However, instead of a temporary escape from the unheroic character's day-to-day problem-ridden life, the 'flâneur,' to borrow Charles Baudelaire's term, finds himself on a rough, restless path. This is the case for James Joyce's 1922 *Ulysses*. Because of his household quandaries and personal tribulations, Leopold Bloom sees the city of Dublin under a different light; it is a filthy, drunken place, populated with aggressive and unwelcoming people. His descriptions are unlike those of past Irish authors and songwriters who romanticised Dublin and even dubbed it "the fair city"[4]. Joyce's novel reflects little of this fairness and more of the daily struggles common men and

[3] The golden path is a term that used by Frank Herbert's in his second book *Dune Messiah (1969*) and expanded upon in the later instalments of the Dune series. It refers to a difficult, singular path that humanity has to cross in order to preserve its future and attain an optimal life of eternal peace and prosperity.

[4] The description of "fair city" can be traced back to a traditional Irish song entitled, *Molly Malone*. The song tells a popular folktale story of a fish seller called Molly in a 17th century Dublin who dies of a fever. The precise lyrics from which the description is borrowed are: "In Dublin's fair city, where the girls are so pretty".

women labourers endure. It captures the environment of a supposed enchanting location from a different vantage point, one that is not as perfect nor as radiant as what many past utopian touring stories have described.

Outside of these local settings, one may think that all classes of travellers would find themselves on even grounds. Whether the character comes from a noble, chivalrous, and strong lineage or a poor, nameless, working family, it is a common misbelief that the difference in the characters' background does not matter in the face of unfamiliar or unexpected perils. While the theory of a new identity getting remade and refitted on the basis of how well the voyager adapts to foreign landscapes does have some truth to it, the reasons that go into making the journey in the first place set a wall between an expedition overseas and a coerced migration. The former is usually made for the purposes of touring, trade or even conquest, which are evidently separate from those of the latter type. Stories of displacements and resettlements revolve around a search for better living circumstances or an indissoluble escape from imperilling local ones. The amount of control and power that the traveller in such cases exercises over his choices of desired destinations or beneficial actions and decisions is minimal to none compared to that of an intentional, desired journey.

Furthermore, the narratives of past Western expeditions overseas, like that of Daniel Dafoe's *Robinson Crusoe,* demonstrate a strong clinging to local selfhood and have a tendency to create what is known as a "paradox of home travel". Such a term denotes the difficulty travellers face in realising that crossing borders requires bidding farewell to one's local culture and territory. "…For Robinson. Despite covering tracts of ocean and landmass, [he] never manages to travel anywhere" (Islam, p 3). The character tries to carry all the supplies of his home over his shoulders like a tortoise's shell. Because of this, Crusoe barricades himself from the risk of being contaminated by any form of alien lifestyle. Instead of trying to understand the differences between his culture and the others'. He decides to assume the moral high ground

by spreading what he thinks is the vaccine to an indigenous population of foreigners. This is evidenced by Friday's presence in the book. The black character is never recognised as Crusoe's friend, but rather a pitiable case of rescue that was brought out from presumable darkness to European light.

Contrary to the travellers, who take their homes with them, the binding fate of immigration offers a different look at the narratives of cross-border travel. The unfortunate, society-rejects and forsaken minorities do not seek to civilize or change the outside environment to resemble their own birthplace, or at least this does not start off as their priority, but instead hope to find a new location they can call home while looking at the prospects of merging into its people. The differences between the two voyages lie in the levels of urgency, economic freedom and socio-cultural struggle individuals face in their migration abroad, as April Shemak outlines in her 2017 article, *"Refugee and Asylum Seeker Narratives as Postcolonial Travel Writing"*:

> Much refugee and asylum seeker travel is clandestine or not officially sanctioned. Among the many issues that refugees and asylum seekers face is the urgent journey marked by escape; they are not travellers who plan and plot journeys in the same way as travellers whose lives are not in danger. Refugees and asylum seekers may travel without official documents that legitimise their movements, or they may carry forged documents. Their journeys are often perilous – they often walk vast distances, take precarious water vessels, stow away on airplanes, and endure a lack of shelter and food insecurity. (Shemak, p 190)

Instead of a search for expansion, comfort or leisure, this type of narrative emphasises the survival of immigrants, who surrender a past life and are forced to forge new identities that single them out as sub-par citizens in their new adopted countries. Their search for shelter is

veiled by the uncertainty of lasting stability and safety. Even after having the fortune of finding a place they can call home, these 'asylum seekers' are always under the threat of being racially profiled, antagonised, stripped of their citizenship, or even deported from their newly found shelters. This is the case for Zadie Smith's hybrid characters in her 2001 novel, *White Teeth*; the example of the Iqbal family is one of the most used ones to illustrate such a threatened life standing on eggshells. Due to their Bengali roots, its members always feel the harsh scrutiny of the British gaze over them, constantly receiving the short end of the stick compared to their white peers. For Zadie, the diasporic blueprint of living abroad tends to generate the common misbeliefs of a better life, if not of a European paradise, within a one-way trip's reach. It is the responsibility of such diasporic novels to curb such expectation, offering a reality of border-crossing that exposes the hardships of settling down while facing the gatekeeping parts of a passive-aggressive, and sometimes an actively hostile, community.

In these novels, writers expect their audiences to evolve from mere sightseers and spectators in their worlds and to assume further roles that are more detrimental to the interpretation of their narratives. They want them to become critical witnesses or even jurists who are able to formulate their own conclusions. The writers attempt to bring forth this transformative change by capturing the fluctuation between friendship and antagonism generated through the diversity of the interlocutors' environment. By depending on a diasporic form of storytelling, travel is then often employed as a comparative tool that provides a multiplicity of perspectives instead of the old linear version that was once spoon-fed to the readers using the words and thoughts of one main character — the visitor or the traveller. Hence, including a wider range of voices gives the reader more substance to assess the persistent issues and challenges that are often observed in the midst of such complex communications.

The question that is still continuously asked to this day is: Can a travel of urgency across borders transform into a travel of comfort? In other words, is there a way to reach the latter state and permanently escape the looming risks that still hover over the immigrants' lives without paying too much of an expensive cost? Sam Knowles argues that it is certainly difficult to reach the realm of permanent stability for immigrants, and it is especially the case for transnational writers like Sri Lankan/Canadian author, Michael Ondaatje, whose writings are proof enough of such a resurfacing insecurity. When analysing some of the travel snippets shared by the author in his memoir *Running with the Family (1982)*, Knowles chimes in by describing Ondaatje as a writer who seems "simultaneously comfortable and unsettled: he is both at home and a foreigner" (Knowles, p 42). His words evoke a sense of self-conscious lack of belonging in a foreign country, deeply entrenched in the memories of the immigrant and only manifesting itself through the semantics of the sharing party's words.

There is an increasing number of literary works that explore this question under the umbrella of a hybrid futuristic human society. As artists dive deeper into the imaginings of future utopian states by imagining relatively different versions of human ascendance, they also stray away from reality. As a result, their works usher in newer predicaments of the idealised blueprints in which bettered worlds born out of differences try to stay up on their feet by the end of their stories. Their closures reflect both of the novelists' optimism and concerns for the future generations of humankind.

I.2. From Geographical Narratology to the Abstract Dimensions of Space in Storytelling

The first images that come to mind when one thinks of travel literature are the journeying moments of characters across lands, mountains, forests, deserts, rivers, oceans, and even galaxies. The geographical settings of travel stories are as important as the process of exploration itself—If not more. The world that envelops the voyager during his progress from

point A to B does not simply place him on a map. It opens up multiple dimensions of opportunities for events to occur. That is why the richness of a narrative often depends on how large and how believable the fictional world is made to seem. The more details the imagination can conjure up through spatial descriptions provided by the author, the closer the reader feels to the environment of the story. The attention dedicated to the mapping details in a novel, including the positioning of characters inside or outside the buildings described, argues Gerald Prince, helps increase the readers' cartographic understanding, thus allowing them to be more immersed in the narrative (p 176). The works of J.R.R. Tolkien and Frank Herbert are great examples of that. The two writers emphasise the importance of world-building by showcasing how impactful geographical settings can be over the progress of the narrative. Herbert even states in the fourth instalment of his popular saga, *Dune, God Emperor* (1981), that "the influence of geography on history (goes) mostly unrecognised (…) Humans (tend) to look more at the influence of history on geography" (Herbert, p 41), hinting at the dismissive treatment that geographical descriptions were suffering from in many post-modern novels.

Unlike narratives that depend on the portrayal of physical travel, temporal and psychological voyages tend to emphasise a more personal outlook on the world. Plunging into the abstract realms of the imagination and/or of the psyche, this type of narrative rebels against the common, overtly expressed characteristics of a traditional trip while casting doubts upon the kind of verisimilitude that many writers aspire to achieve. Kurt Vonnegut's 1969 novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five,* is able to accomplish this objective without dismissing the geographical setting of the story. The result is a time-travel narrative that re-imagines the horrors of the Second World War through the account of the Dresden bombings and a psychological uncloaking of a traumatic fracturing in Billy Pilgrim's mind. The perspective of someone of a remarkably unheroic oddity from New York, who gets shoved into the battlefield to fight against the German troops and survives the massive wipe-out of an air assault, is an eye-opener

for many readers. Time travel, although it takes an abstract, personal tone, which reflects Vonnegut's own experience during the war, is used as an important tool to probe the inner wreckage of Billy's mind while providing a fresh vantage point for readers to discover the scale of destructive impact this dreaded historical event had on a fraction of humanity. Because of his creative endeavours to re-envision what a journey through war would look like, Vonnegut's novel falls into the unconventional category of travel literature. It is one that attempts to create a symmetrical type of travel by achieving a balance between physical, temporal, and psychological events, without having one dimension supersede the others.

Many writers have tried to follow this style of narration, but would often end up heavily leaning on the abstract descriptions of their settings while overlooking the importance of these metaphysical elements' connection to the more realistic, geographical descriptions of the story. American author Marie-Laure Ryan suggests this idea in her 2016 book entitled *"Narrating Space, Spatializing Narrative"*. She believes that geographical settings have been given the cold shoulder in contemporary novels compared to the other two dimensions, stating that:

> Space is a relatively neglected dimension of narrative, especially when compared to time (…). Space is an essential part of the mental act of narrative world (re)construction, since the imagination can only picture objects that present spatial extension. An image, after all, requires at least two dimensions. This spatial bias of the imagination explains why language tends to represent time in terms of spatial metaphors, such as "life is a journey," "the past is behind us," (…) But many of the spatial concepts proposed in conjunction with narrative tend to be metaphorical and fail to account for the physical existence of characters, objects, and setting (Ryan, et al., p 16-17).

Without a firm, physical groundwork on which these abstract notions can gradually mature and develop into the cognitive perception of the readers, their abstruse nature is bound to diminish the audience's immersion. Because of this, Ryan argues that there should be a fundamental rule for travel fiction to rely on a solid infrastructure in the narrative's world-building, starting with recognisable geometrical measurements and physical descriptions before moving into the more complex aspects and alien principles that govern the fictional space. The imagination of the readers can process complex, new information, which tends to stray away from human familiarity only after having been given enough realistic details to start with (Ryan, et al. 45).

It is through the gradual discovery of the mythical world's rules and basics can the readers smoothly sift into its unknown territories. If the rules do not initially offer enough familiarity for readers to feel comfortable before moving into fantastical realms and dreamscapes, then the sham used to distract the audience from the fictitious aspects of the novel's world could easily crumble down by losing its soundness and plausibility. This loss can be caused by any of the events that the story tries to hold as speculative occurrences. A human earthly connection in fictional novels is, therefore, what maintains a compelling level of storytelling, one that could preserve the appeal of friction between the real and the unreal long enough to hold a steady hook over the readers' engagement until reaching a satiating closure in their reading venture.

Another rule that writers who are interested in capturing their stories through spatial settings are often advised to follow is the use of focalisation devices. These tools help them select what elements in the story's settings they would like readers to concentrate on during their reading. In other words, when authors want to keep some props out of the audience's view or locked for later use, they tend to rely on certain covert descriptive strategies to control the perception of their audience. Gérard Genette defines focalisation as,

> …the answer to the question "who sees" (or, more generally, "who perceives") as opposed to the question "who speaks." The "who" marks the difference between point of view and focalization: point of view stands for a purely spatial position from which a scene is observed (e.g., from above or below, from afar or close by), whether or not this position is occupied by somebody, while focalization suggests that the scene is inscribed in somebody's consciousness. (qtd. in Ryan, p 20)

This theory is by no means exclusive to literature. I previously used the word 'props' because focalisation is often employed during theatrical performances. On stage, storytelling is heavily measured and supervised when it comes to perceptual display. It depends on a make-believe sort of setting; what is absent on stage is still alluded to by the presence of props' indications and word cues. This keeps the spectator well-informed about the story's progress. Moreover, the way the stage is set up during each act is a detrimental part of the story's framework. The environment that it captures under the gaze of its spectators has to keep them engaged in the play's development. That means any off-putting distractions the audience becomes conscious of during the performance have the potential to draw their engrossment away. Even if the acting happens to be spectacular at that moment, an out-of-place tree or a green bush that overstays its welcome on set when the next act is supposed to happen in a desert-like location is more likely to create an awkward impression on the attendees' viewing experience.

Spatial focalisation draws a lot of its principles from Carl Husserl's phenomenological ideas. The most important of which is his correlation between objects and human consciousness. Husserl considers the physical presence of an object close to a person to be less important than the thought of it existing in his consciousness. He writes:

> Everything which we call object, of which we speak, which we confront actuality, which we hold as possible or probable, no matter how indeterminately we think it, is precisely, therefore, already an object of consciousness; and that signifies that whatever world and actuality taken universally may be called, they must be represented in the framework of actual and possible consciousness… (Husserl, p 322)

By picking the details that constitute the spatial settings of a story in his readers' minds, the writer can have an impact on the momentary reality in which his audience becomes invested. The novel's fictional world is, therefore, manifested through stimulating thoughts. When the writer intends to make his characters change locations in his work without putting too much focus on the technicalities of their trip, he only has to bring to his readers' attention the means of transportation that he fancies as the most fitting commodity for the written scene. Boarding a train, a boat, a car, or using an otherworldly system of travel is enough to justify his character's transition without describing every detail of the trip. This type of off-frame scene that is implied through narrative devices is one of the most depended upon gimmicks in story crafting. It helps artists overcome the bearing challenges of explaining long and tedious sequences of an unremarkable set of actions. Focalisation alongside the inclusion of diegetic events[5] are used, thus, as compressing techniques intended for audiences to understand the gist of any contextual information without getting lost in the story, exacerbating peculiarities.

Despite the increasing responsibility that is being assigned to contemporary readers by the concurrent novels they read, expecting them to cultivate an all-around form of knowledge,

[5] Diegetic events are related to the diegesis style of storytelling. It allows the narrator to make his audience aware a selected context that contribute the main story's progress without diverting the spotlight from the central events. The audience can thus become aware of past memories, thoughts, and behind the scene instances through these short diegetic instances.

one that even extends to the continuous proliferation of the period's most up-to-dates changes, navigating the fictional space of any narrative remains one of few realms through which writers try to save their readers the trouble of following every step the characters makes. The strategies of space narratology are, therefore, growing in their accommodation of the readers' engagement, demanding less strenuous attention to the details that are distant from the narrative's plot and a greater openness to accept the unmentioned elements within the narrative. This comes at the cost of managing moments that require a slight of tongue, in which the implied information has to be persuasive enough to make their audience participate in this subtle crime of temporal and spatial omission; subconsciously, readers accept the writer's evasion of context in their desire to get closer to the plot's climax.

I.2.1. Boundaries, Borders, and the Frontiers Beyond

There might not be an overwhelming set of differences that could separate the three basic concepts of boundaries, borders, and frontiers from one another. Ultimately, they are all designators of geographical peripheries used to trace the crevices of the earth in the form of maps, and this boiled-down cartographic denotation is, for many researchers, even the ones spatialised in geographical and anthropological studies, enough of a validation to use the three terms interchangeably in their works. What matters is the examination of the phenomenon's peripheral fluctuations. This unified purpose that joins the three spatial concepts is there to help increase the public's general understanding of how the world's formation continues to change over time. Albeit this could also be said about every other epistemological objective when relatively explaining any nuanced technical concept, which still begs the question: Is there even a need to discern any distinctions at all? After all, nations worldwide can be identified by drawing schematic curves and contours all the same on the map. They all represent boundaries, borders and frontiers, and are all used to locate and set terrestrial zones apart from their outer

neighbouring territories. According to researchers such as Ulrich Beck and Etienne Balibar, being aware of these differences is becoming of great importance to untangle the increasing complexity of their social, cultural, and political impacts.

Beck argues in his 2004 book "*What is Globalization?*" that despite the increasing materialisation and proliferation of such spatial notions in concurrent times, people are growing more callous with the various imposed curbs that dictate the pace of their mobility as well as their daily behaviours (Beck, p 28). Any newly imposed restrictions, whether local or international, are, in his opinion, easier to maintain nowadays because of the overall public lack of concern over the roles they serve. Balibar adds further insight to this idea by calling attention to how "[b]orders are being both multiplied and reduced in their localization and their function, they are being thinned out and doubled (…) the quantitative relation between "border" and "territory" is being inverted" (Balibar, p 220). Such changes seem to be redefining the old terrestrial borders, replacing them with more elusive constructs that are constantly getting reshaped and integrated into societal normality. People seem more acceptant of them, and perhaps it is because they believe that they still retain their protective, sheltering benefits. The truth is, today's societal outlines are less transparent in terms of the roles they perform, including the safety and security that was once attributed to them.

When considering the old distinctions that separate the three spatial concepts, scholars who are interested in studying their developing properties up close, have often reported that physical boundaries, once distinguished by their natural structures (like rivers, mountains, oceans, or even forests) combined with human-built architectures (like walls, fortresses, castles, or even towers) have become less organic overtime. A once balanced layering of artificial constructs on top of naturally emerged ones that allowed archaeologists to identify the core and peripheries of past civilisations has now become more susceptible to the latter

artificial, human-based tracts. The old equilibrium that shaped distinguishably hegemonic, societal jurisdictions of borders, as a result, has been fractured (Cherry, p 150). This argument alludes to the increase in legal measures required to enter and leave one's country, leading to modern political issues like those of illegal immigration, asylum-seeking, or even displacement. It also highlights the increasing inconsistencies that exist in the legal systems of separations and the cultural set of beliefs that local regions distinctly continue to modulate and maintain as part of their somewhat exclusive, independent identities.

Despite their complicated sub-organisations and constant re-structuring, it is true that these new geographical indicators are becoming so distant from the old tribal ones, but not necessarily harder to geographically discern. According to Bryan Feuer:

> …distinctions between core and periphery would be difficult to discern in simpler acephalous societies such as tribes, and possibly chiefdoms as well. Thus such characterizations apply almost entirely to state societies which demonstrate some degree of centralization. In such instances it is easiest (…) to identify the core zone or central region as the area most fully developed along various dimensions (…) [which in turn also makes] peripheral zones [easier to] define and characterize in comparison to the center. (p 4-5)

Because they are easier to trace based on the outline of both centre and peripheries on the map, this makes tracking the hierarchy of distinctions between boundaries, borders, and frontiers an essential part of many political and socio-cultural investigations. Issues similar to the ones that I have mentioned previously also affect the geographical formation of their subject territories. When investigating these discrepancies, researchers consider their impact on the balance of power between nations and, therefore, continue to pursue a clearer understanding of the role such concepts play in the midst of international issues. Defining these terms, even while

restating the common aspects they share, can give us an idea about the affinities they have with the new detrimental and less visible norms imposed by the modern diplomatic relationships that define today's international relationships.

First and foremost, boundaries can be described as a more basic concept compared to the other two. While borders and frontiers are defined by the zones they delimit, boundaries focus instead on the marginal, two-dimensional lines that enclose and separate their territories. The notion of boundary puts a lot of importance on the zoning edges rather than the acreage itself. It helps mark the lines that isolate the self from the other or the local life from the foreign one (Feuer, p 12). Borders and frontiers are, therefore, both characterised by their boundaries. They are, on the other hand, harder to differentiate as they are both used as territorial tools that mark the extension of areas inside and outside of their boundaries, so many scholars suggest a definition based on the distance that the two keep from societal centres.

Thomas Schippers compares the contours of borders, for instance, to "the shadow of one's second skin" (Schippers, p 29); they are closest to the flesh as they share more similarities with it, and if the flesh represents the centre, the same goes for borders. However, this makes them less developed compared to the central zone, therefore having a provincial quality to them. Borders are, in this way, more prone to change compared to frontiers. They do not necessarily represent regional areas within a single nation, but they tend to be used as a way of highlighting the level of intimacy in the relationship that one nation has with outer regions.

Frontiers, on the other hand, have become a more solidified concept, recognised as the outer layers that mark a nation's limits of jurisdiction. Previously referred to as areas of colonisation, frontiers have become synonymous with the settlements upon which a country focuses its expansion and sustainment. Feuer puts this into a clearer perspective by depicting the concept as:

> [a]n area of interpenetration between societies. It contains three elements: a territorial element, a zone or territory as distinct from a boundary line; a human element, comprising peoples of initially separate and distinct societies; and the process by which relations between [b]oundaries, [b]orders and [f]rontiers in Archaeology among such peoples commence, develop, and eventually crystallize. A frontier opens with the first contact between the members of two societies. It closes when a single authority has established political and economic hegemony over the zone (Feuer, p 17-18).

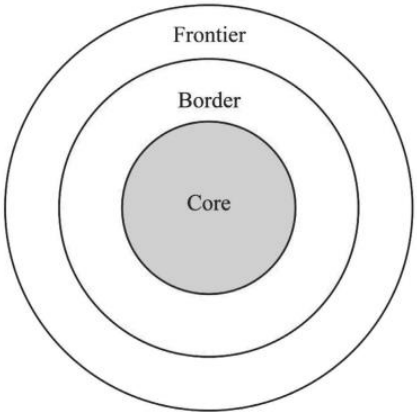


Figure 1: Feuer's First Schematic Model of Core/Border/Frontier

With the assistance of his two schematic circle-shaped models[6], Feuer makes a point by setting frontiers as the second outer layer after borders in any territorial zone. His first outline, seen in Figure 1, indicates that the concept puts a stronger emphasis on the nation-imposed frontiers, marking the international political interactions that govern their relationships. However, he still maintains that borders and frontiers are liminal concepts by nature despite their theoretical definitions, as they constantly overlap in reference to societal aspects (Feuer,

[6] Bryan Feuer's circle-shaped models put a lot of emphasise on the difference in terms distance that borders and frontiers maintain from the centre. See *Boundaries, Borders and Frontiers in Archaeology* (p 15-16)

p 21). This means that relying on their fixed, intended significance that only determines the power shift in a geographical area can sometimes lead to the dismissal of cultural and ethnic factors' impact on the escalation or de-escalation of political friction between rivalling societies.

Since the focus of this research is more on the socio-cultural interactions between characters/interlocutors of diverse national backgrounds, the examination of borders seems more appropriate due to their set of equivocal and provisional features. In the instances where political and judicial affairs may arise in my discussion of such interactions, I will employ the term “frontiers” to highlight the doctrinaire meanings that the concept evokes. But given the important role that societal contacts play in authors and filmmakers' attempts to capture in their stories, I will refer to the traversal of borders as the central form of attention that the books and films I have selected incorporate as part of their artistic congeniality. As for boundaries, I consider the term a better fit for the limits that separate original books from their multi-faceted adaptations. The fact that there is a great number of adapters who construct their interpretations starting from two-dimensional written texts to create alternative narratives always requires them to break through the initial, linear boundaries of ink and paper-based descriptions. Therefore, the term boundaries is often used when referring to these artistic forms of migration, while often emphasising the original limits that novels impose on the adapters’ desire to bring fan-favourite novels to life.

I.2.2. Geopolitical and Socio-Cultural Borders in Travel Literature

When people think of how humanity has evolved over the long course of its miraculous existence, they often mull over the recurring wars and disputes that have erupted among nations. From the first century Roman conquest of Central Europe and the Middle East through which the Great Roman Empire rose to world dominion, and the 13th-century Mongolian siege that covered half of earth’s hemisphere by stretching from China to Eastern Europe, to the rise

of the Ottoman Empire in the mid-16th century as it extended to the Viennese borderlines, these historical conflicts are usually looked at, first and foremost, as territorial battles. The now immortalised idiom "to the victor go the spoils" perfectly sums up most of their culminations. This long thread of rivalry over land throughout human history teaches people a great deal about their own human nature, mostly highlighting an urge for a territorial form of conflict, one that defines our world politics.

Alexander Diener and Joshua Hagen have touched upon this same idea when stating: "We live in a very bordered world where borders are central features in past and current international disputes relating to security, migration, trade and natural resources. We are geographic beings for whom the creation of places and, by consequence, the process of bordering seems natural" (Diener, Hagen, p 1). Their definition, at first glance, not only reaffirms the concept's terrestrial strength in upholding the privacy and power of nations from and over each other, dividing them into enclosed properties to which outsiders are not welcome, but it also accounts for how instinctual it seems for humans to forge and preserve such borders. The internal walls set between nations are well guarded for this reason; these borders are so precious because they are there to mark the outlines of humans' private properties. Shielded against potential threats, all nations use their borders as defence lines that filter out all alien visitors from entering their internal domains. Nevertheless, as doors are used to keep unwanted travellers out, they also serve to permit the chosen, more valued newcomers in. Because of this, the terrestrial borders of nations are commonly defined by their fluctuating levels of encasement. "If borders were just made out of bricks and walls without windows to peer outside, then habitability would be abolished" (Schimanski, Nyman, p 27). A fully brick-walled series of borders could only mean the imprisonment of a nation under a completely totalitarian regime.

The German sociologist Georg Simmel, a pioneering name in the field of conceptual borders, believes that the entire world can be seen through borders. He includes in his definition of these geographical divisions: the paths, bridges, doors, thresholds and even windows that people constantly build. In theory, Simmel maintains that all separations and joinings, even aesthetic ones, are meant to objectively cement the differences between private and public spaces (qtd. in Schimanski, Nyman, p 4). Consequently, identifying enclosed, private locations and public contact zones can only be achieved by our understanding of the oscillating two functions of separation and unification that borders are used for. When considering their conditional and provisional requirements, they again transcend the generic, more commonplace definition of physical barriers used to barricade inside territories, shielding the natives from any outside foreign worlds. They can also assume the role of vital meetup zones, where nations assemble to negotiate the mutually beneficial terms of their relationships, turning a relationship of rivalry into one of a visitor and a guest.

Furthermore, when examining the casual intercultural communications happening within borders, researchers also turn towards the impact of pre-negotiations over political treaties that serve both nations. These formal contacts also represent an essential cause behind the growth of a more recognised set of public interactions in a hybrid environment. Their intended objective is to loosen the political frontiers that outline the geopolitical spheres in which both societies operate, but the results achieved could turn out in the long run to be more to the satisfaction of one party over the other. The discrepancy only reveals itself after a geopolitical shift in power, leading to future disputes and negotiations after punctuated periods of mutual accord.

This liminality can be spotted more clearly in the alternating decay and recovery of public cordiality among the racially mixed citizens of a hybrid landscape. The reason behind

its lack of durability is the fact that contact zones do not always serve their intended purpose of an ephemeral political truce. First introduced by Mary Louise Pratt in a 1991 keynote lecture entitled *"Arts of the Contact Zone"*, the concept of 'contact zones' has gained a lot of traction in the study of cultural borders. Pratt warns the readers about the danger that lurks just beyond the ties of amiableness that are forged inside such spaces. Where there are signs of resolve, there could also be reasons for a flickering, hibernating animosity kept at bay, stubbornly and slowly making itself visible between the people of the two nations over time. This residual tension can also be attributed to the unforgettable past conjunctions where societies once collided over power. She states: "I use this term [contact zones] to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (Pratt, p 2).

Their impact on the way cultural borders are built and how they shift over time cannot be ignored, especially when tackling the complicated cultural limitations that are placed without the use of any physical or written denotations between countries. Over time, the latter type of border is bound to become part of an unspoken set of rules, de facto in their nature and therefore, more difficult to learn to navigate through by the newly arriving foreign immigrant. Such less obvious forms of borders are often overlooked by anthropologists. Because humans are bound to migrate, change homes, or expand their territories by going through periods of rivalry and adversity, borders, too, begin to shift and relocate. It is not a tectonic movement per se, but rather one that entails the continuous development of human relationships. Underpinning the borders that reflect this socio-cultural change is, therefore, much harder to achieve than those geographical ones. Cathrine O. Johansen explains the difficulty in discerning these borders as they are, first and foremost, symbolic in nature, residing in the minds of their advocates. They are invisible to the eye and can only be made more translucent

through the continuous human attempts to examine an indiscriminate number of texts while applying a variety of theoretical analyses to the literature of the world. At the same time, "…the immense issue here [when trying to better understand them] is that censorship can happen without the conscious realisation of it happening at all, and thus adding to the epistemological aspect of access, or lack of access, to knowledge." (Johansen, p 10).

Recognising such limitations, locating invisible borders can prove itself to be a gargantuan task, knowing that the main purpose behind it is to determine whether a future, universal, peaceful world can be materialised despite the disparity of knowledge access that human beings are allowed to have. Nevertheless, many researchers are not discouraged by censorship as they continue to seek out the final perfect formula of how borders can be reshaped to the satisfaction of everyone living on the same planet.

It is worth mentioning that the ongoing various approaches that attempt to re-trace borders have given many critics and writers the growing impression that they might entirely vanish over the next course of human history. It is a reasonable doubt that has been gaining a lot of ground for speculation, especially with the recent spike in economic globalisation and advancement in technological interchange. Advocators of a borderless future often describe such worldly facilitations as a promising progress that has been able to bypass political, ethnic, societal and even racial borders. A cosmopolitan society that would no longer need the dividing function that walls serve is thus often suggested to be just around the corner. If people could focus on expanding contact zones in their intended neutralising state, while raising awareness about how counter-productive and futile borders are becoming, it is argued that the homogenous utopian society, dreamed about by so many writers of utopian narratives, could be built, but can humans truly live without borders?! That is a question that has become the centre of a great debate, especially among sociologists and writers who have found it difficult

to erase the concept from the plethora of epistemological texts that study the cyclical patterns of changes in human history.

Mimi Sheller believes that the path to a borderless, universal society depends upon human mobility. She argues: "[m]obility is the essence of cosmopolitanism. And cosmopolitanism owes everything to the mobilities of people, cultures, and ideas around the world" (Sheller as cited in Rovisco, Nowicka, p 549). This means that Sheller considers crossing borders to be an essential key in the constant engagement of cross-cultural interactions, and that the latter one too is needed in reaching a peaceful human existence. It looks to be an ideal model for hybrid relationships at first glance, as it encourages the growth of diversity in an embracive environment that constantly expands by the arrival of newcomers. However, a never-ending transnational movement rejects, in this case, immobility and settlement as another component that other writers also deem to be an indispensable step towards creating this so ever sought after future of coexistence.

To stop, stagnate, and settle down in a location within a certain new territory does not necessarily mean a complete detachment or dismissal of past native ones. Diasporic writers like Chimamanda N. Adichie, Amy Tan, Mohsin Hamid and others have written a number of works that emphasise the complicated struggle immigrants find themselves enduring when settling in Western countries. Their fictional characters' identities go through a set of realignment phases the moment they come in contact with the new and significantly different networks of Western lifestyles. This kind of shift can be seen in Ngozi Adichie's 2013 novel *Americanah*, as it explores the bordering-induced urge to pick a side: African or American. Going as far as to attempt a forced morphing of the heavily African-accented, spoken English and African habits to make them more uniform with the cultures of the Caucasian community. Her female protagonist, Ifemelu, later realises the folly in such an unconscious attempt at

rebranding herself, and considers instead an identity in which the best of the two worlds can be embraced.

Learning how to accept what Homi K. Bhabha calls a third space of enunciation in an increasingly diversified landscape does seem more reasonable as a first-stage solution to the large ambivalence of cultural differences that have elongated the distance between human societies for so long. More importantly, it is difficult to ignore this increasingly relevant aspect of the wide postcolonial discourse and its impact on the geopolitical shift of borders. Diasporic research constitutes an inseparable subject as it has proven its worth in investigating the potential paths closer to that over-discussed and dreamed-about borderless Eden.

I.2.3. Crossing Borders through Western Lenses

Knowing that past Western travellers have journeyed over and over again through various corners of the world, clearing vast territorial patches of land in search of glory and fame while armed, and perhaps also impaled, by a relentless, egomaniac aspiration to tame foreign territories, crossing the frontiers and borders of "other-ed" societies has become a monumental component of that great Western myth. This one maintains the insoluble belief that there will always be a better life and greener patch waiting on the other side of any terrestrial fence. What prompted such a belief in the first place cannot be simply attributed to the boredom generated by the stillness or the historical imposition that forces a civilisation to expand in order to survive. It is also due to the tantalising wonder and awe that the unknown brings forth upon the traveller, hypnotising them with its mysterious, unfamiliar setting.

The challenges that arise with the decision to explore the outer reaches of the European landscape assume the dangerous cost that accompanies that special sense of fervent curiosity. Meeting the new inhabitant of the lands outside of his/her safety blanket brings a certain shock

to this newcomer. The natives' values do not correspond to the traveller's expectations, and neither do their appearances. The first contact inevitably triggers an urge to compare his/her homeland with the destination they reached. American author Andrew Hammond suggests that this stage of border crossing generates a threatening fracture in the perception of any Western traveller. It is "already the site of absolute otherness; the pure presence of exoticism and barbarity. The threat of the other is increased by the authority that these institutionalised zones wield over travellers" (Hammond, p 198). The cultural contrast that Westerners outline from their visit not only influences the insight of their countrymen through their written accounts, but it also contributes to the endorsement of an inferior, less intelligent race existing overseas. More importantly, it highlights the availability of a plentiful land glistening with promising prospects for a future, Eurocentric-like civilisation. This land appears stagnant in its current state because of the inherent degeneracy that characterises its natives.

A coerced merger with an acculturation that is overwhelmingly dominated by a Western colonising mission ensues, followed by an attempt to gradually persuade the public of its righteous purpose. The less discriminating the first site-respondents treat the 'others' in their process of rehabilitating the population, the more points of public support their travelogues receive. Other fellow travellers, who retain the curiosity to learn more about the natives' cultural upbringing, according to some critics, are still prone to the Eurocentric habit of relying on a voyeuristic, privileged gaze to size up the stigmatized communities' lifestyle. This ultimately renders the intended cultural discovery and assimilation made by the visitor into a mere sightseeing trip, lacking the genuine informative interest that defines the objective behind the expedition. In this, Mary Louis Pratt observes an all-around generational pattern of obsession in the European travellers' texts, imposing cultural dominance rather than promoting a planetary need for the diversity of beliefs and customs of nations. In her book, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (1992)*, she calls attention to the potential affirmation of

cultural superiority Western travel serves, reinforcing the stereotypes that already surround nations beyond European frontiers. She exclaims:

> …empires create in the imperial centre of power an obsessive need to present and re-present its peripheries and its others continually to itself. It becomes dependent on its others to know itself. Travel writing, among other institutions, is heavily organized in the service of that need (...) European travel writing [when interacting] with enlightenment natural history (…) produces a Eurocentric form of global or "planetary" consciousness. (Pratt, p 5)

Because of this, the perspective of the Western travel writer is handicapped by this agency generated from his/her descriptions of foreign territories. This in itself incites another discourse related to the post-colonial stubbornness and influence over oppressed communities. Debbie Lisle calls it "*the discourse of modern subjectivity*." She defines it as "…when travel writing becomes a struggle between masculine, imperial subjectivity or what Mary Louis Pratt calls '*the monarch-of-all-I-survey*' and a liberal cosmopolitan subjectivity that actively resists the colonising and patronising aspects of cultural encounter" (Lisle, p 69). Even more impending on the Western travel writer's choices of portrayal in storytelling is the inevitability of being studied and criticised from a post-colonial standpoint, which becomes almost unavoidable when even his/her sincerity behind the intent to support the mistreated races is questioned and further analysed.

It is clear that Eurocentricism has tainted the reputation of travel writing over the years to an irreparable state. This can be seen in the difficulty that Western writers face even today when trying to capture the diverse facets of African and Eastern territories in contemporary writing. Being chastised and accused of covert racism has become part of the expected reception for any novel of this type that dares to set its eyes on a non-caucasian territory. This

trend has, over time, encouraged a more politically correct form of travel authorship with watered-down descriptions of foreign territories. Of particular interest in such works is the carefully curated language used to reduce any suspicions of superior treatment towards the visited setting.

This strategy of storytelling has gradually changed the face of artistic production, making Western artists less worried about the quality of the messages they convey through their thematic structuring and more concerned with the neutrality they are able to maintain throughout their works. In this growing campaign of aggressive censorship meant to decontaminate classic travel novels from any signs of Western privileged voyeurism, adaptations have involuntarily turned into the perfect instrument for this kind of cross-cultural sanitation. As a result, the heavy weight of the modern, 'woke' reception is slowly transcending the initial textual boundaries to further monitor Western treatment of other cultures, this time even criticising the art of cinematography in its re-enactments of the most popular travel narratives upon which Western writers have built their reputations.

Conclusion

What travel literature once set out to achieve might have been too much of an ambitious task. The objective to let audiences across the world wander inside the territories of foreign nations in the travel logs and memoirs of their local famous travellers, has resulted eventually in a proliferation of linear narratives in which self-promotions eventually became too flagrant not to notice. The heroic feats of Caucasian main characters whose names had been immortalised by generations of readers are proof enough of these individualist and touristic marketing schemes. The growing awareness of the sameness that has tarnished travel literature under the governance of mainstream, European novelists, in turn, contributed to a more

expressive response from its readers and even circles of peer writers and essayists like Johnathan Swift, Claud Levi Strauss, whose frustrations had reached intolerable extents.

The later post-colonial waves of expository criticism to the imperialist tendencies that characterised past Western travels seemed to have freed the genre from its standard disassembling treatment of colonised societies, presumably by some critics, rerouting the genre and bringing back its original ambitions of creating a planetary form of storytelling that international audiences can appreciate and enjoy. Albeit such aspirations have brought further debates about the differences and dichotomies that characterise the human world, most important of which are those pertaining to the evolving role of borders, boundaries and frontiers, from their nature-given benefit of protecting and shielding the lands of the people against their invaders to a more elliptical one that also encapsulates the constantly changing, intercultural and political relationships in the world. Pratt's contact zones attest to the liminality of borders as diplomatic transnational friendships continue to dissipate and resurface under the updating international interests of each world society. Because of this, borders remain a stagnant concept, reshaping and redefining the future of humankind.

Chapter Two: Adapting Intercultural Narratives on the Silver Screen

Introduction:

The art of adaptation might not be specific to cinematography, but it has become one of the essential pillars of the film industry in the last century. Deemed a great way to celebrate the most popular and best-selling literature that the public holds dear, film adaptations have grown exponentially in number in response to the overall desires of diverse audiences around the world, whose calls for storytelling entertainment are no longer limited to their choice of one artistic medium over another. While the initial fraternizing bonds that film directors and novelists seem to build at the start of every movie production process seem to catch a lot of mention from journalists and critics in the field, the more abstruse and combative aspects of these business affiliation, which also involves production sponsors and public relations teams, are paid less attention. Their levels of competitive authoritative calls add a more significant social constraint to the adapter's vision of a re-invited narrative. Furthermore, taking into consideration another important factor added in the cinematic visualisations of travel works makes the art of adaptation, one that is almost always tied to a series of socio-cultural and political stakes set before and after the film's release.

Therefore, this chapter attempts to introduce the concept of adaptation while highlighting its complex layers of bordered bindings, which encapsulate the stubborn dependency that the art of adaptation is often burdened by, despite its promises of enhancing the overall state of storytelling.

II.1. Film Adaptation as a Cross-Cultural Practice

The recent, sudden jump in the number of cinematic adaptations that have been recorded in recent years is a testament to how important literature is as a great source of inspiration for many showrunners and filmmakers alike. To them, novels are indispensable incentives when writing a script, as American director David Lynch once exclaimed:

> When you write an original script, number one, you never know when it's going to be finished. It could take forever. You know, half a story isn't good enough. You can't start a film unless you have a story. So it's a little bit frustrating if you want to be working. Unless you're lucky and ideas just come to you complete. They don't seem to do that for me. So I like the idea [of an adaptation], and if I can find something that I fall in love with, and adapt it to film, it's okay. I like the process of changing it into a film. (Lynch as cited in Hickenlooper, p 155)

Furthermore, film directors are not the only ones who look up to classical and modern texts as a bottomless pit through which they can rummage at any time they happen to be searching for exciting new ideas. Even actors and comedians often testify about the insight they tend to receive from reading novels. Conan O'Brien, who also happens to have majored in literary studies before pursuing a career as a screenwriter for the American popular show *The Simpsons*, , later becoming more known as a talk show host, describes classical narratives as a timeless, valuable commodity. O'Brien advises people to read without discriminating between high and low forms of literature, urging them to "read widely and read well [because] there is comedy in every book." He also encourages future comedians to always look for the next best, untold joke, saying: "…do not lock yourself into a comedy from the last 10 years. Ask yourself, what is funnier than Don Quixote? (…) do not be a snob, look high and look low" (Evans, O'Brien, 23:32-24:05).

While emphasising the unexpected pleasant surprises that readers would eventually come across in literature, his statement rings even more true when considering how well it aligns with Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextuality. Kristeva has argued in many of her works that instead of binding oneself to a single text, it is always more beneficial to look for the potential relations that might exist between different texts. Readers can, thus, locate the sources of inspiration and orientation that writers tend to lean towards. This was later expanded upon by the French philosopher Gerard Genette with his ideas of "hyper-textuality" and "meta-textuality", encouraging the breach of literary genres to constantly create new subgenres. In this ever-growing post-modern attitude to further break and demolish the rigid boundaries that used to keep linguistic definitions in check, there is always an opportunity on the horizon to innovate and build anew.

Out of the foundations of intertextuality and textual transcendence came adaptation, removing the shackles that once kept artists from venturing outside of their own specialised fields. From text and art to music and audio-visual production, the infinite mosaic associations of artistic contributions have allowed for a more organic human communication through a great web of critiques, re-visions, expansions and even compressions (Sanders, p 17-18). Adaptations are, therefore, often considered to be a hybrid type of dialogue between artists. Such devices of artistic intercommunication also include reviewing, comparing, and re-inventing past works periodically. The process of adapting a novel does not simply refer to a story that is copied from one medium and pasted onto another; it also requires the adapter's own involvement in this new version of re-telling. This is why Linda Hutcheon defines it as:

> An announced and extensive transportation of a particular work or works. This transcoding can involve a shift of medium (a poem to a film), or genre (an epic to a novel), or a change of frame and therefore context; telling the story from a different perspective (…) [A]s a process of creation, the act of adaptation involves re-interpretation and then re-creation. This has been both called appropriation and salvaging, depending on your perspective (…), and it is a form of intertextuality [since] we, the audience, experience adaptations (the product) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation. (p 8)

Hutcheon emphasises the importance of personal perspective in her definition because, without it, adaptation as an intertextual, insightful project, through which artists hope to achieve a level of progress, would turn out to be a soulless repetition of past works−if not a direct form of plagiarism. Its success in terms of reception depends greatly on the adapter's creativity and personal touch. The latter's interpretation of the source material is a valuable asset to this whole process.

The most common type of adaptation happens to be the conversion of textual narratives onto the silver screen. The cinematic by-products of popular literary texts represent one of the essential cornerstones of Hollywood filmography. This is evidenced by the all-time classical blockbusters, which are not only remembered for their polished screenplays but also for the performance of their cast. The better the actors embody the book's fictional characters, the more likely the cinematic adaptation can draw in the interest of the original text's admirers. The success of an adaptation is also credited to its art direction, cinematography, editing, and even soundtrack, which are usually all treated under the meticulous care of a crew composed of specialists in every one of those assisting fields. The decisions made on how to capture the

narrative of a text in the form of a motion picture may make or break the filmmaker's reputation, but if the ship sinks, the whole crew drowns with it. Therefore, the coordination of their efforts is similar to that of a musical orchestra, and it is crucial to the success of their final product.

Stephen King's *The Shining (1977)* is one of those adaptations that helped further cement Stanley Kubrick's name in the film industry, not only as a solid film director but also as a great adapter of classical narratives. Already known for his trademark horror/documentary-style approach that successfully paid off in his attempts at revamping stories like that of Arthur C. Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey (1951) and Anthony Burgess's Clockwork Orange* (1962) on screen, his consistent aspiration to bring a sense of realism in his paranormal films helped him gain a devoted number of fans. Kubrick's idea of a good adaptation is one that keeps fictional elements close to the likelihood of their occurrence. His approach to cinema follows Gerald Prince's theory of audience immersion faithfully through careful attention to realistic roots. Kubrick also applies Andre Bazin's view on verisimilitude as he is convinced that "for a film to be realistic, it must locate its characters and action in a determinate social and historical setting" (Qtd.in MacCabe, p 9).

Given that an adaptation already bases its settings on the source material, this rule seems, at first glance, easier to apply here than in any other independent screenplay since the source material offers plenty of details about the film's setting. However, some filmmakers still choose to pay closer attention to the environment when dealing with their revisions of the source texts. After all, recreating the fictional world described on paper frame by frame is what gives life to the story, so it is often better to take as much time as possible when it comes to world-building because it often addresses readers who have long been trying to visualise their beloved novelistic worlds, hoping ever so eagerly to see them materialise.

When attempting to capture a popular imaginary setting from a book like *LOTR's* Middle-Earth or *Dune's* Arrakis. The challenge of remodelling the background lies in the complexity of the fictional environment. Filmmakers look at these types of worlds as ideal situations to create cross-cultural dialogues or generate an organic unfolding of interactions between Western characters and distant others (Rovisco, p 155).

As a naturally embedded form of cross-cultural artistic expression, adaptations have become a fertile ground for artists to tackle political and racial tensions by exploring the cultural differences that authors either intentionally include in their texts or might have subconsciously hinted at during their writing. Screen adapters make use of the film's own personal properties to bring forth or further bury these protruding yet still uncharted domains that the author only hints at in his work.

II.1.1. Adapting the Travel Genre on Screen

If one were to browse the long catalogue of classical film blockbusters, searching for the ones that employ the elements of travel to tell a gripping story while navigating unfamiliar realms, then he/she is sure to find a great assortment of beloved titles under Hollywood's belt. There is no shortage of cinematic narratives in which the journey carries its spectators into foreign settings. More importantly, such locations serve as an ideal opportunity for screenwriters to try and garner pleasure and excitement from the viewers through the fortuity of their unexpected, written plots. The unknown nature of such distant locations helps cultivate a great deal of curiosity in the audience's viewing experience, for what better purpose are films suited if not to entice people's proclivity for exploration by tapping into their desires to conquer the unknown. Alien and uncharted lands, in such cases, certainly represent an excellent starting point for fresh narratives of the kind to mature while growing their audiences' familiarity with worlds pictured on screen.

With that being said, disregarding the thrill that can still be distilled from exploring well-known territories is a common mistake. It means to claim that there is nothing new that can be excavated from realistic settings, often used to tell a variety of stories, but struggling to escape the similarities in such experience imposed by the conditions of the characters' same surroundings. Despite constantly underestimating the novelistic art of defamiliarising mundane colours of neighbouring sites or local ones, many directors choose to keep filming their projects in smaller venues and neighbourhoods. This is not only because of the sentimental value that they might hold for such locations, but also because of the challenge that they usually represent in terms of envisioning newer perspectives, unlike the well-known cliché patterns of generic recycling.

Amy Corbin demonstrates this by using the example of *Blackboard Jungle*, an adaptation of Evan Hunter's 1955 novel. The work tells the story of an English teacher, Rick Dadier, and his struggle to adapt to the environment as a newcomer in the interracial suburbs of New York City. Corbin believes that the American director Richard Brooks was successful in capturing the tension between both the teacher and the residents of the neighbourhood in which he arrived. By analysing the opening of the film, she divides the camera work into two levels: A capture of movement "within a diegetic frame", and one that is "outside the screen". The first one, she states, follows the movement of the teacher as he exchanges anxious stares with the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. People of colour are seen from his point of view as part of an exotic and dangerous landscape.

The second level, on the other hand, displays a different version of the encounter, as the camera pans away from the main character once he exits the frame and "extends shots of the urban area and [its citizens]". Through a prolonged gaze at the background scenery, Corbin notes that the second level of camera work "invites the spectators to share the feeling of being

an outsider with [Rick Dadier]" (p 314). The lingering images of the inhabitants' expressions towards the outsider also reveal their unease at his arrival. They, too, are disconcerted by this Caucasian foreigner's presence, which makes them afraid of the consequences this sudden, unannounced change in their neighbourhood might bring. They fear that this figure is going to stir up a torrent of violence by provoking a racial conflict.

Corbin also proves that a travel theme can be manifested simply by directing the camera's focus on the shift of locations. Although there is a clear sequence of physical motion that involves Rick's arrival in the new neighbourhood in the opening scene of the film, the centre of attention is not the character's physical movement but rather the change of settings that accompanies it. Corbin calls this kind of depiction a form of "virtual travel". Instead of telling the spectator about the characters' whereabouts, the film is "structured on distanced immersion, on the combination of safely being removed while simultaneously experiencing the excitement of the landscapes" (Corbin, p 317). This kind of theory is often applied to cinematography to create in the viewers the impression that they are part of a guided journey into a fictional world. It is guided in the sense that the director holds the viewer's hand while he is watching. In other words, he is the one who decides which location deserves to be gazed at by his audience. When the camera wanders off into the background, away from the character's faces and further into the panoramic view of the surroundings, the eyes gazing on the other side of the screen wander off into that environment as well. The viewer is then treated as a distant traveller who can feel himself momentarily transported into the scene, away from his own reality.

The theory of virtual travel is one that also redefines the travel genre when adapted to the screen. Instead of looking for the physical movement of characters while watching a film, the audience is encouraged to forget the means of transportation and enjoy the panoramic

scenery that is presented in front of their wondering eyes. The emphasis on the aesthetic of the environment instead of the travel itself has become embedded in so many films that even 'rom-coms' seem to employ such travel sequences in which the priority of motion is given to the camera's lenses. Extended shots of urban cities or rural areas are prime examples of this approach, as they are meant to give the spectator a test drive in some of the most aesthetically pleasing locations. Watching these films at times makes the audience feel like they are flipping through a brochure, looking at a set of touristic landmarks captured under just the right amount of lighting, full of eye candy and glamour. In such cases, these locations serve as the perfect backdrop for the light and humorous love stories that people watch continuously to escape their mundane reality.

Despite having this natural promotional quality to it, there are also directors who use such a gimmick to create an opposite vibe. Alejandro G. Iñárritu demonstrates this in his 2006 film, *Babel*. It is a work that connects different stories happening around the world; the setting thus shifts back and forth between Mexico, Japan, and Morocco, but instead of capturing the beauty of these locations, Iñárritu decides instead to make them mirror the anxiety and fear of their visiting characters. Lulled by an initial false sense of security and comfort during their sojourns, the travellers, accompanied by the viewers, soon realise that they are trapped in this location because of a sudden, unfortunate overturn of circumstances. As their happiness fades away, so do the colours of their surroundings. The camera work captures these moments of distant suffering that the audience could not have normally empathised with on such an intense emotional level unless they were expressed by an audio-visual medium. The connection that is felt between the audience and the fictional characters who come from multifarious backgrounds was only made possible thanks to the level of realism that the production crew and actors successfully recreated. *Babel's* multiple settings, thus, remind people of what could go wrong during moments of life celebration.

I have mentioned before that focalization plays an important role in travel literature, especially when changing the scenery, which helps imply that movement has happened alongside the progress of the story; this kind of strategy always relies on manipulating the point of view, subject to the audience's attention. "If point of view is defined in prose narrative as the angle from which the agent narrator relates the events, in film, point of view is an 'optical perspective of a character whose gaze or look dominates a sequence" (qtd. in Eftimie, Manea, p 242). Travel adaptations are, therefore, more reliant on the optical illusion of mobility rather than the implied language used to signal a change in the environment. However, adaptations are often bound to the settings of the source material, so a panoramic, visual panning from one location to another, mutates and develops out of the descriptions given by the original text. It is the challenge that is set upon any travel adaptation. Bringing life to the textual environment, from segments of green patches to large deserts, requires actual transportation to identical, if not similar, surroundings.

II.1.2. Crossing Textual Boundaries and Embracing the Hybrid Forms of Storytelling

In a 2022 article entitled, *Adaptation as Migration,* Thomas Leitch attempted to compare the process of adaptation to a physical form of migration in which stories, just like people, also travel and cross borders in their search for new destinations. Through migration, Leitch argues that the stories which were first written and published in a textual format break their original linguistic constraints to look for better opportunities for growth. In their journey from one artistic medium to another, these narratives aspire to reach broader audiences and spaces with fewer constraints to be retold and reinvented in this entirely different environment with its own distinct properties. Leitch believes that migration is the optimal analogy that critics ought to use when comparing adaptation to people's travels because the process includes a

looser, and therefore, wider repertoire of subjects compared to those tackled by immigration or emigration. The difference between the three is that one, "[emigration] involves moving away from a country," while the other, "[immigration] involves moving into a new country." Migration, on the other hand, is not as linear as the other two since it "involves movement from one place to another that may or may not involve a journey across national borders" (Leitch, p 3). Knowing that novels have a tendency to attract (and be attracted by) other artistic mediums, it is common to see stories get adapted into films, TV shows, music records, comic books, games, and even animations. Similar to their process of adaptation is the migration of travellers from their place of birth to foreign territories. Without putting too much emphasis on the political role that borders play, critics will find that the adaptation of texts shares a strong kinship with human travels across borders.

Leitch suggests that the journey of a novel, when it depends on traversing its textual boundaries, should not be fixed by terms like 'emigration' or 'immigration' because then it would emphasise severing ties with the source material in the first one or becoming intertwined, if not completely merging together in the latter. He considers migration to be a non-linear and non-conditional type of travel that suits the metaphor of adaptation, as it does not lock itself to one single medium but is constantly on the lookout for new audiences to target and more thematic grounds to cover. He states:

> [Adaptations], like all biological organisms, seek to survive by generating new mutations of themselves (…) In considering adaptation as migration (…) The most we can hope is that by emphasizing the provisional, contingent nature of the analogy we can escape the charge of seeking to subordinate the processes and products of adaptation to a single humanistic or posthumanistic theory. (Leitch, p 5)

In its process of conversion, the text is bound to lose some of its original features in order to make room for new ones. It is one of the most essential laws of any adaptation, and it can even be observed in its name; the art has to 'adapt' to its new environment in order to make use of its newly acquired advantageous potential. This re-invented identity that the work assumes is similar to the one migrants acquire when living in their new territory, whether be it local or transnational. It has the qualities of both previous and new lives, and as Leitch has described it, the new version is never entirely pledged to any of the two identities (p 7).

Consequently, this hybrid mode of storytelling that the adaptation process brings always aspires to make the original narrative evolve and conform to the continuous progress of time and the shift of climate. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a great proof of that. The play is constantly being retold and re-invented, not just thematically, but also from a structural standpoint. This can be traced from the 1990 film directed by Franco Zeffirelli, to Feng Xiaogang's 2006 Chinese version of the play, *The Banquet*, and to the even more recent 2022 reimagined version of Robert Eggers, *The Northman,* which brings in a Nordic, Viking twist to the popular tragedy. The play was even adapted into a 2019 time-loop video game called *Elsinore*. It is safe to assume that the Shakespearean tragedy will continue to grow, develop, branch out, and transmutate into new stories and into further different art forms. By doing so, the age-old play, just like other popular texts that were able to catch the interest of both artists and audiences and hold it for so long, is not only remembered for its compelling plot, but it is also enjoyed for its evolving potential; therefore, it can only be explored through an open mind and a great sense of inspiration. An offspring of a film earns these well-sought-after qualities by looking outward for more creative possibilities.

Another less-mentioned example is Keenen Ivory Wayans' well-acclaimed set of comedy films*, Scary Movie (2000),* which started as a series of parodies of the exaggerated

terror slasher narratives that were depicted in older films. References from *Scream* (1996) and *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1995) are used to poke fun at the over-the-top, corny, and irrational lines that figured in these classic scripts. The two motioned examples take such a serious approach that sometimes loses their intensity in their attempts to induce horror shrieks because of the absurd choices the characters make; the stalked victims of the slasher unwarrantedly throw themselves headfirst into danger instead of choosing any common-sense safety measures. Naturally, such films opt for the hyperbole of risk-taking in order to extend the fear factor as much as possible in a sequence of inconsistent jump scares as long as possible. The cost of verisimilitude in some of these movies happens to be more visible than others. Over the years, the following sequels of the American franchise *Scary Movie(s)* have embraced their parodic playfulness without fully committing to the bits that criticise other movies, but also by coming up with their own original material that oscillates between light slapstick jokes and dark, edgy humour.

Although not a direct adaptation of any specific original work, parodies in the late 19th century and onward have grown to be known as cinematic amalgams of collages, referencing both high and low forms of entertainment and rebranding what past crude format of sarcasm had once banished from the interest of professional criticism and academic research. Chinese scholars, Xinhong Xu and Zhibo Chen, argue that this maturation has earned them a sub-adaptation category that must no longer be overlooked. Their intertextual value is far too great for that. They write: "The value-added effect of parody came into being, creating a classic IP [that] contains rich national cultural genes (...) In this way, the parody (…) has infinite possibilities for aesthetic re-creation and reinterpretation." (Chen, Xu, p 17). The last two qualities of 're-creation, and re-interpretation' are arguably the most vital aspects of any adaptation project. Putting aside the focal conversion of a specific text onto a film format, cinematic parodies' innovative treatment of classic novels makes them a strong candidate to be

acknowledged as a subsidiary, hybrid form of adaptations that could in future years become a greater point of interest for academic research.

II.2. Defending Creative Liberties against Corporate Decisions

Writing a screenplay based on a well-beloved novel, which already has a large number of fans ready to scrutinise any changes that might come to be included in the adaptation, represents an overall major challenge that screenwriters have to overcome. After all, they too start off as "readers before being considered as adapters" (Leitch, p 109). They play an important role that shoulders two fundamental responsibilities during the process of reworking a narrative. On the one hand, screenwriters have to honour the original story by preserving what made it popular in the first place. On the other hand, they are required to innovate because innovation is what fleshes out the story when transported to film format. In addition to these engagements, the final alterations made to the product before airing are reviewed under the final authority of the producers. This makes the initial screenplay prone to change depending on what the authority is leaning towards.

American screenwriter Jane Anderson reveals that people underestimate how much impact producers and network studios have on the interpretation of the original text. In a 2014 Film Independent interview, Anderson shared her experience working on the TV mini-series *Olive Kitteridge.* She emphasises how much the producers wanted her to push comedic reliefs in every episode. "They said: '*HBO wants you to be hip and edgy*' [while knowing that] the book *Olive Kitteridge* is very quiet" (Anderson, Sollosi). The corporate supremacy that envelops the film industry becomes a more prominent property of filmmaking when investigating the involvement of authoritative decisions in the creative artistic choices of film directors. What goes in and what does not in the final screenplay is up to this outside funding circle. This is what many critics describe as a stage of unavoidable intrusion on the film's

direction. It distances the artist from the art to the point where it is difficult for him/her to defend their original vision of an audio-visual re-working. Adding to the medial limitations which are bound to separate the adaptation from its source material is the collaborative nature that characterises motion pictures. The Hollywood hierarchy of cinematic production thickens the depths of complexity that screenwriters and directors are constantly navigating through.

However, this section of the research is less about painting producers as the main villains within the arc of cinematic expression and more about accentuating the pressures that go into adapting a novel on screen. When considering the tight budgets, deadlines, and forced censorships that unalterably restrain some of the potential ideas that could have been poured into many films and TV shows, one must not downplay the efforts of screenwriters and film directors when comparing them to those of authorship and novel writing. "Writing a script," describes Malcolm Bradbury, is:

> Like sitting in a taxi, the meter is always running, and everything has to be paid for. You can always see the price turning over everywhere you go, or the difficulties of performance and production; that is the art of writing for the medium. But the novel has the meter switched off; you can write what you like (…), have whatever you want. That is part of the wonder of the novel, the wonder of being a novelist. (Bradbury, p 101)

To be fair, Bradbury does make light of the challenges that novelists face in his statement. The "write whatever you want" argument does not always work as it is supposed to, since authors, too, face the repercussions of censorship and forced auditing, especially for those who tackle postcolonial concerns in their stories. In such cases, there is also a looming authority that inspects the art before its final release to the public, but the metaphor of a cab meter always running before reaching the passenger's destination is something that probably resonates more

with directors than it does with authors. The budget that films struggle not to exceed often becomes another big red line that they must not cross. The past unfinished, axed, or downgraded motion pictures that audiences initially held so many expectations for were most likely hindered by budget cuts or complete funding withdrawals.

These sorts of complications have a tendency to create debates among movie critics when reviewing the final release of a film. The two questions that they often tackle are: Should their reviews reflect the challenges and hardships that the production crew and cast have been through, and review the audio-visual art as what could have potentially been instead of what it is?! Or should they examine the present state of the screen production without looking back at the outside circumstances that might have hindered their filming process?! According to Hutcheon, these interferences that directors go through are the run-of-the-mill experiences that are most likely to be found in any screen production, especially for cinematic adaptations. “It is the director who is held even more responsible for the form and impact of the whole” (Hutcheon, p 83).

If special treatment is granted to some filmmakers while others are severely criticized for their incompetence, then this leeway that is given to some over others would represent an amount of bias that critics hold for the people behind the film. Hutcheon believes that what makes any adaptation stand out is the stylistic trademark of its director, “The characteristic preoccupations, tastes, and stylistic trademarks of the director are what stand out and become identifiable, perhaps all directors should be considered at least [as] potential adapters” (p 84). The adaptations of Stanley Kubrick and Alfred Hitchcock are both known for their subtle Easter Eggs and the inclusion of small details that connect their visions to that of the source material. It is part of their stylistic expression. The joy that audiences get from their personal takes is

what motivates these artists to constantly slip subtle rewards through the screen, even against the disagreements that marked their relationships with the supporting production studios.

Maria Rovisco goes further by urging critics to avoid futile comparisons that mainly revolve around measuring the amount of struggle that filmmakers confront. Instead, she contends that the path to a cosmopolitan form of cinematography can only be opened when critics are able to help explain the filmmakers' cultural messages that they attempt to convey through their work. This should take their entire focus instead of any backstage gossip and white noise that many glamour magazines exploit for clicks, knowing that those details, even if they happen to have a potential impact on the film, they still cannot be fully proven as the main causes of any inconsistencies or hindrances behind a film's failure. She suggests that:

> In order to understand what makes a film a cosmopolitan film, we need to direct the research lens to film culture and avoid a narrowly defined concern with authorship and representation. Since film is a predominantly collaborative art, the making of cosmopolitan films opens up a discursive ethical space where cultural producers (e.g. filmmakers, scriptwriters and cast), subjects of representation, critics and audiences come together in a space of dialogical understanding and exchange that encourages strong bonds of solidarity. (Rovisco, p 154)

Every profession has its share of obstacles. This includes the list of adversities and misfortunes that artists face in their craft. The tensions between network productions, filmmakers, screenwriters, and cast members happen on a frequent basis. However, they are no different from the predicaments a kitchen staff might face during their line of work. The kitchen's problems, including its lack of hygiene and messy state, are usually kept private, outside of the customers' concern. The quality of dishes that are served at the tables is what matters to any food critic, not the out-of-sight environment in which they were cooked. The film industry also

has its unsanitary off-screen environment, but to prioritise this in the review means to disregard the content of the film itself.

II.3. Political Correctness and Its Implications on Western Adaptations

It is clear that Hollywood productions have dominated the world industry of cinematography for the longest period. Constantly producing big-budget films while generating an even bigger cut of revenue, Hollywood might just be the golden goose to the continuous prosperity of the American economy. This is especially true when looking at the number of American filmmakers who were able to build their names in such an industry by following the policy of 'high risks, high rewards, ' spending a heavy budget on their projects while hoping that the return would be worth the stakes. Ironically enough, this policy is what defines most capitalist practices in the country, enticing the crowd into making big investments with the prospect of long-term success, and this might be just representative of the modern American dream. Hollywood invites the world into pursuing a success like no other, one that comes with great worldwide fame, or in the words of Michael Richardson, "…[T]he myth Hollywood has constructed looms so large that it may be said that anyone living in the world today belongs to Hollywood, just as Hollywood itself belongs to us" (Richardson, p 2).

This image of the industry, however, tends to generate some popular, public misconceptions about its practices and intentions, the most common of which is its problematic representations of other cultures. One can understand the basis of such an assumption when considering the ever-growing number of films that both include non-American casts and foreign filming locations as vital components of their screen productions, but as Richardson argues: "Hollywood Cinema may perhaps be characterised (...) as the medium by which America has looked out into the world" (Richardson, p 1). It is through such an artistic medium that appeals to the world that the country is able to cross foreign frontiers without jeopardising

its international relationships. Because of its curiosity surrounding other nations and cultures, channelled through audio-visual artistic means, American films have often been criticised for their ill-intention of representing Middle-Eastern, Eastern and African cultures. Many filmmakers were accused of discreetly applying a layer of political correctness to their works while promoting them as universally celebrated stories, meant to be enjoyed by everyone. This is similar to the travel novels of European mainstream writers, whose empathy for the rest of the world was eventually called out.

For Rovisco, a planetary form of cinematography can only be achieved through its constant defiance of mainstream cultural representations that previous motion pictures have put a lot of effort into promoting. His ideal vision of film production is one that provides a wider space of expression in which marginalised, unheard-of, or kept hostage voices can find a fitting sound amplifier for their stories to be voiced loud and clear worldwide (p 155-156). This kind of expansion would depend upon various strategies of inclusiveness on screen, not only in the film's casting but also in its storytelling. Producing a myriad of events by bringing a multiplicity of perspectives to re-frame the important thematic plots warrants, theoretically speaking, producing multi-national films encouraging enough creativity from screenwriters to push the boundaries of their craft by researching the impact of unfamiliar cultural attributes on the decisions of non-Western characters. Dialogues are then drafted into new formats that intend to shake off the one-sidedness of past cross-cultural communications. Moving away from the same pattern of heroic, whitewashed lines, centricity over Western characters becomes no longer the objective scope within these modern films.

Looking at the more recent Hollywood titles, there seems to be a clear increase in attempts at racial and cultural inclusions on screen. A diversity of characters, chosen from different backgrounds, are used to create new chapters that were not even considered by the

original creators. Does this prove that we are on the verge of witnessing the coming of cosmopolitan filmography in great numbers? Or is it just a transitional period for Hollywood in which Western filmmakers are jumping on the bandwagon of trending globalisation?! Some argue that the sort of inclusive contemporary filmography seen today is closer to Nancy Hamid's concept of *Accented Cinema,* which mainly highlights the diasporic, exilic and post-colonial narratives in its expression (Hamid, p 11). While accented filmmakers focus their efforts on directly representing the lives of hybrid immigrants and refugees living around the world, Rovisco, among other critics in the industry, consider the ideal form of universal screen expression should not necessarily cast oppressed characters as its central figures, nor emphasise the struggles in their lives just to showcase how apologetic and regretful Westerners are about past discriminatory attitudes. Instead, inclusiveness should be brought out organically in the scenes (p 9), but this remains limited by the theory itself, while criticism is still sternly sceptical of most intercultural motion pictures.

Despite this tough treatment they get, film adaptations should continue to depend on inclusivity when attempting to create seamless forms of human interactions, especially where different cultures may cross paths, touch base, and empathise on a largely acknowledged common note. Taking into consideration the benefit that this would bring to the thematic plot, stories of this calibre are worth the journey. The Western intercultural productions presented to the viewers must, therefore, attempt to capture the possibilities of amicable intercultural conversations instead of always highlighting the conflicts that stem from their differences. American screenwriter, John Spaits, calls this kind of focus on rectifying or capturing the essence of a once orientalised culture, like that of Arabs, for instance, a barren task, especially when diving into the depths of fictionalised works:

> …the Arab world was much more exotic in the 1960s than it is today. Today the Arab world is with us, they're our fellow Americans, they're everywhere […] just dipping into Islam and dipping into the Arab world was sufficiently exotic to be science fiction. And now, […] you'd have to go farther afield to make science fiction. (qtd. in Dridi, p 54)

Some critics disagree with this kind of statement to some degree, especially advocates of Edward Said's *Orientalism* and other forms of writing that emphasise the prejudiced control of Western authority over the taste of the general public. However, the contemporary task at hand for filmmakers and showrunners should not encourage a one-dimensional form of cultural representation born out of "analytical compliancy" (Richardson, p 8), but instead must welcome a multiplicity of perspectives on screen. With that being said, pleasing every single member of the audience, if such a thing is possible, would require a complete disregard of the over-the-top confrontational role that cinema sometimes displays. It is, first, a space for artistic expression, where creativity spurs out of a discussion between artists across mediums and cultures, and just like a real-life human discussion, respect is often expected from all participants involved.

II.4. Film Analysis beyond Rhetorical Reception

When reading various research studies and reviews that have been published by either film experts or casual enthusiasts of cinematic productions, one might notice the use of rhetorical phrasings meant to encapsulate the experience of an invisible viewer. The dependence on the assumptions of existent consumers who share a similar opinion to that of the critic tends to be a common mode of utility through which articles of this sort reinforce their theoretical studies. Even more common is the insertion of personal biases to describe the thought process and expectations of such a made-up group of viewers in an attempt to help

progress the line of personal arguments posited and reach a desired set of findings. Martin Barker illustrates this by calling out an essay in which the author, Janey Place, suggests that *noir* films are vivid reflections of rooted male fantasies. He retorts to the way these conclusions were produced by stating the following:

> I am not concerned here with the correctness of this analysis, but with the way it (necessarily) incorporates and builds upon an image of the audience, their reasons for and the manner of their involvement in the film (…), the repeated 'we' which Place has to intrude. These have surely to be women, not men, or these films are failing badly in their claimed ideological mission (…) Women enjoying such a film must either be deeply masochistic (…) or they must get something different out of it. (Barker, p 6)

Place's article might bear some fair interpretations about films of this genre. In fact, it represents a strong case in point for Wolfgang Iser's theory on the importance of reinventing the text by filling in its gaps. The reader/viewer, according to him, is an essential contributor to the creation of meaning and should be encouraged to bridge the overtly captured scenes with those that are less covered by the author/adapter and thus remain indeterminate in their original released state (Iser, p 19), but it is the lack of concrete proof that usually undermines those claims. On this note, Barker adds: "All film analysis makes claims about 'the audience'. Some approaches to analysis admit it and openly declare their premises. Others don't. Very few have been willing to take the step and look for evidence, let alone conduct research, to find out the truth or otherwise of their claims" (p 7).

Barker does not reject Iser's stance on the impact of the readers' response, but he does specify that their analysis of a text/film requires concrete validation that should cross over any

pre-conceived notions to avoid the harmful ramifications of false, untested statements, such as Place's feminist incentivised rant.

Moretti's definition of distant reading[7] encourages a more meticulous kind of study in which the proposed interpretations and criticism built around films are backed up by a set of collected data. These often proposed numerical figures outside of the text's interpretations help concretise the critical assumptions and hypotheses previously mentioned in the research. To this effect, many standards and models can be depended on in that process. Jauss, for instance, calls for a greater focus on the new attempts at formal and thematic innovations a work promotes during its period of publication/release, by comparing it to other works of that same timeline. In Peter F Davis's words: "Jauss speaks of widening the horizons and expectations of the audiences (a phrase Iser picks up on) (…) [A] [c]onsideration of the changing horizons of expectations, or interpretive milieux (…) allows one to clarify the contingency of any present understanding of the work, by comparison with historical understandings" (Davis, p 27). In such cases, a data analysis that records the proportions of consumers' expectations which have been exceeded by the introduced novelties within a work of art objectively supplements the hypothesis offered by the author. It avoids the common isolation of personal fancies from the actual recorded statistics, which can at times prove opposite to that critic's case study-based interpretation.

Stanley Fish's interpretive community-based strategies of analysis also shed light on the need to take a more transparent approach in analysing texts. Despite highlighting the great potential that close reading has when one identifies the determined and undetermined aspects of a subject production (Fish, p 84), distant reading fits well within Fish's embrace of the different strategies these communities share about their own research. The multiplicity of applicable

[7] Refer to the general introduction, p 11.

theories combined with the annexed efforts outside of the personal critic's viewing experience is by no means the way to attain a purely objective or impartial stance, especially about the underlying intended meanings sheltered by the surface glamour of a film. It should instead be considered a conjecture based on parallel studies, both equally insightful in their investigations, and less prone to the preconceived, sentimental assumptions of the researcher. More importantly, these types of interdisciplinary studies are more open to the potential of oxymoronic assumptions that are defied by data findings. American media historian, Paul Moore, emphasises the intertwined relationship the two studies have in his publications:

> The point [from Moretti's approach] was not to displace close reading and qualitative interpretation. Moretti's central point was that the study of the entirety of literature was possible, and indeed was essential for a better understanding of literacy and literature as a political-economic, industrial pursuit. In this respect, he redefines literature as mass culture, and brings the methods of comparative literature closer to those of cinema and media studies (…) Digital newspaper databases do not simply allow close reading at a distance; a more structured view of cinema results from attempting to visualise patterns within amassed quantities of local facts, each trivial but all together substantial. (Moore, p 173-174)

The external smaller units collected outside of the main subject media have their role to play, as they are key factors in enabling a later generalised claim to be made about the state of artistic genres (of films or novels), process of film adaptations, or even the properties of each artistic medium. The validity of such a claim is determined by how substantially convincing the correlation between a close reading of selected case studies and a distant reading of their surrounding quantitative constituents can be established by the end of the study.

Conclusion

Part of the incentives behind adapting diasporic novels is the American film industry's growing desire to expand its targeted audience outside of its local peripheries. The *'Accented Cinema'* that Nancy Hamid mentions in her 2001 critical book implies a growing aspiration of Western filmmakers to include more of the rest of the world in their motion pictures, making it seem like another step towards achieving an all-around inclusive form of narration. The increasing hybridity and flexibility in adapting literature into the audio-visual also seems to be an encouraging step for film adapters to take greater chances in remodelling and re-shaping familiar narratives. This chapter, however, also explored the undeniable impact of political correctness in its forceful censorship of these film adaptations and highlighted the pressures that filmmakers face in integrating their creative ideas into such projects when producers and publishing houses that own the rights to these source materials are also entitled to such directive decisions.

In the analysis of such films, these circumstances should be factored in as valuable research components. Because of this, Many film scholars like Barker and Davies are calling for more thorough investigations of such case studies that do not limit themselves to close readings of film texts, due to the common pre-emptive judgments they usher in for the sake of promoting their own personal cultural, religious, or political hidden agendas. Distant reading, especially when oriented around the receptions of the consumers' digital communities, has proven its complementary results on many past occasions, introducing a greater emphasis on the impact that data mining has on the course of the humanities' investigations. Due to its efficacy, it is an approach that I will be relying on to attempt the concretisation of my analysis of the novels and the adaptations I have selected. The combination of the two reading approaches will therefore serve as a means to reaching an end while avoiding any

compromising temptations of rhetorical insertions, as illustrated in Barker's critique of Place's essay on the noir/crime film *Double Indemnity (1944)*[8]. Ted Underwood supports Barker's opinion by mounting his own series of reprimendations over research that hides in the crevices of its theories. He exclaims: "We've become so used to ignorance at this scale, and so good at bluffing our way around it, that we tend to overestimate our actual knowledge (…) the theoretical foundation for macroscopic research isn't something we have to invent from scratch; we can learn a lot from computational social science" (Underwood, p 532).

The purpose behind this combination of approaches is therefore to bring to the readers a fuller picture of these adaptation performances over time, by tracking their rates, successes, and controversies over spans of historical periods and through different generations of film audiences.

[8] For more information on the essay in question, read Place, Janey. "Women in film noir." *Popular Fiction*, 2023, pp. 152–68. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003391258-16.

Conclusion to Part One

Once promoting itself as an authentic category of documentation, up there with the memoirs of great historians and the journals of popular frontiersmen, travel literature had notoriously gained the interest of its audiences by diving into the unreasonable possibilities of voyages across the world. Its gradual deviation from reality might have been due to the promotional potential it exuded as something more than just the written version of an expedition account. To stay relevant over the course of human history, travel literature embraced artificiality without completely removing itself from its past groundwork. It eventually proved itself as an efficient mode of speculation around the future while contemplating how human mobility can improve over time. Powered by the fantastical thoughts of authors and highly imaginative travellers from diverse backgrounds, real-life travel was slowly embracing the science fiction ideas that artists continue to inject into it. Blurring the line that separates the possible form of traversals from the impossible, human methods of translocation, time was finally catching up to the literature.

As the progress of transportation had catapulted travel writing to new heights of popularity, so did the aftermath of the Second World War. The sweeping waves of post-colonial narratives that followed suit have made it their mission to wash away the white European dominance from the stereotyped identities that had previously tainted the cultures of stigmatised communities. In this counter form of writing, travel voiced the imagination of a more diversified group of writers and artists. It never stopped its breakthroughs into futuristic, outlandish visions of human mobility, which attracted further mediums of artistic expression and, with it, a more open-minded type of fandom.

Cinematography took on the saddles of travel fiction next, and gave the concept of a journey a new set of dimensions by including perceptual narration and by airing the exciting

images that words were able to conjure up onto a bigger screen. From Kristiva's intertextuality came the art of adaptation. Hutcheon believed that it was through this web of artistic connections that adapters could stretch the memories of classical works for an eternal life span. It was, therefore, only a matter of time before people's well-beloved works were adapted into a plethora of shapes and forms. Hence, screen adaptations expanded the possibilities of creativity by allowing filmmakers to implement their interpretations and personal twists into the public's beloved stories. As a result, modern viewers have been witnessing an increasing number of filmmakers who constantly get tagged into an age-old debate between novel and film, one that continues to pit the two mediums against each other.

The competition over which form of expression can portray a better narrative while preserving the sanctity of unfamiliar cultures has challenged artists to re-envision both the past and the future of mankind. This syphoned a new breath of fresh air into travel narratives, especially Western novels that were once criticised for their controversial representations of other nations. It almost seems like Hollywood adaptations were set out on a long path of revamping past literature and correcting its inconsistencies as they were being questioned by a more sensitive type of modern spectators.

At its nucleus, Hollywood might be just an all-around American film industry that would always stick to its national faith in the American freedom and the prosperity of its territories when faced with the choice of a worldwide cultural characterisation or a local one, but because of its dominant reach over the rest of the world, the impact it has over what is happening outside of it cannot be ignored. Ideally speaking, Hollywood has always been on the lookout for new grounds outside its borders to develop its artistic expression. American motion pictures, especially contemporary ones, have grown more inviting to the rest of the world, urging their participation in a universal-scale cinematic production (Richardson, p 1).

However, in its current state, Western Cinematography feels severely burdened by an unescapable responsibility of satisfying all concerned cultures included in its storytelling. While gradually cultivating an undeniable majority of viewers across the vast reaches of the globe, its mission to bring a cosmopolitan form of cinema has become its permanent burden. Americanised filmography, thus, found itself constantly stuck in the crosshairs of public scrutiny.

This kind of responsibility is mainly set upon Western filmmakers due to their historical affiliations with an imperial past. The lashed out criticism has become, over time, less about investigating the artist's attempts to convey his personal ideology in the film and more about the role that the inclusion of a mixed-cultural cast plays on set. It is known that when tackling any aspect of otherness unfamiliar to an American audience, there is a less austere judgment to be expected compared to that coming from a universal one. Hence, the growing difficulty attaches itself to the expanding prevalent position of Hollywood movies. Multiplying this strenuous task by a dozenfold when imagining how an adaptation can come to life while bearing the cultural controversies of past popular source materials. This type of production makes the art itself a challenge, always set for conquest.

Part Two: Textual Encounters, Cultural Reception, and Cross-Cultural Adaptation

Introduction to Part Two

The second part of my research is composed of four chapters. It focuses on the praxis of the previously introduced theories and ideas in Part One, and revolves mainly around the novels and adaptations that I have selected as my case studies. The first three chapters, starting from chapter three, constitute a close reading of Conrad, Forster, and Herbert's travel narratives and include a comparison between their published texts and the motion pictures to which they were adapted. With each of these stories having suffered its share of cultural and political backlash, the film directors who have taken the task to bring such classic stories to life on the screen have come to deal with the source materials' controversial scenes in their own different approaches to filmmaking. From Coppola's attempt to reinvent *Heart of Darkness* into a different context, time, and setting in *Apocalypse Now,* to the recent Villeneuve visually emphasised recent reiteration of the first book in the *Dune* serie*s*, these three chapters take an in-depth look at the amendments made regarding character encounters, book canon events and original setting details. The purpose is to understand the reasons behind such changes in relation to the Western adapters' perception of unfamiliar cultures.

The last chapter, chapter six, constitutes a distant reading of the analysed film adaptations. It highlights a series of artistic paradigms curated based on the viewers' expectations of their ideal film adaptations, and brings a series of collected data about the role that online communities' receptions have played throughout the years, impacting the approval rate of each film. Their influence over the overall body of criticism by which such adaptation performances have been incremented informs the reader of the amount of subjective control online databases have come to garner over the years and the types of adaptations that have earned their appeal the most throughout the last couple of centuries.

Chapter Three: Artificial Reality Across Borders in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Its Film Adaptations

Introduction

Conrad's representation of Africa is considered by many critics to be an iconic example of a colonised nation's reality captured from Western lenses and distorted to the point of becoming culture-less. They contend that the Congo in *Heart of Darkness* is mostly captured through its native indigenous upbringing and arcane rituals. Others, however, maintain the belief that Conrad's intentions were only to convey a genuine, subjective account of a passionate traveller's journey through his storytelling, devoid of imperial malice. Then again, the reality that Conrad highlighted in his novella has become transfixed over time as a solidified set of stereotypes in the public mind. Despite the later modern cultural backlash, its residuals have impacted the image of Africa and presented themselves as a challenge for the later medial transcendence of the original text. The film adaptations attempted to touch upon other artistic themes and cultures, but still struggled to completely dissociate themselves from the novella's ascribed scornful connotations. In this chapter, I will pit Western, African, and Eastern narrative representations related to *Heart of Darkness* against each other in an attempt to evaluate the efficiency of strategic and sensitised details that both Conrad and later Western adapters employed. Their endeavours to avoid damaging, accusatory statements of racism from their marginalised audiences have been manifested in various forms, engaging the interest of researchers over the years.

This chapter will, therefore, analyse Conrad's perception and knowledge of Congolese culture and society while comparing them to the ones composed by African writers. It will also rely on Said's post-colonial theory concerning imperial and artificial realities to investigate the level of authenticity as captured in both the original text and its later cinematic adaptations. Hence, Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* and Roeg's *Heart of Darkness* will serve as the central case

study for optical reframing and thematic reinterpretation in their portrayal of similar cultural and political clashes within Congolese and Vietnamese societies.

III.1. Western Violence and African Mysticism According to Conrad

Joseph Conrad's 1899 novella, *Heart of Darkness,* has been extensively investigated for its controversial comments on European colonialism in Africa. Originally intended to be read as an anti-imperialistic story that reflects the author's condemnation of violence committed against Congo's natives, Conrad did not hold out in his descriptions of the torture and mutilation that many natives had to endure under Belgian occupation. His work was well received, and it shows in its successful portrayal of the novelist's position through Captain Marlow's character as a supposed ally of the oppressed and a dissentient of European colonial regimes in tribal communities. This kind of personal image that the author self-promoted through his fictional character, however, did not sit all too well with the Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe. The writer denounced Conrad's intentions in a 1977 lecture entitled *"An Image of Africa",* describing his message as a disingenuous attempt at cultivating a wider audience by appealing to the softer side of public opinion. Achebe also vehemently expressed his disgust and disappointment at the manner in which Conrad had engaged the post-colonial discourse, exclaiming that:

> [To him] Africa is to Europe as the picture is to Dorian Gray — a carrier onto whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate. Consequently, Africa is something to be avoided just as the picture has to be hidden away to safeguard the man's jeopardous integrity. Keep away from Africa, or else! Mr. Kurtz of *Heart of Darkness* should have heeded that warning and the prowling horror in his heart would have kept its place, chained to its lair. But he foolishly exposed himself to the wild, irresistible allure of the jungle, and lo! the darkness found him out. (Achebe, p 25)

Through his words, one can feel the Nigerian novelist's personal conviction that Conrad's story is just play-pretend. Marlow's conflicted attitude towards his own kind and the natives is used to coax the audience into believing that the author maintains, albeit reluctantly, a disapproving opinion of the cunning strategies that colonisers have taken to hold African countries hostage. He seems to carry some sense of remorse over his shoulders most of the time during his journey, yet the English sailor's subliminal comments constantly slip out when he encounters the settings and the anatomy of the African race. His personal Dorian Grey-like portrait reveals some of its cracks to the audience when examined more closely under the limelight of assumed existing prejudices.

This is especially the case in the instances where Conrad describes the Congo as being a primitive and barbaric country, going so far as to articulate how Africans not only blend well within the repugnant wilderness of their landscape but also significantly contribute to its untamed aesthetic. Marlow remarks this in one memorable scene of the book: "…a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage" (Conrad, p 38). African green biomes, in Conrad's opinion, assume the role of a lurking monster, half-human and half-organic. This

voiceless fictional creature that he created is the result of Marlow's paranoid descriptions. The fear-induced accounts continue to resurface over and over again throughout the main character's expedition, and it is difficult to completely separate this fictional soul-shattering vision from that of the author's own experience. The result of dependence on the psychological build-up fracturing that Marlow goes through while diving deeper into the dark depths of the Congolese jungles constitutes, upon the unsuspecting reader, a terrifying struggle to get out safely, while creating a solid alibi for Marlow's liminal hostility. The white protagonist, whose bravery is put under the spotlight of this trip, makes the foreignness of the geographical setting at fault for his moments of antipathy, and the same, a token of heroic survival after escaping the dark continent alive to spread his tale.

The focus on the traumatic torment that the characters face is what brings forth the cultural aversions to which Marlow comes about when assimilating the African environment. A lot of effort has been put into imagining such morbid descriptions, attributed to the natives' exterior physics, to the point where the words sometimes do not seem to match the tongue of a sailor but rather that of the experienced, dark romantic writer. To much of Conrad's lack of consideration, this obsession comes off seamlessly in its incorporation of the most exotic list of words exhibited in his narrative.

While still attempting to normalise the distortions hidden in his own perception, this list was still bound to put the central character under greater later scrutiny. By using Marlow as his fall-guy through fictionalised, yet well-curated remarks, Conrad tries to paint the country as a dark, ominous, underdeveloped, but most importantly, cruel landscape while hiding these thoughts in the subtlety of the main character's human flaws. The Congo thus soon becomes the perfect setting for a horror story from the perspective of Marlow; it is the equivalent of a haunted house. The natives are the lost, pitiful ghosts that roam its arid corridors, and Marlow's crew are only there to record and confirm their existence.

Admittedly, disregarding the discrepancy in the sailor's language. Conrad still somehow manages to mystify the African continent without it directly coming off as racial stereotyping at times. *Heart of Darkness* captures, therefore, a testing environment that could curse any foreign traveller. It makes him renounce his European moral compass to take on an inhumane form of existence, especially when tempted to indulge in its crude, natural existence. As he fights valiantly the urge to stoop to the others' primitive level, the humane hero manages to criticise his European peers who could not do the same and instead have turned to militant means in order to domesticate the natives. At this point, other than setting up the European identity as an apex form of progress and edification, while describing only what the eyes of a cautious newcomer would capture in an unfamiliar zone, Conrad has given the benefit of the doubt to a great number of readers. The reason behind this is the author's convincing, altruistic desire to defend the natives against the more overtly racist settlers in the land without besmirching his own Western origins.

In his attempt to prove this European descent's right to colonise, Conrad still shows his support for the occupiers' '*mission civilisatrice'*, which, to some degree, intended to lighten the deeper, darker shades of Africa. He stands firmly behind the claim that it was, in fact, a genuine mission to bring progress and knowledge to an underdeveloped, impoverished continent. He sometimes, therefore, paints the Western travellers in the image of righteous pilgrims hoping to rescue a "third-world society" from their enclosed degeneracy and monstrosity. The pursuit of ivory is just another cost that keeps the occupiers motivated in their honourable quest. Through his novella, Conrad claims that the pursuit of this resource, for many of his fictional settlers, including Kurtz, has turned into an inescapable addiction, yet the mere requirement to collect it in the hopes of moulding a brighter change should exonerate them of their psychotic obsessions. This is often highlighted in Marlow's argumentation as it amounts to one general idea: In order to attain the noble end of civilising the indigenous, all means are justified.

The series of retorts that the author comes up with throughout the progress of his story also touch upon the colonisers' violence. It is true that the main character does not agree with some of the methods used by his fellow occupiers; he thinks that they are extremely vicious and unnecessary tools of discipline. When looking at the diseased, powerless colonised who are unable to protest, let alone resist the inflicted coercion, the main character, at times, shows sympathy and understanding for the overexerted corporal punishments that are forced upon them. Nevertheless, Conrad continuously tries to make Marlow, and also his audience, pivot towards an ulterior, normalised motive more deserving of the colonisers' assaulting treatment. The natives must always be kept in check for the greater good of human civilisation because Africa is too distant from humanity and, therefore, represents a threat to it. As Marlow's reasoning indicates in one of the passages:

> …we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign—and no memories. The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there—there, you could look at a thing monstrous and free. (Conrad, p 38-39)

"The night of the first ages" is a very bald way to say it. It alludes to an image of a pre-historic landscape on which travellers from the future have landed. By calling attention to the native primal lives of the past, he also categorises the group with which he is travelling as bringers of light to an arid, dangerous land. The next part adds a more direct and personal resolution to his portrayal of the journey, focusing on building a future Congo and not destroying it. The country is sketched as an earth that is far from being earthly, in that current sense, and therefore, could not possibly be inhabited by humans, confirming the pending universal danger the mission represents. In Marlow's awareness, there is something paranormal about entering Africa, a thing that brings Caucasian travellers to the edge of insanity. His descriptions could even be compared to an expedition on a new planet with ferocious creatures hiding in the homogeneous,

alien formation of its habitat. The population there is ready to lunge at them and devour them in a fleeting moment, and if not that, then disrupt their mental sanity, making them act irrationally towards anything foreign they come across.

Despite being the ones equipped with the firearms and the military force, he attempts to turn the balance of power around by making the travellers feel threatened; they are placed in a position of victims of the unknown. At the same time, Marlow attempts to rationalise the source of the Western traveller's fear while keeping it partially concealed under rugs of mysticism. This argument is therefore strengthened by the fact that the journey to the Congo requires of these fictional travellers to cross the borders of civilisation, and be on the lookout for what this new corner of the world might throw at them. Conrad, while keeping one foot firmly anchored on each side of the fence of both Europe and Africa, employs interim arguments to guarantee a positive portion of reception for his story, one that would defend him against the more sceptical of readers.

The Congo is poor, but it is also mysteriously threatening because of its African, barbaric nature. The Belgian colonisers are wrong in their violence, but they are also right in defending themselves against these pre-historic savages. These mixed messages are not just opportunities for personal moments in which the writer takes a pause to vent out and release his repressed thoughts on the need to protect the superiority of the European identity; they also dictate the pace of his story. By deflecting the blame of physical aggression practised in African territories through ephemeral judgements, the writer humanises the actions of his Western characters. Even Kurtz, a person who drowns in his own obsessions of power and is known by his peers as a madman, who lost his wits, gets to be absolved by Marlow as he expresses a sense of admiration for being a rebellious trader. Kurtz was able to achieve a formidable, fast form of controlled monopoly over ivory and harbour power over Congolese lands like no one else. This makes him a key figure in their mission of civilising the natives.

Despite its initial success at convincing the audience of the good intentions behind Marlow and his peer travellers' caution of the Congolese environment, this strategy Conrad employs in shielding certain aspects of the imperial occupation is eventually questioned. While keeping a direct conclusive verdict from ever-escaping his voyeuristic tendencies during the entire trip has now become the centre of attention, making Marlow the subject of heavy criticism, commonly shared by many writers and scholars. Those who have felt a need to shed light upon the constant attempts of obscurantism that the sailor hides behind were not going to be dissolved by the story's apologetic façade. South African writer Benita Parry is one of the most outspoken researchers about Conrad's shifting remarks. In his book, *Conrad and Imperialism (1983),* Parry admits that *Heart of Darkness* is a true sensational read of the 19th century. When it comes to the language that Conrad uses, the author believes that Conrad was able to elevate storytelling techniques to new heights. However, thematically speaking, the book is far from being a *bona fide,* anti-imperialistic, Western restitution as many had chosen to label it during its time of publication:

> …the book has been interpreted as an attack on imperialism, a parable about the construction of ethical values, [but also] a mythic descent into the primal underworld, a night journey into the unconscious self and a spiritual voyage towards transcendent knowledge (…) the fiction paradoxically contains within itself the seeds of an unorthodox apologia for values it has discredited and disowned (…) [F]or Marlow the 'pure uncomplicated savagery' of African life is 'something that had a right to exist - obviously - in the sunshine', whereas Kurtz's depravities had transported him into 'some lightless region of subtle horrors'. (Parry, p 20-21)

The deprecation of Congolese culture under the pretext that it has nothing worth describing other than its putrid savagery is a strong deterrent from the initial intention of recognising the

freedom that the country retains[9]. In addition to his use of strong, manipulative language, Conrad's biases in the story are concealed by a rich repertoire of life experiences as a Western traveller who has documented his stay at the centre of Africa. There are many implied examples of notes in which the author claims that he has gathered enough knowledge about the country's governing principles to draw a definite conclusion concerning its past and future. More than that, Conrad often insinuates in his book that the whole of Africa is no more than an extension of the Congo:

> In the immutability of their surroundings, the foreign shores, the foreign faces, the changing immensity of life, glide past, veiled not by a sense of mystery but by a slightly disdainful ignorance, for there is nothing mysterious to a seaman unless it be the sea itself, which is the mistress of his existence and as inscrutable as destiny. For the rest, after his hours of work, a casual stroll or a casual spree on shore suffices to unfold the secret of a whole continent for him, and generally, he finds the secret not worth knowing. (Conrad, p 5)

A vindication of the Congo's past pain is not the purpose of his novella. Perhaps it might have been at some point during his contemplation of what the *Heart of Darkness* should be about, but the imperial impact was too strong for the writer not to continue the European tradition of looking down condescendingly at the world outside of Europe. This made him extend his unfavourable impressions of Congo's natural landscape to the rest of the continent. His racially motivated opinions are well hidden underneath the traces of guilt that have rarely —if not

[9] "The Congo Free State" is a title granted to the African nation from 1885 to 1905. Despite being recognized as independent self-governing country, the name did not reflect the dominance of Belgian, King Leopold II over Congolese territories. Leopold treated the Congo as his private property, exploiting its natural resources (rubber and Ivory) and only admitted to the African country's colonized state in 1908 changing its name to "The Belgian Congo".

ever— found a place of concern in the 19th-century European literature over the colonisation of Africa.

Still persuaded by this change of European heart that Conrad sometimes tries to put out, some critics like Cedric Watts defend the claim that this book is the first step towards a full, genuine apology coming from an awakened consciousness of past Western exploitations. Watts argues that Conrad's story has been taken out of context in so many of its scenes by the likes of Achebe to sound patronising and cynical about the Africans' dehumanisation (Watts, p 198-199). He also praises the book's attempt to raise awareness about the colonised sufferings, and while this might be true of his intentions to emphasise the nation as a victim of exploitation, the author does manifest the same level of focus in his direct condemnation of the colonisers' crimes. More importantly, his personal actions of defiance against the station's imperial chief officers are stopped short by the growing admiration Marlow expresses towards Kurtz's character, despite Kurtz having taken extreme measures against the natives to gain control over the monopoly of ivory. The overall fate of Congo is, in fact, rendered as the casualty of misfortune caught in the horrific yet necessary European webs of ruthless expansion.

The arguments that Watts presents fail to consider the possibility that the novel might just be a packaged political stunt Conrad was going for after expecting a public opinion's overturn by the mid-20th century against the racist and orientalised texts of previous mainstream European writers. In the name of saving European face and earning an immaculate, fresh start, *Heart of Darkness* fits the perfect retreating strategy because what followed the decolonisation of the Belgian Congo was a great deal of public prosecution centred around such gruesome past invasions. Most of the reception that followed was calling out these waves of colonial land encroachments, insisting that they were mainly driven by Eurocentric, spiteful aggressions towards the settlers' darker-skinned fellow humans.

At the dawn of the writing back period, *Heart of Darkness* was, therefore, at the heart of public de-escalation, softening the counter-blows thrown towards European colonisers (and ex-colonisers), especially those targeting the British imperial front. Nevertheless, while hiding behind this curtain of supposed empathy, which he found the time to sew and flesh out after his illuminating travels to Africa, the writer still could not avoid the cultural backlash that later ensued. In fact, his diary was argued by a great number of academics to be a damning piece of evidence that displays his personal support for the imperial cause, as we shall examine in the next section.

III.1.1. Conrad's Imperial Selfhood in his Journey across European Borders

There is little doubt about the contacts that Conrad had made with the natives during his stay in the Congo. The author's diary clearly mentions coming across Congolese people outside of his white circle of European merchants and station officers. While passing through various villages and markets, he calls attention to how surprisingly crowded these locations seemed: "…left very early. Road ascending all the time—Passed villages. Country seems thickly inhabited. At 11" arrived at a large marketplace (…) [Saw] a small cross with the words: a white man died" (p 96). Conrad also constantly names the native villages and the islands he travels to as he keeps track of his journey progress in the country, he writes: "Proceeding on pass the village of *Pressunbi* then *Irebu*. Sharp bend in the shore where the mouth of the R is. From elbow cross over to the flat island avoiding (…) snags" (p 113). These descriptions have a tendency to sound the same throughout all of his notes.

He gives out the names of stopping points where he and his crew members rest to recuperate before proceeding with their trip, but the supposed "thickly" inhabited zones with infrastructures spread throughout the insides of the Congo's borders are, at the same time, captured in the form of ghost towns. The citizens of the "Free Congo State" almost seem non-

existent to him. remaining in the same invisible, black state of living, while Conrad moves by them and seemingly and inexplicably phases right through them. There are few to almost no natives who were able to leave a strong enough impression worthy of being mentioned in Conrad's diary.

In contrast to this complete omission of his interactions with Congolese villagers, every time Conrad meets his Western peers, he dedicates longer passages in which he mentions their names and provides a summary of their personalities, often exhibiting a sense of cordiality and welcoming that cannot be found within the natives' territories. The reader can therefore recognise this pattern of biases by shifting his attention from the novel to the writer's diary. Some of the passages there read as follows: "Through Mr R.C. have made the acquaintance of Mr. Underwood the Manager of the English Factory (Hatton & Cookson) in Kalla Kalla; Hearty and kind. Lunched there on the 21st" (p 91). Conrad also stresses how civilised the European-made infrastructures felt to him, "Hospitable reception by Mrs Comber (…) The looks of the whole establishment eminently civilized and very refreshing to see after the lots of tumbled down hovels in which the State & Company agents are content to live—Fine buildings. Position on a hill. Rather breezy—" (p 97). Serving as a beacon of comfort in the midst of the African primitive jungle, these fragments of Western homeland shed much light upon the safety bubble that the author sets around himself, keeping anything that has to do with the natives' lifestyle or character away from his convictions of European superiority.

Adding to the absence of native hospitality are the personal author's exasperations, which are highlighted in his descriptions of a deadly wilderness and a threatening African nature that stares down at the voyagers even during their periods of supposed rest. To Conrad, the Congo is not a place where one can take a moment and enjoy the scenery; he and his companions seem to be always on the move, which looks rather similar to Marlow's own dangerous trip to Kurtz. Conrad does not seem to open for exploring or learning from the

natives. He shields himself from this knowledge lest it cast a malediction upon him and lead him to his death. His knowledge of Congolese culture is, therefore, a shallow one, collected from the preconceived assumptions of his European companions there. The natives' traditions, when not seen as part of an African, primitive oddity, are described as morbid, grotesque rituals that include acts of cannibalism and half-naked dances to the jungle rhythms of tom-tom beatings. These ignorant notions deter Western travellers from ever learning any information about the actual culture by listening to the natives themselves. Instead, the author follows the same traditional heresy pattern that other European past writers have depended on in their past, compromised writings.

Conrad's deliberate narrative ambiguity, which presents itself in a series of morally ambiguous expressions, oscillating between a vague empathy for the African natives and a passive aggression towards them, cannot be ignored either. In fact, a lot of the late 19th to the early 20th-century reception caught on to the author's act of hiding his racist presumptions under his well-mastered romantic craftsmanship. In 1938, the American presenter and actor, Orson Welles, had perhaps one of the more articulately pinned down descriptions mentioned about the book on his Mercury Theatre Broadcast, stating that:

> *The Heart of Darkness* could be described as a deliberate masterpiece or a downright incantation; its best aspects are an artful compound of sympathy for humankind, and a high, tragical disgust *(...)* its successful contrival of moods hides its craft as an octopus hides in its own ink. And we are almost persuaded, after all, that there is (…) something essential waiting for us in the dark alleys of the world: aboriginally loathsome, immeasurable, and certainly nameless. (Welles, 2:00-2:48)

After reading his diary and listening to the opinions of critics who seem to be aware of Conrad's artistic trickery, it is difficult not to suspect the underlying motives behind the author's personal support of the African colonies and ex-colonies' retribution. I would even venture further by arguing that his novella would fall, by today's standards, into the category of artistic productions that seek to achieve financial success by adhering to a level of political correctness. It is an early example of a deceitful narrative, but one in which we can still feel Conrad's attempts to blend in with both crowds located on opposite sides of the Manichean colonial fence. The most dominant difference between his story and today's more politically desensitised narratives is that Conrad leaves larger crumbs of evidence leading to his imperial biases. Many other authors in the years that followed his book's publication, I would argue, have become more skilful in hiding behind a façade of neutrality and being careful not to stir up any dispute by provoking the pro-marginalised proportions of their audiences.

Knowing that the author's diary has served as a primary source of inspiration for his fictional adventure, it is not surprising to detect the writer's participation in his own work. When the narrator is not Marlow speaking, Conrad takes his place in the role of an extradiegetic narrator[10], reinforcing the ominous air that the African environment projects over his characters, especially Marlow's. When Conrad decides to include his contribution of narration, it comes off as an attempt at a subtle interjection over Marlow's lines, and it is often there to heighten the terrifying, macabre vibe that the environment casts upon the unfamiliar visitor. We can see that Conrad, the invisible narrator, sets the dark tone of the story right at the beginning of the first chapter:

[10] A prescient narrator that chooses when to share additional accounts about the story and its characters while always staying out the fictional world he is describing.

> It had become so pitch dark that we listeners could hardly see one another. For a long time already, he, sitting apart, had been no more to us than a voice. There was not a word from anybody. The others might have been asleep, but I was awake. I listened; I listened on the watch for the sentence, for the word, that would give me the clue to the faint uneasiness inspired by this narrative that seemed to shape itself without human lips in the heavy night air of the river. (Conrad, p 30)

Some of the more unsuspecting readers would think that the central character here is the one uttering these words. The use of a first-person perspective reinforces this misconception, yet this description is different from previous ones in that the narrator conceals himself among present listeners as a mere awakened presence. He is the only attendee who continues to monitor the environment after Marlow finishes his speech about Kurtz, "…he, sitting apart, had been no more to us than a voice. There was not a word from anybody" (p 30). After Marlow's voice dies down, this unnamed character pursues an earlier half-sensical line of thoughts and tries to impress upon his readers that Marlow's anxiety about the travel ahead is what made him start this rumble of a monologue in the first place. As Romanian critics, Monica Eftimie and Anca Manea argue:

> Both narrator and focaliser, the anonymous agent seems to create a deliberate incomplete image around Marlow's story by attempting to produce a narrative text that 'opens up' to the readers and to himself simultaneously. His highly personal discourse (…) is intended as a manipulative device. Providing the readers with insight into his thoughts and feelings brought about by Marlow's story, he manipulates the reader into accepting the novel character of Marlow's account, and, thus, its authenticity. (Eftimie, Manea, p 225)

The oddity of Conrad's sudden interjections cannot be ignored either. By placing himself as a listener, the author/narrator does not bother to provide much context or later descriptions that would explain this unnamed man's role in the expedition. Any character who is able to bring further insight into the hero's own words while speaking in first-person is bound to pique the curiosity of the more shrewd observers. The character might successfully come off as an extended cut of Marlow's rant, fooling the less concerned, but those who become aware of his presence can no longer simply ignore the moments in which he picks up the narration. The challenge of interpreting the reasons behind when and where this mysterious member of the crew starts to talk gives ample evidence of Conrad's strategic self-inserted cameos.

The lurking presence of the author in the story, combined with the traces of diary inspiration that the novel demonstrates by pursuing dialled down, but still racially charged observations, keeps the fictional narrative embedded within the author's subjective reality. Instead of crossing the threshold of his own reality and moving away from the notes of his compromised diary, his fictional novel feels at times like an extension of that same personal journey. Just like in real life, Conrad's perception of Africa in his novel is one that lacks any form of genuine interest in the African culture. His narrative style is, therefore, prone to the criticism and counter-judgement of those who oppose his travel descriptions. Being presented as semi-realistic accounts of his visit, his mischievous portrayals of the Congo were bound to eventually provoke and attract cultural controversy. Despite its exposure to European malice, the novel was not able to deceive some of the more conscious readers, and critics would go on to challenge such callous interpretations of African reality.

III.1.2. Cultural Backlash in Defiance of Conrad's Stereotypes

In the wake of its attempt at African retribution, *Heart of Darkness* has gained, to a large extent, the reputation of an exemplary European guilt-tripping text, disguised in the shape of a

plea for humanitarian justice for the still-badly-hurting continent of Africa. This travel fiction, although it sets itself as a worldwide planetary form of writing that is first addressed to the European consciousness and then the rest of the world about the importance of human rights, in reality, is one declared on behalf of the European identity. In other words, if we are to evaluate Conrad's presence in a court of justice as an unbiased jurist in the case of European colonial discourse, he would probably still lean more towards the side of the European defence than that of the African prosecution, always re-interpreting the coloniser's criminal deeds under a different, less corrupted light.

The black "other", though pitied and recognised as a victim of European violence in his work, is still depicted as an inferior human race. The Congolese culture has no concrete standing in his work, which, in my opinion, is the greatest form of discrimination against the colonised's cultural identity, while Conrad's story attempts with much effort to subvert these signs. Silvia Riva considers this lack of interest in the African nation's tradition and history as "…an example of cultural muffling and racialisation" (Riva, p 233). While Edward Said, on the other hand, goes further by calling it "a narrative of two visions". He contends that *Heart of Darkness* has moments in which (a) the imperial European reign feels obligated and justified to commit slaughters in the name of preserving an authority that must not be shared with the darker race, and (b) other moments in which the colonised attempts to resist this decisive violence committed against him, being captured in instances of righteous human revolt before passing away and getting replaced by an illusionary serf of an African continent (Said, p 25). The two arguments Conrad uses to describe what is intended to look like a balanced conflict between a Western thesis and an African anti-thesis are far from being equally opposite. Despite the evident attempts towards a worldwide recognition of an African civilisation, to the author, this concept of non-European identity cannot survive without its dependency on the Western world. Said notes that the novel tries, and in some cases succeeds, in luring the readers into a reality

of Africa that is trifled with "what ifs," blurring the boundaries between speculative fiction and actuality:

> …the whole point of what Kurtz and Marlow talk about is, in fact, imperial mastery, white Europeans over black Africans, and their ivory, civilisation over the primitive dark continent. By accentuating the discrepancy between the official "idea" of empire and the remarkably disorienting actuality of Africa, Marlow unsettles the reader's sense not only of the very idea of empire, but of something more basic, reality itself. (Said, p 29)

The novel tackles this ideology through the indirect placement of Kurtz in the role of a foreign divinity worshipped by his loyal Congolese servants. This mysterious character to whom Marlow's quest of search is originally dedicated becomes a kind of glorified figure who builds his own inner station, a secret empire filled with a tremendous amount of precious ivory. For Kurtz to turn into a worshipped deity among the natives insinuates that there is a spiritual void inside the Congo. The unexplained infiltration of this white merchant into a tightly closed African tribal circle sets a condescending look upon the colonised nation as a whole. It is as if Conrad truly believes that a show of power and a demonstration of European supremacy is all it takes for the darker race to kneel down and submit. Said strongly argues against this possibility:

> If, while sitting in Oxford, Paris, or New York, you tell Arabs or Africans that they belong to a basically sick or unregenerate culture, you are unlikely to convince them. Even if you prevail over them, they are not going to concede to you your essential superiority or your right to rule them despite your evident wealth and power" (Said, p 19).

The question of how Kurtz's successful breach was made possible is never disclosed in detail. Despite the astonishments of station officers who would only amplify the legend of Kurtz as a man of great talent and an unmatched genius with inconceivable power that allowed him to rule over the savages, the story never bothers to explore the original background sub-story of the character. Therefore, Kurtz remains throughout the entire novel an illusory possibility of a European ascendance to divinity in the mind of Conrad. Although not the main character of the story, he receives the admiration and respect of all circles, shining inconceivable authority and wisdom upon everyone he meets.

His unrevealed methods of climbing the ranks of merchants and eventually disappearing into the darkest depths of the Congo, just to emerge later as a triumphant leader, can be compared to many Western heroes who often exude an aura of an invincible conqueror, achieving feats that no other race is capable of. The trope of skipping the details behind such achievements has turned into a canon pattern of creating whitewashed main characters with attributes that defy any form of logic. These mysterious and sometimes supernatural powers are never rationalised to the audience in terms of how they work. It is as if there is no need to do so when confronted with what the author would perceive as weaker adversaries. This is supported by later fictional Western characters that have been built on the same vague premise as Kurtz's, from the decorated English soldier, Harry Flashman, in George MacDonald Fraser's series of stories *Flashman Papers (1969*) to the American captain and later revered "white samurai" Nathan Algren in Edward Zwick's film, *The Last Samurai* (2003).

It has often been suggested that such characters are employed as points of relief for the Western consciousness, twisting the historical roles of their soldiers, spies, and leaders so that their good deeds outweigh and justify their bad ones. Not only does this method suggest a continuous disguise of imperial colonisers as prophesied characters and superheroes made for the purpose of ruling others, but it also reaffirms the old-aged law that Western artists have

established in their works: the darker race is an inferior existence that is meant to be ruled from the outside. This means that such orientalised cultures cannot be part of a planetary inclusive literature unless they yield their own identities to be fragmented and subsidiary components that cannot survive on their own.

To be acknowledged as part of what is perceived as a world civilisation, in the opinion of many writers and critics, a nation has to have a clear cultural standing, recorded in a written form and considered to be an educational necessity in a universal system of learning. However, turning to the words of Arnold J. Toynbee, "[t]he evidence suggests [that the cause of civilisation's death] is one of suicide, and not murder" (Toynbee, p 613). Although I disagree with Toynbee's essentialist suggestion that outside, alien forces do not have a hand in the perishing of civilisations, I do share his definition of the term from a cultural standpoint. The decline of a culture is an important precursor that does not get enough credit for its involvement in a society's historical progress and regression. Culture, if not reclaimed through post-colonial and neo-colonial writings, can lead to a civilisation's total death. Toynbee considers the survival and growth of a nation's culture a core asset of living civilisations. If people stop caring about African culture and if the stereotype of poor, ignorant black citizens persists, the threat of another civilisation committing suicide becomes imminent. It is no longer a question of whether it is going to perish; it is rather a question of when exactly it will happen.

Fortunately, the African culture has been carried and converted into the parts of a more worldly art by its African immigrants and travellers. It is true that the great heritage of the Congo is now bound to be expressed through a large corpus of languages, transcending the national borders of communication, but the substance of their past societies still lives on. Many Congolese writers, therefore, tend to move away from their native tongues like Kesai's Tshiluba, the Lingala, or the Kikongo, embracing more popular international languages to reach a greater deficit of audiences around the world. However, in the opinion of many critics, the

preservation of African Cultures requires the sacrifice of translating their deeply rooted traditions into foreign languages. Riva considers this a bargain worth taking; she gives the example of Luba's *Kasala* as a literary custom, which is a genre of Congolese oral poetry often accompanied by traditional musical instruments when performed. National writers like Pius Nkashama refurbished this type of poetry in his 1980 book, *Blood Pact*. Originally written in French and later translated into English, Nkashama wanted to share with the world the celebratory beauty that is embedded in *Kasala's* rhythmic poetry (Riva, p 238). This revered Congolese tradition helps illustrate Luba's commemoration of life and death. In both marriages and funerals, *Kasala* is therefore expressed as a way to cope with the organic connection the two denominators share: humans live to die.

What Conrad's novel constantly stresses is the lack of any traces of cultural upbringing in Africa. Cannibalism and detachment from modern civilisation are brought up at every possible chance: "…Fine fellows, cannibals, in their place. They were men one could work with, and I am grateful to them. And after all, they did not eat each other before my face" (Conrad, p 37). Many African writers try to fight off these stereotypical descriptions. The Congolese French-speaking novelist and playwright Kama S. Kamanda does this by bringing up the African memory in both his poetry and novels. By creating a dream-like vision of a childhood owing to his own experience in the Congo, Kamanda attempts to capture the peaceful and colourful lives of his characters before getting ripped apart by European colonisers. Although he does not directly address Conrad's comments, his collection of writings in *Tales of Kamanda* blends different African traditions with fantastical elements to create a sense of magical fairytales in a pre-colonial era that Conrad revokes or dismisses in his novel. This era goes against what he calls "a land of the first ages" in his story; his tales instead tell of a prosperous society that was established a long time ago. The childhood memories shared in *Tales of Kamanda* constitute a solid cross-examination with what *Heart of Darkness* insinuate

about the country. The book assumes a defensive response against the stereotypical violent demeanour and the misrepresented African traditions that many Western writers spend an unhealthy amount of dedication mocking.

Writers like Nkashama and Kamanda, who choose to cross the borders of their local regions after having experienced their mother culture in their youth, carry a piece of their identity during their later mobility. Nkashama's popular later works, although published in an international setting and in foreign languages, more specifically French and English, are laced with fragments of his past culture. This is what distinguishes them from the more anchored forms of orientalised Western writings, such as that of Conrad. The revival of *Kasala* not only proves that the Congolese, as well as other African Cultures, still hang on to what they consider important vestiges of an ancient black civilisation, but they are also evolving into an impactful part of a more modern culture. Although now part of a wider hybrid body of identity, both African writers demonstrate that the thought of always needing to look outward in order to write about the African colonised in his current aching state should not be a fixed rule to abide by. A worldwide body of literature, when cultures interact in a web of intercommunication, should always be kept open to the contribution of minority voices, even those which are unfavourable to a traditional elitist community.

The public's interest in the cultures of the oppressed hangs not only on the resistance of traumatised writers but also on how willing Western writers are to learn about them before introducing aspects of their culture as essential fragments and plots in storytelling. Moving away from the bigotry of past imperialist contaminations, their artistic productions must preserve the integrity of other cultures in order to avoid repeating the same futile feuds over which society holds a purer way of life. Western Culture must not be treated as a dogmatic, authoritative theme to which the lost and struggling African artists hide behind while hoping to prove that they are as creative as their more acclaimed Western peers. It is important to consider

the surviving fragments of African traditions as an essential component of their creativity, embracing the modern amalgamation of cultural contacts and acknowledging that they all form new and richer present identities.

"Border thinking," calls out Riva, "is an alternative way to grasp the hybrid literary phenomenon that allows us to speak about metonymic societies –that is, societies informed (but not contained) by globalisation (Riva, p 234). What Riva here is referring to when using the word globalisation is not a cosmopolitan knowledge that allows for cultures to equally coexist, but rather a current restrained state of the concept, still controlled by Western, dominant outlets. Challenging this control and redefining what a planetary literature should strive to achieve requires social reassessment. Crossing borders should be met with genuine aspirations to cultivate and include further knowledge from around the world without pressing a mainstream narrative as a superior art form.

III.2. Crossing the Novelistic Borders of *Heart of Darkness*

The popularity of Conrad's story seems to have attracted a significant number of passionate artists over the years, from mere well-liked references and quotes used as selling points in contemporary artworks to what feels like getting an entire piggyback ride and being carried by the 19th-century English writer's immortal fame. It is safe to describe the success of this controversial novella as a rampant achievement that transcended its original textual frame and went on to conquer all other forms of artistic expression. The adaptations of *Heart of Darkness* today range from cinematic productions of the classic journey to theatrical plays and visual novels that emphasise its symbolic meanings, and even to a video game about a

futuristic war set in a post-apocalyptic Dubai, where the player's main goal is to save a scientist who goes by the name of Joseph Konrad.[11]

This constant renewal of relevance in *Heart of Darkness* continues to manifest itself over the passing generations, and it is by no means a surprising one. Conrad's story is, after all, one of the first stepping stones in the portrayal of an African culture from a supposed objective European line of sight. The potential critiques and amendment opportunities the story unintentionally promoted have become too tempting a venue for adapters not to venture into. Not only that, but I also believe that old controversies serve as a great source for modern re-assessments, considering the dimensional expansions that audio-visual means can add to the symbolic and voluntarily-made vagrant textual descriptions of fiction authors. Paul Klee theorises that switching a story's text to an illustration or instance provides the audience with a whole new, fresh perspective. Art does not reproduce what we see; rather, it makes us see under a different light. In this way, paintings that reinterpret literature give shape to the unspoken and the veiled, inviting us to discover meanings hidden between the words (Klee, p 9). Capturing a scene of a narrative into an image frame could shed a brighter light upon what the text had brushed off as an unimportant or irrelevant detail.

In the case of Conrad's notorious exclamations that pertain to the natives blending well with the wilderness of the environment, some adaptations attempted to bring such thought-provoking comments closer to reality. Catherine Anyango and David Zane Mairowitz's splash art-image in their *Heart of Darkness* graphic novel stands out the most for its vivid retracing

[11] For a more in depth analysis about the 2012 game adaptation's themes, see: Alexander Jahr's *"The Line.* See: *The Monster is You: An Analysis of Spec Ops: The Line as an Adaptation of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness"* See:http://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-45990

of how Marlow's carriers and porters would have been treated by the stand-alone, English voyeur, as shown in this figure:

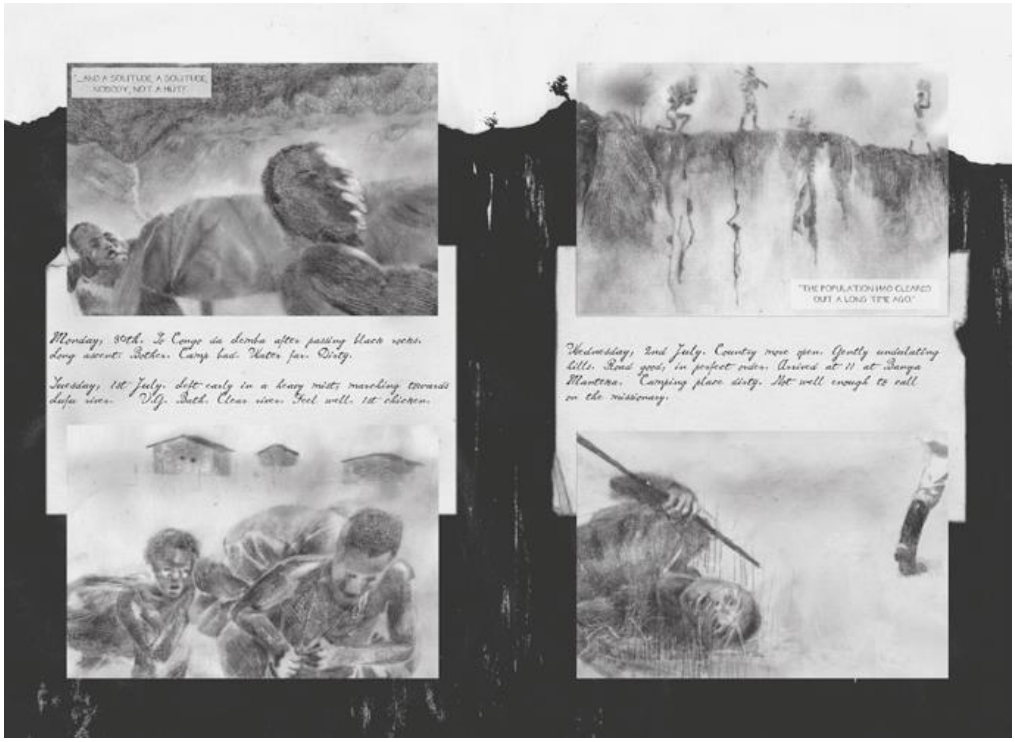


Figure 2: A Splash Art Featured Anyango and Mairowitz's Graphic Novel Adaptation (qtd. in Pośpiech, p 84)

While probing into the added significance that the illustration adds to Conrad's original scene, the Polish critic, Adamowicz Pośpiech, notes the following:

> The two black carriers blend into the background mountains of the main borderless panel as if they are not there, as if they are transparent (…). The head of one deceased porter is lying on the ground with his hand clutching a spear, and in the corner of the frame, the high leather shoe of the departing coloniser (probably Marlow). (Pośpiech, p 83).

Between the illustrations of these four panels, the mundane details of Conrad's excursion are written while mentioning the date and the location of his progress. The author's own diary inspired these artists to create their expressive panels, but what is striking here is the lack of

comments from the adapters themselves. The sketch is captured plainly and simply based on Conrad's own description. It is stripped down of any personal opinion or direct combative statements on the matter, yet it comes off as a showcase of Marlow's lack of care for his companions. His stoic demeanour for the death of the Congolese porter is captured by one single protruding foot moving away from the scene of death, discernible in the final right panel.

The same thing could be said about Tarik O'Regan's recent opera adaptation, which premiered in 2011. This condensed musical performance is accompanied by animated illustrations shown on a set of digital screens, displaying African motifs, tribesmen masks, and sometimes eerie black and white shapes, possibly a contrast between coloniser and colonised. The lyrics that are composed of popular quotations taken from the novella are made short and are quickly produced in the midst of the singing. Much of the rest is inspired by Conrad's diary and is captured through dancing sequences on a dimly lit stage. The intent of the play seems to be far from outlining the violence of European occupation in the Congo, yet the staggering spread out pieces of tusks all around the stage, in the corners of the background, sitting and even held in the hands of the performers. These purely aesthetic extra props accentuate the popular, original statement made by Marlow: "the word ivory rang in the air" (Conrad, p 24-25). The choice of decoration, by consequence, accidentally brings forth proof of what Andrea White describes as "the ongoing rape in the country" (White, p 14). Applying Genette's theory of focalisation[12] to this live performance, one can surmise that ivory represents a focal point that could have been used to control the awareness of the attendees, but that the intention might not have necessarily been to provoke imperialist revulsion.

In fact, I would consider the intended objective of the opera to be far from bringing up colonial discourse. The melodic dialogues between Marlow and Kurtz and the colourful voyage

[12] Refer to pages 40-41

of the sailor stem from admiration instead of hatred, which can mean that even in its most faithful adaptations, and even in the reiterations that try to express homage to the original text, *Heart of Darkness* struggles to hide its Eurocentric injustice in the background. Without trying too hard to bring up the racial connotations of the original novel, Conrad's narrative always evokes the derogatory, controversial acts of Marlow in the Congo. As generational interest in the work keeps resurfacing, the difficulty in re-enacting the novel, it seems, has become enveloped not around proving its pro-imperial messages but rather around defending its altruistic, objective status and promoting its redeeming facets.

This begs the question: Is there even a need to continue to adapt the original text if it is always going to be tainted with the same old Eurocentric colonial past? Owing to the fact that later transnational cinematic productions continued to shed light on the imperial ideology, both that of Europe and the United States, it is fair to say that such a question has already been answered. *Heart of Darkness* holds a strong thematic and linguistic attraction that keeps inspiring artists, even the most contemporary ones. Their re-imaginings and reconstructions of the story represent a creative challenge that attests not only to the craftsmanship of the adapter in his re-creation of it, to comment on the more relevant periodic matters, but also to how well the strategy of sensitising cultures is still used in hopes of re-inviting the audience to take another look at a thematically revised classic of the past.

III.2.1. Optical Focalisation and Cultural Contention in Roeg's Film Adaptation

Nicolas Roeg's version of Conrad's story might not be the most popular one on screen, especially when compared to Coppola's successful, Americanised voyage at the heart of Vietnam. Roeg's film has a monotonous pace that dominates the majority of its scenes, and for many critics, this has been the most justified reason behind this 1993 adaptation's flop. Anyone

at the time would have probably expected the film to, at least, scratch some gains off of its lottery ticket, especially when looking at the packed roster of great actors who took on the roles of the book's iconic characters. Tim Roth, starring as Marlow, and John Malkovich, in the role of Kurtz, would always come off as promising casting picks in any film, even by today's standards. Unfortunately, their performances back then were not on par with some of their more recent memorable roles.

In his review of this adaptation, Bernard Hemingway criticised, more specifically, John Malkovich's Kurtz while comparing it to Marlow's Brando version of what, in his opinion, powerfully captured a "cypher character more than a blood and flesh one". He reprimanded the prior actor's played version of Kurtz under the direction of Roeg by saying that: "Coppola got it right by leaving him a half-lit oracular presence." He also argues that: "[This version] has John Malkovich playing him like a drag queen with a Gloria Swanson fixation, which, if you like, Malkovich is fun but, like the film in general, never comes close to dramatically suggesting an encounter with the heart of spiritual darkness." (Hemingway). Malkovich's performance simply failed to match the intimidating, rugged personality that Kurtz evokes in the minds of the audience. Tim Roth's Marlow seems like a rushed-out version of what the character is supposed to look like. Sticking to a passive observer persona throughout the entire screen time, most of Tim Roth's hollow dialogue shows a vague understanding of the character's progressing traumatic fracturing. Instead of betraying emotions of bewilderment or dismay at the encounter with Kurtz, Roeg's Marlow preserves a sense of facial composure without ever seeming rattled by the sight of cruelties committed throughout the journey.

Other than the lowbrow acting delivered, however, the film still put some effort into exploring smaller details originally implemented by Conrad but chosen to be left unexplored. Having been described as a loyal adaptation that attempted to recreate some of the most memorable scenes of the book, I would not go as far as to call Roeg's *Heart of Darkness* an

actual attempt at a love letter addressed to the source material. In fact, the addition of the Congolese, native character Mfumu, played by Isaach de Bankolé, could be interpreted as a statement of disapproval at the lack of African presence. The black assistant aboard Marlow's steamboat was initially inspired by the same African co-pilot who accompanied the British captain in the original. Marlow originally depicts him as:

> …a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind legs (...) He ought to have been clapping his hands and stamping his feet on the bank, instead of which he was hard at work, a thrall to strange witchcraft, full of improving knowledge. He was useful because he had been instructed, and what he knew was this—that should the water inside that transparent thing disappear, the evil spirit inside the boiler would get angry through the greatness of his thirst and take a terrible vengeance. So he sweated and fired up and watched the glass fearfully (But the snags were thick, the water was treacherous and shallow, the boiler seemed indeed to have a sulky devil in it" (Conrad, p 39-40)

In this passage, the man is compared to a trained, savage animal over which he has to keep watch. This supposed guide of the main character is therefore vulgarised and dismissed as a mere greaser aboard his steamer. Marlow draws clear boundaries in his relationship with this secondary character. The roles that bind the two remain, therefore, those of a master and a slave until the latter dies during their trip to Kurtz. When that happens, the deceased native ascends to "a dear companion". This is the later revised description of Marlow read in the novella, who exclaims, "I missed my late helmsman awfully (…). It was a kind of partnership. He steered for me—I had to look after him (…) when he received his hurt remains to this day in my memory—like a claim of distant kinship affirmed in a supreme moment" (Conrad, p 55).

The change of perception in his feelings is one of the most vital manipulative devices that Conrad uses to persuade his readers of the main character's compassion and ability to befriend the darker race. However, the final memory that he creates after his death does not align with his earlier treatment towards him. From an "animal" that needs to be watched to a "kinship" born without any direct communication between the two, the problem here is that this supposed Congolese friend does not have any real presence or impact on Marlow's later actions. Even his death seems to be of no great contribution to the change that affects his psychological state after returning from the Congo.

This often-used Western trope of deceptive narratology, or what Ruth Mayer calls a "trick translation of reality" (Mayer, p 26), is a vital instrument of imperial control over the intercultural communication used in many travel fiction writings. It usually highlights a contact of the Western hero with the 'other', less focused on character. The subtle partnership is captured, in this case, in a way that maintains leadership over the natives by keeping the Africans off European civilisation and marking the ethical limits in their treatment of the colonised. Conrad implies that this black henchman left the world as a merely hypothetical friend candidate for Marlow's consideration. He is reduced to a short-lived, yet fond recollection, and all accountability for his death is soon removed from Marlow's consciousness, and eventually from that of the readers (Mayer, p 171).

Roeg's Mfumu is supposed to be a more vivid interpretation of this Congolese character. Just like in Conrad's version, this co-pilot dies by getting hit with an arrow, and Marlow mourns his death. However, unlike the underdeveloped leap that the author makes from slave to a well-remembered "partner", Roeg tries to create a slow-paced, growing relationship between the two characters before his death. On screen, Mfumu is given a voice. His dialogue seems at first to be a genuine effort at humanising the colonised on the part of the filmmaker. I would even argue that the additional substance added to his lines is more conceivably constructed when compared

to the less memorable roles of other non-American supporting characters in Western Cinema. In contrast to the interracial partnerships of Lieutenant Dunbar and the heavily stereotyped Sioux Indians in Kevin Costner's 1990 film adaptation *Dances with Wolves, for* instance, the relationship between Marlow and Mfumu never tries to establish a level of equality between the two. Right at Marlow's arrival scene, the fear and helplessness of the black natives are captured through a "trembling camera (…) [it] continuously shifts from Mfumu, a poorly dressed black man, to Marlow, who wears a white suit and moves around incessantly" (Eftimie, Manea, p 227). Through the portrayal of these initial, unequivocal positions between the white coloniser and the black colonised, both in their physical attire and in their behaviours, Roeg's version attempts to maintain the difference in terms of power instead of shying away from it. When Marlow crosses the imperial borders of cultural interactions, deciding to violate an unspoken code of European treatment with the other, his understanding of Mfumu grows gradually over the course of the next few scenes together, which makes their companionship one born out of curiosity and open-mindedness.

In the final scene where the character dies, Marlow seems to be truly saddened by the abrupt passing away. This shows the evolving bond that had gradually formed from Marlow's perspective. Tim Ruth's character, who was earlier in the film, warned about Mfumu's cannibalistic fetishes and indigenous, brutal inclinations during fights, was eventually able to break the misconstrued and prejudiced qualities attributed to Mfumu. The viewer understands that such expectations are what keep European officers presumably safe from the dangers of getting socially involved with the natives in the Congo by showing the audience moments of small talk between the two. Roeg attempts to build a bridge of mutual respect between the two cultures through small humane exchanges of words.

However, what still ruins well-built moments like these in the film, in my opinion, is the aftermath of Marlow's trip. Similar to the book, his sadness feels short-lived and quickly

dissipates from the screen, just like in the book. The extent of important, critical amendments Roeg makes to the original story stops there. When compared to the emotional distress and impact the death of Kurtz later imposes on Marlow, Mfumu's passing away becomes more like a snag that was in the way. In fact, the few minutes Marlow spends on screen with Kurtz in a philosophical debate, which looks more like a nonsensical aesthetic dance ending with the killing of his pet monkey, all added for show, give greater enlightenment to the former than the supposed months of companionship he presumably cherished with Mfumu. This lack of balance in the importance given to the two supposed prominent film characters renders Roeg's attempt to bring a vivid African presence into the story lacking in its commitment.

Ironically enough, the filmmaker's inclusive decisions feel more like one of Achebe's scenes in *Things Fall Apart*, where the main character's death is disregarded by the coloniser; Okonkwo's rebellious suicide is reduced to an entertaining spectacle. Despite stirring talk among both his peers and the British officers, his actions succeeded in catching the attention of the commissioner, but only to deserve a short section in his upcoming book: "The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading. One could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph" (Achebe, p 188).

The same fate is reserved for Mfumu after his death, as he is only mentioned shortly in that final conversation between Marlow and Kurtz: "Kurtz: Lose blood? Marlow: A friend's. Your people killed him. Kurtz: Mfumu, I knew him, an old lion. Marlow: You killed him. Kurtz: No, what he was becoming" (Roeg, 1:20:23-2:21:00). Every sentence in the exchange is cut briefly short. There is no sharing of memories about their common acquaintance, despite both of them warming up to him. The reasons and achievements of Mfumu are left open to the imagination of the viewers.

Additionally, the African character, who initially comes off as an appointed native guide to Marlow's journey and is supposed to be responding to inquiries about the nation, is not shown talking about Congolese customs and traditions or manifesting any daring opinions about the colonisation. There is no active contribution of lines to be acknowledged as a guide for both the hero and the unfamiliar audience. Instead, he remains a linear support character, if not a temporary prop, throughout his crossing scenes with Marlow. A well-curated, ideal sacrifice that only needs to happen in order for Marlow to reach Kurtz.

III.2.2. Critics' Cultural Feedback to Roeg's Film Adaptation

Owing to the preceding overwhelming success of Francis Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, there was a strong chance for Roeg's more faithful televised remake to be neglected and forgotten after its release. While Coppola made a storyline of his own that could be argued was only inspired by Conrad's work, Roeg's film did not showcase any major original details that could alter or enrich the audience's perception of *Heart of Darkness*'s potential meanings. Trying to expand upon an already richly explored classic story was, to be fair, a challenge that many artists preferred not to engage with. The project that Roeg had undertaken, according to some early reviews, was no more than another desperate attempt at squeezing the last drops of financial fruition left in the novel. Even so, an adaptation of any reputable story that already has its cult of admirers eager to put their hands on any new re-imagining, unfolding in the world of their beloved narrative, remains a safer bet in comparison to the efforts of marketing a completely new and unfamiliar screenplay.

In a 1993 article published by David Nicholson around the film, a few months prior to its airing, the journalist noted the strategic plugging scheme that Roeg pushed during a previous interview. Nicholson reveals the filmmaker's semi-humorous comment about his, at the time, upcoming film: "Acknowledging the shadow of Coppola's film, Roeg makes a teasing

suggestion: ‘They'll probably say 'there goes that Nic Roeg, setting *Apocalypse Now* at the turn of the century. Why couldn't he leave the story alone? Why did he have to be so perverse? I preferred the original” (Roeg as cited in Nicholson). Roeg clearly expected a heated reception from both Conrad’s and Coppola’s fans, making his venture into this production already pressed by the tensions to deliver at least a reasonable remake. His vision needed to be worthy of joining this hall of fame list, where other acclaimed adaptations of the novel figured in the consumers’ rankings, even if it was placed at the bottom, Roeg would at least be recognised for his mutual passion and knowledge of Conrad’s real-life inspired travel. The financial endeavour to succeed might have accompanied a prideful personal desire to reinvent Kurtz’s persona and actions throughout the narrative, but that preceded any actual plans for thematic increments. The film desperately required a solid marketing campaign, even if that meant taking a hostile attitude towards the more sceptical of his critics.

At the same time, bearing in mind the modest budget that this televised version depended on, a few critics did not hold the 1993 adaptation up to the same standards of a feature-length motion picture. A bigger budget Hollywood production would usually first premiere in theatres, hoping to sell as many tickets as possible before giving television networks the right to air the film, while cable TV ‘flicks’ often depended on the initial viewership count at the time of their airing and the reruns that would later boost those numbers. The profits that Roeg’s docile adaptation would rake up were not even in the same brackets as the former production type. Because of this, early reviews were less scathing when it came to the camerawork and sound editing. They were more focused on the story’s writing and the acting performances of the cast.

Because Roeg maintained a noticeable fidelity to the book, preserving long dialogue sequences and core plot scenes, the opinions were divided between proponents of new ideas and loyalists who preferred a more dedicated imitation on screen. Nonetheless, even among

those who wanted to watch a film that is able to repackage the story while making it look brand new, there were some exceptions who sensed a moderate amount of audacity incorporated in Roeg's version. At least, this shows that the filmmaker was willing enough to insert some of his own interpretations of the novel, making the narrative a more appealing as a screen adaptation, and as English author Gene Moore, argues: "A truly faithful film, [if] were such a thing, would have nothing to teach use" (qtd. in Watts, p 91).

Bernard Hemingway's previous harsh critique of Malkovich's role as a more crazed and effeminate Kurtz met its match with American writer Gene D. Phillips's comment, calling Malkovich's Kurtz "a fine performance" (Phillips, p 154). In his review, Phillips contends that this version is actually more in tune with Conrad's development of the character than what other critics believe it to be. He also elaborates on this by illustrating the change that happened to Kurtz during his period of settlement in the native village. His mental collapse is intentionally made visible during the character's meeting with Marlow: "Kurtz (John Malkovich) is wearing native attire. At this point in the telefilm, when the viewer recalls a photo of Kurtz wearing a European outfit, Roeg suggests that Kurtz is 'going native' not only shedding the clothes associated with Western civilised society, but also casting off the ethical principles of Western civilisation as well" (Phillips, p 152). This also explains Malkovich's over-the-top rant and the killing of his pet monkey. It could be argued that Roeg was going for a scene that reflects the ongoing metamorphosis of Kurtz, stimulated by two colliding urges: the self-indulgence in his ruling power over his African worshippers and the slowly fading, less visible wish to reunite with his European Fiancée.

Despite reviews like Philips's giving some credit to this limited budget adaptation, the growing, more recent number of articles and reviews, which decided to contrast the telefilm with its higher budget predecessor, at least in terms of story, were inevitably affecting the more straightforward vision of Roeg. Coppola's entirely different apocalyptic universe contributed

more prominently in the eyes of Roeg's supporters to the slow dissipation of the smaller situational re-imaginings of the journey made in his modest work. As a result, Mfumu today is a far less memorable of a character than Colonel Kilgore, who takes as much screen time—if not less— as the former secondary role, but leaves a far more noteworthy and quotable presence in the memory of viewers who watch both films.

Roeg's efforts to recapture the soul of the novel were able to achieve a momentary success before dwindling away. Coppola would go on to leave a larger print with his American adaptation. This suggests that originality and cinematic creativity, when finding enough compatibility with the original work, take the lead as the valuable component of an adaptation. The daring re-invention of a classic story continues to prove the soundness of the age-old formula: the greater the risks taken, the more substantial the gains will prove themselves.

III.3. The Transformative Approach of Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*

When peeling the thematic layers of Conrad's novel one by one, it is inevitable to pause and take a reflective look at the traces of discourse that are nudged between each and every one of them. Readers often ponder the binary opposition that had set itself as a salient core plot for many cross-cultural works that followed suit in later centuries. In doing so, critics have remarked how difficult it has become for such a historical, generational, human conflict to be separated from the rest of the narrative's events. Cultural disputes are known today among the most instinctive themes that writers tackle in their cross-bordering tales, intertwined with the rest of the stories' components, from their world-building to their characters' development. This condition of disagreement between nations has also taken a toll on cinematic productions. Francis Coppola's 1979 adaptation, a version that preceded Roeg's film, suffers from that same contagious discourse despite its well-acclaimed rebranding of Conrad's journey. Thematically speaking, Coppola wanted to shed light on the horrors of war and the human casualties on both

sides. Because of this, one would believe that the detrimental effects of all wars are going to be at the forefront of his film, using the Vietnam War as a case study on which audiences can reflect upon the human history of derogatory violence.

In his comparison between Conrad's work and Francis Coppola's Vietnamese version of the popular travel across the borders of Western civilisation, critic Gilbert Adair examines the affinities that the two works share. He articulates this by contrasting the theme of darkness:

> Vietnam (the war rather than the country) is no more than the heart of the darkness and endless psychodrama, half Theatre of Cruelty, half Theatre of the Absurd, in which impulses normally lurking just below or intermittently bursting through the crust of civilisation are given free rein. (…) And Kurtz's Cambodian enclave was doubtless intended to symbolise the very heart of the heart, the inner sanctum of America's collective unconscious. (Adair, p 155)

What is striking about his quote is the symbolic mention of the heart of darkness, which he considers as an expression that Coppola had transported not from one description of an African location to an Asian one, but rather to the event of the Vietnam War itself. According to him, it is where the true centre of darkness lies, not supposedly in the culture of a nation but in the historical devastation that the war had left behind it. The film, therefore, percolates with scenes of carnage; the characters' movements are always outlined by the smoke and the burning metal scraps scattered inside military camps. Quentin Tarantino sees these minute aesthetic details as an essential part of the film's living pulse. He argues that Coppola's obsession with setting up so many military helicopters in the background of his scenes is a justified creative decision, ushered in by his desire to capture the dynamic and chaotic state of the war. Without these kinds of signs that tell the audience of an active military fight happening, "it just does not work (…)

that means the place is alive (…) there is always some living thing running from one pilot trash to another in the background" (Tarantino, Thomas, 14:15-15:32).

At first glance, Coppola's adaptation seems more like an appropriation of events than a translation of Conrad's themes. It almost gives off a certain surface intention as the narrative tries to escape the imposing and infamous imperial themes of its predecessor. This especially looks to be the case when examining the extent of the featured connection that *Apocalypse Now* publicly recognises to have with *Heart of Darkness*. There is no clear mention of Conrad's name or his novella in any of the film's end credits. There is also little to no mention of any inspiration Coppola might have had while revising the original text, aside from certain popular quotes, yet the skeleton of Conrad's story can clearly be discerned in the film. The reason behind this dissociation, then, could be explained as a lack of personal concern that Coppola has assumed for the colonial debate. The racial overtones of Conrad's novel belong to a European time and history of vicious power proclamation, while *Apocalypse Now* is a manifestation of a bloody and unfortunate conflict in which American soldiers found themselves entrapped.

Looking further into it, this detachment could also be attributed to a form of vanity on Coppola's part. He wanted to be recognised as a better storyteller and prove his ability to redesign a challenging classic, while constructing an American set piece and merely taking inspiration from different sources, many of which happen to include the original *Heart of Darkness*'s novella. The film feels like one of those career-defining moments for Coppola, except that some would argue that it is not the case. His *Godfather* series was already enough of a visually stunning creation that made use of Marlon Brando's virtuous talent to catapult the ambitious filmmaker into major fame. This trilogy indeed set Coppola among the A-list names of other big blockbuster hits of the time, but Coppola was not comfortable with being known as a one-trick pony. He wanted to prove that mafia stories are not the only type of tales he can

excel at and that, as an artist, he does have a greater range of creativity. Achieving this objective of challenging oneself by remodelling a well-known story requires a willingness to commit mutiny against the English late 19th-century narrative, relinquishing one's past admiration for the novel. Many articles have also supported this conclusion. American critic William M. Hagen explains how the detachment from the book was to be organic, not just to the production team but also to the viewers. He writes:

> We could perhaps accept the deliberate departure from Conrad's novel if the director did not also seek to build in the psychological-moral dimensions of *Heart of Darkness*. His characters may be caught in a ritual of death and rebirth, but he wants them to have depth all the same (…) Conrad's name originally appeared in the screen credits, but was removed after one of the listed writers protested through the Screen Writers' Guild. Coppola is quite candid about the three texts that contributed to the final script: the novel, Michael Herr's *Dispatches* originally published as a series of Esquire articles, and John Milius' script, entitled *Apocalypse Now*, which built some of its passages from Herr's book and *Heart of Darkness* (p 45, p 47).

Despite its collage of different works, *Apocalypse Now* does present itself as an independent film that should be enjoyed without the need for the fruitless obsession of chasing the tails of every reference made. Poignant or not, the contexts of such references have been displaced for a reason. It is to make the film more under Coppola's name and less under any of the other authors' grace. Nevertheless, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* has clearly left its residual imprint on the film and, more importantly, brought back its curse of inferiorising the non-Western native within his own country. The story might have been described as a transformed narrative that highlights a new era of war and modern conflict, but the drabs of the old European imperial descriptions have been recycled and brought back in the form of glamorous, Hollywood

gimmickry. In which the enemy abroad is far detached from the hinted at American, high-spirited heroism.

III.3.1. The Vietnamese Yellow Peril in *Apocalypse Now*

Setting aside the level of creativity that the Americanised film was able to generate thematically, we cannot consider *Apocalypse Now* as an original, standalone film despite Coppola's striving for originality. Its connections to *Heart of Darkness*, even when disregarding them as mere structural ones[13], are still similar in terms of popular Western cultural representation. Only in this case, the other culture is not African; it is Asian. The characters in the film are all portrayed in the fictional, American, stoic type of main heroes that one would come across in the old 70s American action movies. The story itself can easily be summarised as the journey of an American soldier who has already served in prior military deployments and who is now considered a valuable pawn in any war in which his nation decides to join. If we go by this logic, Willard has been assigned the dangerous task of finding and eliminating Kurtz, knowing that he is the perfect man for the job.

The most important threat to be expected from this mission is not the retaliation of Kurtz against his peers but rather the aggressive, surprising attacks that would come from the Vietnamese resistance during their journey to the temple. In other words, if Willard represents the American hero in this conflict, this does not automatically make Kurtz the enemy that awaits him. Here, he mainly represents the same revered figure who was able to dominate the Vietnamese soldiers and turn them into loyal guards ready to die for him at any chance they get, but the character does not harbour any personal hatred towards American soldiers. He does

[13] Bill Benzon's 2013 online article, *"From Heart of Darkness to Apocalypse Now",* argues that the ending of the two works, *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now,* is akin to a myth's tragedy, he dives further into the esoteric significance of both novel and film, and highlights its affect over the Western's economic front. Read more in: https://new-savanna.blogspot.com/2013/11/from-heart-of-darkness-to-apocalypse-now.html

not wish to attack them of his own volition. At the same time, Kurtz remains a well-sought-after prize in Willard's perilous journey. His intriguing words alone found a his letters pique the main character's interest to the point where he becomes willing to endanger his squad just to meet him face-to-face. In one scene, we see Willard reading one of Kurtz's letters to his son. He stops at the part where Kurtz stresses his lack of concern about the charges he is accused of:

> Dear Son (…), I have been officially accused of murder by the army. The alleged victims were four Vietnamese double agents (…). The charges are unjustified and quite completely insane (...) I would like you to tell me what you choose about this letter. As for the charges against me, I am unconcerned; I am beyond their timid morality, and so I am beyond caring. (Coppola, 1:20:43-1:22:19)

The audience becomes aware of the conflicting thoughts that surround the main character about his target. What if Kurtz were a hero who eliminated a dangerous threat that could have infiltrated the US forces? What if the orders he is made to follow come from a lack of research and understanding of Kurtz's decisions? A suspicion about the character's guilt becomes engraved on his face, making him less firm about the objective of his official mission. The implications of these thoughts are meant to illustrate the position of many US soldiers who were deployed during Richard Nixon's period. A general sense of doubt was growing increasingly about the war at the time, especially among those who were ordered to kill their fellow soldiers without being given any logical reason as to why they were ordered to do so. This is what Kurtz would later term as a mindless following of orders. "You're an errand boy," (Coppola, 1:02:12) he tells Willard. Similar to the past soldier that he was, he only aimed and shot where his commanders would point.

When Kurtz first makes an appearance in the film, He is captured in the image of the final boss, shrouded in darkness, exuding both an enigmatic and intimidating presence. The camera's angle prevents Brando's facial features from ever emerging in their entirety. Instead, the audience is shown lit snippets of his facial features in a series of unfolding shots, combined with frame freezes. In doing so, Coppola focuses on producing a level of intrigue that is meant to hide the character's true identity. He is the personification of a fragmented Veteran, broken by the horrors of war. In the last part of the film, when Willard reaches Kurtz, the viewers become curious about his calm demeanour, questioning if he is truly an insane wild card, a thundering storm hiding in the quiet of the wind and ready to unleash its wrath, or a sane man who has simply lost all care for the outside world and is now hiding from conflict? I would personally argue for something in the middle. Kurtz has accumulated a great wisdom from his war experience; to him, it was a necessary evil to get where he is, and despite gaining the upper hand over Willard, he never again manifested an intent to kill him. Instead, he shares his sorrowful philosophical conclusions about surviving the battlefield. He represents the shattered future of Willard, who continuously throws himself into the service of his country without ever objecting to his assigned orders. Through his monologue, the character makes both Willard and the viewers aware of this fact:

> I've seen horrors, horrors that you have seen, but you have no right to call me a murderer. You have the right to kill me, but you have no right to judge me (…) Horror has a face, and you must make friends with horror (…) You have to have men who are able to utilise their primordial instincts to kill without feeling, without passion, without judgement (…) because it's judgement that defeats us. (Coppola, 2:58:24-3:02:57)

Kurtz's later final uttering of his famous mantra, "The horror", before he dies, is proof of his lack of empathy or care for personal grudges. This final exclamation that ends Brando-

Kurtz's intense monologue about soldiers having to surrender their personal abilities for judgment so that they can kill without remorse almost makes him feel like a machine rather than a human being. The character's lines fixate the meaning of the term horror, preventing it from being misquoted or taken out of context (Hagan, p 46). Unlike the popularly suggested interpretations of Kurtz's horror in the original text, this one does not refer to how savage or monstrous the enemy is, or even to how unmerciful the American soldiers have been during this war. Instead, the concept of horror here attaches itself to what war, in general, requires of any soldier. For Kurtz, the perfect regiment to fight on the battlefield should be made out of senseless human beings, an automaton of a battalion, emotionless and obedient. Moreover, the actions of this machine of war must only follow the logic that leads to victory. In his case, when he no longer saw the logic behind the orders given to him, Kurtz decided to act on his own. He chooses insubordination to stay on track with what is needed for the Americans to come out victorious.

Through the character, Coppola shares his own personal credo about the war: It is a cruel place where human emotions go to die. In doing so, the filmmaker tries to remove himself from the coloniser/colonised debate. He consciously attempts to avoid making any direct, specific moral claims that would show his personal siding with any of the forces involved. However, despite these attempts, Coppola still crosses certain lines and moves away from the neutral contact zones that define the concept of war as having casualties on both sides. In the Redux version[14] of the film, Willard and his crew come across a French rubber plantation where a family of patriarchs reside. During dinner, Willard asks them casually about how long they

[14] *Apocalypse Now Redux* is an extended version of Coppola's film. The unreleased footage was re-edited and released by Coppola and Walter Murch. This version first aired in 2001 at Cannes film festival, featuring an additional fifty-three minutes of exclusive footage that included scenes Willard and his crew stumbling upon French colonisers protecting their plantation in the depths of Vietnamese jungle.

intend to stay in the country. “We will stay here forever (…) this is our home”, one of the French officers furiously retorts, “You [Americans] don’t understand the French officers’ mentality. We lose in the Second World War while Americans win [SIC], In *Diên Biên Phu* we lose, in Nigeria, we lose [SIC], (…), but here we don’t lose [SIC], this piece of earth we keep it [SIC], …” (Coppola, 2:05:20-2:06:00). In this scene, Coppola points fingers, albeit in a subtle away, at what he believes is the real incendiary exponent in the Vietnam war, despite making no direct accusatory statement about the French colonisers. There is an implied personal contempt for the French occupation.

What is most noticeable in the film is the filmmaker’s gradual shift from an objective, general stance through which he criticises the psychological burden war has on all soldiers, and in every battle, to a more specific internal and external causes as to why the Vietnam War led to so many American casualties. He first settles on the ambiguity of commands that higher-ups had imposed on American troops, but later deflects this blame, attributing it by consequence to the French colonisers as the original inciters of this war. It seems that the direction of his film is far from being a neutral, sensitised one. In a 2019 interview about Apocalypse’s re-release, Coppola shared this sentiment towards his film:

> The only reason I’m in a position to go back and evaluate some of these decisions is that I own the film (…), the version that you open with, you’re very concerned that it will have some longevity. And so you may do things for the opening that you’d rather not do, but you don’t want to risk a negative reception because a film that opens with a negative reception is dead. If you can get it to be a positive reception or even a qualified positive reception, then it has a chance of surviving (…) When you make a war film, it’s from one side (…)This film was specifically about these young California Americans participating in this war, and that was the lens through which this film was made through. (Coppola, cited in Coyle)

His statement about the needed changes in *Redux* for the film to survive contradicts the last line of requiring to portray the war through the lenses of those young soldiers involved. If anything, Coppola here is preaching about the acceptance of all unfortunate antecedents and series of instigations that led to the war's aftermath as a natural form of chaos. At the same time, it seems that he had hopes for the external causes, including the added stubbornness of the remaining French battalions in the country to outcast the internal ones, like the major American governmental involvement in extending those casualties. This seems especially the case when examining how this film would look from the perspective of its viewers. The old version paints Coppola as a strong opponent of the American government, while the *Redux* version sends a different message, mainly that Coppola is not necessarily an anti-American governmental objector. Applying Genette's focalisation theory to the film, one realises that this director's cut version of the film strategically sets the new scene as important props in the viewer's line of sight to shift his consciousness from one corner of the screen over to the other.

A third enemy that is captured throughout most of the film's scenes is known as the "*yellow peril*". This is a term that the Vietnamese resistance falls under, belonging to the same category as the often-caricatured Asian figure of *Fu Manchu*[15]. This fictional, purposefully antagonised character has served, for many decades, as a strong inspiration to the Western portrayal and farming of Asian cultures. John Kleinen believes that this menacing character is the personification of everything Westerners fear. From holding the mysteries of ancient oriental knowledge as a secret hidden from the rest of the world, to mastering mystical powers that allow him to hypnotise and enslave the enemy, *Fu Manchu's* fictionalised gimmicks have turned into the overgeneralised stereotypical set of characteristics that are used to define most

[15] *Doctor Fu Manchu* is a fictional Chinese creation of English author named Arthur H. Sarsfield Ward, more famously known as *Sax Rohmer*. Described a mad, evil scientist, the character has been used as the model for so many Chinese villains in Western works, ranging from novels to comic books and even films. See Ruth Mayer's *Serial Fu Manchu: The Chinese Supervillain* (2013).

of the Asian antagonists in Western films (Kleinen, p 448). In *Apocalypse Now*, the Vietnamese villagers and tribesmen are treated the same way. Always representing a looming threat around Willard and his crew. Even a small canoe with a poor family of farmers aboard is searched and shot at by the American soldiers despite showing no signs of aggression or resistance.

The unnecessary violence committed against unarmed civilians, as displayed by Willard, who finishes off an injured woman with a bullet to her head, shows a lack of remorse towards all Vietnamese lives. Such actions prove that there is a certain imperial reality that soldiers are conditioned to believe before getting deployed. The other side of the fence does not include any morally and humanely inclined people in this war; their enemy is completely devoid of any innocent, pure intentions. Only one truth is needed from them to be kept at bay, going into conflict: All Vietnamese are their enemy; if they hesitate to shoot them first, they will not do the same. This conviction is deeply rooted in Fanon's idea of Manichean system ideology in all colonial settings. If the coloniser sees himself as a hero, a righteous person willing to eliminate evil, and an overall superior race, then the colonised has to automatically assume the opposite characteristics within this paradigm. No grey area where innocent lives become casualties is permitted in a time of war. The Vietnamese population are thus endowed with all of the characteristics that make them a dangerous threat and a yellow peril.

One of the soldiers in Willard's platoon is hit and killed amid a barrage of bullets targeting the soldiers' steamer. The scene of his death resembles that of the unnamed black character in Conrad's original novella and that of Mfumu in Roeg's film. Although *Apocalypse Now* follows the same plotline of having to sacrifice one member to reach Kurtz's temple, the enemies in this scene remain completely invisible; not even a sign of a shadow or a silhouette is shown hiding behind the green foliage of trees. This camouflaged enemy fits perfectly well within the mystical status of the yellow peril, manifesting an unexpected danger that comes darting at the Western, American hero from a dark, mystical place. The number of bullets flying

in the scene defies all human reason. The exaggeration feels intentional, looking at how the cameras capture these bullets as laser beams flying past every soldier and filling up the entire screen. Despite keeping up with the Hollywood cliché of bullets never hitting the main character, a few of them, in this case, are still able to strike one of the soldiers, called young. Clean, dead.

III.3.2. Glorified Patriotism through Hollywood Lenses

A general humanitarian note of war relinquishment should be felt at the centre of Coppola's film, and yet, upon watching Willard and his companions traverse unfamiliar, enemy territories that manifest themselves in the form of squandered Vietnamese villages and jungles, the imperial pattern of superiority upon the colonised reappears over and over again. Instead of an Anti-war script that should have been packed with messages opposing the war's lack of concern for human rights, we are offered something different: convoluted with a high spirit of American patriotism, almost stating that the presence of American troops makes this one war more interesting to watch.

The high-octane fight scene at *Do Lung Bridge* is a solid example of the divulging nature the film decides to lean on. The scene feels like it was captured in one single take. It quickly shifts from a chaotic shooting between Willard's platoon and the unseen Vietnamese soldiers, focusing fully on the fidgeting faces of American soldiers while the radio is blasting a Heavy metal track in the background, to one of them shooting a grenade launcher and somehow perfectly hitting the last Vietnamese attacker in complete obscurity. This extraordinary accuracy that he demonstrates is not the only impressive feat viewers are going to notice, but also the way he first somehow locates the enemy's position from the mere sounds of his shouting, displaying super-powerful hearing. The unfolding of this battle, although

unrealistic in its action sequence, is an appealing showcase of American heroism and strength on the battlefield.

Despite the unsavoury reaction that the grenadier receives from his commander-in-chief, Willard. He still carries himself in a composed, nonchalant manner. After getting reprimanded by Willard, who taunts the character, "Hey soldier, do you know whose in command?" to which he replies unfazed, "Yeah!" followed by a pause and a stare down between him and his captain, the audience can almost hear a second part to that reply. An unuttered follow-up question hangs at the tip of the soldier's tongue, "Yeah! (Do you?!)" (Coppola, 1:45:55-1:46:61). The intentional insubordination and taunting back of this character can feel tantalising to a younger category of audiences, coincidentally giving the lower rank soldiers a greater importance in the midst of war. It is as if the dialogue is meant to sell a unique kind of freedom and a release from the shackles of societal hierarchy, one that can only be experienced if a person is drafted for battle.

In the 1991 Fax Bahr documentary, about the challenges that were recorded during the filming of *Apocalypse Now's* script. A fourteen-year-old Laurence Fishburne, who plays the role of Mr. Clean in the movie, can be seen on the set during the film's shooting. He describes the Vietnamese war as being "fun": "The war is fun," he exclaims, "You can do anything you want to while you're there. That's why Vietnam must have been so much fun for the guys who were out there. I know a dope smoker who went back and said Vietnam was the best thing that they could have done for [me]" (Bahr, Fishburne, 11:25-11:48). These words although seem to be uttered by the spontaneous mind of a young, inexperienced actor at the time, seem still quite representative of the thoughts of many new American recruits; those who joined the war not because they believe in its cause, but because of 'how fun it looks'.

However, the euphoric freedom that war provides is not exclusively granted to young soldiers. The more experienced ones in the film, although crazed and broken by the number of battles they fought and the body counts they stopped keeping count of, are also captured in some scenes under lighter circumstances. On several occasions, such characters find the means to improve the mood of their troops by enjoying a form of American leisure, even if it is in a foreign country.

Lieutenant Col. William Bill "Kilgore" does not just capture the role of a warmonger who "loves the smell of napalm in the morning" (Coppola, 49:06-49:19). He is the manifestation of a larger cultural American attitude that is deeply rooted in their military campaigns, prioritising his desire to surf the waves of "Charlie's Point" beach while behind him, attacks on Viet Cong villages are taking place. In fact, Kilgore shows little to no care about the environment getting ravaged by the continuous bombings, and his only concern is to demonstrate how well he can ride those waves. Interpreting this character's insanity as just another mere mental break, shattered and numbed due to witnessing too many war horrors, would not do him justice. His delinquency is unbecoming of a captain's behaviour. It promotes instead a sense of vanity that appeals to the American youth. His character can be described as a poignant reiteration of Laurence Fishburne's previous words, "War seems like fun". Because of this, Coppola's movie almost feels like it is advertising the recruitment of Americans coming of legal age into the army. The film inserts a lot of pop-cultural references from older American films and uses extravagant spectacles with half-clothed, flashy female dancers as tempting bait to capture the targeted viewers' interest.

In its obsession with portraying the American spirit of individual freedom and patriotism, the film buries the opponent's culture by deafening Vietnamese voices and lowering their visibility on screen. The result feels like a one-nation show fighting the wilderness and its monsters. This metaphor shares a surprising resemblance with Conrad's original tale; despite

the change of settings and periodic events, the original imperial ideology that received so much backlash is preserved in Coppola's adaptation and masquerades as a fresh coat of paint. It keeps the image of the colonised publicly transfixed by the same strategy of stereotypical reinforcement. As a result, no strong Vietnamese presence can be detected in the film. The story follows the same plotline while saturating the cultural existence of the colonised.

American Valour and bravery are, therefore, the stars of the show here, and these values are clearly celebrated and rewarded by a sense of cultural indulgence. I consider the appearance of Playboy Showgirls in the *Redux*'s added scenes to be the strongest evidence of such insensible representations of the Vietnamese cultural onslaught. Researcher Alifa Mori notes that:

> [T]he portrayal of the Playboy Bunnies, brought in to perform at a USO show located at an outpost along the Nung River, is a stark illustration of overt objectification (…) they reduced to objects of visual pleasure (…) in a later scene, he Bunnies takes place in a helicopter, where they become stranded at an abandoned outpost and are "forced" into exchanging sexual favors for gallons of fuel. This specific scene is one of the additions in the Redux version of the film. Here, the women's bodies are not only blatantly exposed, but the use of natural lighting serves to accentuate the objectification of their bodies. (Mori, p 314, 316)

This explicit choice of scenes by Coppola not only highlights a display of seducing sexual gratification even during a time of war, one that is able to catch the curiosity of the same youthful prospects about joining the army and getting drafted overseas. Moreover, it also serves as an instrumental instances that reduce the gravity of war in the eyes of such an audience. The potential retention of American vanities outside of the American geographical setting carries

the same weight as Syed Islam's previously discussed metaphor[16] of a Western traveller carrying his home with him like a turtle carrying its shell. Unconcerned about the native cultural rules that govern Vietnamese territories, Coppola paradoxically encapsulates an assault on foreign, Eastern values while condemning the doings of all wars by ending it with what some would describe as a redeeming scene of killing the crazed war supporter, Kurtz.

Is this ending redeeming enough for the viewer to forgive any prior condescending murdering of Vietnamese soldiers resisting the colonisers' assault?! I argue that this is not the case when the purpose is to actually reduce their presence to mere invisible shadows of the movie's war. Every ounce of heroism and bravery is attributed to the American platoon led by Willard, and no credit is even slightly considered to be granted in favour of their enemies. More importantly, this has proven to be a somewhat unsuccessful attempt to distract the viewers from the resurrection of Conrad's imperial tampering because that is what Coppola's fictional Americanised battle scenes are meant for: pointing fingers at their enemies and at the war instigators to set the main characters above everyone else.

Despite the film's success, some critics noted that Coppola's political agenda was still discernible amidst the hyperbole of national patriotism and the symbolic binding of armed colonisation in any colonised country. Frank Tomasulo believes that the film is filled with "double binds and mixed messages in its attempt to have it both ways" (Tomasulo, p. 153), which almost sounds like a reiteration of the same sceptical reactions Conrad's book evoked in its forceful denial of its discriminatory nature towards the colonised. American journalist Michael Wood also states this in a lesser cryptic form:

[16] Refer to Chapter One, p 34.

> Introducing the film at Cannes in May 1979, Coppola said it wasn't about Vietnam: it was Vietnam. By Vietnam he didn't mean the country in South-East Asia, he meant what 'Vietnam' nearly always means in post-1970s American English: the historical moment when Americans met themselves in a foreign mirror and were frightened by what they saw. (…) [The film] is full of the sense that Americans exported whole chunks of their culture to Vietnam and discovered its horrible secret in the process: it doesn't travel…(Wood)

Escaping this inability to cross any actual cultural borders is granted a difficult, if not close to impossible, task, given the lack of conviction in its potential merits. If American patriotism is not the highlight of any motion picture about fighting a war, then what is the point?! A question that has probably been mouthed by many filmmakers and producers in the industry, but never truly uttered publicly. This shows that critics and audiences alike have the power to restrain such self-centred, power-driven, essentialist thoughts. As Wood mentioned, the culture "doesn't travel" all that well, so it may be best for it to learn how to do so by letting other cultures have more screen time, especially in an intercultural exchange such as this one.

Conclusion

It seems that tracing the images of Africa from the perspective of Western artists like Conrad and Roeg will always require a thorough examination of the influence that the large and inherently constructed body of African misrepresentations has over works produced in similar veins. This body has become part of the concrete on which the universal human culture stands and walks. However, Ruth Mayer prefers to define it differently by calling it:

> *The logic of cultural stereotyping*, a logic that seems to rely on trite, narrow, and repetitive structures yet is often used as a complex technique of meaning-making, constantly moving between the familiar and the new, and indefatigably adjusting the symbolic repertory of yesterday to the conceptual and ideological framework of today. (Mayer, p 1)

What becomes clear over time is that artists belonging to mainstream circles of business entertainment render the public reality as malleable as clay based on their own agendas. The culture of the "other" becomes then an object of these artists' playground, shaped by their own wits of exaggerations and narrative deformations. Edward Said describes them as the authority that controls the public taste when it comes to artistic consumption. He illustrates this point by talking about the art representations of Arabs that used to be worldly admired and acknowledged for their exotic qualities. They have eventually become treated as factual findings that when people look at Arabs, they go back to them as points of reference. However, when comparing his own knowledge of what was captured in the paintings of Eugene Delacroix, Jean-Leon Gérome, or Jean-Auguste Ingres, women were not the sensual dancers or the product of masculine oppression. When reading about the travel journals of the likes of Benjamin Disraeli and Gustave Flaubert, there is little truth about the mysterious, magical Orient that they had plastered in their works (Said, 4:24- 4:50).

One might even venture to say that such a control is embedded even within something as fundamental as the language of the orator. This is demonstrated by Conrad's deceitful narrator. Nevertheless, the evolving nature of the audience raises a certain generational consciousness over the artist's trickery and eventually becomes an important source of countermeasure. Therefore, ignoring the cultural backlash that follows derogatory representations in books and films while hoping that it would either dissolve

over time or be swept by the narrative plot and forgotten has been deemed futile, and Coppola clearly understands this. This wishful thinking is constantly being challenged by the loud booing shouts coming from modern audiences. The viewers have been proving that any inforiorising portrayal of the marginalised characters should no longer be tolerated, whether engraved on paper or paraded on the big screen.

Knowing that the reception does not simply criticise the employed biases of authors and filmmakers but also rectifies the reality in which African and Eastern cultures are mistreated, contemporary adaptations have become wary of the political discourse that might ensue from the misrepresentations and misappropriations used in past media. This is seen in the growing awareness of readers and spectators of such stereotypical descriptions like those of the *"African cannibal"* and the *"Asian yellow peril"* in the two adaptations of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. While both Coppola and Roeg have tried to avoid the potential punishment of critics by either swerving away from any past imperial discourse or including small redeeming contentions to the lack of colonised presence in the original source, their attempts could not completely escape the bashing rants of certain prominent, unforgiving reviews and articles.

More importantly, presenting Conrad's story as a semi-biographical work that depicts a close reality of Africa, rather than acknowledging its artificiality, has made *Heart of Darkness,* alongside its adaptations, prone to strong counterarguments concerning authenticity. The lack of African cultural presence, more specifically of Congolese voices, has been used over the course of its generational remakes and adaptations as evidence of an Indigenous and orientalised stretch. The focus is on the arid wilderness and impoverished, weak people who lack civilised knowledge, but who are shown frequently as having been dipped into a pool of powerful, threatening mysticism,

which has significantly contributed to the watered-down racist representations of Western artists, both in past and contemporary times.

Chapter Four: Socio-Cultural Unrest in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* and David Lean's Hollywood Re-Branding

Introduction

The number of Western novels that have attempted to convey a sense of empathy for marginalised societies radically increased after the emergence of post-colonial movements at the dawn of the twentieth century. Some critics believe that such attempts were, and still are, incentivised by no more than just a marketing scheme that artists exploit to gain over a wider audience. This aligns well with the popular idiom that suggests a strategy of retreat to be the most optimal solution: "If you cannot beat them, why not simply join them?" The problem with this popularised phrase, however, is that it does not specify any conditions on how to do so. Relying on deceitful, appeasing bluffs is often employed for such a contingency. E.M. Forster is one among many British writers who have been accused of exercising a privileged, imperial gaze in their travel writings, while hiding the subtlety of their fiction. His 1924 novel, *A Passage to India*, was published during a time of brewing colonial tensions, and because of this, the writer was swiped alongside other infamous European authors, whose proclivity for using descriptions that lack candid cultural research behind them made them a target of public criticism.

This chapter will attempt to probe into the cultural, historical, and religious events described in Forster's novel for the purpose of locating the potential fringes of orientalised details in his fictionalised journey. The theories used for this purpose are related to Debbie Lisle's inherited colonial perception of Western writers visiting foreign lands, and Joseph Nye's theory of political control through 'soft power', combined with Hollywood's branding of the outside world. Just like in the previous chapter, the comparison between text and film is vital to achieve a general understanding of the reasons behind the changes brought to the source

material. This chapter, therefore, also focuses on investigating these different layers of the story's reception and their impact on the course of its adapted events on screen.

IV.1. Mixed Reception to Forster's Storytelling

Labelling E.M. Forster's novels as the unconventional, exciting stories of an avid European traveller who was able to come up with some of the greatest narrative plot twists seen in the twentieth century would probably be a sufficient claim to stir up the booing of many avid fiction readers. This is especially the case for those who do not appreciate the boring, long dallies that mainstream novelists have been exploiting emphatically for years in the hopes of stretching their audiences' appeal for the more historically inspired tales. Many writers, even today, still retain this tendency to drag the descriptive and panoramic detailing of their stories' settings in parallel with their temporal ones. Forster, in this matter, is far from being the exception. In fact, several critics are willing to go the extra mile just to build a case about how uninteresting this Londoner's thematic build-up feels, while believing that his contextual descriptions greatly impede the enjoyment factor in his storytelling.

The Norwegian writer, Katherine Mansfield, is amongst those who have daringly cast doubt upon the value of his works on several occasions. When talking about his 1910 novel, *Howard's End,* for example, she notes that: "E. M. Forster never gets any further than warming the teapot. He's a rare fine hand at that. Feel this teapot. It is not beautifully warm? Yes, but there ain't going to be no tea" (Qtd. in Meyers, p 158). Admittedly, the slow burn shattering of the initial merry friendship that forms between the rich Wilcoxes and the poor Schlegels in the novel is of no help in dismissing her somewhat rugged metaphor. The fact that many critics

have called out *Howard's End* for its abortive, anti-climactic closure contributed to the spread of this generic, boring image around Forster's career as an author[17].

It is also noteworthy to mention that *Howard's End* provides his newer audience with a strong hint of what to expect from his later works; nothing that could strike them as an astonishingly melodramatic resolution. Nevertheless, to deem Forster's narrative benchmark as a complete waste of time does not really serve his craft any justice, much less does it help analyse his personal intentions in creating different human entanglements between classes and races in what some have described as intentionally elongated novels. It is clear that the thematic tropes the writer uses to ignite a sense of restlessness through the imagined dialogues that happen between his characters reflect a deeper significance, perhaps even on a personal level. This, on its own, grants a more nuanced sense of intrigue to his works, making them appealing to the proportion of the more patient readers, especially those who are willing to humour their curiosity about Forster's intended life messages.

By factoring in such depths in his artistic objectives, it is possible to consider Forster's own private struggles as one potentially important piece of the puzzle as to why his stories are so thickly layered, especially in terms of his character interactions. The death of his father at a very young age is often argued to have left an irreplaceable void in his life. Missing that initial companionship of one of his parents, let alone that of his father, is possible to have had a great impact on shaping his social ideology about people's intercommunications. It is also worth looking at his past Cambridge memories of getting bullied by some of his classmates after being "cast in the role of 'the delicate boy" (Roberts). Some people can imagine how such an

[17] Prof. Aziz H. Majan writes at lengths about the "Anti-Forsterism" group of critics who have built cases about Forster's intentional ambiguity in his works, and lack of meaningful insights, especially in his use of symbolic descriptions. See: "*The Critics' Views on E.M. Forster's Fiction"* by Aziz Hamzah Majan. Link: https://iiste.org/Journals/index.php/RHSS/article/view/21137

early societal rejection, which may be attributed to a missing protective figure, could have furnished the novelist's later thoughts with enough conviction about the human complex emotions. Going by this logic, writing is certainly the most logical reliever able to provide a talented writer like Forster with a precious, shielded space to condemn the flawed dominant standards held by most societies from a safe distance.

Just like in his youthful years, Forster saw his peer artists as imposing and gatekeeping in their treatment of foreign subjects. The intercultural levels of his scrutiny that he later tackles in *A Passage to India* reflect an extension of an already well-maintained, personal, leftist position. Forster's bare-bone intent that can be extracted from his dense fictional writing seems, at first glance, to be an altruistic urge to defend the minorities of the world and make a case for the validity of their human rights. However, when examining his works from a purely cross-cultural standpoint, it is possible to attribute a more travel-related set of reasons.

Perhaps one of them could be that Forster had made it his mission to make his audience aware of the sordid consequences that crossing topographical and cultural borders can lead to. After all, why should people always expect charming, utopian landscapes and joyful, safe settlements in foreign territories when such expectations are only rooted in their wishful, touristic thinking?! Hedley Twindle seems to support this theory. She believes Forster is the kind of writer who submits his works in the form of a challenge addressed to those who think that universal harmony can be achieved among people of different backgrounds outside of their local settings with ease. She suggests that Forster is not only consciously mocking this quest for an old-fashioned kind of excitement, where the travel story ends either on a happy note or a devastating one, but is equally immersive in its entertaining unfolding. Forster also questions these two existential choices that novelists keep turning towards. The objective behind this is to give a kind of wake-up call to his audience about how outdated past narrative genres have become in terms of closing stories. Twindle states:

> ...*A Passage to India*, I think, presents us with the rarer, more delicate case of a genre dissolving, dissolving before our very eyes. The result is great text as problem text, one that arrives at the limits of the English novel and points towards, even if it cannot achieve this itself, the novel in English; the proliferation of postcolonial fiction in the second half of the twentieth century. (Twindle, p 28)

That would make Forster's style a transitional one if I had to characterise it. In its attempt to change this forceful pursuit of irrational, over-the-top forms of entertainment in mainstream works while sacrificing credibility, Forster continuously hopes to find a less discriminating way of drafting multi-cultural stories with elevated and inclusive forms of communication. To this day, many contemporary novels still market happy and exciting endings as potential realities, even if that requires stomping on the cultural makings and stop signs of neighbouring nations. Such works have a tendency to blur out the borders between reality and fiction, giving a false sense of smooth, unperturbed contacts. Forster's *Passage to India* reminds readers of how obsolete such happy moments are and brings people's attention instead to the difficulty that lies in the hybrid coexistence of human beings. While putting a period of Anglo-Indian communal unrest at the forefront of his hypothetically proposed social exchanges, he sets a more realistic, complicated tone in his fictional worlds.

His storytelling, therefore, can feel at times like a provisional attempt at solving a pending post-colonial problem while curbing any residues of idealistic borderless havens that mainstream writers continue to promote. He rejects their prescribed solutions for a happy, everlasting intercultural living because they lack the conviction to remain in effect. More importantly, these shallow solutions continue to brush over the resilient, stubborn set of borders that separate the stories' subject nations while ignoring the possibilities of creating further severances in the intermingling of cultures within a shared space. Simply put, their stories'

pacifying eventualities cannot work in real life because of how forced and unnatural the social accords look in print.

This suggests that Mansfield's previous description of Forster's empty stories is far from being fair. His works attempt to mimic the hardships of human communication, including their potential anticlimactic closures. This only means that a conceivable, satisfactory solution has not yet been reached when exploring the vital conditions of peaceful coexistence; therefore, I used the term transitional to describe his style. Multicultural societies are still the talk of the new century, and novels that ponder upon the question of a cosmopolitan future are still in search of a more close-to-real-life happy ending that would make sense. Neglecting this search and underestimating its impact on any artistic plotline only makes for shallow, generic resolutions that define the final product. Whether in an ending state of extreme enmity or harmonious friendship, the details that would lead to those two results are far too detached from the convoluted human reality. Even if fictional writing can afford the luxury of creative gullibility, remnants of realism in any novel will always be used as the scale of comparison readers both consciously and unconsciously turn towards.

With that being said, Forster's intentions are by no means the only non-conformist, unique antics of an artist. They may still be compared to those of many modernist writers who were trying to capture the void that transpires from the skirmishes of different societies harbouring a sense of spite. Samuel Beckett does this by sneering at people's pursuit of a unanimous meaning able to transcend human differences in a post-war period. He frequently includes theatrical, comedic sequences with a morbid touch of reflection added to the slapstick jokes performed on stage, while Forster demonstrates a very different tone in his approach to life's stagnation, but still manages to stay on the same track of the modern, rebellious, and ironically infused scrutiny. The difference here is that the latter's style leans towards the more serious tone by focusing on the conflict escalations and negative connotations that can erupt

from foolishly attempting to escape or ignore those human grudges and disappointments in one another.

Twindle makes note of this in her article, she writes: "Forster's novel addresses itself to the impenetrability and incoherence and incommunicability of human experience, but it does so in full sentences" (p 30). She later uses the Marabar caves as an example of that: "What happens in the Marabar Caves? It is one of the most famous absences in English literature: A well-known-unknown (…) Nothing attaches to the caves, we are told, a nothingness that might be extraordinary" (p 33). What she means by extraordinary here is how palpable it can easily get for people to stand in awe of an ancient site such as that of the caves. As long as the mystery of their interior confines is kept sealed in the legends and rumours that circulate among foreigners, the caves retain an aspect of the mystical appeal, luring in the most unworldly-minded tourists, and in Forster's viewpoint, the unveiling result can turn into more than just a sign of discontent. Things can easily blow out of the audience's expectations, as depicted by the spiralling hallucinations of Adela Quested.

Consequently, A *Passage to India* stands as an anti-romantic novel, in which Forster addresses past romantic European works on the topic of the East; the likes of Hermann's 1922 novel, *Siddhartha* and much of Ralph Waldo Emerson's poetry that was inspired by Hindu philosophy[18] fit his targeted counter-depictions of charming destinations. His book is devoid of what used to be seen as a mandatory dose of enchantment and magical, eye-candy details expected of Westerners when choosing to capture any Eastern track in the world. By criticising these old Eurocentric, banal myths in *A Passage to India,* he seems to claim a more rational

[18] Much of the transcendental poetry Emerson produced in his life was influenced by his readings of the Charles Wilkin and Charles Grant translations and poetry of Eastern philosophy and religion. See *"Emerson's Earliest Interest In India* by Robert C. Gordon":
www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/i_es/i_es_gordo_emerson_frameset.htm

approach in his portrayal of the country, for the most part. The entire story is inspired by his own experience as a traveller and, therefore, could be argued, should earn his novel more points for authenticity compared to the past shrouded accounts, blending the words of other writers with figments of their own imagination. While copying writers who claimed they grasped the true essence of India, they contributed to the spread of lies and fairy tales, which further increased the distance between West and East. The artificially filtered images often chosen by European novelists to emphasise some Eastern marvels are kept here to a minimum, creating instead details that oscillate between moments of praise and admiration but also of disinclinations and disappointments at the less majestic side of the country.

This by no means changes the fact that Forster's stories can get pretty tedious to follow, drawing out the pages by clinging to unnecessary environmental characterisations and hammered-down technical contexts. Nonetheless, the monotone, slow-paced progress observed in *A Passage to India* is compensated for by a well-polished set of social interactions between characters. The discussions sometimes, if not often, succeed in touching upon a human note. Mrs Moore and Aziz, or Aziz and Cyril Fielding, whichever exchange the reader chooses to tune into, display a great sense of chemistry between the mentioned characters for the better half of the novel. Forster, in such exchanges, provides his readers with more than just culturally in-depth lectures on how different East and West are. There are also moments displaying a sense of decency that transcend those differences in backgrounds.

The most prominent proof of this can be observed in one scene where Aziz gives Fielding one of his collar studs after being told that the latter had broken his own. Aziz passes off the stud as a spare that he keeps in his pocket for emergencies when, in reality, he detaches one of his back neck ones that he is wearing and gifts it to Fielding (Forster, p 56). Small gestures like this one come off as a genuine desire to befriend a man whom he had never met and set a good impression from their first meeting. It is an etiquette that the author keeps

pointing towards, as if trying to remind his readers of a common-sense level of respect in treating any new acquaintances. Such attention to basic ethical rules even challenges the newer postmodern concepts of para-socialism, which try to normalise a decentralised form of interaction, unbound by any rules and incentivised only by illusory, verb-less companionships.

The casual conversations and the wholesome appreciation for the good company that is felt throughout most of the scenes are Forster's way of arguing that travel is not just about the experience of sightseeing, although it plays a big part in his book. It is also about meeting new people and directly sharing the cultural knowledge they have with each other while still connecting on a much more basic human level. It is almost as if traversing topographical settings comes second in the list of the novelist's priorities when exploring the world. Despite knowing that his stories have a tendency to turn such good relationships into sour disagreements after a while due to the impact of his characters' backgrounds, these moments of temporary affability are also included as part of his personal experience in India. They constitute temporary contact zones, glimpses of cosmopolitan harmony that the writer still encourages people to pursue.

The connection, therefore, only gets interrupted once the characters start to follow their externally influenced, wrongful indulgences, which often seem tainted with prejudiced comparisons and stereotypes; contrasting each other's customs and local habits in terms of what is defined as mainstream civil nature and dismissing critical thinking. In demonstrating the consequences of such categorisations, the novelist opens up a colonial discourse that is far more rooted in human misconstrued ideas and hasty judgements stimulated by the closed worlds/ spaces in which people live. The rapid spur of socio-cultural tensions in the second half of his novel encapsulates a set of problems that can happen in real life. Arising from instantaneous, combusting disturbances due to a lack of open-mindedness, these small fractures widen and exacerbate quickly, leading to the end of promising friendships between visitors and natives.

From baseless accusations, Forster shows how aggravating and harmful the sense of home attachment can prove to be. In the next section, I will attempt to examine the extent of the severity of such social escalations in both the short-term and long-term divisions between British and Indian communities.

IV.1.1. Socio-Cultural Tensions in Forster's *A Passage to India*

Perhaps the most well-appreciated trait that E.M. Forster has earned over his years of authorship is the ability to stand his ground when it comes to expressing a personal solemn conviction about other people's character. His devoted fans consider this trait a sign of honesty in a time when double-entendre has turned into no more than a marketing tool exploited by writers. It is clear that Forster is less concerned about the sensitivity of his audience, and to much of his credit, his blatant observations have significantly helped remove the saturated, archaic social standards that had plagued fictional characters for years. Against the backdrop of familiar idolised amiability and acceptance of the 'other', *A Passage to India* is arguably able to capture the frustrations of coexistence better than other intercultural depictions. This is because the novelist often centres his stories around resilient, uncompromising characters while keeping their conflicts with those they consider uncivilised or lesser human at bay. His unresolved narratives, therefore, bring to his audience's awareness a complicated and disjointed reality of hybrid human relationships.

Works like *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) and *A Passage to India (*1924) emphasise the biologically and racially unfit within their societies, who are discriminated against and constantly being forced to succumb to their designated role of the inferior, despite the signs of sympathising with the oppressed that Forster's writings manifest at times. I suggest that the author does not side with the marginalised nor the self-entitled. Instead, he tries to find lines of reconciliation, spaces in which both the alleged oppressor and the alleged oppressed

can hash out their differences and perhaps even reach equal human understandings in terms of how they treat each other. Daniel Schwarz argues that the anxieties of finding solutions to cohesive intercultural communication are not meant to be left unresolved. His open conclusions simply reflect the personal struggle that Forester himself is going through. Unable to form a fixed judgement while strutting along the edges of both sides of this Manichean division. The writer is trying to find a solution that satisfies everyone involved, but without foreseeable results. He notes: "Forster sought to move beyond the subjective and to create an impersonal art out of his own experiences and feelings. But he never quite succeeded in getting outside of himself, and it may be that his novels are more exciting because of this" (Schwarz, p 627). Forster might just be a humanitarian writer who hates violence as much as he hates cultural targeting from both confrontational parties.

Uncertainty could be set as a silent characteristic that colours most of the later modern and post-modern novels, but while many writers would constantly backtrack in terms of their statements, Forster tries to escape the conflicting contradictions that are constantly pushed upon people as potential facts. He considers the embrace of uncertainty to be a hypocritical show of neutrality that does not offer any helpful solutions. It is true that Forster neither pushes for the punishment of natives nor the retaliation of the marginalised against the settlers, which could be interpreted as a form of neutrality as well. However, in his narratives, he still attempts to explore potential human alignments through various plots, opting for a third option. While keeping a careful, slow pace of relationship building up in his writings, he constantly explores the potential lines of mending, which gives a convincing work-in-progress sense to his takes.

Many attempts at building friendships between Indian characters and English ones are, therefore, hypothesised in his work. John Colmer suggests that the first part of *A Passage to India* depicts "an underlying note of intimacy, almost casualness that characterises the opening [meeting between Aziz and Mrs Moore], which leads to a series of invitations to amity;

domestic events like the tea party. The two central characters' encounter initially leaves readers with a positive impression and a genuine intercultural fondness for one another. He also talks about their scene at the Mosque in the way it reflects "…a kindness and spontaneous affection that throws a magic bridge across the gulf that separates people" (Colmer, p 158).

Later, this seemingly unproblematic social companionship eventually becomes one-sided when Moore chooses to leave India instead of defending Aziz against the sexual assault crime for which he is later accused of committing in the Marabar caves. The audience is made to realise that such links between Brits and Indians have their time limits. Moore's choice of leaving the scene instead of helping her friend illustrates a flimsy, paperweight loyalty that is severed when imperial pride is put at stake. Although Moore does not pick any sides during Aziz's case, she still ponders the possibility of false accusations based on her knowledge of his character. Nonetheless, her doubts prove insufficient to side with her Indian so-called 'friend' and go against her son, Ronny Heaslop's warnings about meddling in the affairs of the British law. The novelist imagines all kinds of judicial and cultural barriers that can bring such friendships to an abrupt end, and because of this, he is never able to guesstimate a hopeful conclusion about the coexistence of his characters. The highly confining colonial system of justice, combined with the settlers' peer pressure, in Forster's opinion, becomes the main villainous force that breaks the wholesome bounds of a 'could-have-been', everlasting friendship.

In one of his letters to his Indian friend, Syed R. Masood[19], Forster mentions that he is incapable of sensitising his personal truth about India while writing *A Passage to India*. He

[19] Syed Ross Masood is a Muslim Indian with whom Forster had become good friends, He travelled with the English author to Europe in 1907, where they exchanged important ideas about India, Indians, and the relationships they have with English occupiers. Much of their conversations, which were recorded in Forster's journal *Indian Entries*, had influenced the author's later writings. (Colmer, p 138, p 141)

shares: “When I began the book, I thought of it as a little bridge of sympathy between East and West, but this conception has had to go. My sense of truth forbids anything so comfortable. I think that most Indians, like most English people, are shits, and I am not interested in whether they sympathise with one another or not” (qtd in Abu Baker, p 69). The author expresses a sense of contempt that he harbours for both the coloniser and the colonised, and might have even gone on to extend a universal hatred for all human existence had he been asked about his opinion of the remaining races and nationalities in the world. His comment, albeit intended as eccentric banter between two friends, provides valuable insight into the type of idol readers Forster might have been trying to address through his story. Despising human nature and seeing its diseased inclinations for power is how some critics choose to interpret the author’s message: ‘I hate all people, and this book is for those who understand and share my hatred’. At least, that is what his story’s constant criticism conveys. Colmer suggests, on the other hand, that even though the novel has been described as:

> …the Final Collapse of Forster’s liberal faith: a profoundly pessimistic novel conveying no hope to mankind, close attention to its structure, tone, characterisation…, and symbolism, (…) this is too simple an interpretation. Such labels as pessimistic or optimistic are misleading, and the harmony achieved in the novel is one that involves doing full justice to polar opposites: good vs evil, earth and sky, the negative and the positive vision. (Colmer, p 157)

I would probably add to this list of oppositions the conflict between West and East, but I am not certain that harmony was achieved behind such probing. One thing for sure, however, is that the escalating aggression between English settlers and Indian natives can be felt throughout the unfolding of the events, and continues to loom in the air even when the reader reaches the final page of the book. The characters’ back-and-forth verbal quibbles give the audience a sense of mutual hatred disguised under drabs of intercultural bonding. In some scenes, we are

presented with the scornful remarks of Mrs. Turton, probably the most racist character in the story. This one exclaims at the so-called 'Bridge Party' organised between the West and the East while talking to Adela Quested that they are "superior to them [Indians]." She also insists on reminding her peers that they have an Englishness pride to uphold: "Don't forget that [Adela]. You're superior to everyone in India except one or two of the Ranis[20], and they're on an equality" (Forster, p 36). She considers even the Indians' revered Ranis to be of a lower class compared to the English women, except for those she has taken a liking to. Ironically enough, in setting herself as an overall prime human existence in India, Mrs Turton draws lines of civilisation that Indians supposedly cannot cross. Indians, according to the character, are considered uncivilised because of their shameless, intrusive manners of interaction, yet she herself displays similar traits; imposing an overly chummy, invasive manner towards Moore and Adela during their first meeting on the train, she is not held accountable by those same standards of Englishness she refers to.

Moreover, unbeknownst to Mrs Turton are the earlier conversations that were captured between central Indian characters in the story. One of the conversations, which includes Aziz, Hamidullah and Mahmoud Ali, describes half-satirically Turton, the wife of the district collector in Chandrapore, as a very talented woman. Despite her high claims of morality, she accepts bribes but performs no beneficial services in return. Aziz is the first to call this out: "Mrs. Turton is so skilful. When we poor blacks take bribes, we perform what we are bribed to perform, and the law discovers us in consequence. The English take and do nothing…" (Forster, p 10). Not only does this emphasise the hidden irritation they harbour towards their English higher-ups, but it also shows that, in contrast to their positions and reach, these

[20] *Rani* is a Sanskrit word that refers to Indian female royalties. This title mainly applies to the queen(s) of the *Raja(s)*; a title that represents the male monarchy in India, but it also extends to women of great importance in India, including celebrities.

powerful settlers do not provide any noticeable positive changes in the country and are only there to feed upon the poor and elicit further misconduct.

Aziz's remark acknowledges the corruption that exists in India. His statement gives off the impression that for any Indian to survive in this country, he/she is forced to accept bribes offered by settlers as long as they are up to the task. India, to him, clearly has its faults, but to be criticised by Western rulers who control the politics within their society while indulging in the same corruption as Indians is a strong illustration of the common proverb that says, "One camel should not make fun of the other camel's hump." This proverb is reiterated by Forster through one of the most memorable lines Aziz shares with his companions: "…They have no chance here; that is my point. They come out intending to be gentlemen and are told it will not do. Look at Lesley, look at Blakiston, now it is your red-nosed boy, and Fielding will go next" (Forster, p 10). To much of the readers' later surprise, this idea rings true when the friendship that slowly builds up between Cyril Fielding and Dr. Aziz starts to crumble down during a time of a great dividing crisis.

A Passage to India is not a story of physical confrontation, but it is certainly one that explores the dangerous threats of overriding lawful jurisdictions through racial profiling. Aziz is depicted by Forster as more than just a victim of unfortunate circumstances. After getting accused of assaulting Adela Quested, the trial of the Indian character becomes a trial of Eastern habitual misconduct under the chastising glares of Western occupiers, who themselves are often depicted as dubious, highly positioned characters. The accused is clearly the underdog here. He is put under the mercy of the accuser's statements and the honesty of the judge. The court is divided between two types of attendees: the members of the English Club and the supporters of Aziz. Forster clearly intended to create a feeling of close eruption during this trial. When words fail to satisfy one of the two groups, violence surely has to be next in line, yet this thematic twist never comes to fruition. If only it were not for Quested's resolve to drop

the charges, a violent divulgence would have probably set a different set of post-events in motion. It is only teased by the author, which makes this type of scene even more compelling, left as a warning.

Forster uses the trial, therefore, not only to bring his audience's attention to how unfair the judicial system is when the colonised are prosecuted, and how they react under imperial influence, but also to comment on how quickly such false accusations can turn into a massive bubble of violence. In this case, it was ready to pop at the smallest sign of physical protest, bringing the entire country into armed conflict. It is during such stressful moments of cultural entanglements that the two nations' subjective discrepancies and common stereotypes become visible at their highest.

IV.1.2. From External Tensions to Internal Frictions

Much was discussed about the defining limitations of friendships between British settlers and Indian natives in the novel. Forster interprets the challenges of crossing cultural borders as often being miscalculated, even for the travellers who arrive in India with an open mind and a desire to discover the unfamiliar facets of a rich Eastern life. India might have been looked at as a rough patch, in its dull and arid welcome during Forster's first visit, but on his second visit, the author discloses a change of heart:

> During the first visit, there was violence and acute unrest, so that afterwards, 'the sense of racial tension, of incompatibility' was never absent from Forster's mind. 'It was not a tourist's outing, and the impression it left was deep.' The second visit was invaluable because it showed 'a side of India unknown to most foreigners' (…) Forster states: "Perhaps the long wait was to the good and the religious atmosphere of Dewas certainly helped to establish the spiritual sequence I was seeking." This was of special importance. (qtd in. Colmer, p 155-156)

It is safe to say that the religious sanctity Forster pivoted to in his second visit greatly helped him finish the novel after struggling with it for 14 years. The spiritual diversity of the existing sect affiliations and the multiple ethnic groups in India represented a completely fresh and unfamiliar territory to him, much more fascinating when observed up close than when read about on paper. What is even more admirable is his willingness to go against the colonisers' tide of indigenising the beliefs of Indians. Forster seems to excel at the dialogues happening between intellectual characters more than the interaction of British, prejudiced settlers and natives. In my opinion, the slight lack of comfort that Forster faced in depicting racial connotations is more visible during the scenes of aggression made against Aziz, especially those excreted from the sidelines of the court's trial. I consider such moments to be less intense in their disparagement, in contrast to the amount of cordiality displayed in the story. Forster, therefore, struggles mostly with the scenes of hostility between the two parties and intentionally avoids physical confrontations due to their strenuous effect on his imagination.

What bigoted writers and artists of the past rounded up as strange and incomprehensible customs was clearly meant to dismiss any outside foreign interest in the country's rich practices. Such writers often racialised and illegitimised the existence of various identities in India. Instead of emphasising unhealthy obsessions with 'bindis'[21] imprinted on foreheads and snake charmers just waiting to confirm the oddity that visitors expect to find the moment they set foot inside any Indian street, Forster decided instead to bring a better documented and, at times, even charming side to the culture without trying to oversell people on its ceremonial beauty.

[21] A Bindi or (Bindú in Sanskrit) refers to a small coloured dot drawn at the centre of the forehead often worn by Indians and Malaysians citizens. The Bindi is believed to be a gate opening to the wearer's concealed chakra and spiritual wisdom. The religious significance of this symbol is often misinterpreted by foreigners and stereotyped as a blood mark leading to a serious spur in Hinduphobia. See: *Breaking cultural barriers: embracing my bindi* by Ranjani Venkatakrishnan: https://shorturl.at/3MpHb, and *Red dot and the History of Hinduphobia* by Casey Wong: https://shorturl.at/wwHSY.

One of these instances appears by the end of the novel. Chapters thirty-five and thirty-six are dedicated to the return of Cyril Fielding to India after his marriage to Mrs Moore's daughter, Stella, in England. His tour in the province of Mau is partially encouraged by a strong desire to witness the Rajah's procession, a Hindu ceremony in which one of several chained, convicted Indian prisoners gets to be chosen and pardoned for his crimes. Aziz happens to also be invited to the event. Forster describes the whole experience with the whimsical curiosity of an innocent child. This is even more substantiated by the introduction of the ritual from the perspective of Ahmed and Karim, Aziz's children. While roaming around the territory that is meant for the awaited festivities, the two kids encounter the passing prisoners, asking them immediately if they had prior knowledge of who was going to be chosen to earn the Rajah's clemency. The author uses the opportunity to provide his readers with more context about the sentiments of the prisoners at that moment. He writes:

> …the prisoners discussed with the gentry their chances of salvation. Except for the irons on their legs, they resembled other men, nor did they feel different. Five of them, who had not yet been brought to trial, could expect no pardon, but all who had been convicted were full of hope. They did not distinguish between the God and the Rajah in their minds both were too far above them (…) As a matter of fact, the Rajah was dead, the ceremony overnight had overtaxed his strength. His death was being concealed lest the glory of the festival were dimmed. (Forster, p 259)

This passage stresses how important this religious ceremony is for all Hindus, so important that the death of the Rajah is not made public to avoid the fear of disrupting the long-awaited procession from taking place. The audience is later informed that there are two successors to the throne, but neither of them was eager to claim it during that time, "because religion is a living force to the Hindus, and can at certain moments fling down everything that is petty and temporary in their natures" (Forster, p 264).

There is a hint of awe and respect that is detectable in the narrator's voice when describing how Hindus treat their religious formalities. More importantly, there is no touch of condescension or dismissal in his words. The reader can only feel the excitement of a foreign traveller eager to recount what kind of marvellous scene he was able to capture from his journey. I also believe that Forster's personal interpretations of internal religious tensions between Muslims and Hindus are offered reservedly in these last chapters; a reticent take on the feelings that the two factions harbour towards each other. This becomes clear when Aziz stumbles upon his Hindu friend Godbole, who, we are informed, has taken the role of the Minister of Education in India and is involved more closely in the procession. When Aziz bumps into him, Godbole exclaims in an exasperated tone: "'Ah, you might make me late' —meaning that the touch of a non-Hindu would necessitate another bath; the words were spoken without moral heat. "Sorry," said Aziz. "The other smiled" (p 256). When taken out of context, the reaction of Godbole would seem inappropriate towards Aziz, but Forster makes an effort to provide readers with more information on Hindu credence in terms of physical sanctity, which is often misjudged as an inherited spiteful treatment towards Muslims.

In this case, what might potentially seem as an offensive pushback from the character is quickly clarified as a requirement of religious faith not to be touched by outsiders, not just Muslims but all non-Hindus alike. The purity of their bodies is taken much more seriously during these types of practices. Aziz clearly understands this, and that is why he immediately apologises without questioning the reply. The author grapples with several nuanced moments that can easily be misread or exploited for their differences from Western ideals. By making the boundaries of ethnicity more visible to his audience, he attempts to combat the baseless, disparaging interpretations of other European writers and sets the minds of his readers on a more enlightened path.

He also tries to pinpoint the dangers of getting entangled in the disaccords that characterise and separate the multiple ethnic groups that exist in the country, which British Colonel Maggs later tries to achieve by employing a sort of passive-aggressive tactic:

> Colonel Maggs learnt with concern that a [Aziz] was coming to Mau, and, adopting a playful manner, rallied the old Rajah for permitting a Muslim doctor to approach his sacred person. A few years ago, the Rajah would have taken the hint, for the Political Agent then had been a formidable figure, descending with all the thunders of Empire when it was most inconvenient (…) and generally arrogating the control of internal affairs. but replied that Hindus were less exclusive than formerly (…) he felt it his duty to move with the times. (Forster, p 255)

The moments in which Forster adopts a direct strategy of scrutiny toward the British officials' involvement in Indian internal affairs are very scarce in the novel's layout, but when they are presented to the audience, they are intentionally set to expose a great deal of political bleedings in India; the mischievous and outright nasty instigations used by the coloniser. There is nothing neutral about this passage. The Rajah's wise reply, although speculative in nature, would have probably sent the Colonel into a raging fit. The writer's use of the fictional Indian royalty as the reciprocator of his personal convictions could raise the eyebrows of certain critics, but I find his decisions to be justified, as a nationalist Rajah would represent a more authoritative voice than a British narrator would. Forster's advice for strengthening the Indian resistance against the deceitful strategies of the oppressor is set in his idealised faith that internal religious tensions can only be resolved if Indians are open to embracing national unity first. This idea stems from Mahatma Gandhi's own philosophy of non-violent, anti-colonial resistance.

Unfortunately, as gratifying as it might look to witness a British colonel's attempts at pocking neighbouring beehives getting brushed off and ignored by the Indian authority, the

success rates of these third-wheel British provocations, in reality, exceed those of their failures. The ethnic gaps that separate Indians have proven to be more difficult to bridge and, therefore, more prone to outside aggravations. Forster does not emphasise the repercussions of these internal exploits but references them just enough to make his audience aware of the problem's existence and its grave potential escalations.

IV.1.3. Breaking the Contact Zone in Foster's Novel

The bridge party in Forster's narrative is a great symbolic illustration of Marie Louis's multifunctional contact zones. Set intentionally as an opportunity for all main characters to cross paths, share their personal ambitions and concerns about one another's cultures and reach a set of compromises that would momentarily diffuse any political unrest between settlers and natives, the bridge party is the main forefront of an attempt at reaching an entente between two rival nations. Albeit coming from a place of superficial sociability, the event remains unmatched in its magnitude of intercultural contact. The author strategically places within this supposedly joyful gathering of British officials, Indian royal figures, and other prestigious attendees, hypothetical moments of awkwardness and social discomfort between guests. The objective here again is to test the patience of the interlocutors, as is Forster's style of narration. The masquerade of civility, as a result, lets down some signs of disapproval on the side of both parties involved. Right at its beginning, Forster prefaces how much of a fiasco the event turns out to be. He states:

> The Bridge Party was not a success —at least it was not what Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested were accustomed (…) most of the Indian guests (…) stood massed at the farther side of the tennis lawns, doing nothing (…) it was not picturesque; the East, abandoning its secular magnificence, was descending into a valley whose farther side no man can see. (p 34)

While highlighting this initial mob partition. The author alludes to an inherent colonial vigilance that permanently affects any initiative at building a peaceful accord. These metaphorical private enclosures built by Indians, even during an occasion of a diplomatic treaty such as this one, show a lack of trust in the intentions displayed by an intruder living inside their country. Once an enemy, always an enemy at heart. This also demonstrates the expedient nature of contact zones. Always set as conditional spaces of armistice, dependent mainly on the political sustenance that both fighting nations are able to agree upon and profit from throughout their period of coexistence. Such shared grounds of mutual conciliation can never fully maintain a balance of satisfaction, in this case, between the British and the Indians. Forster's intent to demonstrate the provisional status of these zones on both social and political fronts becomes the main plot of the story as he gradually turns the characters' unrelieved concerns into growing ammunition. The harboured amount of dissatisfaction for one another is used in the form of outlandish accusations and crass remarks during the later trial of Aziz.

In contrast to the party, the prosecution scene reveals a more genuine contact. In court, the readers quickly sense that the friendliness of the people who also attended the party starts to dissipate under the pressures of competing for judicial justice, and by affiliation over the authority in the country. An altercation about how the attendees should behave in the court of law replaces those happy moments of congregational accord. Quested is set at the centre of this live metamorphosis. The change of air is captured through her point of view: "Miss Quested examined the hall (…) Beneath her were gathered all the wreckage of her silly attempt to see India —the people she had met at the Bridge Party (…) the old man who would lend his car, various servants, villagers, officials, and the prisoner himself." (Forster, p 189).

At one point during the trial, while attempting to prove the attraction Indians conceive towards the White race using presumptive scientific observations by the prosecutor and insinuating that it was all a premeditated plan on the part of Aziz, one member from the

audience rattles Quested by calling her ugly. By doing this, the Indians directly confront the alleged stereotype aloud here, compared to their quietness at the Bridge Party. The heckler's comment challenges the observation by pointing out that most Indians have their own expectations of beauty that do not include skin fairness, as is often implied by the European coloniser. To console the now upset Adela, who takes personal offence at the comment. British acquaintances and officials carry their defendant to the platform close to the witness box. They sit her down on a more comfortable chair located slightly above where the rest of the court's audience is sitting, and gather around her as if forming a shield. Their position can be seen as A defensive rally constructed rapidly at the sensing of a war-like threat. The human barrier they form is similar to a wall, but this one is set on a smaller scale to protect Quested from any further crass, uncivilised assault that might be thrown her way. This only aggravates the Indians, leading Aziz's defendant to protest their self-absorbed behaviour, unbecoming of the court's legal environment:

> Pleader Mahmoud Ali now arose, and asked with ponderous and ill-judged irony whether his client could be accommodated on the platform too: "even Indians felt unwell sometimes (…) And the party, including Miss Quested, descended from its rash eminence. The news of their humiliation spread quickly, and people jeered outside. Their special chairs followed them. Mahmoud Ali (…) objected even to these; by whose authority had special chairs been introduced, why had the Nawab Bahadur not been given one? (p 187-190)

While continuing to escalate the verbal confrontation by pitting both the cultural and ethical peculiarities of the two sides, Forster manifests a clear breach of Anglo-Indian silence, one that was delayed throughout the majority of the narrative, only out of respect for the bridge party's symbolic cordiality. One would think that a fight is about to erupt at any single moment, but the author prefers to stay on the sidelines of social disagreements. All the same, the trial seems

to serve as a catalyst between the two groups, announcing the start of a rebellion in the colonised country.

In a desperate attempt to maintain a shred of individual friendship between him and Aziz, Fielding tries to reach out after the trial, expecting the special camaraderie they had to survive the crossfire of the two nations' bigger conflict. Unfortunately for Fielding, Aziz chooses to interpret his persistent loyalty to Miss Quested as proof that his English friend's decision to part ways by siding with the settlers. The contact zone that joins these two characters on a more personal level compared to that of the diplomatic international party fails to survive despite its initial promising signs of perpetuity. Aziz shouts his decision out loud, "India shall be a nation! No foreigners of any sort! Hindu and Muslim and Sikh and all shall be one! Hurrah! Hurrah for India!" (p 279). The character's ruinous trial made him no longer want to associate with anyone or anything that would, even if in the long term, prove to be a threat to his nationality, religion or birthplace.

This also implies that the author holds a morose opinion about the overall role that contact zones are supposed to serve, even the ones established on a subjective level. To Forster, the weight of severance in public relationships between natives and settlers is eventually bound to affect those tied to individual identities, suggesting as a result that friendships cannot defy the greater national interests of each interlocutor's country. Making them confined by the political borders set between Europe and the East.

IV.2. The Boundaries of Magical Realism in the Novel

It is true that magical realism started as a niche Latin-American genre of artistic production in the early 20th century. lo real maravilloso*',* which later would evolve into '*realismo magico',* initially included different types of semi-fictional works. The latter often attempted to shed light upon the mysteries that are nudged in the cracks of human reality as we

know it. In its more recent connotations, however, magical realism has found its calling in the works of international novelists who sought to criticise different taboos and beliefs within a plethora of societies without bringing up the politics that centre around them. To achieve this, the fantastical elements they use serve as masquerading tools that hide the writer's personal interpretations of such controversial subjects. Much like Gabriel Garcia's *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* or Haruki Murakami's *1Q84*, there is a solid case built around the fact that *A Passage to India* falls into the same spectrum as these titles.

According to Nawal Mahmoud, Forster utilises magical realism to entice the readers' attention into his narrative, distracting them enough in order to avoid getting worked up over the implied criticism of India. This is evidenced by the Marabar Caves, a fictitious tourist site that is inspired by the novelist's visit to the real ones, known as the Barabar Caves. The blending of fiction and reality is a subtle way to criticise the precursors that escalate the friction between English and Indian characters. Mahmoud notes that:

> Whatever is said (in the caves), the same monotonous noise replies and quivers up and down the walls until it is absorbed into the roof. [any noise uttered] all produce a Boom (....) it chases everyone and no one understands it (…) this noise symbolises a form of confusion to the extent that it shatters people's peace of mind." (Mahmoud, p 34)

This lack of reason is argued to be at the centre of the magic that Forster generates in his work. Therefore, while *A Passage to India* dabbles much less into the fantastical realm and more into realistic rants, there is no denying the abstract effect that the cave's intimidating boom and the dream frenzies have on central characters like Adela Quested and Mrs Moore. The scenes of hallucinations and fragmented images bring fear into Adela's mind, a fear that she finds great difficulty explaining in court. The details of her trauma and her feelings remain vague and

intangible, hidden from the public's awareness. They serve as spikes that separate her ideal expectations from the bitter reality. Walking on those spikes to see the real India is what Adela does, and Forster uses her experience as a form of illustration, an example of how unsatisfactory, if not harmful, putting those over-exaggerated expectations about the charming image of a destination could turn out to be for any traveller excited at the prospect of a utopian, Edenic Eastern territory.

Forster's novel takes a lot of inspiration from the non-cooperation movement that was organised against British rule in 1921. During his second visit, the writer witnessed the havoc that the intended peaceful Indian protest had spiralled into after clashing with British soldiers. He saw the notorious Amritsar massacre in which British law enforcement wiped out the nationalists who were protesting "Britain's hostility towards the Islamic movement of the Khalifat" (Beer, DAS., p 3). More importantly, the sexual assault that Adela Quested imagines in the Marabar Caves shares a strong similarity with an actual alleged British charge that was made against six Indian protesters during the same time. The officials backed up the testimony of the victim, an English woman by the name of Marcela Sherwood. Sherwood accounted for a brutal assault that happened in her tent. (Beer, Das, p 7) Forster might be casting some doubt here on the charge that was rapidly and unusually ruled upon. Adel's hysterical aberrations would surely have done the same by gaining the sympathy of the magistrate if not for her retreat. Forster might also be calling his audience's attention to the fact that no matter the nature of charges raised by British officials, the verdict against Indian perpetrators has been, for the most part of the colonial period, a one-sided decision.

If this is the case, the hallucinations of Adela Quest represent a magical point of entry for those who seek reason and truth behind the inclusion of such abstract scenes. Aggression is captured in a set of fragmented cut scenes, getting scratched by rocky walls with bulging thorns and invisible forces trying to hold the character down while she's running back from the tunnel.

The perpetrator is captured under a vague light as if hiding in the inner darkness of the crime scene. This passage, in which Adela recounts the details of her assault while being treated, sets the hazy tone that dominates most of the later trial set against Aziz:

> People seemed very much alike, except that some would come close while others kept away. "In space things touch, in time things part," she repeated to herself while the thorns were being extracted (…) I remember scratching the wall with my fingernail to start the usual echo, and then as I was saying, there was this shadow, or sort of shadow, down the entrance tunnel, bottling me up. It seemed like an age, but I suppose the whole thing can't have lasted thirty seconds really. I hit at him with the glasses, he pulled me round the cave by the strap, it broke, I escaped, that's all. He never actually touched me once. It all seems such nonsense. (p 167)

This hesitation of Quested generates a great deal of suspense before the court day. The continuous transformation in the descriptions of her story, oscillating between the shadowy silhouette of a perpetrator and the direct claim of Aziz's physical presence that is only blurred out by the sounding, flattened echoes and the overwhelming tunnel vision of the victim, makes Adela's mental battle interesting to the audience's own interpretation. The conflict of the character's thoughts is fuelled by the machinery that British officials are trying to set in motion, and the weighing of the personal conscience of sending an innocent man to prison. Her story, therefore, goes through several revisions under the scrutiny of many listeners who were present in the cave, from Mrs Moore to her son Ronny to other members of the British Club, each with their own unreliable passive contributions suggested to her.

Adela had always meant to tell the truth, and she tried to prepare herself for this, rehearsing her statement before taking the court's stand, but trying to provide an honest account

of what happened to her proved to be more challenging than expected. Her memory of this traumatic experience is connected, though by a thin thread, to an eventful part of her personal life, the failure of her engagement to Ronny. She realises this during the trial and eventually blurts out: "I'm afraid I have made a mistake." "What nature of mistake?" "Dr. Aziz never followed me into the cave" (Forster, p 169). Once these words are uttered, Adela's magical obsession with seeing a fantastical, picturesque India, one that is also shared by other European visitors, presents itself at the roots of a larger problem. Turning the disappointments of not finding India, the magically mesmerising destination marketed in the brochures, into a nightmarish, tourist-devouring pit.

IV.2.1. Voicing India through Chandrapore

India's Landscape in Forster's novel is, in some scenes, painted as more than just a hostile territory that gradually induces psychological discomfort in newcomers. Unwelcoming and, more importantly, unsympathetic to the foreign tourists who expect to gaze at the wonders of an Eastern oriental panorama while it gazes back at them approvingly, the setting of this narrative projects the novelist's own tribulations during his travels. The experience is encased by a personal trauma of deception at the comparison of majestic images captured in Western travel texts and the materialisation of the real country in front of the writer's eyes. Forster recorded such instances of disappointment in his *Indian Entries*, describing a journey devoid of "the real India," referring to the public-fed, beautified scenery that he had in mind before his first visit. This concept of an ideal, oriental country is also used to express the disappointment of one of his characters, Miss Quested. Adela Quested never truly got to see the visualised setting that she hoped for. In one exchange with her companion, Ronny, she reiterates the same desire that Forster once harboured:

> Miss Quested, who always said exactly what was in her mind, announced anew that she was desirous of seeing the real India. Ronny was in high spirits. The request struck him as comic, and he called out to another passerby: “Fielding! how’s one to see the real India?” “Try seeing Indians,” the man answered and vanished. (Forster, p 23)

As witty as Fielding’s reply might seem to the reader, his suggestion of meeting the people instead of just advising Adela to explore the city of Chandrapore herself hints at the inconceivable possibility of wandering about in India without the company of a well-trusted native guide. It was probably a spur-of-the-moment choice of words on his part, but it was also born out of Fielding's own experience living in the country. He is, after all, the closest connection that Indians have to British settlers in the novel. He represents a human bridge that keeps the Anglo-Indian diplomatic peace alive. Fielding, in other words, plays the role of a mediator in times of conflict. A character that also shares Forster’s desire to preserve the peace between his peers and the Indians, so when this Foreign man who lived in India for years still warns those about its dangers, one can feel the worry that the author harbours for the country. Validating its dangerous traits through the words of both a long-time settled Englishman and a well-educated Indian.

To the unfamiliar wanderer, especially to the likes of Mrs Moore and Miss Quested, the hazardous wilderness of India, despite its charm, is gradually conceived as a more salient organic trait to be wary of. This perception of insecurity is cemented even further after receiving the concurrence of Aziz as well. In his first meeting with one of the arriving ladies at the mosque, he warns her of this as he exclaims:

> I think you ought not to walk at night alone, Mrs. Moore. There are bad characters about and leopards may come across from the Marabar Hills. Snakes also." She exclaimed; she had forgotten the snakes. "For example, a six-spot beetle," he continued, "You pick it up, it bites, you die." "But you walk about yourself." "Oh, I am used to it." "Used to snakes?" They both laughed. "I'm a doctor," he said. "Snakes don't dare bite me. (p 18)

What is delivered as a lightened instance of jesting between two acquaintances getting along does not change the gravity of the warnings mentioned by this well-acquainted individual. If anyone should know better about the prying sides of the Indian terrains, it should be one of its inhabitants. This, Forster cleverly hints at a personal fact: that crossing over these Easter barriers of unfamiliarity can prove to be too much of a challenge for any English settlers, even the most intrepid ones. Inserting the cautionary notes early on in his story contributes to the foreshadowing of the later assault on Adela. He even tries to deter the outsider from believing that the natural environment has something special to offer. He does this by drawing a comparison of the inner and outer topography of Chandrapore:

> Except for the Marabar Caves—and they are twenty miles off—the city of Chandrapore presents nothing extraordinary. Edged rather than washed by the river Ganges, it trails for a couple of miles along the bank, scarcely distinguishable from the rubbish it deposits so freely (…) Inland, the prospect alters (…) Houses belonging to Eurasians stand on the high ground by the railway station. Chandrapore appears to be a totally different place (…) It is a tropical pleasance, washed by a noble river (…) [T]he Civil Station (…) has nothing hideous in it, and (…) the view is beautiful." (qtd. in Aki, p 53-54)

Much of what is described here reads like an inviting itinerary towards the more European parts of India instead of a mere heedful warning about the country's unpredictable nature. The British dwellings inside the city appear to be a beacon of hope and civilisation for any newly arriving European traveller and a compromising deal for those who retain a curiosity to discover "the real India". Limiting their visit to the civil station, which is located inside Chandrapore, might dampen their initial gullible excitement, but based on Forster's descriptions, it feels like the hidden objective of the novelist is to help avoid the old imperial fear of "going native" and losing sanity. The city of Chandrapore becomes a window through which the Western traveller can peer, just like the previous Newby analogy of how car windows narrow down the tourists' vision[22]. But is it really a strategy to shield the traveller from a presumed dangerous India?! Or does it have more substance to it?

From the above passage alone, one can see why Forster is often listed with other controversial British writers like Kipling and Conrad. It seems easy enough to build a colonial discourse around his notions of the unsafe environment. However, when considering the possibility that his words can be taken out of context and given a more prejudiced meaning than their original intent, the dangers of contemporary cancel culture resurface in people's awareness, especially for those more familiar with some of Forster's memorable story passages in their full depictions. Parts of this passage, for instance, were omitted voluntarily; the Turkish critic, Tugay Aki, has kept certain adjectives unmentioned in his quote of the book. The actual description of Forster about the civil station reads as follows:

[22] Refer to Chapter One, page 31.

> …As for the civil station itself, it provokes no emotion. It charms not, neither does it repel. It is sensibly planned, with a redbrick club on its brow, and farther back a grocer's and a cemetery, and the bungalows are disposed along roads that intersect at right angles. It has nothing hideous in it, and only the view is beautiful; it shares nothing with the city except the overarching sky. (Forster, p 8)

Although much of the inland, in which a majority of European settlers reside, feels significantly more dignified than the outer contours of the city. The station itself does not arouse the charming, utopian-like shelter that the critic captures it to be. Forster believes neither in its imperial charm nor in its hegemonic-want-to-be appearance. His attempts at painting a neutral Anglo-Indian environment are praiseworthy at the least; his imperial tendencies serve to disparage the Eastern setting, which is instead highlighted by the continuous light shedding over the dissimulated, natural threats India keeps in store, even going so far as to allude to their role in incentivising human misdemeanour. Because Indians are familiar with the inner dangers of their landscape, they are prone to exploiting them against foreigners.

His tactile approach towards the natives' environmental negligence by calling out its infectious impact on British infrastructures, and even on the visitors, could be made a case in point for a despicable colonial comparison. In my opinion, while the main objective is not to emphasise the ugliness of India, the author at times subconsciously does follow the same pattern of strategic compromise as Conrad does. He condemns some of the indigenous actions of the Indians because of the influence that their settings have on them, while at the same time putting some of that blame on his peers for not helping tame the Indian wilderness. The stations, therefore, are not up to the hygienic standards of his homeland, and the heat of India eventually becomes a third outside potential cause, similar to Conrad's assumption about the mystical curse that Congolese jungles are able to cast on any crossing traveller.

The comparison between the two writers, despite their similar tendencies of exotic accounts, stops there. It is of interest to look at how critically inclined Forster's characters behave throughout the story. When compared to Conrad's main character's dubious portrayal of the natives in *The Heart of Darkness*, Forster's Moore and Fielding, who could be argued, are part of the writer's main roster of characters, and maintain a respectful demeanour towards Chandrapore and its people. Instead of the conflicted Kurtz, who keeps leaning towards a personal, discriminatory judgment of the cannibalistic fetishes of natives and darkness dripping out of the Congo's most landmarks, Moore is here clearly mesmerised by the city's natural beauty. She considers, at some point in the story, stepping outside the sultry, unpleasant vibe the private British club imprints on her, perhaps partially encouraged by the pleasant encounter she had earlier with Aziz. Forster writes:

> Mrs. Moore, whom the club had stupefied, woke up outside. She watched the moon, whose radiance stained with primrose the purple of the surrounding sky. In England, the moon had seemed dead and alien; here she was caught in the shawl of night together with earth and all the other stars (…). She did not dislike (…) the [British] National Anthem, but their note had died into a new one, just as cocktails and cigars had died into invisible flowers. When the mosque, long and domeless, gleamed at the turn of the road, she exclaimed, "Oh, yes —that's where I got to — that's where I've been." (p 25)

Moore's impressions of a Supermoon[23] that appears larger and more defined compared to the one she remembers back home bring the audience's attention to how different the panoramic scenery is from the perspective of this character. When she steps outside of her stifling circle,

[23] A full moon's at its nearest or farthest point of orbit from the Earth tend to generate the illusion of a slightly larger appearance witnessed from certain locations. This astrological phenomenon is often referred to as a "Supermoon". American Astrologer, Richard Nolle, coined the term in 1979.

she suddenly becomes conscious of a new kind of freedom that comes with the unfamiliarity that surrounds her, and she embraces it instead of returning to the enclosed cocktail party. This makes her character unlike those at the club who cling to their British habits, uncaring for the wondrous displays of this new environment and only celebrating the cosy feeling of being home, or at least the illusion of it.

For the most part, the novel displays a city that is both dangerous and naturally beautiful at the same time, which could be seen as the closer-to-reality combination that inspired Forster during his trips to India. From the perspective of the Western traveller, the difference in the Eastern hot climate alone makes the landscape feel daunting and even unpleasant to the newcomer, but if one is willing to tolerate such climactic pet peeves, the experience can turn out to be more enjoyable in its own right. The country can surprise the audience outside of the author's picky praise and lack of acknowledgement for its history of great innovations in various fields. For Benita Perry, if the novel is to be scrutinised for how close it feels to capturing the real India, it should be rightfully criticised for its lack of reference to India's long-standing traditions and contributions in the fields of mathematics, science, technology and even history. Other than the personal excitement that was felt by Forster when talking about some of the majestic sights in Calcutta, Lahore, and Mau, or the cultural richness of the country in general, not enough interest was devoted to its contributions in expanding the world's knowledge. It almost seemed that an intellectual India had no place in his novel (Perry, p 177).

Other than being a picky traveller, with a slight prejudiced eyesight, I believe that critics like Tugay Aki and Kavita Patil[24], who choose a more essentialist, hostile interpretation of the work, are part of the scolding wave of critics, attempting to condemn every European statement

[24] For more information on Patil's post-colonial research concerning both the novel and the film. See *Translating Word to Image: Retelling of A Passage to India*: https://dx.doi.org/10.48189/nl.2023.v04i1.005

uttered outside of their homeland. While arguing that the novel is a subtle manifestation of a well-concealed desire to physically transform colonial India into another one of Great Britain's additional prosthetic limbs, Aki extrapolates this argument to a more reproachful metaphor. The line that serves to preserve the organic hierarchy between the two is never revealed to the natives but is gradually consolidated "…by injecting the Indians with the ideology of Western metaphysics, in which the constructed superiority of the West to the East is put forward." (Aki, p 55). This might be the case, but if we are to label Forster as just another defender of the Eurocentric expansion ideology, a number of critics like Aki, by consequence, choose to deem his anti-romantic approach in his storytelling as an unnecessary additional effort that does not really help promote this message.

Moreover, as much as the postcolonial discourse seems to fit Forster's choice of portrayal, with the purely Eastern environment getting a lesser share of the expected impressed characters' reactions that the reader might hope for, there is also a need to consider the satirical effect that such curated details evoke. The civil station is described as a decent place to visit, almost like a safe starting and ending point in the midst of Chandrapore's filthy streets. Nonetheless, Forster's descriptions feel a bit off when looking at how he gradually moves away from what he insinuates could be a comfortable, secure place in which it is possible to observe and describe the rest of India as if the claims for safety in the British settlements bring with them a sense of stagnation, not worth the visit. In this, Forster reservedly mocks this sheltering security of the station, insinuating that the insulation found in the station and the private English club are not worth the trip in the first place. Also, indicating momentarily the dullness they bring to a travel novel such as this one. After all, if the purpose is to explore a foreign air that automatically entails stepping inside an unknown, perilous space, indeed, but one that can also reveal the magnificent hidden vista of the destination.

Instead of sticking to the one-dimensional perspective of British characters like Ronny Heaslop and Turton, he attempts to provide more vantage points in his story, so that the audience can get a different look at the city. The tea scene, in which the history and culture of India are expanded upon in a discussion among various attendees, including Dr. Aziz, Professor Godbole, Adela, and Mrs Moore, gives the impression of a more interesting side of India. It is true that often it looks dipped in the assumptions of the two visiting ladies about Indian customs, beliefs and the Marabar Hills' significance, but it still reflects a more multi-layered image of the country, born out of a genuine Western inquisitiveness to learn.

If the reader takes Forster's every word for a personal understanding of the city, this creates an image of a condescending, arrogant British writer, almost like the account of a survivor who outran an uncontrollable wilderness. However, his *Indian Entries* give off a more embroiled experience in the East. If anything other than a slight conveyance of serenity and enjoyment, these entries encapsulate in their audiences the mental image of a traveller with a desire to educate himself around the country's popular landmarks, systems of beliefs, and culture.

IV.2.2. The Unheard Echoes of the Marabar Caves

One important example of a popular site that Forster had a hard time formulating his feelings about is the Barabar caves. His diary includes short records of these dark and hollow rocky natural cavities, in which he mostly highlights their time-worn ridges, and the shared unusual echo that they are famously known for. He writes:

> The caves are cut out of the solid granite. A small square doorway and an oval hall inside. This sounds dull, but the granite has been so splendidly polished that it ranks very high among caves for cheerfulness. Date — 250 B.C.; as early as anything in India. … We lit candles which showed the grain of the granite and its reds and grays. The nephews also tried to wake the echoes, but whatever was said and in whatever voice, the cave only returned a dignified roar (Forster, p 76-77).

The impression generated from not hearing one's echo back would be, for most people, a total disappointment, but for the sake of preserving the magic of an orientalised, well-sought-after touristic site, Forster adds a certain wonder to the caves. "The Boom" is mystified and incorporated as part of several mythical tales intended to replace the tourists' sighs of regret with a sense of intrigue. The author's Marabar caves serve as a parody of this fake effect. The vague, irrationalised, and scary reverb in Forster's novel represents, therefore, a selling point for tourists to buy an expensive trip inside the caves, but at the same time, the author puts into perspective how the contextual problems of an individual can very much impact their experience inside such a muffled abyss.

For Adela, the splinters of her break-up with Ronny demonstrate how anxiety can turn an ordinary sight into the opposite of a marvellous experience. Keeping the illusion of the cave alive while projecting her buried frustrations on the person closest in her mind to India, Dr Aziz. The latter character soon becomes painted as a fictional perp, gradually leading Adela, all this time, to the caves where he can lunge at her, unwitnessed and unsuspected. The location transforms into a dark, unsafe alley, and it is clear that Moore also gathers a negative impression around the caves prior to Adela's incident, feeling the suffocating air of people closing in around her and deciding to leave the caves instead of continuing the visit.

Later, the trip quickly spirals into a traumatic event and, as a consequence, creates a promiscuous reputation around both the culprit and the caves. It ruins what few attempts were made to market an enchanting attraction worthy of both local and foreign interest. The coming of Aziz's trial only carves a stronger feeling of a dark, assailing setting. It would seem that everything pertaining to these supposed touristic Indian wonders brings into the minds of its visitors nothing but pessimism and fear, but this hyperbolic, appalling image is mainly constructed by English characters. Dibbie Lisle argues that this tendency to pinpoint the safer zones within a foreign country is embedded in all Western travellers' subconscious. In their efforts to paint an objective, cosmopolitan terrestrial portrait, they subsequently compare public areas in terms of comfortable living and safety. In doing so, they shape their audiences 'understandings of security, where is safe and where is dangerous" (Debbie, p 172). Debbie describes how these writers' blending of imaginative constructs and predisposed, inherited colonial knowledge generates a misleading and sometimes even inaccurate criterion of safety. As a result, their descriptions often insinuate that some of the native's landmarks and homes are the equivalent of dangerous slums, while European stations and settlements are safer to live in for all new, outside travellers and immigrants.

The archaic and primal nature of the caves fits, in my opinion, the category of threat that Westerners often attribute to their destinations. Their sense of mystery is daunting alone, but there is also their untamed nature, uncivilised and unrestrained by humans. Compared to built infrastructure and remodelled organic environments. This one is kept in all its raw, uncarved circumscription. The sacred respect that Indians attribute, thus, to these caves incites the ghastly attempts at defining the Marabar caves by European colonists and other visitors, who have limited access and knowledge of the site. Due to their restricted ability to study these holy local terrains, the Western frustration that comes with this lack of freedom is poured into their caricatures of mystical danger comparable to Conrad's depiction of African jungles. The

caves are described as a terrifying prison of muffled reverberations, like a hall of mirrors where one is met with his disfigured reflections: The result is the person staring at a blurred out silhouette that resembles his, and it stares back at him. The caves have a similar mirroring effect, with a focus on the contortion of the human sound. Any utterance uttered is sent back to its receiver after a few seconds, just like a normal echo, but this time the response is always indecipherable, often resembling a flattened cry. The unexpected resounding' boom' is what makes these caves a panic-inducing wonder of Chandarapore.

While Forster attempts a disinterested stance towards his description of these caves in his diary, making them look like a dull, passable attraction, they are still used as the central setting of a terrible offence believed to be committed against an English guest in his narrative. Because of this, his whole portrayal of the abrupt assault invites a colonial discourse that questions the intent behind such fabrications in the first place. No later rectifications or attempts at an apology are provided by Miss Quested; the caves remain a hunting domain, a crime scene, and this also reflects a real sense of discomfort and perhaps even terror towards the location in the author's mind during his visit to the actual site. In my opinion, this is where Forster falls victim to the inherent imperial judgment that Lisle refers to. Looking into the opinion of those who see the true beauty of the caves is never explored, despite the fact that Forster's main objective is to find conceivable lines of stable harmony between the visitor and the visited. The truth formed by the European eye is cast into the consciousness of all future visitors, tainting the Indian landscape, while the assault on Miss Quested, despite the charge having been dropped, had already caused irreparable damage to these natural landmarks. Forster's lack of research about the Barabar caves, in this vein, is truly in line with the disfigurements that mainstream writers have often passed off as facts in their travelogues and novels. "…it is the style of conqueror who is here the guilt-ridden conqueror but the conqueror nonetheless" (Kael qtd in. Kellow, p 323).

IV.3. Opting for the Lean Charge in the Film Adaptation

In a 2012 book entitled *"Filming Forster: The Challenges of Adapting Forster's Novels"*, Earl G. Ingersoll reveals in the chapters the challenges that the British Filmmaker, David Lean, had to confront on his journey of filming *A Passage to India*, and what a jagged journey this one seemed to be. From Forster's abstinent rejections of all candidates who wanted to adapt his novel into film format to Lean's requisite struggles that also included jumping through several hoops of legal interferences with the project, the process of filming *A Passage* was no less gruelling a task than that of its original authorship. A considerable amount of this difficulty had to do with Forster's reluctance to give the custody of his artistic child to another artist, especially one coming from a different industry that is almost completely foreign to him. One can understand how deeply the writer was concerned about the alteration of his intended portrayal of the Anglo-Indian lifestyle during his visit. If his book were to be rewritten into a Hollywood screenplay, the possibility of changing some of his politically inclined remakes was likely to occur.

Moreover, Many previous novels, especially those written in foreign destinations by Western novelists, and dealing with multicultural themes unfamiliar to a majority of the audience, are ultimately revised just to beguile and grab the interest of American viewers, the core targeted audience of a film adaptation. Hutcheon contends that the main consumers of interest in a Hollywood film are always going to belong to the Western World before reaching the rest of the public, because "adaptations are so much a part of Western culture" (Hutcheon, p 2), ingrained in its history deeply.

Pearl S. Buck's historical fiction, *The Good Earth (1931)*, is a living example of what Forster and others believe to be a scandalous treatment of their craft. The 1937 adaptation of a Chinese-based drama narrative felt completely whitewashed, as director Sidney Franklin opted

to hire American actors in order to play all the leading roles, which consisted mainly of Chinese characters. The 'yellow-faced', Asian-ised cast seen on screen did not age too well over time. More importantly, Franklin's decision to keep the story slightly digestible for his viewers, by allowing a perfectly English-speaking cast to portray a presumable lifestyle in China, lacked the authenticity and respect that Buck's novel was credited for by several critics.

Similar crude strategies of remodelling intercultural novels to make them live up to the misconstrued expectations of the filmmakers' targeted spectators continued to spur out of careless interest in the authors' original accounts. Powder-faced white actors took on the roles of Malaysian characters in Emilio Salgari's *Sandokan* series, which revolves around a Malaysian hero whose adventures extend across the globe. The 1963 film, *Sandokan the Great,* pulled the same stunt by centring the story around the famous American actor and bodybuilder, Steve Reeves, whose brown-make makeup was not enough to cover his out-of-place performance.

Initially, in Forster's case, Santha Rama Rau, an Indian-born American playwright, wanted to prove her qualifications as a worthy new caretaker for the novel first on stage, and this quickly made her warm up to the idea of writing a script for a motion picture. After witnessing the success of Rau's 1960 faithful theatrical production, the novelist was reassured by the audio-visual potential his novel would have if vested in the right hands. The prospect of the novel being conveyed into a more vivid, life-like shape was, in the end, too enticing to ignore. The baby steps taken towards a full-fledged film seemed, for a period of time, well on their way to reaching the big Hollywood theatre. Sadly, the passing away of Forster in 1970 was bound to undermine the list of worthy directors that the author kept ashore. The unfortunate incident reopened the hunt for the rights to direct his novel, and David Lean was ahead of the pack. His unmatched persistence against Forster's rejections and later his confident pestering of the author's estate executors and trustees during one of their meetings earned him the chance

to become a top shot-caller who would have much larger control over the production of the screen adaptation (Ingersoll, p 27).

Not only did Lean write his own screenplay, ignoring Rau's own draft that was supposed to be a condition set by the executors before giving Lean the green light, but he also made it clear that he was aiming for more than one Academy Award with his project. He wanted to rely purely on his artistic wits. The British producer, John Brabourne, was well aboard to support Lean's stubborn and aggressive charge, even if that meant forcing a concession of the creative writing authority from Rau and allowing Lean to re-imagine the story without any outside interference. To Lean, fans of the novel, like Rau, might have had a better grasp of the book content than he did, but they did not have enough knowledge of the art of cinematography. Indeed, when comparing the two types of screenplays, especially in terms of dialogue, the differences become gradually evident. For one, the Theatrical dialogues are far too dependent on the dramatic staged movement of the performers, and the tidiness of the lines delivered. The verbal exchanges are usually imagined with the objective of avoiding any overlapping or stuttering from characters. A limited number of words and gestures are granted to the actors under the condition that they wait for their turn. They are therefore confined by the conventional rigidness of the playwriting. Furthermore, as Debra Fried notes:

> …movie dialogue is not destined to be contextualised in successive and different performances. [It] does not need to be protected for repeated recitings as does stage dialogue (…); however, many takes may be required to get the performance the director wants, by one set of players in one setting (…) We must assume, then, that when dialogue in film obeys the rules of 'floor apportionment' control inherited from dialogue in the theatre, it does so for its own reasons. (Fried, p 295)

Knowing that Forster's novel depends heavily on social exchanges, dialogues would be the centrepiece of his film adaptation. Brabourne would go on to call Rau's initial attempt at a film script a "disastrous [text], too wordy and literary (…). In short, it just wasn't a script" (Brabourne qtd in Ingersoll, p 29-30). The fleshed-out new screenplay that Lean wrote was bound to feel more adequate for screening. More importantly, he believed that it highlighted what was needed to reel in the Hollywood crowd, which Forster's original novel lacked to a great extent. Rau did not care as much about catering to the interests of the viewers as long as the result adhered to Forster's vision. Brabourne admitted, this was at least a very admirable thing worth crediting, especially knowing that the process of rewriting the conversational scenes of any novel becomes an even more demanding task, knowing that the screenwriter's main purpose is to capture the spirit of the novelist while isolating any white noise (qtd. in Ingersoll, p 29).

Lean could be argued to be more adamant in listening to that white noise. He believed that viewers cheered for originality on screen, and so he chose to add his own touch instead of attempting a quick and generic rinse-and-repeat strategy. This ultimately led to a fresh, yet highly controversial retelling of Forster's diasporic venture. Many critics viewed his film as an egotistical power trip on the part of the filmmaker, wanting only to impose his dominance over the story and removing, in the process, any novelistic thread that might harm his creativity. In other words, he wanted to make viewers enjoy *A Passage to India* first as a Lean production and not as a Forster novel.

This manifestation of hubris in the process of film adaptation is anything but new to the industry; Kamilla Elliot defends it as a trait that has become increasingly required from adapters who hope to reach a comfortable level of fame. She exclaims: "Adaptations commit the heresy of showing that expression can be separated from content (…) Pacing can be

transformed, the focal point of view in the novel can shift completely…" (Elliot qtd in Hutcheon, p. 11).

Creating these mutations depends on two factors: the filmmaker's willingness to demolish chunks of infrastructure, starting with the narrative foundation of the source material. As a result, the adapter has to choose which threads of fidelity that initially bind the two art forms need to be severed. The second factor focuses on the influence of the film business. Adapters are forced to consider what works best financially for the industry's market. Adaptations, therefore, can, at times, set a hierarchy of art expression, competing over which work tells the better version of the same story by comparing revenue figures. It is a crass capitalist-induced competition and ignores the thematic harmony between the two versions of storytelling. Nevertheless, while film adaptations only concern themselves with the trending, periodic state of Hollywood, one has to admit that they still contribute to "the survival of their source novels" (Stem qtd. in Hutcheon, p 301). Lean's film, in this case, is a strong proof of that kind of novel plugging when looking at Forster's still-breathing, and arguably continuously proliferating[25], legacy.

IV.3.1. Lean's Romantic Auditing of the Original Story

At first glance, David Lean's 1984 film adaptation looks like it turned out to be a minor form of rehashing applied to the original text, despite previews condemning Lean's Artistic narcissism. It is true that the British filmmaker had shown an early, strong desire to direct Forster's work, and after the release of the final cut, it would seem to anyone unfamiliar with

[25] Following the more recent adaptations and references made around E.M Forster's novels, it is possible to make the argument that the 20th century British author is still relevant today. From the newest Peackock TV comedy show "*The Paper*" making an entire episode on discussing Forster's novel, *A Room with a View*, to the same novel greatly inspiring an upcoming Musical Broadway show under the direction of Cody Gerszewski. For more recent news around Forster's mentions, see: https://www.imdb.com/fr/name/nm0286950/news/

Lean's actual feelings towards Forster that he actually wrote a screenplay intended to be worthy of the author's blessing. Despite removing Rau from the picture, the demonstrated ambition to carefully oversee every stage of the production has influenced many reviewers to overlook. The praise granted to Lean as a result overshadowed much of the criticism that attacked his significant change of direction from the book, calling it a project of both a passionate cinephile and an avid reader at work.

This, unfortunately, is only half the truth. While Lean happens to mostly like *A Passage to India* in its raw format, he does not share the same appreciation for Forster's persona. The disagreements between the author and the filmmaker were recorded at an early stage of the production and were eventually exposed to the public. The begrudging history that festered between the two was enough to revert some of the earlier supportive critics' opinions back to the impression collected before the release of the film, calling Lean an opportunist who profited from spurring a fake rivalry with the author to promote his own work. Cast under this new light, A more in-depth look at some of the film's elusive scenes and controversial decisions that the director stuck by, generated significantly different interpretations of the revisited tale compared to those made about the source material.

After calling Forster's novel in one of his early interviews the work of a "queer," who he believes must have been met with the disapproval of both English and Indian readers (Qtd. Kennedy p 31-32), to Lean, the extensive focus on exploring both external and internal tensions has robbed the work of its romantic potential. He believed that his film would be far detached from the textual focus of colonial discourse. *A Passage to India,* the book, reads after all like a complicated and, at times, extravagant love venture of a young English woman who travels East to marry her betrothed, Ronny, but becomes enthralled with passion for another Indian character instead due to the aphrodisiac effect the environment has on her. Arthur Lindley believes that the eager filmmaker wanted to bring a romantic feeling to what he imagined as a

forcefully anti-romantic story of Forster (p 62). The author created a promising blueprint about a hybrid lovers' entanglement story, but wrote stiffly about it and went the extra mile to cover its flirtatious cries. This only made for a fanciful, romantic side hibernating under the seriousness of the politically charged main story. Lean thus wanted to present the hidden, fantastic, and complicated amorous tale of what *A Passage to India* is supposed to look like.

Instead of parodying the real caves like Forster did, Lean attributed a certain charm to the Marabar location, celebrating its mysterious imprint on tourists instead of emphasising their disappointments. The landmark in this film is made to look effortlessly charming under the mixed excitement and nervousness of the characters. More importantly, Lean had made it its objective to recast Forster's characters, considering them unfit for Hollywood's glamour, something that he thought every modern viewer would happily relish while watching the film. "Ronny's red nose has been replaced by the more presentably Roman beak of Nigel Haver (…) the Raj is larger, handsomer, younger and/or more highly polished than in the original…" (Annan, p 5). An expensive set of garments has also been chosen to bring a more pompous and clean setting. The choice of clothing of the characters does not reflect the washed-off and dirty venues that Forster portrayed in his work, and they certainly do not mimic the getup of excursionists who had been walking through grubby jungles or rocky hills. Lean, while liking the touristic elements of the source material, wanted to highlight the aesthetically induced, highly emotional social exchanges that the characters share. The adaptation does not exclude the panoramic eye-candy shots from its script, but makes them more entwined with the changing mental state of Adela Quested.

Dusting off the characters' images that figure in the original text by bringing up-and-coming celebrities to the screen is probably Lean's most prominent personal contribution in the re-imagining of Forster's *Passage to India*, and it does not just look to be a decision that came from merely wanting to sprinkle some Hollywood glitter on top of the classical story, either. It

is very noticeable that much of his casting choice also impacts the course of the events, adding a different perspective from that of the original journey. Lindley calls out this in his article:

> …Lean is intent on exorcising the stick Adela and conjuring the heroine Forster has cruelly denied him. Adela's is now the first and last face we see in the film, thanks to two extratextual scenes Lean has supplied as a frame. Since the first of these shows Adela booking her P&O passage to India, it effectively confines the reference of the title to her experience, in keeping with a general tendency to subordinate other major characters to her. (Lindley, p 62)

The majority of the scenes are shot from Adela's vantage point. Aziz gets a few moments of camera focus, but most of the story is influenced by Adela's interpretation of the events, from the beginning, where she is booking a trip to India, to the end of the film, where she is seen leaving the frame outside of the court with the company of Cyril Fielding. Adela could be argued as the protagonist in Lean's story. I would extend that reasoning to a main character that is easier on the eye for the immersion of Western viewers. She represents an ideal outlet through which Lean was able to channel his admiration for Hollywood's gimmicked enchantments.

Despite what people might consider as a Hollywood effect taxing the film of realistic immersion, there is still much to be admired about Lean's adaptation. The director does not try to play to Forster's strengths by bringing characters close to the author's acquaintances or experiences. He attempts to incorporate fragments of his own world instead, being also an occasional traveller who had visited India, Lean saw the country differently; a place of great wonder but also of exciting oddities. Because of this, "[h]e enlarges the scale of Forster's irony, and the characters live in more sumptuous settings than we might have expected, but they live" (Kael). They still feel vivid enough for the build-up of the plot, and the artificiality of their

expensive, more Hollywood-like habits does not change the course of the story, at least until its closure.

The novel's more attached admirers would probably find the ending of the film unsatisfactory and leaving much to be desired. Aziz's decision to completely cut ties with his once cherished English friend, Fielding, is never rationalised properly. All that the viewers witness in the last minutes of the film is the two solid friends parting ways abruptly without any exchange of words. More importantly, the highlight of the trial's aftermath is that Adela's fate is set to a great extent on her bravery in confessing her own mistakes, instead of Aziz's change of views about the British settlers. This feels almost like an attempt at avoiding any post-colonial discourse, but in doing so, the final scenes encapsulate the denouement of the tourist and the settler's worries rather than those of the native. Aziz's damaged reputation and mental state are left unattended, as if not worth following up on.

Everything after the trial that is supposed to generate a new sensation of cultural entanglement is toned down here in the last scenes, to offer the old generic formula of a happy ending. On the surface, everyone wins at the end of the film. Aziz comes out of the trial redeemed and victorious, regaining his freedom against a corrupt system of justice. The viewers see a crowd of Indians chanting "Esmiss Esmoor", giving Miss Moor credit for the miraculous verdict of innocence that had been blessed upon Aziz. As a result, the absent Moore, who leaves India instead of helping the accused, ascends instead to a Guardian Angel that watches over her friend and his peers. Both Fielding and Quested leave together, hinting at a possible romantic relationship opening between the two. The unresolved loose ends are muffled by an end-credit chiming music, as if reassuring the viewers of a permanently stagnant moment of celebration cemented in those last few frames.

This romantic, idealised closure is exactly what Forster made sure to avoid. The film not only diminishes the importance of a harmonious coexistence between English settlers and Indian Native Americans, but it also chooses to preserve the tense and irreparable hostility that defines their relationship. As a result, it normalises the post-colonial hierarchy of power that still resides in the country, making light of the intercultural lines of accord that were attempted to be established at the beginning of the story. Lean's romanticism might be enjoyable to watch, but it comes off as a manipulative depiction that keeps the spotlight on the Caucasian characters most of the time. In my opinion, it makes Lean's happy closure, an artificial magic trick born out of narrative irrationality and social gaps, but masqueraded just enough by Hollywood tropes, lightning music, and close-ups on the celebrating characters' faces, to elevate the actual tension that remains unaddressed between all the parties involved.

IV.3.2. Lean's Adaptation under Audience Scrutiny

There is no denying the large fandom that Lean's film was able to cultivate over the years following its release. *A Passage to India* was as much of a highly successful, acclaimed historical production as Lean's previous iconic film, *Lawrence of Arabia*. Some of the early reviews took notice of the British filmmaker's obstination to create another career-defining cornerstone through this adaptation, and the audience of the eighties recognised the 'Lean' passion that was exuding from what some would define as a love for Eastern diasporic storytelling. If the film adaptation's objective was not to bow down to the novel's debated superiority and instead catapult Lean back into Hollywood's limelight, then, in the opinion of American Journalist Robert Ebert, that goal had been reached with ease. He states:

> It is one of the greatest adaptations I have ever seen. (...) Lean places these characters in one of the most beautiful canvases he has ever drawn (...) He doesn't see the India of travel posters and lurid postcards (...) Lean makes India look like an amazing, beautiful place that an Englishman can never quite put his finger on — which is, of course, the lesson Miss Quested learns in the caves. (Ebert)

Considering that Ebert's review was among the earliest ones to have come out on the film after its release in 1984, praising the cinematography and the screenplay's structuring of events is to be expected from the period's high interest in good-looking, expensive scenes. The luscious camera shots that Lean exhibits complement the cast's great performances to the point where a beautiful painting comes to mind when comparing it with other movies on a scale of picturesque elegance. Julie Michot further asserts the great care that was devoted to making the settings part of the story's foreshadowing in a 1984 article. She illustrates the parallel change of aesthetic environment around Adela in her trip to India when she and Moore first meet Mrs.Turton, "…Lean moves the camera to an out-of-the-window view of moonlight on water. The mysterious night is crosscut by Miss Turton [and her famous statement] 'East is East'(…). The editing pattern of an adventurous conflict is being set up: The English inside, the Indian outside" (Michot, p 6).

What is interesting, though, is the more recent general temperaments published in the last few decades, which sum up a different take, less favourable in the eyes of a contemporary, highly judgmental audience. In a 2024 review entitled *Reeling Backwards*, Christopher Lloyd argues that the film is a strong downgrade from the book, mainly because it "commits the cardinal sin of not knowing who its main character is. Instead, its theme about the irretrievably broken relationship between the British and their subject Indians becomes its lacklustre centrepiece." (Lloyd) While many critics and reviewers suggest that Lean had set his eyes on

Adela from the start, choosing to make her the heroine in his film, Lloyd contends that this choice defeats the purpose behind the story's closure and therefore simply cannot work.

In other words, he believes that if Adela is truly meant to be the main character, she does a lousy job in her actual contribution to the progress of the story. This is because the character does not form enough of an impactful friendship with any of the Indian characters who have a weight on the overall Anglo-Indian relationship. Neither Godbole nor Aziz confess any desire to befriend Adela. Their exchanges are always confined by diplomatic formalities, which strips the social interaction involving Adela off the interest that the viewers are supposed to bear for the growing transnational companionship.

In his novel, Forster accentuates the casualness with which Aziz and Fielding address each other, facilitating the identification of the two main characters in his story. Adela, in the novel, is more of an honourable mention than a valid case for that role. Their dissociation after the trial represents a rupture in the larger ties that initially joined the two nations. Throughout the story, Forster continues his attempts to keep the friendship between Aziz and Fielding alive and even tries to fix their dispute during the Hindu concession. Rectifying some of the misunderstandings that the two central characters have gathered about one another after the tarnishing trial of Aziz, in a way. These attempts constitute a recurrent motif that distinguishes Forster's intercultural journey from other attempts at foreign contact. Lean almost completely ignores this motif and brushes it off as an unnecessary route that only ruins the fun in the story, exactly what Forster warned his peer artists about: not to drown in the artificiality and shallowness of exciting happy endings.

Arguably, the most controversially argued decision made by Lean, however, is the casting of the English actor, Alec Guinness, in the role of Godbole. To some people, the brown makeup worn felt out of place most of the time; the performer, simply put, failed to pull off a

convincing Indian character, and a Hindu scholar at that. American critic, Seth Steele, exclaimed in a 2018 review the same discomfort that many viewers felt seeing Guinness parade a fake Indian accent on screen, he writes: "…every time he came on screen I cringed (…) While I do appreciate that Viktor Banerjee was cast as Aziz, it makes it awkward when he is standing next to a look-alike Indian" (Steele)

These reviews clearly did not communicate the same positive impression as the ones mentioned above, and the difference between the two opposite poles is, I suggest, their focus of scrutiny. Those who thought well of the adaptation happen to concentrate on the camera work and aesthetic of the film and ease up, by consequence, on the lack of intercultural knowledge and the source's thematic fidelity that Lean displays, while the second category of reviews does not give the filmmaker the same due diligence. Considering the fact that the Indian lifestyle that Forster worked for years to capture constitutes a big part of his narrative's plot, to ignore the personal inconsistencies found in the way Lean depicts the Indian characters and environment was bound to provoke a public backlash, especially from an audience familiar with Indian customs and people. These more recent takes are coming from educated viewers who have grown more conscious of Hollywood's devious strategies of foreign impressions, imposing a sense of 'soft power' on the rest of the world while pleading their intentions of generating light, cynical and comedic effects by poking childlike fun at the outside world.

Joseph Nye explains this strategy of imposing this type of power on the rest of the world as opposed to depending on a form of violence to achieve the authority's purpose. He exclaims: "It [Soft power] is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced" (Nye, p X).

Soft power is exercised by the most dominant corporate distribution companies in the USA, 'powerful oligopolies,' as Richard De Zoysa and Otto Newman refer to them, who continue to advertise an overall contemporary Western lifestyle, bad ideals that dismiss other cultures different from those of Western peripheries, as mere indigenous sub-existences (Zoysa, Newman, p 196).

The world outside the United States and Europe, through this condescending, privileged gaze, in my opinion, is always treated as a continuous running gag that the rest of the world is encouraged to be amused by, because it promotes inherited inferiority as 'a dismissive sobriquet, 'infotainment'" (Newman, Zoysa, p 198). The soft control that Hollywood corporations enforce on a global audience, naturally, requires the participation of their consumers to maintain this outlined normalcy. It is just like the same subtle European imperial strategies that were once used to promote the concept of a 'Manichean division[26]' during a time of aggressive colonisation. "The gulf between the rich and the poor and externally between core and peripheral nations, extends into information and cultural exchange", and by blurring the hierarchy between the themes of the format of a screen production, local audiences are persuaded by the authenticity of marketed stereotypes" (Newman, Zoysa, p 198).

It is fair to describe Lean as another creative wielder of this more subtle imperial strategy. On the surface, his film shines bright with a highly acclaimed set of performances taking place inside of an attractive and beautiful Eastern painting, but underneath its visible charm, the Indian culture slowly dissipates as the story gets nearer to the trial. It leaves only

[26] Franz Fanon makes recurrent references to the reinforced coloniser's concept of a 'Manichean world' in his critical work, *The Wretched of the Earth (1961)*. It is used as a core argument that separates Africans from Europeans under the pretext that the former race harbour all of the despicable characteristics in humankind: Blackness therefore refers to poverty, corruption, evil, cannibalism and everything else that stand against the height of righteous civilisation. This division is also a form of justification to the European coercions and violence committed in the continent of Africa.

room for the generic mockery that is inserted in many scenes. At some point, the viewers attend alongside Adela what could only be described as a circus-like riot on their way to court. A native dressed in a monkey suit throws branches at Adela's car while hanging on a tree and sneering at her in a primate voice. He is eventually pulled down by Indian law enforcers and beaten up to a pulp (Lean,1:55:02-1:55:24). Although the scene is meant to provoke a sense of shock and even terror in the viewers' minds, it remains among the many scenes that critics choose to label as a form gritty dark humour, Lean's bold way of keeping the audience entertained. Equally as condescending to the significance and customs of Indians is the focus of close-up shots taken of naked statues and extravagant drawings, as if capturing a magical temple deep within the jungles of India that invites an awakening of sexual fantasies into the minds of its visitors.

Such scenes not only desecrate the sanctity and practices of the natives that are highly commemorated within the country, but they also push an image of India as exotic and as prejudiced as the ones captured through superficial descriptions of the older European travel logs. Lean's adaptation is at its core an interpretation of a foreign landscape, romanticised and caricaturised. To an American consciousness, it is an appealing spectacle because it sheds a stronger spotlight on the visitor's mindset rather than that of the visited. It is a piece of art that makes unfamiliar Indian territorial peculiarities encountered by the character look to the bystander like an inferior, primitive oddity. An India that is only there to pique the curiosity of the highly civilised tourists and hold it for as long as possible before it loses its mask. Forster's original story, by comparison, comes from the perspective of a dull tourist who does not enjoy the scenery the way Lean does. Therefore, his India is of little serious interest to the viewers despite his genuine proclamations and greater efforts at conveying authenticity.

Conclusion

Much of the backlash that Forster's story has received over the years might be argued as an overblown attack planned against the writer due to the influence of the few essentialist members belonging to a larger post-colonial criticism movement. As reviews continued to pummel over the author's character and nationality rather than his thematic objectives, the undeserved reproval that *A Passage to India* has garnered looks more to be the result of a politically charged witch-hunt for the European travellers of the 20th century than a campaign to rectify any disparaging stereotypes. Forster's fictional Chandrapore has been described as a downgrade to the more popular destination of Bombay, but in reality, the fictional landscape is relied upon as an objectionable, isolated territory for foreign criticism and opinion to be expressed without directly targeting any Indian real-life whereabouts. This narration strategy helped the author provide, what I believe, is a genuine personal feedback around India's uneven scenery, fluttering between magnificent, picturesque landmarks and diluted, colourless venues. The novel's setting is thus a blend of many locations that Forster had previously visited and collected his thoughts around.

Despite serving as an unbound realm for an inspired Eastern environment, however, the imaginary city Chandrapore also sets further scrutiny around the author, when he further delves into segments of comparison between English settlements and native ones. In moments of what might perhaps be interpreted as unintentional contrasting, Forster fails to contain his imperial judgment, tarnishing as a result the holy significance and the cultural codes that Indians hold towards their land. The Marabar caves come off as a subtle parody of the real site. The decrepit, un-charming impression that the author had formed around them during his travel gradually overshadows narrative scenes of friendly companionships and wholesome interactions. He instead promotes them at the central subject of a defaming trial, becoming the display case in the second half of his story.

The aftermath of visiting the caves leads to insinuations of a breach in European guidelines of tourism. The real India to Forster is charming enough, but the caves are not for the Caucasian eye's enjoyment. His affable attempts at exploring the conceivability of Anglo-Indian harmony, aside from his baseless disparagement of the caves, should be credited nevertheless. The lack of sugar-coating and the insistence on probability could be seen as tokens of honest interest in the discourse of future cosmopolitan living. The vivid, complicated portrayal of intercultural conversations sets *A Passage to India* in a category of its own. It is a thorny and rough form of contact imagined between Aziz and Cyril, different from the generic, shallow harmonisations of past Western writers. The latter group often focused on creating over-lasting friendships with little to no concern for the coloniser/colonised begrudging relationship.

Compared to Forster, Lean re-imagines an overall aesthetically pleasing journey on screen. Despite his wonderful cinematography that captures a beautiful environment, with less ordinary-looking characters and more photogenic ones worthy of Hollywood's magnetic marketing, Lean's interpretation of the Indian culture casts a less inviting space. With a similar set of Western tropes used to encase the Eastern culture and lifestyle as an aboriginal, and times comical, touristic exhibition, Lean's more exotic approach in the film adaptation proves to be a less genuine attempt at conveying the challenges that can be faced within transnational communications. The 'soft power' that Lean exercises is felt in the whitewashing of Indian characters like Godbole, played degradingly by Alec Guinness and the sexualised landmarks of India. The same goes for his other Indian characters; the natives' presence, other than Aziz, is felt unimportant and glossed over in the second half of the film. Setting a heavier focus on Adela and Cyril Fielding in their heroic stand against their racist English contemporaries.

This shows that despite the magical realism introduced by Forster in his book in the form of pandering hallucinations that Adela struggles to deflate, and as a somewhat

compensation for the lack of excitement in the novel, the story's prospect in its raw form remains unfulfilling for the television spectators' cravings, without the over-the-top romantic extravaganza set in Lean's story. The expectations set for a more faithful film adaptation when it was in the hands of the Indian playwright Santha Rama Rau were leaning towards an unfit production for motion picture admirers and more designed for stage performances.

Therefore, the more recent reviews revolved around a re-watching of the film from a contemporary standpoint, revealing a superficially disposed re-telling of Forster's narrative, one that reinforces the stereotypical beliefs about both the people and their nation instead of using materials from the author's authentic bumpy expedition. *A Passage to India* has been translated into a Westernised version through an American Hollywood production to please their local viewers, and hoping to extend those favourable first impressions by distracting the rest of the world's audience through visual glitters and pacifying background music. This strategy has become the trademark of the American film industry, but its dismissive interpretations of marginalised cultures have become more visible over time due to growing awareness of the industry's influence on the cultural world.

Chapter Five: Sci-Fi Escapism in Herbert's *Dune* and Villeneuve's Two-Part Screen Adaptation of the First Book

Introduction

There are several novels that have earned the notorious particularity of being called "unfilmable[27]" on any-sized motion screen over the years. Frank Herbert's science fiction epic, *Dune,* is one of those novels known as a challenging work to visualise outside of its original textual frame, and yet this label was eventually proven wrong after the release of Denis Villeneuve's 2021 and 2024 adaptations of the first book in the series. From the unexpected success of its first instalment in 1965, the *Dune* series would go on to become a hallmark for post-apocalyptic narratives. The un-organic Deus Ex Machina[28] of previously known literary resolutions that included the coexistence of artificial intelligence and human life would not only be appalled here, but entirely removed from the audience's expectations of an ending. *Dune* is often described as an ecological science fiction saga. It tells of a futuristic journey on a planet entirely made out of sand, but along the way, Herbert takes the opportunity to insert certain political, religious, and cultural references in his fictional work. These subtle nods to human reality include a heavy focus on Middle Eastern culture and the religion of Islam, but they are captured under the unique 'novums' of science fiction. His long storyline thus takes on a nuanced, multi-layered shape where Herbert's real perceptions towards such subjects are hidden under a dense, creative system of alien prevalence.

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[27] In 2021, an article published in The Ringer Magazine by Ben Lindbergh described the year 2021 as the ending point for "Unfilmables novels". Lindbergh argued that *Dune,' 'The Foundation,' and 'The Wheel of Time* have proven that nuanced fictional works can indeed be captured on the screen with the right set of cameras and enough creative vision. See: https://www.theringer.com/2021/12/22/year-in-review/the-end-of-unfilmable-ip-dune-foundation-wheel-of-time

[28] *Deus Ex Machina* is originally a greek expression that translates to "god from the machine". In literary studies it is often used when referring to a sudden instance of resolve that untangles a long build-up of complicated events. This type of solution is usually arrived at through one crucial moment, or a sudden decision taken by a character that would lead to an overall denouement of the novel's main plot.

This chapter will investigate the role that the thematic elements serve in hiding Herbert's messages within the deep levels of his long-nurtured story. While using theories of science fiction escapism and seeming de-orientalisation, I will attempt to look at the amount of success Herbert finds in covering his personal thoughts and biases through his storytelling by examining the reviews that tackle the versatile themes of *Dune*. I will also investigate the textual boundaries that are crossed in order to compare the concealment of fictional writing with those of Villeneuve's own original strategies of screen adaptation and remake. The purpose behind this is to determine the degree of impact that such methods have on attempting to build a positive reception, devoid of the critics' backlash.

V.1. Blurring the Boundaries between Reality and Fiction in Herbert's *Dune*

To build an immersive world that escapes the mundane rendering of human reality is perhaps the ultimate goal that every science fiction writer aspires to achieve, but the desire to start from scratch without using any earthly elements could be detrimental to the general understanding of the narrative plot. John Pierce argues that a level of familiarity should always be maintained in such works since it serves as an important background itinerary for sci-fi enthusiasts, and more directly as a sanctum of comfort, for non-sci-fi readers who tend to get lost more easily in the vagueness of the extra-terrestrial explanations. "One of the main goals of world-building", he exclaims, "is to make the new world strange and different to readers, but still believable enough that they can and want to immerse themselves" (Pierce, p 99). This argument is strongly similar to the previous remark made by Marie-Laure Ryan[29]. Although Ryan focuses on the importance of maintaining a realistic infrastructure in world-building, the principles of creating a familiar foundation in all aspects of the story stand as a logical writing

[29]Refer to Chapter One, page 39.

decision when considering the readers' engagement as a top priority. Her ideas also support Pierce's more generalised remark about the genre.

The blend between the comfort of familiarity and the excitement that science fiction novelty has again and again proven itself to be a successful recipe in attracting larger communities for such estranged, futuristic stories. The works of Arthur C. Clarke, Douglas Adams, and Iain M. Banks are good examples of the level of appeal an outer space story is able to generate. By de-familiarising reality, such writers are able to give the impression that the reader has already travelled light years throughout the galaxy, crossing both space and time to reach new, yet oddly commonplace-feeling territories. American author Kim Robinson praises this quality in sci-fi, modern novels because he believes it imitates not only the relationships between individuals, but also between individuals and their history, as well as their planet (Robinson, 44:15-45:00). They help keep their audiences in a state of constant contemplation and critical assessment of their current times while in search for the significance behind the futuristic and often prophetic, forecasts made by their writers.

These assumptions, by consequence, are forced upon readers as the rules of this new futuristic, fictional epoch, or as Darko Suvin refers to them, the 'novums' of an estranged space where problems of reality are offered potential solutions to be contemplated, but are only effective if one respects the rationalised conditions of the sci-fi world at hand. Suvin extrapolates on the idea by saying: "perhaps a labour-saving and nature-saving society would also need novums (…) the incantatory use of the Novum category as explanation rather than formulation of a problem has to be firmly rejected. Novum is as novum does: it does not supply justification, it demands justification. Where is the progress progressing to?" (Suvin 18-19). Science fiction pushes for such solutions in the hopes of reaching practical, real-life resolutions.

On the other hand, the more abstract a science fiction work becomes, the more niche and cultish kind of audience it is going to attract. The objective of many writers who at least

dabble in such a genre is mainly to expand their fandoms as much as possible, but that does not always necessarily require catering to the preferences of the unfamiliar, novice readers. Albeit all works of this nature require a touch of realism. The balance reached between fiction and reality is just relatively different in each work. From complex science fiction stories to softer ones, reality remains all the same, buried somewhere underneath their alien settings. When the blend works well, it makes the distinction between fact and fiction almost as organically invisible to the perception of its enjoyers, at times, as that of a theatre's lifelike performance,

This is the case for Frank Herbert's fictional ecosystem, as well. Arrakis is an entirely independent planet, separate from Earth, but it encapsulates the earthly biome of the desert as an outer space environment, very similarly to the real thing. As a result, the reader can easily imagine himself transported to *Dune's* settings, assuming the role of a traveller in a sandy landscape, just as dry and as difficult to manage as the real Sahara desert. On this planet, the author constantly stresses how precious the water is. The lack of this natural resource and the constant need for its careful and un-wasteful consumption affect the traveller's pace of movement and even decisions throughout the story. Moreover, the exceptionally high temperature of the planet constantly keeps the characters on their toes. The Fremen, the natives of Arrakis, can be compared to the Arab nomads, both in their physical attire and system of belief. They are portrayed as well-experienced people who were able to hone vital survival methods of roaming the desert over the course of multiple generations, avoiding the dangers of getting lost in its vastness.

The imaginative tropes the Fremen use could be perceived as conceivable tactics for the unfamiliar, gullible reader. The 'still suits' both Fremen and outsiders wear to save up their water supply by recycling their bodies' moisture is one of many well-thought-out safety measures. If such a type of audience were told this equipment actually exists in real life, or at least is inspired by other similar, efficient space technology, it would not seem too much of an

outlandish concept. As it happens, Herbert's 'still suits' are very similar to early theoretical prototypes of astronaut outfits, designed specifically for Martian expeditions. In such a context, one can imagine the plausibility of these suits existing, helping astronauts survive the suffocating heat of the red planet by saving their oxygen in spare containers. Not only that, but the spaceship filtering fluid system is already an available and up-to-date technology indispensable to the safety of all astronauts. The functionality of this system was included in one of NASA's briefings:

> There is an entire closed-loop system onboard the [International Space Station] dedicated to water (…). Astronaut wastewater is captured, such as urine, sweat, or even the moisture from their breath. Then, impurities and contaminants are filtered out of the water. The final product is potable water that can be used to rehydrate food, bathe, or drink. Repeat. (qtd. in. Loeffler)

Herbert thus sticks by a familiar rationale that people can relate to, instead of making up new rules that would transform preconceived knowledge about the real habitat. He makes *Dune* look like a logically based Martian desert. Away from any far-fetched, ambiguous lifestyle, he prefers to keep the origins behind his storytelling safely grounded in our reality, yet he is still able to create a sense of over-the-horizon fantasy born out of its cracks. In the case of Herbert target audience, it is not just composed of sci-fi connoisseurs, but more importantly of the lesser experienced in the genre as confirmed in one his interviews: "…I write science fiction for people who don't read science fiction and people who read [it as well]" (Herbert, 0:53-1:00). The challenge of trying to appeal to both groups, makes *Dune* a story that attempt to achieve a stable fluctuation between realistic properties and extra-terrestrial ones, and it seems to have excelled greatly at that when looking at the series' continuous pulsating popularity.

What the general audience does not know about, especially in terms of the future of mankind, offers fertile soil for the imagination to do its sowing. As an example, the reader is

presented with the different cautious security measures that Arrakian Imperial houses employ early on in the story. Atreides, Fremen, Harokonnens, and even the later introduced race of the Bene Tleilax all take enormous care to conceal their inner state affairs from outsiders. This leaves a scarcity of opportunities to spy on one another. The local secrets that these societies work so gruellingly to hide come at a heavy cost. None of them can scout or infiltrate the other houses' inner-domains that easily. The cause of that is the general fear that governs their intergalactic universe. It is a justified concern that grew with the history of past generations who had learned the risks of dealing with automated surveillance machines firsthand. Even remote drones or spying cameras are deemed dangerous to the safety of the planet. In this far future, Artificial Intelligence has become too great a power to be harnessed by any humanoids. After demonstrating its ability to grow into a rebellious entity and claim control over other living beings, waging a war against its own inventors, it was abolished in the following millennia. Therefore, the lacklustre dependence on technology seems at first to render the spying game a rather primitive operation compared to our time.

It is almost as if the author re-imagines a Cold War that would prove itself slightly colder in a distant, mechanically unequipped future; or, in *Dune's* case, hotter. Due to the technophobia that had taken a toll on the survival of *Dune*'s imperium, everyone is forced to rely on less advanced equipment, like spying chambers with secret holes strategically placed into walls, and a defensive energy shield that can protect the fighters from heavy and quick physical attacks during close combat. On the other hand, the challenges of introducing moles inside any fictional imperial houses, or including depictions of unorthodox methods used to plan an inside coup against one of the families, are bound to create some entertaining plot twists. This is first demonstrated through the exploitation of Dr Wellington Yueh, a trusted

physician close to Leto, the duke of House Atreides[30]. Despite having been mentally conditioned to be incapable of harm against Atreides citizens, the supposed good friend of Leto's family is eventually threatened into doing Vladimir Harkonnen[31]'s bidding after the doctor's wife gets captured and tortured by Harkonnen troops. Yueh deceives Leto and is later delivered to his sworn enemies, but not without a last resolution, which is to try to take down Vladimir with him. As he is handed a deadly poison inserted inside one of his artificial teeth, Leto bites on the tooth, trying to take down as many foes as possible during his last moments (Herbert, p 322). This is one among many instances of ingenious infiltration used to show the audience that espionage and treason can still survive without the reliance on the latest cutting-edge technology. The old-fashioned hostage taking strategies and diplomatic threats are considered vital in executing plans of invasion. More importantly, violating the prohibition laws of relying on automated devices is also slowly incorporated and explored in the sequels of the series.

It is possible to analyse these types of granted contexts as small-scale imaginative creations that illustrate a level of slow and careful threading in this anti-technocrat vision of a human future. Herbert gradually attempts to introduce the more fictive constituents of his world to the readers without rushing into the complicated abstract aspect awaiting ahead, such as the later metamorphosis of Paul's son, Leto II, into half a sandworm and half a humanoid in *Children of Dune*. He also untangles layers of complex conspiracies while keeping all descriptions that spur out his imagination well coherent and closely monitored by the laws of

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[30] House Atreides is the homeland of the protagonist, Paul Atreides in *Dune*. The Atreides lived originally on a planet called Caladan, but they were eventually given control over spice mining on Arrakis and the father of Paul became the new Duke of the planet under the Padishah Emperor's orders.

[31] Vladimir Harkonnen is the ruler of house Harkonnen on planet Giedi Prime. In Herbert's first instalment, the Harkkonnens conspire to take control over the spice of Arrakis, by planning an attack against the current Duke, which leads to the death of Paul's father, Leto Atreides I, and the escape of both Paul and his mother into the deep desert.

reason. Psychological conditioning, prescient visions, Mentats: the human equivalent of computers, and remote hunter-seekers[32] are all examples of Herbert giving his readers a slow, unveiling look at potential paradoxical dangers that could materialise within a future society. One that cannot fully ascertain the magnitude of damage Artificial intelligence is capable of doing, especially when it is put on steroids. Although reluctantly and without direct focus, Herbert makes it clear that machines are also going to be used by Paul's enemies and even his future son, despite the greater risk they pose to the safety of the universe. Through these oxymoronic decisions taken through the cycles of change, Herbert predicts a clear dilemma for the future. Humans are faced with a choice of using the growing efficient properties of machines, knowing that they will eventually lead to their own demise.

This can be seen in Duncan Idaho's plotline as well. The constantly re-emerging character gets resurrected in the form of a ghola[33] after his death in the first book, allowing him to appear over and over again in the following sequels of *Dune*. Idaho eventually transforms into a sentient, intelligent existence in the sixth and final book of the series, *Dune: Chapterhouse*. The end scene shows a powerful clone version of a once faithful Atredeis pawn, having ascended to a prophet-like figure similar to Paul, a new Kwisatz Haderach. Idaho steals an invisible spaceship to escape the control of the Bene Gesserit and wanders off while holding to unmentioned future plans that may affect the entire fate of the galaxy. The later involvement of such instruments, although dreaded and considered to be some of the most immoral, forbidden acts an imperial house may commit, assumes the role of unspoken constraints and

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[32] Hunter Seekers are remote drones that requires of their pilot assassin to be in present within their range of movement before launching them towards their target. See the attempt at Paul's assassination in *Dune: Book One*, (Herbert, p 142-147)

[33] Gholas are the equivalent of artificially manufactured Frankenstein creatures in *Dune*. The Bene Tleilax is a race that makes great profits selling these clones, usually commissioned by houses to bring back vital characters, after re-animating their cadavers and re-engineering their mental states, gholas constitute dangerous puppet weapons in the hands of those who control them.

rules. As the story progresses, the audience understands more about the evolution of warfare strategies in this post-apocalyptic future. It shows that all rules are set to be broken and crossed, leading to constant shifts in the balance of power during different eras of Arrakian conflict.

Knowing that the story is set against the backdrop of mainstream sci-fi works that often envision a world where technology and scientific innovations become a friendly, inseparable part of the human world. It assumes a clear anti-machinery dystopian vision, one that rejects all possibilities of harmonious coexistence between the breathing human species and the non-breathing, metallic one. *Dune* suggests thus, a future far detached from what Dan Brown describes in his novel, *Origin,* as a time, "…in which breakthrough technologies [are] creating such an abundance of humankind's critical resources that warring over them would no longer be necessary" (Brown, p 484), to one of great energy resources scarcity and water deprivation. American essayist Timothy O'Reilly introduces this backwards vision of a future eloquently, as he exclaims:

> Imagine a world so dry that one man might kill another for the moisture in his body. From its deep desert, guarded by enormous, predatory sandworms, comes a spice with the power to prolong life and evoke visions of the future. Ten thousand worlds are dependent on that spice–a Galactic Empire, seemingly strong, but rigid and ruled by fear. One man stands against the desert and the Empire. Driven out into the sand to die, he promises the environmental transformation of the water-starved planet and unites its people in a holy war to seize control of the spice, the future, and the Empire. (O'Reilly, p 9)

What is more noticeable about *Dune's* futuristic setting, however, is the survival of religious sects and the thrive of prophesying fanatics. Paul is presented as the most mystified character in the novel; he is called by many names: The Kwisatz Haderach, Lisan al Gaib,

Mahdi, Usul. All of them are closely synonymous with his inherently chosen qualities of a Messiah. The spice-induced prescient power he owns goes against Hari Seldon's psychohistorical calculations that predict the future of planets in Asimov's *The Foundation*. They represent something far detached from scientific logic. It is true that there is a slight hint of eugenic breeding prospects and a certain psychedelic interest in the novel, but not enough to explain the great multitude of powers that Paul can tap into and suddenly change the outcome of any seemingly humankind-ending level of crisis.

Dune Part One and *Dune Messiah* both focus on the tale of a long-awaited, impactful figure who would end the war between imperial houses. He is prophesied to be a charismatic leader who would bring salvation for the long-plaguing drought that had radically brought down the population of the planet, but Paul turns into something beyond the expectations of both the Fremen and the Sisterhood of Bene Gesserit. He becomes an omniscient, all-sensory, high-end individual to the point where even blindness cannot stop him from seeing danger and sensing conspiring lies that hide behind the words of his double-agent advisors. The instances in which he topples plans of his own assassination are far too many. Some critics believe that this focus on spiritual convictions and the rise of human hope for such miracles is stimulated by a growing loss of trust in the benefits of technological progress. Religion is sometimes portrayed in the book as a working beacon of hope for the colonised and the oppressed Fremen natives, and it is evidenced by the powers of their prophet, Paul. At the same time, this devoted religion that Fremen would sacrifice themselves for is captured as an exploitable weakness and an opportunity for an attack by outsiders. It is especially used by the Bene Gesserit witches to plot their universe conquest through a shadow kind of feudal government.

The parallel similarities between European colonisations that had not only reached all territories of the world but also redrawn its map, and the Fremen falling under the mercy of

other houses, cannot be ignored either. Such an intricate and, at the same time, realistic system of politics in *Dune* has only been possible to imagine because of the great number of real-life prominent concerns that Herbert hints at and builds around in his world. On the surface, it is a story of planetary kingdoms fighting against each other for control of spice. On a deeper level, it makes great allusions to historical, cultural, and even religious clashes that have shaped human history while sprinkling a pinch of Herbert's personal take on that same span of human lifetime that Paul and Leto II reminisce about as a dark past of a primitive history.

V.1.1. Oscillating between Speculative Fiction and Science Fiction

When trying to figure out the story's overall thematic label, researchers often come across a debate concerning its overarching substance and objective. *Dune* is a work, after all, that explores a plethora of facets, from its ecologically based world-building to its religious future developments, and perhaps even more indicatively, its space-frontier-defining political relationships that Herbert uses as an outlet for his criticism of imperial leaderships. When deciding upon its more fitting genre, we come across another form of discourse. Rather than describing it as a pure science-fictional, high-octane action story where space battles are enveloped in a set of future impossibilities just for the sheer entertainment of it, some critics, including the author himself, view the work as a form of speculative and philosophical fiction. In a 1987 PBS interview, Herbert commented briefly about the literary genre to which he believes his lifetime work belongs, saying, "My Arab friends wonder why it's called science fiction. *Dune*, they say, is a religious commentary. The thing that it has often been aimed at is to turn into a philosophical fiction rather than a science fiction" (Herbert, 0:35-0:56). It is, as mentioned before, a story that parallels multiple aspects of reality as it attempts to make

somewhat conceivable speculations about where humanity is heading over the next few millennium—if its survival extends to such a long time span.

The philosophical nature behind such speculations sometimes feels indistinguishable from the artificial ideologies generated by the author's creativity, which makes the story even more original, but is this enough to make the *Dune* series stand out as something more than just a science fiction narrative, as the author pointed out about its speculative and philosophical qualities?! Margaret Atwood believes that the speculative fiction genre is so closely related to science fiction that it might as well be called "science fiction two." Admittedly, the Canadian author, known for her dystopian novels, follows this statement by drawing certain thematic boundaries between the two similar classifications. She exclaims that "…they are different in nature in [the sense that] science fiction one takes place in a galaxy far, far away and in a different time, and you're never going to go there […] Science fiction two or speculative fiction takes place on this planet and it's well within a possibility…" (Atwood, 2:42-4:11). The possibility of populating outer planets, however, has become well within humanity's reach, and this, in my opinion, makes *Dune* at least a semi-speculative narrative in its attempts to make predictions about the survival of mankind beyond Earthly frontiers. The overwhelming transformation of the universe into a large, dry, hot desert biome is one example among the possible outcomes of climate change that is strongly felt and argued about its likelihood in environmental research. Kevin Walsh even wrote an article about the possibility of the Earth transforming into a Dune-like planet with a level of heat and drought that would make human habitability impossible on its surface. While Wlash contends this could only happen after billions of years, signs of it occurring in that distant future are already visible to the human eye, which makes it feel not so distant after all. He explains:

> … [A] consideration of the environment of a desert world is not entirely academic, as Earth itself is likely to become one in about a billion years or so. As the Sun becomes brighter, temperatures on Earth will inevitably increase. Ocean loss will occur, and desertification will be the likely result (…). On a future Earth, evolution will therefore favour species that are able to live in a very dry environment. Sandworms would be right at home (Walsh, p 37)

Nevertheless, Herbert's intent from his portrayal of a rugged, dried-out planet is probably more about raising awareness about this environmental change than endorsing an unreasonable level of panic about an urgent, catastrophic rapture. Still, while his fictional world still retains a certain amount of oxygen justified by the existence of an exotic sand-trout species that releases breathable air by consuming trickles of underground water (Walsh, p 35), our planet might not be so fortunate as to acquire a similar natural source of life in the long run. This alone paints enough of an alarming threat to some people, worthy of change to protect the planet.

When examining other attempts at defining science fiction, critics also often tend to turn to Brian Aldiss's suggestion. First introduced in his 1973 book, *Billion Year Spree: The True History of Science Fiction,* Aldiss argues furthermore against the mandatory condition of an extra-terrestrial setting for a work of literature to be classified as sci-fi. He exclaims: "Science Fiction is the search for a definition of man and his status in this universe, which will stand in our advanced but confused state of Epistemological knowledge, and is characteristically cast in the gothic, or post gothic mould" (Aldiss, p 8). While emphasising the eerie effect it has to produce from its fictive elements, Aldiss suggests that Gothicism, a once considered sub-branch of Fantasy writing, must be present in the experimental outer reaches of science for a literature to be recognised as a true science fiction story.

This suggestion is not based on shallow preferences either. Aldiss strongly argues that Mary Shelley's 1797 novel, *Frankenstein*, should be acknowledged as the first attempt at science fiction, instead of being addressed as a pure horror fantasy (Aldiss, p 6). The grotesque aftermath of reanimating a dead corpse, later known as Frankenstein's monster, is a scientific creation born out of the human unquenched curiosity for pushing the limits of experimental research. The result is a shocking, monstrous emergence caused by the accidental success of human flesh revival. Not to mention, *Frankenstein* is a true modern Prometheus retelling that shows humans' relentless pursuit of glory and peer-acknowledgement. This sacrilegious experiment puts into question the consequences of ethical boundaries when deciding to create a breathing organic being while defying the taboos of death and the afterlife. Such a plot not only opens up the imagination to a fearsome case scenario in which the creation decides to take revenge on its master, but it also feels like it paved the way for many following narratives in the same vein, where the goal is to startle the reader with the thoughts of the experimental researchers' potentially catastrophic outcomes. It explores the ethical limits set between what theoretical science is able to achieve and how humans choose to test its results based on tempting, promising possibilities while ignoring the risks.

By following Aldiss's logic, the science fiction genre becomes a combination of both speculative reality: What could happen when one attempts to push the limits of practical science, and gothic fantasy: A concoction of the more irrational, inconceivable elements that bring both surprise and shock through artistic outstretching and bending of reality. Despite the fact that many critics choose to treat speculative fiction as a separate category, I believe that the latter cannot properly maintain its readers' interest regarding its artificiality without relying on the larger scope of personal speculations. *Dune,* alongside other beloved futuristic tales, builds its fictional world by utilising potential realistic hypotheses of future occurrences. For instance, in a desolate world where spice is the only treasure that is sought by people, the search

for answers behind such construed questions makes science fiction embedded in the bleak anticipations of that distant life to come. Although disproportionate in their attempts at balancing the figments of complete imagination with those inspired by factuality, these stories' success depends heavily on maintaining the illusion of a conceivable abstract world. J. R. R. Tolkien phrases it in a better way as he exclaims: "…story makers are successful sub-creators if they can design a secondary world which the reader's mind can enter into, and believe it to be true" (qtd. in Kennedy, p 106). It is thus difficult to ignore the overlapping roles the three genres serve: sci-fi, speculative fiction, and dark fantasy.

Dune presents itself as a strong blend of the three, while highlighting the properties of each category in a different set of scenes. The role of alien, giant sandworm creatures might seem like another fantastical detail that contributes greatly to the aesthetic appeal of the narrative, but they are much more than just fanciful, background foes born out of Arrakian Mother Nature. These scary animal-predators constitute a unanimous entity called "Shai-Hulud" (thing of eternity). They represent an unexpected, terrifying disaster that would often interfere with the intergalactic clashes on the planet. These colossal creatures, thus, can significantly overturn the outcome of fights in a somewhat spine-chilling streak of earth devouring. Their presence adds a certain absurdity, and to the more ordinary characters, a form of fearsome chaos. They represent the darker, more gothic extremities of the story. This, in turn, challenges the old notions of mainstream science fiction and speculative fiction. Instead of highlighting fixed differences in territorial borders, *Dune* brings, thus, a more synergetic, grey area of creative storytelling where both genres, along with other sub-genres, can maintain the so-ever desired balance between reality and imagination.

V.1.2. *Dune*'s Rules and Their Impact on the Reader's Immersion

At their core, the conflict on Arrakis involves highly important intercultural figures, each serving a substantial role in the echelon of their imperial houses, which makes the

governmental futuristic structures in the story feel a lot closer to a realistic hypothesis of what human authoritarian wars raging in the future would look like. They retain the same primitive desire for power and control over the riches of the territory. In this case, the precious resource that is fought over is called *"Spice"* or "*Melange*" (used interchangeably). It is a combination of all valuable commodities today, equivalent to consumable energies such as oil, and the miraculous effects generated in the form of drug ingestion through various methods. These effects include, most importantly, prescient glimpses into the consumer's future and a higher visceral awareness. What is most important about the inclusion of spice in the story is its relationship with the "CHOAM mining company". This one is the equivalent of today's OPEC organisation. While bearing strong similarities, "CHOAM in this respect, is subject to a leadership change every eighty years between the two great houses of Atreides and Harkonnen" (Yacine, Majdoubeh p 504).

While OPEC was founded in 1960, *Dune* was published only five years after the now-popular organisation, predicting its growing role in monopolising the prices of that well-sought-after spaceship travel fuel. Except that spice is a more powerful energy since it allows the breach of any outer frontier through interstellar whizzing speed.

The less realistic elements of the novel, in my opinion, provide enough tonic encouragement for the audience to follow the set of significantly long political dialogues and socio-cultural disputes. The oscillation between rational and irrational here feels seamless in the story, as there is little to no mention of Earth in the first two novels. It is referred to as a planet of the Golden Age (Herbert, p 1092). Yet, the rules of the green planet are often implicitly used as the face of comparison for Arrakis. For instance, when the protagonist, Paul Atreides, tells of a story that happened on his home planet, Caladan. He recounts an incident that threatened the life of a local fisherman. This one had to step on the shoulders of his drowning companion to save himself from death. The Fremen guests' reaction to this short

incident sums up the difficulty they face when presented with the inconceivable possibility of dying by water, a precious resource that is regarded as a sacred element of life, so how can it possibly bring death?! (Herbert, p 287). This kind of scene attests to the craftsmanship of the author in using a familiar mode of reasoning to craft new, virtually distant ideas that are believable enough to preserve his audience's attention, keeping them invested once they latch on. The dependency on specific facts that everyone could agree upon in reality is what allows a sci-fi storyline to preserve its plausible sense of progress while thriving in terms of creativity. It is for this reason that the early rules of world-building a writer initially sets must not contradict the latter events of the story.

The risk of accidentally leaving plot holes unattended behind the author's tracks is what could ultimately stir the audience away from an initially good sci-fi work. In his 2022 collection of essays entitled *Escape into Meaning*, Evan Puschak speaks about the major problem that comic books face in modern times. Perhaps more than any other writers, the modern comic book ones are left with the daunting challenge of carrying the legacy of these superheroes, "…modern writers of long-running superhero titles face a common problem: the bullet points of the hero's backstory were created in an era when psychological reality wasn't important" (p 159). The early lack of background development would create a major hurdle for future issues, especially in the storyline of characters as linear as Superman, for instance. The gimmick behind the skyrocketing popularity of Superman is mainly credited to the gradual increase of his superpowers, yet it was also the cause of his later downfall, since no villain created was believed to be a worthy opponent for the Man of Steel. Puschak notes: "…they didn't account for depth, which forced modern writers to work backwards from iconic but hastily conceived origin stories" (Puschak, p 159). By using the Superman example, Puschak stresses the importance of establishing a well-balanced, solid foundation for a sci-fi narrative within the

boundaries of reason so that any future development in the story can hold water and still be faithful to the general lore of the work.

It seems at a first glance that Herbert's psychic characters assume the role of Superman-like figures in his story, from Paul Atreides to his sister, Alia Atreides, to his son and daughter, Leto II and Ghanima, and even his friend and loyal soldier Duncan Idaho. One would consider the plot, which involves characters belonging to the Atreides bloodline being ahead of the curve compared to everyone else, to be rather a linear and unexciting series of events, quickly turning stale and unsatisfactory to the audience's cravings for surprises. After all, all of these characters can see what could happen in the future before it takes place. They all share prescient visions that allow them to plan ahead of battles. It is easy to imagine how this quirk can determine the outcomes of any confrontation beforehand. More importantly, they can communicate with their ancestors due to their high consumption of spice. This allows them access to an unlimited storage of memories from the past, and to add to the surplus of advantages, they are all physically gifted fighters who have been trained in the ways of the Bene Gesserit sisterhood and know all the secrets behind all military Atreides tactics.

From the sound of it, these super-powered characters fit just as well into the Superman conundrum. No threat would seem strong or logical enough to defeat the main characters in the *Dune* series, but Herbert somehow is able to balance the scale of powers between them and other carefully devised antagonists. As an example of that, Vladimir Harkonnen, the murderer of Paul's father in the first book, makes a later, subtle appearance in the memories of Paul's sister, Alia; he tries to take advantage of her prescient ability that allows her to connect with her ancestors of the past. He tries to take control of her body during moments of weakness. In the third instalment, *Children of Dune*, Herbert brings a set of problems faced when relying too much on the consumption of spice. The addiction to the substance makes its user lose his/her sense of the present time. This allows the existing past entities inside his/ her memories to fight

against each other and the weakened addict to conquer the junkie's body. He can then bring himself to a triumphant, newly formed awareness. It is as if Herbert were imagining what a schizophrenic drug addict would go through in reality, a very unique scenario, but one that Herbert makes use of to tackle the discourses of human heritage and identity dissociation.

V.2. Blending Realistic Representation and Stereotypical Retrospect

I have described Herbert earlier as a master craftsman who excels at using the facts of life to create plausible, futuristic ideas while generating just enough unearthly excitement to captivate his readers. The most prominent example of this is the imagining of the potential that human psychological conditioning can reach. In the case of *Dune,* humans discover a new form of personal realm of intelligence through which they are capable of extracting highly important data by running a large number of complicated calculations at the same time, all in a matter of seconds. Mentats, or the human computers imagined by Herbert, are a great anti-technocrat addition through which the author celebrates the human mind's natural, God-given adaptability. According to him, humans should not be underestimated when pitted against the hostile, aggressive takeover of Artificial Intelligence. Mentats eventually become a strong force used to topple the plans of the Honoured Matres[34] in *Dune Chapterhouse*. Calculating all of the possible routes and methods that these enemies of the Bene Gesserit might take, and deducing the most efficient countermeasures to their conspiracies of ruling Arrakis. All of this would be an impressive feat to attain if it were achievable in the future, and Herbert implies that it could indeed happen.

What Herbert does not excel at, however, is the ability to discern between stereotypes and facts. The narrative of *Dune* falls, in my opinion, into the same cultural misconceptions

[34] The Honoured Matres is a faction of hybrids, consisting of both Rebellious Bene Gesserit previous members and Fish Speakers; previously serving as the female Royale Guards of Duke Leto II. The Matres make their first appearance in the fifth instalment of the series, *Heretics of Dune*. Their mission is to destroy the Bene Gesserit and rule over the planet.

that many Western works have advocated in the past. It is the Western writers' departure from an orientalised version of the Middle Eastern culture, which is treated as a verifiable fact and used as the base for speculative thoughts that affect the plausibility of the story. The Fremen come to be known in the novel as religious fanatics waiting for a prophetic figure, also known as "Lisan al-Gaib", and Paul Muad'Dib. Paul is meant to lead them into battle in order to claim their legitimate possession of the imperium. They are seen as an unstoppable force of Jihad, ready to die for the cause. One could draw similarities between Islamic essentialists and Fremen *Fedaykin*, but the comparison could also be extended to include all Fremen citizens and their willingness to obey their Messiah.

Brian Herbert, son of the late author Frank Herbert, confirms that one of *Dune*'s main sources of inspiration was the Arabic culture and the Islamic religion. In his 2003 biography "*Dreamer of Dune*", Brian Herbert claims that the Fremen's religion is a version of Islam that his father believed would be likely to survive and develop in the long future (Herbert B., p 149). These so-called speculative descriptions of Eastern religion and culture are, nevertheless, not used for the purpose of bringing forth possible long-term outcomes and are more about achieving a satisfactory level of divertissement by mystifying Islamic beliefs by focusing on stereotypes and prejudices as the basis of fiction in his science-fiction work. The Fremen maintain a traditional lifestyle, almost as if all other Arrakian houses have been able to develop and flourish as futuristic civilisations, while the natives remained buried all this time in the fantasies of their prophecies and revered customs. As a result, the Fremen do not possess any Mentat-like abilities like those of the Atreides House. They do not have any large battle ships like the Harkonnen, nor do they even have something similar to a force shield, or a powerful firing weapon. In fact, the only attribute that they are known for is 'power desert'. An abstract term that almost casts them as space magicians.

Moreover, the excitement generated through the over-complications of the Arabic language and Islamic notions such as Lissan Al-Gaib, Jihad, Shaitan, or even Al-Burhan is certainly one that incorporates an exotic quality able to differentiate Herbert's story from the growing generic, purely Western sci-fi narratives whose purpose is to make contact in outer space civilisations. Mouthing distorted Arabic words alone opens for the Western audience a new realm of boundless, extra-terrestrial possibilities heightened by their original lack of familiarity and bemusement at the initial hearing of their estranged annunciations. Appropriating Oriental cultures seems to be at the heart of *Dune*. Without it, this entire fictional universe would not survive. The desert of Arrakis, the main setting in which most of the story's events unfold, shares strong parallels with Iraq, starting from the inspired name itself: Arrakis. It is argued to be a combination of the word al-rāqiṣ "الرَاقص" in Arabic and the country Iraq (عراق itself and could even be pronounced "عِراقص". There is also the noble quest of Jihad (جهاد) to reach the golden path and the leadership of Paul Muad'Dib (المأدب), who is there to teach the Fremen the ways to that same path. These terms, among others, are integrated as a vital part of the Fremen identity, defamiliarised to bring an alien effect to the story, yet retaining the same sound and pattern found in the Arabic language.

There are certainly other terms and notions inspired by Christian, Jewish, and even Hindu ideologies; The word "Bene Gesserit", a powerful secret organisation made out entirely of a religious sisterhood in the novel, for example, is believed to be a combination of Latin and Hebrew terms. "Gesserit" is speculated to have been derived from the word "Jesuit", referring to the catholic order, while "Bene" could potentially either be Arabic or Hebrew, both referring to the "sons of" or, in this case, more fittingly, " the daughters of" that order. There is, therefore, no denying the great inspiration that the author had accumulated from the multifaceted stage. The saga of *Dune* has been partially written as Herbert's own thoughts on the evolution of religions and culture, shaping concepts of his work that are supposed to be a humongous stretch

of human growth while birthing a sense of extra-terrestriality in the perception of his modern audience.

As the Fremen's role grows exponentially with each instalment, so does the focus on their culture. Herbert dedicates a great amount of effort to expanding his vision of an outer space universe with a relatively dominant Islamic kingdom colliding and often defeating its competitors. The semiotically inspired catalogue of *Dune* is not the only aspect of the saga that seems to reflect Herbert's interest in Islamic culture. Herbert's extension of efforts goes as far as to include personal travels to similar popular locations in the book while exploring the Fremen Sietches, the equivalent of Arabian Oasis villages. According to his son, Brian Herbert, his father visited the Oregon desert several times and was inspired by different texts focusing on the sandy biome to generate a somewhat close depiction of a Middle Eastern habitat.

The taming and riding techniques that the Fremen use with sand worms bear strong similarities with the Arab inhabitants and the great care they dedicate to their camels and horses, as his son writes in the authored biography of his father:

> Three of the world's major religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam…came into existence and grew in desert regions (…). The story would include an Arab-like worldview, and the hero would be a messiah. He envisioned a desert messiah like the Mahdi or Mohammed on horseback, with a ragtag army on horse and camelback with him, thundering across the desert (…). My dad scoured every library and bookstore for books about deserts, desert peoples and languages and desert religions, [including T. E. Lawrence's masterpiece about war in the desert, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*" (Herbert B., p 134-135)

The combination of references to a personal life, the figment of the author's imagination and the amount of borrowing from books that he had read, yields an indistinguishable blend between factually well-documented statements about the desert and its people, but also the preconceived,

racially coloured notions that the author insists on reusing in his narrative. The purpose in this case is not to educate or inform his reader about another culture, but to make them savour its exotic traits, without indications as to when he would switch between the former task of concocting fiction and the latter one of sharing facts. Because of this, the story of *Dune* often appears as a spontaneous artistic creation relying on random moments of both admiration and critical commentary concerning the Arab culture.

While underneath lies, I suggest, a narrative with a mystically structured pattern open for the analysis of the author's feelings towards Middle-Eastern lifestyle. One that reveals a slightly more scornful approach set to denounce the practices of the Arab culture. Through the subtle inconsistencies mentioned around the tribal Fremen's power and position in the hierarchy of his world, Herbert tries to strategically shed light on what he does not like about the culture that inspired his fictional desert nation. These personal derogatory jabs that slip into his storytelling unnoticed are hidden within the laws of his fictional universe. In other words, despite having a stereotypical quality to them, they are subverted by the distance science fiction brings to his series.

V.2.1. Herbert's Orientalised Insinuations and Criticism

Accusing Herbert of having a personal vendetta against the Islamic tides or the Arabs' culture would make it seem as if the author had only planned his six books around the scrutiny of Middle Eastern societies. As much of a paper-thin weight of an accusation that is, many critics chose to follow this argument, if not go with something even less tangible. Romanian scholar, Doru Pop, points out that Herbert's work was initially rejected by a dozen publishers before finally getting adopted by the 1963 sci-fi magazine "Analog". John W. Campbell, the lead publisher at Analog, who both promoted Herbert's *Dune* and Asimov's *The Foundation*, had been accused of racism on several occasions. There was clear evidence of this, but after the outright rejection of the magazine for stories that were meant to emphasise the presence of

black characters, fingers were pointed at the closest to those decisions, and Campbell figured in most of that targeted displeasure (Pop, p 24). It was clear that, even though Herbert had not expressed or denoted any particular favouritism for Western, Caucasian main characters in his narratives, many critics have chosen to follow the trail of breadcrumbs left by Campbell and paint Herbert under a similar, conjoined light.

Even more recently, several articles have picked up the opportunity to rekindle past discussions about Herbert's potential, fraudulent anti-colonial writing, especially after the release of the film adaptation of *Dune*. After all, a Hollywood production of this scale was bound to generate a new surge of interest around his books. In 2021, Nathaniel Flakin and Liliana Cofalka wrote an article titled "*Dune Is Anticolonialism as Imagined by Megacorporations,"* in which they describe both the film adaptation and the original work as capitalist products following the same direction of selling fake compassion and empowerment for marginalised voices around the world. The first line in the article summarises their sentiment about Herbert's presumable marketing scheme: "The new film based on Frank Herbert's epic is full of anti-imperialist imagery, but it amounts to nothing more than a Hollywood version of colonial resistance struggle" (Flakin, Cofalka). The label "Hollywood version" seems to have become synonymous with disingenuous artistic expressions and a politically correct portrayal of postcolonial resistance. The authors also refer to Herbert's subtle conviction that a decolonisation movement requires a white messiah at its frontline to be deemed effective; a clairvoyant Paul Atreides leading the resistance for the oppressed:

> Herbert himself had a contradictory yet reactionary worldview: he opposed the Vietnam War but supported Richard Nixon. He embraced an anti-modernist "rugged individualism," which led him to glorify a colonial fantasy about the purity of indigenous peoples. In *Dune*, this is expressed in a white saviour myth. It is a scion of the colonisers, the young Paul Atreides, who is needed to lead the oppressed in their struggle against colonisers (Flakin, Cofalka).

However, Herbert made it clear that the story does not revolve as much around Paul's heroism as it does around his deceitful plans to use the army of the Fremen and execute his revenge against his father's killers, including the emperor himself. The questionable decisions that followed his victory allow the audience to see a little of the true ambitious nature of Paul, as he takes on the role of Emperor Shadam IV and marries his daughter Irulan. David Higgins describes these aftermath decisions as a dead giveaway, where Paul never considers bringing down the entire imperial system, but simply applies amendments to it, making it more fitting of his reign ideology. He does not recognise the injustice committed against the Fremen, even after acknowledging that they have been dispossessed of their land; he only believes that the imperium is flawed because of the man who used to rule all houses (Higgins, p 238). This hypocritical view that Paul maintains throughout his plotline is knitted on purpose to make the audience question the personal objective behind the role of political leaders that the character assumes. A position that even in real life has been criticised for its risks, egotistical indulgences, which often tempt its holder, and does not align with those of the nation's greater prosperity and that of the people.

One thing that is certain is that *Dune* grapples with the colonial discourse as one of its main narrative themes. There is great care poured into the Fremen's initial subjugation context. Their gradual rise to power, and their awaiting of Paul's growth and ascendance to leadership serve as motivating factors during their resistance against Harkonnen assaults. The Fremen

might even share a very distant kinship with some of today's darker-skinned races, especially those who are still carrying the scars of their ancestral past of slavery and colonisation. Herbert implies that these types of oppressions are as much of a curse on human history as they are proof of the cyclical effects that chasing a position of power has on the rest of mankind, even in outer space.

More importantly, such pursuits for dominion are all the same. Barbaric wars and capital violence are embedded in all living organisms. The characteristics that differentiate the oppressive leaders in such wars are all depicted in the character of Paul, who has the power to enchant and even hypnotise an entire nation only by his words, but also can prove to be a violent, indifferent punisher, and domesticator of those who try to rebel against his order. The truth that Herbert subtly slips into his work is that the purpose behind these leaders' rallying around the necessity of war is always something far less altruistic. It often goes back to a more personal set of reasons, usually closer to some egomaniac pursuit of reaching the top of the world and staying there.

Herbert also expresses two personal takes through his depiction of Paul's plotline. He first familiarises his readers with the Fremen, a Middle Eastern-like society and religion, before showing them how this same society allowed an outsider brought up in a completely different environment, a planet called Caladan with an abundance of water, to infiltrate their hideout. Paul rapidly climbs the ranks of these natives until he reaches a status where he is more respected and revered than some of their older elite members. By describing such details, Herbert hints at the weaknesses that are embedded in this supposedly private, highly secretive, nomadic nation. The fact that it allowed such a detached figure to become its most revered representative is only an opportunity to shed criticism upon the natives' rigid spiritual convictions in the coming of a prophet saviour.

The second matter that he focuses on is the transformative situation of these oppressed Arrakian natives as they change from a position of resistance and defence to one of ruthless attack, greatly advantageous because of their faith in a concept called "the Buttlarian Jihad". The term Jihad here is completely paltered and distanced from its original Arabic meaning. It does not refer to the religious mission of Muslims, centred around fighting off their enemies if provoked. Instead, it is used as a necessity towards a future foreseen path. In this, Herbert initially captures a self-conflicted, unsure Paul, who on the surface seems to eventually get swept by the Fremen's deeply rooted belief in the need for armed conflict, but it is later confirmed that Paul himself has already set his mind on this path for retribution. He wants to destroy the enemies of the Atreides house and uses this new notion of Jihad for that purpose. In other words, Paul would have unleashed havoc on the other houses, whether by navigating the conveniently made religious convictions of the Fremen, to his own desires or by using any other army that is susceptible to cajolement with his prophetic-like powers.

If we are to consider Fremen as the descendants of past Islamic nations, or as Brian Herbert has put it, how his father first imagined this native society partially as a progression and growth of Islam in the distant future, we can deduce possible opinions made by his father, through his storytelling. In the two most crucial narrative developments mentioned above, it seems that he keeps up with the same traditional, stereotypical descriptions of Middle Eastern territories found in past Western mainstream texts. Just like the old representations of Arabs, the Fremen are portrayed as too superstitious a people, who do not have enough intellectual knowledge to get them out of their colonial shackles. They might be a strong bunch of fighters, but they cannot strategise on their own, and their military numbers cannot compete with their enemies to win wars by themselves. They need a white saviour for that, a Paul-like figure who can change the outcome of their efforts at resistance, but more importantly, who can erase and rewrite their deeply rooted rules from the inside. Paul brings them out of their dark isolation

after hiding under the crevices of the desert for centuries. He changes what he sees as a primitive, animalistic code of honour that entails them to kill each other in order to claim governorship by refusing to kill Stilgar. Edwards calls out these Western-made presumptions promoted through televised media. He exclaims:

> My interest in Orientalism began for two reasons, one of which was the Arab-Israeli war of 1973. It had been preceded by a lot of images and discussions in the media and the popular press on how the Arabs are cowardly and don't know how to fight. (…) They are always going to be beaten because they are not modern. (…) Then, everybody was very surprised when the Egyptian army crossed the canal in early October of 1973 and demonstrated that, like everybody else, they could fight (Said, 3:30, 4:06)

While it is possible to make the argument that the Fremen are never captured as cowardly or indigenous in Herbert's novels, it is hard to deny the overwhelming difference in power between them and the Harkonnen, the Atreides or even the Sardaukars[35]. Before the integration of Paul into the Fremen society, the natives of the desert are only seen as a mysterious force that survived the oppression of their colonisers. Duncan Idaho of the Atreides House becomes an admirer of the discipline embedded in their culture. More importantly, he is impressed by the methods they use to domesticate the dangers of the desert, including their ability to ride wild sandworms, but overall, the race itself is kept veiled by a strategic layer of ambiguity. The army of the Fremen is neither dismissed as a weak threat nor given enough importance at the initial stages of the story.

[35] The Sardaukars represents members of the military force that belongs to House Corino, the homeland of the imperial ruler Shadam IV, who rules over the Padasha Empire. They considered as the most vicious, and fighters among all houses.

On the other hand, Herbert also captures their customs under the direct gaze of the white coloniser. When Stilgar comes in contact with Paul's father, he spits on the table the moment he enters the meeting room. This provokes the close guards of the Duke and instantly sets them on alert mode, ready to pounce at the crude insult. The gesture, however, as explained by Duncan, is their way of offering their body moisture to new acquaintances, and they expect their interlocutors to honour them by spitting back. This welcoming ritual, although seems odd to the outsiders, is immediately set clear before any physical alterations happen. "…Idaho say[s]: "We thank you, Stilgar, for the gift of your body's moisture. We accept it in the spirit with which it is given." And Idaho spat on the table in front of the Duke" (Herbert, p 194).

In such scenes, Herbert teases the possibility of a peaceful merger between Fremen and Atriedes. The two nations could have been good friends. They could have become allies if not for the premature destruction of the latter kingdom by the Harkonnen invasion. The respect shown by Leto to Stilgar, followed by the later acknowledgement of the Fremen ecologist, Liet Kynes of the Duke's sympathy for both Atreides and Fremen people (Herbert, p 257), promotes the impression of an alternative future where Arabs and other Westerners would become great allies, and be able to live harmoniously as one nation.

It is a much less conceivable possibility of peace, but still open for critical interpretation all the same, is Herbert's use of mixed signals in his description of the growing relationship between Fremen and Atreides. The author still alludes at times to a future where the Fremen remain a colonised nation under the rule of the Duke and his family, drawing thin lines of boundaries between the two people. The discussion of Stilgar and Leto over the crysknife the Fremen leader held, for example, that same contact meeting evolves at a certain moment into a debate over power and jurisdiction:

> "I am the Duke Leto," the Duke said. "Would you permit me to see this blade?" "I'll permit you to earn the right to unsheath it," Stilgar said, (…) A man near the center of the table across from Paul muttered: "Who's he to tell us what rights we have on Arrakis?" "It is said that the Duke Leto Atreides rules with the consent of the governed," the Fremen said. "Thus, I must tell you the way it is with us: a certain responsibility falls on those who have seen a crysknife (…). They are ours. They may never leave Arrakis without our consent." (Herbert, p 193)

The people surrounding the duke become anxious the moment Stilgar explains the creed of the Fremen. This shows that despite the Duke being open to learn their rules and traditions, not everyone in the House Atreides is as open as their head of state. The short-lasting confrontation over the need to unsheath the crysknife out of respect for Leto could be seen as a brewing form of disagreement, where both parties are trying to impose dominance. Differences in their systems, traditions, and beliefs like this one are far from being the signs of a future mutually consented-upon, amiable merger. Herbert might not have gone in depth about the complicated relationship between the two houses while Paul's father was alive, but it is difficult to ignore the scattered instances of dispute between the new coloniser and colonised.

This, by consequence, goes to show that there is an unexplored grey area in the story that Herbert chooses not to elaborate upon. Despite his reluctance to discuss the result of that discourse, Aspects of the grey area are certainly made visible enough to let the audience make their own decisions on how their disagreement would end. Fremen show no desire or reason to pay their allegiance to the new authority of the Atreides. They might have proven to be a better alternative than the Harkonnen, but they are still invaders demanding the surrender of spice and land from the Arrakian natives.

V.2.2. The Shambled Reception over Herbert's Intended Messages

Despite the fact that Herbert had won the Nebula and Hugo Awards through his first two books of *Dune*, the massive success the series has achieved did not unfold overnight. It was far from being an instant, trending sensation. Clearly, the American 'Analog' magazine had paved the way for the series to build itself under the eager reception of a sci-fi community composed initially of sci-fi heads. *Dune*, while manifesting the same qualities of a scientifically and historically dense story that had its own imaginative, technical jargon, promoted the interesting story of a fifteen-year-old hero whose powers are partially granted to him through the consumption of a psychedelic substance. It has an enticing premise that first and foremost speaks to the rebellious teenage movements of time, as journalist Daniel Immerwahr, editor at the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, remarks in a 2020 review: "science fiction had always been geeky, but *Dune* made it trippy" (Immerwahr).

A great sense of freedom and power is manifested through Paul's character; he makes the hallucinogenic effects of spice seem all too real. The protagonist of the first two books reflected the mindset held by a significant decimal of juvenile American activists during the late fifties and sixties eras of the United States. *Dune,* therefore*,* might have taken a lot of inspiration from the lifestyle and aspects of hippie-associated groups, especially those who participated in the Civil Rights movement. During that period, these groups pushed for a strong rejection of the growing capitalist and imperial regulations that were gradually cementing the authority of an elitist community.

The Fremen are all too similar in this fight, hoping to build a less oppressive and rigidly controlled imperium. They are also just as well in tune with the nature surrounding them, and just as appreciative of the natural benefits of melange. "Here [on Dune], [there is] desert power. The Fremen are the key" (Herbert, p 402). The Civil Rights Movement was a national protest aimed first and foremost at combating racial segregation and gender discrimination in the

country, but the Hippies, alongside other youthful demonstrators, took the opportunity to expand these public dissatisfactions into a full-blown rally against all the restrictive and disparaging aspects that shaped the American Government of the time.

In Immerwahr's opinion, Herbert only used the Arab/Islamic references "as a façade" to hide his real criticism of the Native Indian massacre that had led to the gradual death of many local tribes in America. He argues that this is especially true when comparing the Fremen's lifestyle with that of "the Quileute and Hoh people", who, instead of harpooning big sandworms, "thrived in the forests of Western Washington and harpooned whales off the Pacific Coast" (Immerwahr). I agree that Immerhawer's suggestion of the book including a closer to home thematic criticism, the American concern for dangerous leaders and rigid values, as started as the intentions Herbert had initially planned to embark on, especially owing to his populist inclinations and internal political interest.

To describe the author's curiosity about the Arab culture as just a mere form of window dressing, however, would be to deny the impactful inspiration he had received from reading about this foreign culture at the time. Herbert was a devoted journalist before becoming a committed writer. While drawing the blueprint for *Dune,* he gradually expanded his study to the Jordan Bedouin lifestyle until reaching greater depths that included even more Middle Eastern territories and Northern African ones, leading him back and forth into the Arabs and Muslims' Culture. In an online essay entitled *Erasing Arabs from 'Dune",* the author, Kheldoune Khelile, argues that there are many instances in the books where Islam and Arabs colour not the Fremen lifestyle but other characters and elements of Herbert's world:

> Clearly inspired by the culture of the Amazigh people of Algeria and Morocco, even taking their name from their language, the Fremen are just a small part of the deep MENA roots of the "Dune" universe. The entire setting uses Islamic concepts and several Arabic sayings are common throughout the Imperium (…) In fact, one of the most famous lines (…) heard in the Fremen's Arabic-inspired language of Chakobsa as "YA HYA CHOUHADA." The phrase comes directly from the Algerian War of Independence against the French. (Khelil)

The question of whether the focus on these aspects, foreign to an American writer such as Herbert, and the American targeted audience, occupies a greater attention span in his book than those revolving around his protests of American activists is up for debate. In fact, there are several articles and columns that have denounced the author's intentions of Oriental impact in his work by suggesting other potential objectives. Haifa Mahabir's 2022 review is perhaps the most unequivocal in its attempt to trace a greater importance behind the saga's intended messages. She writes:

> …To discard Frank Herbert's masterful work to the dustbin of Edward Said's Orientalism is frankly a bit too lazy; we are so caught up in our own novel gazing that critique fails precisely where Said fell short (…). What is more compelling than the cultural orientalism of Dune is to acknowledge Herbert's own critique of Imperial ambition and competition (…). The writer dares to imagine a future that rescues humanity from its own abyss [through a shared humanity and potential]. Flawed as a work as it may be, Herbert does not make enemies of Arabs. (Mahabir)

Not only does her words acknowledge the existence of a large body of criticism that can be found around the series' tendencies to capture Middle Eastern exoticism through science fiction elements, but she also makes it seem that applying Edward Said's orientalism to analyse the books is nothing more than an opportunistic evaluation of a popular art product.

Needless to point out, the overuse of a theory of criticism is not a testament to unsound or irrational arguments used as a personal attack against the literature. If anything, the number of critics who turned to Orientalism in their examination can only open up a valid set of reasons to question the author's fixation on Arabs. Mahabir does attempt to find a more universally accepted objective behind the Arrakian wars that keep on raging in every book. She believes that the final purpose of Herbert's science fiction saga is to reach mutual grounds of harmonious coexistence at the end of the story, a suggestion that we have seen before, one that disapproves of a monolithic imperial body of power ruling over the planet, and this might actually be the end-goal of Herbert. Nevertheless, one has to admit that it is suspiciously founded upon the involvement of Fremen troops in every major conflict, almost making their sacrifice during wartime an indispensable set of chess pawns used to achieve that presumable sense of universal peace.

While suggesting other interpretations of the series' prime purpose behind the author's thematic writings than those focused on racial eccentricity, it is noteworthy that the classic saga has also received its share of ecological appraisal over the years. Many researchers and scholars who initially reviewed the books did take notice of the dangers that Herbert attempts to signal out inside his desert planet, and they believed that climate change takes a greater priority in his story rather than the politically and religiously inclined subjects others suggested. Climate change in *Dune* indeed sets humanity back to an arid state of emptiness, taking on the form of a serious warning about the frightening post-apocalyptic desolation our planet is steadily heading towards. Even the attempts to bring a greener life back to the planet become a problematic human interference with Mother Nature, leading to a scarcity of spice. This precious resource is only able to grow in perpetuity because of the sandworms' existence. Leto II realises this only by exploring memories of the past:

> The sandtrout (…) was introduced here from some from some other place. This was a wet planet then. They proliferated beyond the capability of existing ecosystems to deal with them. Sandtrout encysted the available free water, made this a desert planet (…) confronted by large bodies of water, their chemical factories went wild, exploded in the death-transformation [becoming Sandworms] which produced the dangerous melange concentrate… (Herbert, p 1333-1334)

The attempts to break this cycle by forcing a botanical re-immergence on the planet would lead to the death of such vital creatures, along with the spice, the only fuel source in the future. Ghanima and Leto II both contemplate upon this future vision of an environmental collapse greater than the isolation in which they already live. It would again be a mistake largely reached by the contribution of human ignorance of such consequences and self-centred selfishness to see a green planet again. The two siblings' realisation of this truth plays out in this passage: "'When the sandtrout go, so do all the worms' [Leto] said. 'The tribes must be warned. No more spice,' [Ghanima] said. Words merely touched high points of the system danger which they both saw hanging over human intrusion into Dune's ancient relationships" (Herbert, p 1334).

There are many parallels drawn between the pending environmental crisis that people face in reality and the changing ecosystem *in Dune*. Herbert's great concern for the environment was even able to grab the attention of the popular counterculture American journal "*The Whole Earth Catalogue*" in 1968. In a review published during that year, Brand Stewart describes *Dune* as a "rich, re-readable fantasy with a clear portrayal of the fierce environment it takes to cohere a community (…) the metaphor is ecology, the theme is revolution" (Stewart, p. 42). These words read like a true slogan of a dedicated environmental activist, and they might serve as a detour from the Middle Eastern orientalist interpretations. However, the last part echoes a

stronger political affinity, even to the sympathy harboured for nature. “The theme is revolution,” might just be coded in imperial rule as its casualty. Even matters that concern the planet's fate are up to the politicians' own personal aspirations, and many of the decisions needed to cure the planet's deteriorating health remain bound by the interests of such groups.

Much of the distrust raised by Herbert about American politics seems to point out the ability of leaders to shift the public's attention away from many concerns to the discourses of race and marginalisation. This, by consequence, put a heavy interest suspension on other matters, including that of the colonisation. However, to assume that the author himself is not engaged in the former debate as well through his story means to ignore some of his potentially rant-like scenes. *Dune* has layers upon layers of Herbert’s personal voice concealed in the third-person narration, as one of the most used and famous phrases encapsulated in the book goes, there are “[p]lans within plans within plans within plans” (Herbert, p 443). Compared to the more realistic forms of fiction, the complexity of Herbert’s highly distant and imaginative world, I contend, encourages a dissimulation of personal opinions, as they are inserted strategically within the ambiguity of the story’s fantastical writings.

Therefore, where Herbert’s own voice stops and where that of his imaginary narrator and even that of his characters are given independent free will, it is intentionally harder to discern in his otherworldly amplified description. As a result, this voluntarily made unreal genre of storytelling shows how much more difficult it is for critics and reviewers of the series to reach a unanimous agreement about the most essential messages that the *Dune* series shares with its audience. They offer fertile space for criticism that also shields their authors from greater scrutiny driven by the conformity and synchronicity of earlier published reviews and critical analyses.

V.2.3. Attempting to Stay on the Fence through Sci-Fi Escapism

Given the highly imaginative visuals that science fiction has the ability to conjure up in the reader's mind, it is to be expected of writers to take all of the advantages available in its large and flexible field. One of its most beneficial functions, according to Daina Chaviaono, is when the science fiction is treated by the writer as "spiratorial tool (…) [that] can serve to camouflage ideas of human beings, intended to safeguard or disseminate [them] in the midst of social or political chaos, inherently opposed to freedom" (Chaviano, p 4). In such cases, the genre turns into a strong instrument of personal argumentative defence. Its unreality allows the artist to backtrack on statements and positions he/she had opted for in the past, especially during interviews. The fantastical elements generated by stretching the fringes of scientific assumptions are used as a blanket. It protects the owner from the public pitch and fork drawbacks that might attempt to chase after him/her in the form of bashing interpretations. These assumptions are often largely deduced from the potential liaison that could exist between the author's private life and personal storytelling, and therefore can go as far as to track down every controversial facet of his/her life on a malicious basis to ruin their career.

Compared to the more realistic forms of fiction, the complexity of Herbert's highly distant and imaginative world, I contend, encourages further dissimulation of personal opinions. The author's political stances are, therefore, inserted strategically within the ambiguity of the fantastical elements of his work. Where Herbert's own voice stops and where that of his imaginary narrator and even that of his characters are given independent free will, is intentionally made harder to discern in the midst of his otherworldly amplified descriptions. To put it simply, *Dune* is a proven science fictional case of how much more difficult it is for critics and reviewers of the series to reach a unanimous agreement about its most essential messages; the ones they can connect to the real world. Robert Heinlein says it best: "It is the difference in Science fiction that makes the difference" (Heinlein, p XI). The genre offers

fertile space for a wide range of varied criticism, but it also shields its authors from the kind of hostile scrutiny that is driven by the conformity and synchronicity of the initial published reviews.

If race, religion, or any memorable event in reality are not tackled directly but instead are concealed under an ambiguous dictionary that the writer both aesthetically and thematically wields, he gains an immunity card against intense forms of critical commentary than those directed towards realistic fiction and non-fiction writers. As a result, the make-believe realm of science fiction allows artists to create a distance between their statement and real-life judgment. The greater the distance they put in their process of alienising their books, the better their efficiency becomes at deflecting public assumptions about any interpreted political or cultural stances. They achieve this all while maintaining a conceivable authority over the real intents that are deeply embedded under layers of fabrications.

Despite the natural concealing characteristic genre, cracks, plot holes or simply a lesser amount of imagination poured into the story, estrangement can still expose those concealed fragments of personal creed. In the case of Herbert's storyline, I contend that certain elements of *Dune* are less camouflaged than others on purpose. The intergalactic conflict over *Melange* or *Spice* is not so much a subtle nod to the warmonger, barbaric human tendency of claiming ownership over precious resources, as it is a closer and personal prediction made by the author about the future continuity of a worldly strife over oil-filled lands. Oil in Herbert's future remains the most valuable commodity out there. Even if the name changes, it retains the same energy resource value. Spice not only has the petrolic side effect of polluting and reshaping the atmosphere, but is also the single most expensive and irreplaceable substance in the market. Herbert sets the transactions made over *Spice* as a condition of power. He continuously criticises this capitalist overview throughout his six books, demonstrating how spice becomes a core, stagnant source of rivalry and conflict around which houses continue to turn Arrakis

into a planet of destruction and impending death, chasing whoever is unlucky enough to find himself in the crossfire of these raging wars.

"The alien", according to Thomas Disch, is science fiction's most iconic "signature trope" (p 185). It is often employed as the vehicle of unfamiliarity and discomfort through which writers tackle some of the most abstruse and fear-striking scenarios of encounter with our mysterious neighbouring, living organisms. Outer-world beings serve as the subject of great speculation for this type of literature, as it is often agreed that it is only a matter of time for their theorised existence to prove its soundness, showing that they have been leading different lives somewhere outside of our earthly hemisphere all along.

One would think the depicted images of extraterrestrial beings are the combination of man's vague dreams and nightmarish mental incarnations, and because of this, their overall traits would be relatively different from those found in mankind. Aliens are, therefore, often captured in highly contorted shapes to create a sense of horror and panic. Multiple or one single eyeball, or even no vision at all, three fingers or a set of tentacles, a pair of antennaes, often distinguished by a large head with a protruding brain, these are the most common physical traits that have been fabricated and fantasised in many artistic displays. From renowned novels like H.G. Wells's *War of the Worlds* and Ursula K. Le Guin's The Left *Hand of Darkness*, to classic motion pictures like *Mars Attacks* and *Aliens,* and even animated productions like *Megamind* and the *Futurama TV Show*, their depictions indicate, if anything, a focal thematic element only essential to the entrainment that shapes and distinguishes stories of the same category. However, Disch offered a different opinion on the subject, exclaiming that: "…If planets have inhabitants like ours then will not their inhabitants be people like us? so long as their creation was accounted as an act of God who wanted to mould some beings in his own likeness. It stood to reason that extra-terrestrial acts of creation would vary no more from the basic patterns than do varying races of humankind" (Disch, p 186-187). Giving this claim the

benefit of the doubt, Disch's alien conception attaches by consequence layers of cultural and political underlying references while trying to pose as just another nonchalant imaginary detail in an already fairly artificial future.

Applying his theory to the characterisations that Herbert depended on to build his world, the Fremen and Harkonnen are captured as the most physically distant kind of future humanoids compared to the Atreides. It is true that throughout his story, Herbert gradually implements unique quirks that separate such supposed descendants of ancient humanity from the personal, normally perceived attributes that modern audiences think of as a scale of comparison. Fremen, for instance, have their own language system. They are born with blue within blue eyes, a hue that was caused naturally by their spice-filled environment, and as we have mentioned before, they have darker skin. The Harkonnen, in contrast, are depicted as a bald-headed, dimly white race, and they painted the first colonising antagonistic forces on Arrakis. Despite the fact that aliens are not officially part of *Dune*'s lore, readers cannot help but think of what each of these futuristic houses holds as discernible evolutionary eccentricities. The oddities remarked in their speech mannerisms, customs, and moral compasses are almost alien-like aspects that make them, at times, less of a future human probability and more a plot-serving non-possible entities.

However, Herbert's use of 'the alien lie' as Disch labels it, is too shallow for the usual science fictional fabrications, as it reveals much of his real political stances and cultural convictions by still evoking real racial and dogmatic characteristics. The author frames the Harkonnen almost as an extension of the old European Colonial raids, while the Fremen are cast as combinations of Northern African and Arabic colonised nations. In doing so, it feels to some that Herbert is placating the post-colonial scrutiny with an acknowledgement of the wrongful deeds that continue Imperial aggressions of the West. This impression is even reinforced by the rise of the colonised resistance, and with the joining of the protagonist. At

the same time, Herbert gradually tones down the powers of the Fremen while highlighting Paul's dominance instead; he and his future bloodline, shifting as a result, the focus of the story from Fremen retribution to Fremen disposition to a new form of outside sovereignty more powerful than the previous ones. This can be interpreted as Herbert's conviction that Imperial forces will reign victorious no matter the time or space, which negates the veil of neutrality that science fiction offers. My belief is that the author could not help but get involved in certain controversial discourses, and during such instances, the veil slightly drops.

V.2.4. Paul Atreides between Heroism and Anti-Heroism

There are many academic studies that have attempted to build a case around Paul representing an ultimate figure of heroism in the series. Most of which draw comparisons at great length between the protagonist and his enemies. Vladimir Harkonnen, his nephew Feyd-Rautha, and the Emperor of the galaxy, Shadam IV, are usually among the most prominent foes and seem to represent the oxymoronic side of Paul's presumable righteous aspirations. Other investigations also extend that juxtaposition to his allies and family members, especially with his son Leto II, who, later in the series, earns himself the title of "The Tyrant" in *Dune: God Emperor*. Compared to the rest, Paul is often described as a benevolent and powerful individual. In a study about these presumable traits, Marcos Berenguel suggests the opposite. He argues that Paul's feats reflect, at times, an egotistical sense of verbal command and an obsession with the divine right to rule that he has been granted at a young age. These qualities are far detached from those of a modern science fiction hero. When referring back again to Asimov's The Foundation, the contrast between the two characters, Paul Atreides and Hari Seldon, seems even more prominent, matching Berenguel's previous assessment. Hari's purposeful research in psychohistory in the novel is achieved for the sole sake of protecting the Foundation, a name given to a group of intellectual researchers after being permanently exiled

from their original home and ordered to live the rest of their lives on planet Terminus. Even after his death, the character leaves precious research predictions for his banished knowledge enthusiast peers to survive a series of challenging assaults on their new planet and extend its preservation against further challenging obstacles to come. His sacrifice for the greater stability of his people can only be described as a heroic, unselfish feat.

Paul, on the other hand, becomes obsessed and even paranoid about the dangers that threaten his life during his climb to power, questioning everyone's motives, even his closest friends, but his preemptive tyrannical fits are constantly disguised under a sacred necessity to cross the invisible 'Golden Path' and bring Arrakis back to an older, more prosperous life. His decisions throughout the story are, therefore, always justified by his knowledge of the future. The dilemma here is that his predictions of an achievable, peaceful future cannot be shared with others, or else that would impact the course of upcoming events. At the same time, there is no way of telling whether Paul's prescient visions constitute a legitimate route towards a more prosperous imperium or merely another fold of lies in Paul's complex web of deceptions.

To Berenguel, Paul's character fits the classic meaning of the word "hero", going back to Greek mythology's super-powerful conquerors such as Achilles (Berenguel, pp. 37-38). An ancient hero is known first and foremost for his Godly demonstrations of power, ignoring at times the moral decisions that are meant to protect his society from partial demise due to a greater necessity and requirement of his powers. Paul displays the same traits through his growing lack of concern for the Fremen's number of deaths during the Butlarian Jihad. He is determined throughout the story to maintain his leadership, which would, in an older sense, mean proving his worthiness as the rightful imperial ruler of all kingdoms. He exploits the prophecies to keep the Fremen in check and indulges further into the role of a Massiah, fully embracing the advice of his late father, "Power and fear (…) The tools of statecraft (…) they

call you ‘Mahdi’—‘Lisan al-Gaib’—as a last resort, you might capitalize on that” (Herbert, p 217).

At the same time, this archaic vice in his character, which is close to a hunger for world-domination, grants him a more human allure of sinful greed, and because of it, I argue that the concept of the anti-hero is more befitting of his character development. Knowing that the term prioritises the personal moral code of the individual himself, and not a general one that encompasses the ideal, righteous principles generally agreed upon by society, Paul’s somewhat fits that criterion. The concept of an anti-hero is characterised by Northrop Frye as an inherently underdog position in the story, brought out of suffering and frustrating circumstances, and granted inferior status compared to the more shining characters in the story (Frye, p 151), but that does not always have to be the case. In fact, Alberto N. García contends that the most important aspect discussed in the recent studies made about the figure in question is his/her moral ambiguity. In that matter, Garcia's definition reads: “…The anti-hero of more recent times is closer to a Byronic hero, instead of mediocre and listless; the predominant trait of today’s anti-hero is a mixture of hero and villain (…) a contradiction between ideals and actions” (Gracia, p 3).

The flawed, ambivalent development of this type of character is in sync with the reader's daily moral struggles. Constantly attempting to make the rightful decisions in any situation while at the same time weighing the personal aftermath that is inflicted upon the arbiter of that choice is one of humanity’s oldest endeavours. Paul is confronted with continuing on the most optimal path for the future and retaining his human appearance. In *Children of Dune*, the third instalment of the series, the readers understand the rebellious fits that appear in an older Paul when he confronts his now worm-metamorphosed son, Leto II. In that moment, Herbert explains to the audience why Paul could not follow the Golden Path until the end:

> Leto looked up to the top of the dune where his father stood, still defiant, but defeated. That was Paul Muad'Dib up there, blind, angry, near despair as a consequence of his flight from the vision which Leto had accepted (…)" Paul asks: "Do you wish to live those thousands of years, changing as you now know you will change?" Leto recognised that his father was not speaking about physical changes. (...) When metamorphosis came, if it came, a thinking creature of awesome dimensions would emerge upon the universe—and that universe would worship him. No…Paul was (…) the thoughts and decisions which would inflict themselves upon the worshipers. (Herbert, p 1680-1681)

Paul renounces this utopian vision of a divine human-less entity worshipped and fought over for generations to come because it exceeded his human aspirations of power and leadership. It is, as later explained in the sequel, a position that requires the sacrifice of personal human soul, letting in the sacred presence of the sandworm to control the mind of the emperor. Herbert transforms his character from a hero cherished by his loved ones into an anti-hero disowned by his own son. His care for his humanity and his soul more than the destiny of Arrakis makes him welcomed once more among Fremen, but this acknowledged as a fallen blind Messiah, closer to them than to the dictatorship of his son. Herbert's plan, in my opinion, was to create a flawed character with whom the audience can empathise, an ambivalent figure whose personal code triumphed over the idealised societal one in the end. Such a development is an attempt at redeeming the earlier imperial, merciless Paul, who sent his Fremen army to die on his behalf. It shows that the Anti-hero is another important device that fits within the genre traits of political camouflaging, as it often generates a discourse about the importance of preserving human nature when faced with outer temptations and demonised monstrosities, which is more possible to imagine in a fictional realm. It is also a valid and effective distraction from the earlier dominant white saviour storyline that paints Paul as a new alternative form of

colonial imposition on the Fremen from Baron Vladimir Harkonnen's reign and that of the Padishah Emperor, Shaddam IV.

V.3. The Challenges of Crossing *Dune's* Textual Boundaries

If one were to mention the screen adaptation of the book *Dune* in the middle of a casual conversation, the current young generation of avid film viewers would probably think about the 2021 film version starring Timothée Chalamet as Paul, Rebecca Ferguson as his mother, Jessica, and Oscar Isaac as his father, the Duke Leto of the Atreides House. Denis Villeneuve's most recent adaptation was certainly able to leave a mark as a bona fide, lifelike audio-visual translation of Herbert's first book in the series, or at least the first half of the novel. In 2024, Villeneuve would eventually go on to direct the second part adaptation, entitled *Dune: Part Two.* This one covers the rest of Paul's victorious conquest led against the emperor. It proves to be a second successful instalment in which Villeneuve has a similar, if not an even better, firm grasp on the portrayal of the novel's continuation of events as he did with *Dune: Part One*.

Others who belong to an older generation and bear a stronger appreciation for David Lynch's production as a filmmaker, however, would probably assume that the 1894 quirky, screen version of *Dune* is the one being referred to in the discussion, not necessarily because this one is better, but because they believe it inspired Villeneuve's direction in many ways. The mistakes that Lynch made during his writing of the screenplay may have played a key role in the more recent, fleshed-out remakes. It is certainly not the first attempt at screen conveyance of Herbert's '*Dune*', but because this one actually came through with its release, Lynch was able to create something memorable for generations to admire.

Among the most notable prior pursuits of the rights to the books, Alejandro Jodorowsky's obsession with adapting *Dune* into a heavily cost-draining film stands out.

Tempted by the mere prospect of filming the surreal hallucinogen effects of the LSD drug as the focal point of his project, Jodorowsky's popular motto, which states, “When you make a picture you must not respect the novel”, was believed to have come from a lack of familiarity and knowledge about Herbert’s saga. By 1984, it was reported that the filmmaker had already spent over 2 million dollars (approximately the equivalent of 11 million dollars today), while still asking for more funds to finish the film, but no studio would take on the risk of covering the rest. In 2013, Frank Pavich made a documentary that tracks down the failing, expensive journey of Jodorowsky in his stubborn hope to adapt *Dune* without referring to the books. Pavich’s real-life feature garnered more attention than John Harrison’s miniseries adaptation, which was released between 2000 and 2003 and covered Herbert’s first three books (Kennedy p 12-13).

What is interesting about the adapters who came after Jodorowsky is their commitment to keep Herbert’s material right by their sides while filming his work. Lynch, Harrison, and Villeneuve have all approached the project with a firm consideration for the audience’s expectations of a *Dune* film feature. As Kennedy puts it, “the directors of three screen adaptations [harboured] a certain level of anxiety about how existing fans and new audiences will respond to adapting Herbert’s classics on screen” (p 16). The opinions of viewers mattered the most as they have even come to manifest themselves in the form of a second-guessing voice in Lynch's mind, making him hesitate at every step of the production, but also still allowing him to better immerse himself in the imaginary world the author hoped to immortalise on the pages of his series of books.

A similar sentiment was also felt towards Brian Herbert’s spin-off novels that focused on enlarging the background lore that led to the disagreements between the houses. His stories are therefore centred around the origin of each enclosed society: from the sisterhood of Bene Gesserit, and the history of growing animosity between Harkonnen and Atreides, to the

geopolitical growth of planet Caladan. The 2024 HBO TV series, *Dune Prophecy,* is in fact an attempt at adapting Brian Herbert's prequel trilogy: *Great Schools of Dune*, starting with a faithful recounting of the witches' origin in the *Sisterhood of Dune (2012)*.

Deviating from any original work always takes a greater risk, but at the cost of fidelity and at the cost of losing some of the more 'die-hard fans' of the novels, the payoff can still be worth it. The adaptation of the *Duni-verse* by the video game studio, Fancom, into a large multiplayer open-world survival game generated mixed reviews upon its release. Only depending on the setting of Arrakis to tell its standalone version of events, *Dune: Awakening (2025)* presents a vastly different story that is almost the equivalent of a sequence of 'what ifs' compiled in an alternative take of the original work. An example of that is the Atreides house surviving the attack of Vladimir Harkonnen's invasion and preserving their power and dominion on Arrakis. The solid presence that the game has been able to maintain in the gaming community despite its unabashed gameplay serving to retell a beloved classic shows that fidelity is not always a rule of thumb in the field of adaptations.

Destroying the textual constraints and trespassing beyond what the source materials entail certainly sounds like an invitation to a heavy barrage of scolding from the fans. Even so, if the adapting party involved is able to power through with its new set of original narrative expansions, convinced that this kind of exclusive re-imagining is interesting enough to hook open-minded consumers, then a standalone form of success is not entirely out of the canon equation. Admittedly, it is a rare kind of achievement depicted, so challenging to reach that Thomas Leitch labels it as an exceptional combination of ground-breaking change evoked and a business-beneficial contribution incorporated into the content of the book; convincing enough in its trail of hybrid re-telling of the story that it avoids falling completely out of favour (Leitch, p 1).

While Villeneuve's *Dune* leans towards a faithful screening of Herbert's mainstream tale, it still has its moment of textual breach. The bigger differences can be labelled as including changes of convenience that take into account the growing judgmental culture of our time. Influenced by constant political controversies and an easily sparked online outrage at the slightest show of racial patronising. Steering off the plagued, sensitive discourses of post-colonialism and imperial dispositions is a task that Villeneuve acknowledges to be the primary inflictor of harm on any multi-cultural artistic display; it involves a form of concession to the bland censorship of political correctness. To manage such an enemy of originality, his version of *Dune* is dipped further into the cosmopolitan, all-welcoming realms of science fiction visuals.

At large, the film adaptation takes shelter in the alien setting and the technology of the book. It displays more of the intimidating sandworms of *Arrakis*, elongated solo shots of the desert planet, with at times massive spaceships hovering in the sky while a spice incubator is rooted in its soil. It also offers a noticeably extended duration of fight sequences, heavily dependent on the unique, futuristic props found in the book: atomic force shields, crysknifes, plasma guns. At the same time, Villeneuve adds subtle details that are not included in the book but come off as seamless ideas that could have easily belonged there. The hand signals used as a private system of communication between Jessica and Paul track well with the Bene Gesserit secret spy-training, and an actual display of Paul's prescient vision, as awakened dreams, fragmented and out of order between the far and near future, are examples of well-thought-out narrative filling.

V.3.1. Villeneuve's Pursuit of Originality against the Epidemic of Recycled Remakes

Following David Lynch's adaptation. which has tragically flopped at the American box office and even made Lynch himself remove his name from the credits of the film, the Canadian

film director, Denis Villeneuve's decision to re-invest in this challenging story again after all these decades, was, to say the very least, a bold initiative. Taking on such a condensed sci-fi literary franchise and translating it into a screenplay that would make sense to the unfamiliar viewer was already acknowledged as a clear defying experience, if not a career-defining moment. The passion of Villeneuve for the book, however, was also undeniable, as the novel clearly stuck with him after first falling in love with the Arrakian world in his youthful reading years. He mentions this in one of his interviews, saying: "When I was a teenager, I was obsessed with [*Dune*], read all the books. I had the *Dune Encyclopedia* at home. My Graduation ring had the word Moua'Dib engraved inside, and there were even *Dune* quotes inside my yearbook. I loved it" (Lapointe, Villeneuve, p 12). This project felt like a perfect fit between an artist and an older, used canvas carrying outlines still barely visible, but clearly showing a past familiar painting. He was willing to preserve a near-to-heart devotion for Herbert's world-building and epic scenes, but more importantly, he was eager to add his own brush strokes to it.

It is also important to mention that Villeneuve was anything but a novice science fiction film director. One of his most acclaimed previous space film titles is the 2016 blockbuster movie, *Arrival*, a re-imagining of Ted Chiang's 1998 successful short story, *Story of Your Life*, about the efforts of communicating with an extra-terrestrial species. The film served to demonstrate Villeneuve's versatile talent for telling dramatic and action-packed stories from both inside and outside the outer layers of our universe. This was later followed by his sequel to Ridley Scott's *1988 Blade Runner*, *Blade Runner 2049*. Though it upheld the name of the original film modestly, it was able to expand upon the original universe of "replicants" and portray a more conceivable cyberpunk futuristic world on screen. Villeneuve had also produced original, successful screenplays outside of science fiction, including his dramatic Quebecois project, *Incendies,* released in 2010, which served to validate his talent as a versatile filmmaker and an ambitious screen artist willing to take risks.

Not everyone, of course, shared this opinion about the up-and-coming Canadian filmmaker. Quentin Tarantino, for instance, vehemently expressed his unwillingness to watch Villeneuve's adaptations of the Herbert desert sci-fi saga at any future point in his life, not out of personal spite for the artistry of Villeneuve but because of his general distaste for cinematic remakes as a whole, which he considered amounted to nothing more than a mere recycling process. He stressed this hatred for all recent remakes in a Vogue interview, saying:

> …I don't need to see that story again. I don't need to see spice worms. I don't need to see a movie that says the word 'spice' so dramatically (…) It's one after another of this remake, and that remake (…) People ask 'Have you seen '*Dune*?' 'Have you seen '*Ripley*?' 'Have you seen '*Shōgun*?' And I'm like, 'No, no, no, no.' There's six or seven *Ripley* books: If you do one again, why are you doing the same one that they've done twice already? I've seen that story twice before, and I didn't really like it in either version, so I'm not really interested in seeing it a third time. If you did another story, that would be interesting enough to give it a shot anyway. (Tarantino qtd. in Oganesyan)

Being a dedicated advocate of original screenplays and creative cinematic ideas himself, Tarantino certainly makes a good point when scrutinising the directors who have built their entire careers in the film industry by recycling archive movies. There is clearly a current monopoly of adaptations purely motivated by re-telling, not literary works or texts, but by almost re-using sets of older footage from previous cinematic projects that had already been consumed by audiences in the past, copying every scene shot for shot without adding any significant transformative content to it. If this sounds like a form of plagiarism being committed in plain sight, it does linger thin over that form of violation. The only thing that is protecting this type of recycling is the studio's ownership of the original title, greenlighting the production in the hopes of getting a generous cut off the film's revenue.

Mel Stuart, the first film adapter of Roald Dahl's children's book, *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory (1964),* expressed his displeasure with the 2005 follow-up adaptation of Tim Burton, believing that there was no need for it. While American actor Gene Wilder, who played the original Willy Wonka, called it an insult, "It's all about money. It's just some people sitting around thinking 'How can we make some more money?' Why else would you remake Willy Wonka?" (Wilder qtd. in Bailey). The trick to presenting the same film's plotline without appearing outdated would seem, on many occasions, as easy as sticking a high-definition ratio over them, and to Tarantino, alongside other non-supporters of this continuously growing pandemic, producing a minimum amount of effort while re-packaging memorable films into less shabby formats is hurting the original image of the industry. From this, one can understand why many would consider newer remakes to be an insult to cinema when filmed in a manner that does not turn to the book as a source material, by merely copying the homework of previous directors. Remakes produced that way not only feel like the equivalent of a street hustle run by many producers who lack the creativity to shoot their own narrative visions from scratch, but they are also slowly transforming the process of filmmaking into a generic, artificially automated craft of screenplays. No matter how lucrative it grows, the problem with the industry is the loss of its entertainment factor and, therefore, the loss of its fundamental focus, which revolves around the audience's satisfaction.

'Soulless' has become a popular labelling term for the state of remakes and unnecessary sequels today, as beloved franchises like *The Matrix*, *Star Wars*, and *Men in Black,* once considered to be some of the biggest magnum opuses of originally appreciated sci-fi narratives, have turned into a cesspool of modern cash-grabs and promotional material for actors to maintain relevance. In this, Tarantino's concerns for the industry's future are mostly well-placed, but Barry Jenkins would express a slightly different take during his attempts at defending his 2024 remake of *The Lion King* on Twitter: "There is nothing soulless about [it].

For decades, children have sat in theatres worldwide, experiencing collective grief for the first time, engaging Shakespeare for the first time across aisles in myriad languages. A most potent vessel for communal empathy." (Jenkins) One could easily be swayed by this kind of rebuttal. If Jenkins's intentions were truly to retell Simba's memorable tale through a new set of eyes, his prequel to the original work would have achieved this appealing objective of trying to rekindle a similar level of enjoyment and appreciation in the newer generation of viewers. This would have been especially the case for those who did not get the chance to watch the original 1994 Disney production in its prime with its iconic cast of voice actors, like James Earl Jones and Jeremy Irons. This remake would have felt slightly justified then, even to the hard-boiled film critics, but it was far from bringing the same level of dialogue with its masterfully delivered lines.

Moreover, the use of realistic 3D designs curated for both older and newer viewers' entertainment would have also been a creative risk worth noting if it had been an original brought by this remake. Unfortunately, the 2024 version was not the first of its kind to try the 3D revamping format of this story. Jon Favreau's 2019 version of *The Lion Ki*ng attempted it first, and it was decently received, but not so much that it exceeded the quality of the original story. This renders Jenkins's defence unbecoming of the actual state of the film, if not coming off as a little disingenuous. The truth is that a lot of new remakes do not offer anything new to their audiences, which makes them feel like creative exploits instead of passionate projects. This is mainly why Villeneuve's more recent attempt at adapting *Dune* has been shunned by the more doubtful proportion of viewers, partly out of respect for David Lynch's 1984 attempt at bringing Arrakis on screen, but also because of the bad, junk-food-like reputation that remakes have garnered in the last decade, consisting mostly of forgettable movies.

Coming back to Villeuneuve's adaptation/remake of *Dune*, when comparing the remake at hand with what many call an excuse for an artistic film, a question naturally presents itself:

Does *Dune (2021)* actually fall into the same category of recycled slop? To answer this question, we must assess the levels of improvement and creative liberties that are brought into Villeneuve's production. This first instalment opens up with a few minutes of instructions for the viewers' quick immersion into Herbert's nuanced narrative. The narrator is setting up the context behind the war happening between several interplanetary kingdoms, including that of the main character. From the initial context alone, we detect a certain loyalty to the book instead of a decision to reuse David Lynch's opening, which has arguably been described as an ambiguous attempt at copying Star Wars' famous introduction prompt, combined with Princess Irulan's cryptic introduction to the world of *Dune*. Although David Lynch looks to be more faithful in his treatment of Herbert's story, choosing to use Irulan as a narrator of Paul's story, the lack of context behind the blond female character speaking on screen already sets the viewers on edge. Princess Irulan is supposed to be recording a journal of Paul as he later becomes known by Paul Muad-dib (a name given to him by the Fremen once recognised as one of their own). The problem with Lynch's version is that it does not prioritise the history behind Arrakis, and instead follows a linear route with a certain reluctance to cross any textual boundaries as a result. This made it difficult to stuff everything happening behind the present story into the limited screen time that Lynch had compared to the book's great advantage of a wider space offered in its uncapped number of pages.

Fitting the first long book that revolves around Paul Atreides' life presented in itself as a challenge for the ambitious filmmaker, and it certainly did not help that Herbert made suggestions of his own throughout the period of production. Lynch called the whole filming process "a slow, dying, terrible experience." He also answers the evident question of the journalist in an honest, yielding fashion: Yes! [I regret making it] (…) It was squeezed, because in those days the maximum length they figured I can have is two hours and seventeen minutes (…) it was compacted, and it hurt [the story]" (Lynch, 15:15-16:23), and this is more felt in the

second half of the film. It only takes a few minutes of screen time for Paul to become acknowledged as the new leader and the de facto duke of the Fremen people. There is not much testing of Paul's abilities happening before that moment of earning the “Lisan al Gaib” title.

Villeneuve, on the other hand, first chooses another character to assume the crucial role of the initial narrator, one that appears a lot sooner and much more frequently than Irulan in the book. Chani, a female Fremen who later becomes the unofficial spouse of Paul, recounts the history of colonisation on Arrakis, all to emphasise the same shared desire of the clashing imperial houses to acquire ‘Spice’ that the viewer would find in Lynch’s version. The beginning of Villeneuve’s film, however, is slightly different from lynch’s work and even the book. It does not stray away from the facts of the original world-building. Chani keeps the audience in the loop about what is happening to her people on Arrakis. The viewers understand that the Fremen are the natives who have been colonised and driven away from their original homes to live under the sandy surface of this planet. In doing so, the opening takes on the colour of a story told from the underdog’s perspective instead of the aristocratic class to which Irulan, daughter of Emperor Shadam IV, belongs. Chani narrates the opening to *Dune* with a clear sense of concern for the future of her people:

> …The outsiders race against time to avoid the heat of the day; They ravage our lands in front of our eyes. Their cruelty to my people is all I’ve known. These Harkonnens came long before I was born by controlling spice production. They became obscenely rich, richer than the emperor himself. Our warriors could not free Arrakis from the Harkonnens, but one day, by imperial decree, they were gone. Why did the emperor choose this path, and who will our next oppressors be?! (Villeneuve, 0:42-2:29)

Moreover, Villeneuve takes his time to develop important relationships between Paul and Fremen characters, especially those who play a significant role in later events. The story of the first book alone is divided into two films. *Dune Part One* ends with Paul making contact with the Fremen and fighting a duel with Jamie, a Fremen leader. Paul proves his talent as a strong fighter and takes his first human soul. Everything that unfolds during this first contact feels like a test or an initiation ceremony to enter the ranks of a private cult.

Part two continues to emphasise the growing admiration and respect that Stilgar cultivates by watching Paul ascend to the role of a prophet figure. Chani is also given more attention in this version. Just like in the book, she plays the supportive soulmate of Paul, encouraging him with words of ancient wisdom in the most pivotal moments of his life. Villeneuve adds more substance to the character, however, by envisioning a stronger and more rebellious Chani. She does not see Paul as a God-like figure, but rather as a human partner blinded by his obsession with revenge for his late father and his fallen nation. This becomes evident in the second half of the film, when she runs away after hearing Paul make a sudden marriage proposal to Princess Irulan. Although the reason behind the marriage is not due to a natural love chemistry that sparks between two royally blessed nobles, but rather to impose a political union of the Imperial family with that of the Atreides, Chani still believes that Paul is morphing further away from the savvy, charming, young rebellious leader he once was, into a controlling, monarchical, power-obsessed mogul. The reputation that preceded his growth was changing the man she loved, which is bound to set in motion a whole different path for the character in the upcoming sequel.

V.3.2. De-Orientalising Herbert's *Dune* on Screen

When considering the similarities that Fremen and Arabs share in Herbert's story, it is difficult to picture such characters belonging to anything other than a darker race with a broken

English accent and a stronger proclivity to prioritise their daily prayers, especially when compared to other ethnic groups. Caucasian actors with little to no knowledge about the Middle Eastern culture would certainly look out of place when chosen to play characters like Stilgar or Chani. In a planet that is built as a blueprint of a futuristic Arabian desert, filmmakers tasked with adapting Herbert's narrative are expected to maintain the credibility of that special imaginary world, one that is race-coded and bound by the rules of a Bedouin-like lifestyle.

Past depictions of characters with Islamic descent, both in Western texts and on the televised shows, can seem at times controversially stereotypical and with no regard for foreign cultures. Herbert's work does not help reject this orientalised version either. The Fremen are depicted similarly in his book to what Edward Said calls "a lesser breed, a breed that only understands the language of force" (Said, 7:00-7:33). The Butlarian Jihad, although a neatly planned and organised rebellion against the empire for the purpose of bringing justice to both houses, Atreides and Fremen, is still captured as a vicious and brutal war in which many people on the planet would perish before reaching a time of peace. The story of a white leader who would help the colonised native to rise up against their enemies was inspired originally by Lawrence of Arabia's memoir, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926), which Herbert had read prior to writing *Dune*. The film adaptation of 1962 "showed a British officer, T.E. Lawrence, helping lead the Arabs against the Ottoman Turks, who were allied with Germany and the other Central Powers during World War I" (qtd. in Kennedy, p 11). Paul spearheading the Jihad against the enemies of the Fremen is clearly inspired by Lawrence's tale, and similar to the character's ulterior motives of gaining an Arab militia ally for Britain, Paul also acquires an army willing to follow both on his avenging quest and his crazed pursuit of the Imperium's dominion.

The mindset of Islamic terrorism is a similar case. It has been heavily integrated into so many American films to the point where Arab actors have garnered the expectations of two-dimensional, rigid roles of bearded super villains with bombs attached either to them or their

lackeys. As a result, any Arab aspiring talent's name listed on an IMDb cast page before a film is even set to be released likely means that the story is going to include some scenes of terrorist attacks. If the actors in question, however, happen only to bring a secondary role and not one of radicalised hostility into the film, it is usually of an inferior, exotic nature, like the middle-aged, Muslim guide and his two sons in the first instalment of the Sci-Fi Reddick trilogy, *Pitch Black*.

Villeneuve's choice of casting is surprisingly different from the stereotypical expectations of racially coloured performances. The film still brings a diverse set of actors to play iconic Fremen characters, but most do not bear Arabian origins or have Islamic connections. The reason behind such faint cultural dimming is probably to veer off from any foreboding negative comments that would find any potential disparaging oriental marks in his multi-cultural sci-fi story. To avoid such a trap, Villeneuve reshapes the Fremen into a unique futuristic desert society, whose hybridity is the only defining factor that separates it from the other imperial houses. The performances of Javier Bardem, Zendaya, and Babs Olusanmokun, combined with the domineering presence they engrave in every scene, contribute immensely to this new, refurbished look of an outer planet, strong, extra-terrestrial race. Tunisan scholar Yosr Dridi extrapolates on these points by pointing out the film's "shift of focus from the intriguing and convoluted geopolitics of the novel, to broaden (if not obfuscate) the cultural and ethnic identity of the Fremen" (Dridi, p 57). There is less ambivalence used to describe their military power on screen; every fighting scene demonstrates a great deal of strategic attacks involved when bringing down Harkonnen ships and troops. These scenes are further extended in *Dune Part Two* with a stronger focus on carefully choreographed hand-to-hand combat segments and less time devoted to presenting the vaguely explained and more orientalised lifestyle of the natives that figure in Herbert's work.

The wise use of the limited lengths that the two films are both permitted to have is felt even more when considering the highlight new addition that is showcased in *Dune Part Two*, which, in my opinion, is the incorporation of the original verbal desert tongue used between Fremen. American linguists David and Jessie Peterson are known for creating unique systems of language, specifically designed to fit into the fantasy worlds of their stories, from *Game of Thrones'* Valyrian dialect to the recent portrayal of Kryptonian phrases in James Gunn's *Superman* (2025). Villeneuve's decision to avoid any heavy channelling of the Arabic language is noticeable by viewers who are also familiar with the books, as Dridi confirms:

> Of the glossary-sized Fremen lexicon of words borrowed from Arabic in Herbert's Dune, the film only uses a handful: Mahdi, Lisan al-Gaib, the eyes of the Ibad, Shai-hulud, and Sayyadina. Since a cinematic adaptation is limited by screen time, a certain economy of filmic narrative dictates the writing of a screenplay that is more condensed than the source text. Reductive choices need to be made, and in the case of *Dune*, only the names deemed most crucial to Paul's journey of becoming are kept. The rest is left to the expressive potential of the cinematographic image rather than long narrative explanatory passages. (Dridi, p 61)

The criticised reductive quality that cinematic adaptations struggle with is often presented as an argument for their inferiority compared to their original novels. *Dune's* focalisation on visual storytelling seems to turn this inherent setback over and highlight the power of rich wordless visual moments. This can be felt from the first scenes of the first film. Villeneuve's Gom Jabbar test depiction highlights both the pain and fear on Timothée Chalamet and Rebecca Ferguson's faces the moment his hand is placed inside the black box. The famous Bene Gesserit mantra: "I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past, I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the fear has gone, there will be nothing. "Only I will

remain" (Herbert, p 32) is merely whispered here, but it is truly felt by the vivid, mutual discomfort and later triumph that the two actors experience only on screen. (Villeneuve, 24:44-27:35)

The adjustments made in Villeneuve's two-part adaptation have been overall well-received during their time of release. Because of its heavy focus on visual effects and performances, the filmmaker was able to strike a discourse more centred around the need for dialogue in films, believing that they constitute more of a hindering element than an asset to the audio-visual medium. This was enough to steer off the reviews fishing for political and cultural anatomisations and directed the opinions instead to a more constructive kind of disagreement, helpful in its continuous improvement of cinematography's universal state.

Conclusion

Reading Herbert's densely layered saga will probably leave each reader with a distinct set of assumptions about its hidden messages, and more importantly, differing drastically in their views of what the author hoped to achieve from his work. From attempts at crafting the next new popular epic that transports the concept of wars in a distant future of intergalactic, feudal disputes, to an alarming environmental warning about climate change, or even to a subtle personal religious and philosophical commentary on the evolution of the oriental East, it is clear that Herbert puts great effort into concealing his true intentions.

This makes *Dune* an exceptional demonstration of what science fiction is capable of achieving. The combination of speculative threading, alien horror thrill, and scientific stretching of theories into foreseeable practice, the genre offers a sheltering space for the artistic lies of writers to bloom un-reproachfully and without much fear of public scrutiny. However, Herbert's personal voice, arguably, still remains in tiny fragments throughout his storytelling, and in such instances, the story seems to lose its balance between artificiality and reality,

making the personal convictions of the author more identifiable. This can be seen in Herbert's take on the future of oil transportation and marketing. Shedding his strong beliefs in a growing monopolisation taking hold over the resource prices and criticising the role of OPEC through its fictional shallow equivalent, the CHOAM Company. Its management is depicted as prone to the corruption of the dominant powers on the planet. Such a company is turned into an intermediary agency, through which a monolithic dictatorship controls all of the Spice distribution throughout the world.

Herbert also exposes his views on the Middle East's fate and its inhabitants in his future world by disguising essentialist Islamic tides in the image of the superficially different Fremen race. It is a colonised society predisposed to the leadership of the white main character, Paul Atreides, who is foreseen as their Messianic liberator from Imperial Harkonnen occupation. The use of a distorted Arabic language and the vague efforts at alienasing that part of the world are especially noticeable in the defamiliarised lifestyle and customs of the desert people, similarly present in Bedouin life and the Islamic religion. The author's ambivalent description of the *Dune's* natives exposes his thoughts on the permanent weaknesses retained by their religious convictions. Herbert's replacement of the former colonisers by the later imperial dictatorship of Paul accentuates his belief in the persistence of that so-called weakness, almost making the argument that outsiders can penetrate the borders and frontiers of any religiously enclosed community by exploiting its spiritual dogma, thus allowing easy access to its interior political affairs.

Despite such revelations, science fiction remains a better form of hiding for artists from the essentialist tides of political backlash than the realistic and semi-fictional travel works that can easily be tracked down to their writer's personal experiences abroad. Critics who work vehemently to bring forth accusatory interpretations of tainted core thematic plots employed by writers for the sake of rallying their readers against, or for, a certain controversial subject

represent part of a growing cancel culture. These often far-fetched evaluations have contaminated the creative grounds of travel writing. By constantly attempting to trace symbolic instances of insinuated racism or imperial injustice, contemporary reviews and scholarly-endowed articles have, in other words, joined the ranks of social media commentary and become part of a larger mob-driven community. Compared to the previously discussed novels: Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Forster's *A Passage to India,* it seems that skittering over the edge of reality is much more prone to political, cultural, and religious severe scrutiny. It is considered today a risky manoeuvre often underestimated for its consequential public backlash. The fertile space of other-worldly tales offers, thus, more possibilities of creativity and at the same time a more secure kind of freedom in the author's personal takes while depending largely on his/her imaginative wits.

Moreover, looking at the amount of praise that Villeneuve's film adaptation has received, and the tighter leash of audience criticism set on any new Hollywood productions, Science fiction seems to marry even better with the audio-visual medium due to its more manageable potential over sensitive social subjects. *Dune's* depiction of Fremen as merely a vague race with less connection to Middle Eastern tides, and furthermore to its unique hybrid decadence of the future, is a solid example of that. Furthermore, the audio-visual quality of cinema provides a larger field for artists to work with. The tropes of custom-fitting and audio editing allowed Villeneuve and his crew to display a relatively different image of Fremen compared to the one told in the books. Their alien-like homeland and their uniquely recreated verbal system of communication generate the impression of a vaguely mixed-race society. As a result, Villeneuve's retelling of *Dune* is the closest form of artistic cosmopolitan cinema that focuses on the future of mankind.

Chapter Six: Challenging Public Expectations by Crossing the Boundaries of Fidelity

Introduction

The overall public appraisal of multi-cultural cinematic adaptations has often been linked to a presumable degree of owed fidelity, if not allegiance to their source materials. This chapter serves to investigate such claims from an interdisciplinary, quantitative perspective. It attempts to assess the extent of importance this kind of association has over the prospects of success that Western filmmakers are able to reach when sharing their interculturally dependent visions with a large, international viewership. This chapter relies on Karen E. Kline's work concerning the influence of screen adaptation types on public opinion, Marc Verboord's theory of peer-produced criticism, as well as Ilona De Jong and Christian Burgers' research on the difference between casual and professional reception. It tries to put the often-proposed rules of medial migration from text to audio-visual format to the test by analysing both the viewers' reception and the favourability of the viewed adaptations. Therefore, by using a distant reading approach, I compare in this section the post-release performances of previously discussed film adaptations in terms of statistical and qualitative standards, hoping to generate an approximate idea of their relevance and longevity from the perspective of their generational viewers.

While each targeting a different genre, type of travel, and set of themes, the common denominator between the re-imaginings of Roeg, Coppola, Lean, and Villeneuve is their endeavour to tackle foreign cultures, unfamiliar to them and to their Western audiences, with the least amount of overtime built up negative backlash. The latter has been argued often as the most damaging scale of public judgment to these artists' personal narrative visions and intents. The purpose behind this comparison is to highlight these adaptations' performance over the course of different generations in the hopes of understanding what helps maintain the agreeable longevity of a travel cinematic adaptation from the perspective of its diverse consumer bases.

VI.1. Comparing Levels of Novelistic Fidelity between Roeg, Coppola, Lean, and Villeneuve's Film Adaptations

Despite Linda Hutcheon's unbolted definition of an adaptation[36], the flexibility of this transportative and transformative medial art has proven over time to be susceptible to the follow-up personal theories of subsequent peer scholars who have dissected her work in the hopes of popularising their own critical takes. Many of their arguments continuously revert back to the question of artistic allegiance; a debate that has long been mulled over in terms of how much credit the audio-visual medium should pay to its antecedent textual one in terms of conveying ideal, refurbished, film-fitted stories. Some critics' mention of the matter seems to especially encapsulate a conviction in either the overly extraneous and outdated impact of fidelity over its assessment of adaptations' quality, arguing for its harmful influence on academic comparisons between film and novel. Such artistic juxtapositions, according to their opposers, stem from a distasteful competition between the two art schools, and these would often lead to growing habitual dismissals of the distinguished qualities and strengths that each medium of expression brings to storytelling. Therefore, instead of focusing on what makes novel and film adaptation so intertwined in their accounts of the same narrative, the discourse often becomes the thief of joy when it only tries to present claims about the superiority of either textual or audio-visual means.

Others, however, do not share this somewhat morose impression about the comparison of fidelity and its overall impact on narration. Paisley Livingston believes it to be a necessary scaling factor, as the adapter often makes his audience aware of his divergence from the source

[36] Refer to Chapter Two, p 62-63.

material through his film[37]. He also makes it clear that, despite the meticulous focus on the extent to which a replication can benefit or harm the quality of the story, just acknowledging the fact that the process itself is bound to affect the format or the content of the original work in question should be worth the interest of research. (qtd. in Harold, p 5). George Bluestone rephrases the notions of benefit and harm by bundling these two amendments into the necessity of creative destruction. “In film criticism, it has always been easy to recognise how a poor film 'destroys' a superior novel. What has not been sufficiently recognised is that such destruction is inevitable.” (Bluestone, p 62).

The contrasts between adaptations and their texts, following this logic, should be recommended if not mandated as part of any adaptation study. Trying to ignore its contribution to the public’s general understanding and scrutiny of how screenwriters curate condensed narratives into simplified scripts based on what they read and what scenes they choose to help visually materialise is to undermine such an affinity. More importantly, a lack of concern for this kind of contrast dismisses the underlying pretext that preserving the sanctity of each art form is futile, as Moretti famously expresses in one of his essays when discussing past comparatists' approach to transnational literature:

> Comparatists (…) have always been shy in the presence of national literatures, too diplomatic as if one had American, English, and German literature, and then next door a sort of little parallel universe [they] studied a second set of literature, trying not to disturb the first set. No! The universe is the same, the literature is the same, we just look at them from a different point of view. (p 61)

[37] For further information, read: Livingston Paisley’s “On The Appreciation of Cinematic Adaptations.” *Projections*, vol. 4, no. 2, Jan. 2010, https://doi.org/10.3167/proj.2010.040207.

One can say the same thing about art media. They share a common objective, telling a story to an audience, but revisiting that same story not only in a remodelled shape but also through a fresh pair of eyes enriches our overall knowledge about the impact of adaptation on the nature of the retold narrative. It is imperative in this case to consider the filmmakers ' attitudes and feelings towards the novelists who provide them with the raw, basic mould needed to shape their own productions in the first place. It is also recommended to examine the consumers' opinions and thoughts outside those professional, often-undisclosed states of correlations between the artists and their business agents.

Among those who attempted to trace the potential delineations of what a successful, ideal adaptation might look like, Karen E. Kline's research certainly sets the bar high in terms of illustrative evidence that supports her four paradigms. These factors, she contends, exercise a strong influence on the critical reception of a cinematic contribution's range, and are, therefore, suggested as the main indications that should be relied upon by aspiring filmmakers in their attempts to create the most well-received novel-inspired motion picture. The first three paradigms she mentions can be simplified as the standards behind any adaptation's critical assessment. The reviews of film critics often depend on either the expectations of a purely translated motion picture in the translation paradigm, a critical commentary of the adapter inserted into the based cinematic world in the pluralist paradigm, or an inspired production seeking its own original voice in the transformative paradigm (p 71-73).

Her fourth suggestion, on the other hand, is less clear-cut and more open to the interpretation of the reader. It evaluates the adaptation's content and considers the financial motivators that influence the filmmaker's decisions to lean towards one of the three above-mentioned expectation factors (p 73). The materialist paradigm could, therefore, be figuratively described as Kline's way of leaving an open door for other outside influences to be added as long as a possible nexus between them and the film's final generated figures can be

compellingly advocated. Despite its lesser tangible evidence, this paradigm still encapsulates and encourages Kline's idea of a near-perfect cinematic adaptation. It remains within the intent to prescribe the most convenient recipe for its success on screen while factoring in additional underlying trends and components that might relatively affect both the casual viewers' and the original story's hardcore fans' opinions.

Considering the relevance of her arguments to my analysis, I set out to find which of the previously discussed films are closer to a well-balanced adaptation. Kline's most desirable cinematic re-telling is, therefore, one deduced from her arguments about taking into account the different types of public reception's wishes while shooting the film. This method stands as a potentially valid set of objectives that all adapters might want to pursue. In other words, their cinematic versions should be capable of marrying fidelity and originality while tapping into the most current trending interests of the public. Based on this, I tried to outline below a comparative table that represents how many of the suggested reviewing expectations were met in the making of each film. By using a personal scale of grading from "Low to High", for example, Roeg's *Heart of Darkness* registering a high level of thematic copy-pasting on the translation paradigm**,** I attempted to assess the degree of paradigm manifestation within each subject study. In the materialist paradigm, I highlighted the disparity between the budget used and worldwide box-office revenue attained for each subject study, using specialised online databases like *The Numbers* and *Mojo Box Office by IMDb*, and backed them up with reports of popular outlets like *Time* magazine and *Variety.*

Film Adaptation	**Translation**	**Pluralist**	**Transformation**	**Materialist**	**Overall Assessment**
Heart of Darkness (Roeg, 1993)	**High** -It preserves most of the characters' original lines. - It re-creates	**Low** - Mfumu's addition as an African character is a shallow attempt at	**Low** -There are no noticeable transformative changes aside from	**Low** - Budget of over $6 million - Due to its dependence on	**Low** - The film is a close to heart replica of Conrad's work with minor added details, unimpactful to

	Marlow's journey from start to finish, featuring core scenes from the novella.	criticising the lack of African presence in Conrad's story.	Kurtz's more extravagant performance in his hut as he kills his pet monkey in front of Marlow.	television viewership and network ratings as a main source of income, there have not been any reports of approximate revenue, but it is expected to be less than the average successful theatre film release.	the course of the original story.
Apocalypse Now (Coppola, 1999)	**Moderate** - It follows much of the same thematic storyline but changes the context of the journey, the setting, and the period.	**High** - It includes visible commentary on the role that the deployed American troops played during the Vietnam War.	**High** - It transports Marlow's journey into a different place and time with a different set of characters - Captain Willard shares the same features of voyeurism as Marlow.	**High** - Budget of $31 million - Revenue of over $100 million worldwide.	**Moderate to High** -The stronger focus on American patriotism casts a more glamorous and less chastising image of Vietnam's colonisation.
A Passage to India (Lean, 1984)	**Moderate** -It retains the main plot and most of the characters' original interactions, but omits the second half of the book.	**High** -Lean Orientalised depiction of India is a strong contention to Forster's original journey.	**Moderate** -The adaptation sets an extravagant tone by projecting Adela's romantic frustrations on the orientalised landmarks of the country.	**Moderate** Budget of $16 million -Revenue of over $30 million worldwide.	**Moderate** -The film stretches the romantic triangle that Forster only hints at in his novel, and changes the vantage point from which the story is told by setting Adela at the centre of the journey.
Dune (Villeneuve, 2021,2024)	**High** -It re-creates the Dune-verse from the first book, and preserves the atmospheric political conflict that Herbert's novels extensively explore.	**High** -Villeneuve's Paul acknowledges the position of Atreides as Fremen colonisers and states it aloud in the film. -The film leans less overtly into the concept of an updated version of Islam and Arabs in a far human future and	**Moderate to High** -Both films (the second more than the first) display imaginative visualisations of the Fremen. An alien vernacular being used to communicate is an example of that. -The second film deviates from the	**High** Budget: -*Dune Part One*: Budget of $165 million. *Dune Part Two*: Budget of $190 million. Revenue: *Dune Part One*: Revenue of over $400 million.	**High** - The film succeeds in creating a balanced marriage of faithful re-telling and original extrapolation, moving away from the controversial takes of Herbert and tapping further into the potential sci-fi and thematic elements of his desert world.

		highlights instead the alien nature of the planet.	second half of the book by making Chani less submissive to Paul's intentions and refraining from showing Alia (the sister of Paul) demonstrating her absurd mental powers at a very early age.	*Dune Part One*: Over $700 million.	

Table 1: Subject Adaptations Appraisal based on Kline's Four Paradigms of Viewers' Expectations

Looking at the list of adaptations that cross most check marks suggested in Kline's paradigms, Villeneuve's recent two-part cinematic blockbuster does seem to be the closest fit for an ideal audio-visual re-iteration based on this criterion alone. *Dune* seems to have achieved a balance between fidelity and originality while also scoring high in terms of its budget/revenue disparity. Coming close second to that is Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*. Although I have described this film as a discernible scheme of military promotion, targeting the specific American demography of young people who are searching for the next new source of high ecstasy in life. The modern transformation of Conrad's classic anti-colonial novella apparently had borne its fruit in concealing its true purpose from a majority of its viewers through its half-cynical exhibit of America's imperial warfare in Vietnam. Kline's paradigms thus prove that my close reading of Coppola's adaptation deviates from the actual results of its successful depiction of the war, with what appears to be an effective attempt at distracting viewers from this American military promotion of concepts like freedom and patriotism. The underlying political messages, therefore, according to the table, are more unnoticed than what I have assumed in my close reading. *Apocalypse Now's* surprising 'Moderate to High' score is followed in third, also closely, by Lean's slightly magical and extensively romantic retelling of Forster's *Passage to India*. This one shows a disproportionally higher interest in the pluralist

paradigm, owing to the strikingly opposing changes made to the novel and portrayal of a more orientalised India than that of Forster's; a version that most likely proved to be more appealing to American viewers due to its exotic promotion of the setting. Roeg's *Heart of Darkness* is in last place because of its high translation of the book scenes and the significant lack of changes brought in the film. It only resulted in a screen version of the same controversially received original story.

What is most noteworthy about this table is not the impact that the audience's expectations of alterations, personal critique, or budget utilised have on the film's overall favourability, but the amount of artificiality and imagination exploited in breaching the linear reality initially set by the story's authors. It is a factor that is not directly mentioned in any of the paradigms, but might as well be included in the materialist one on the basis of the public trends that have often been suggested and incorporated for their financial prospect. There is no concrete evidence of parallel association, but the suggestion alone is certainly worth further research in order to determine the extent of their relation.

Dune and *Apocalypse Now* incorporate either fictional details or hyperbolic insertions relevant to the plot-building, which helped the filmmakers conceal any subjective thoughts or opinions they might have hinted at in their movies. *Dune* avoids the controversies of Herbert's Islamic scrutiny more efficiently. Coppola's exaggerations of warfare, glory, and patriotism have somewhat helped avoid the harsher accusations of racial segregation and women's objectification throughout his film. The two adaptations also happen to have scored the highest revenues at exceedingly impressive margins compared to Lean and Roeg's productions. Should one assess the success and quality of these films mainly by their generated profits, it is safe to say that they have passed this assessment with flying colours. Furthermore, extending the assumption that such a success also includes a more self-gratifying objective of pleasing the viewers by showcasing enough entertainment to make them forget about the screenplay's

underlying, political, cultural and even religious charged meanings, I would also believe that this goal has been met to a reasonable extent compared to its peers.

Nevertheless, one must acknowledge the limitations of such a schematic distant assessment of quality, especially in its failure to consider the disproportionate numbers of non-American descent viewers and their perception of both the pluralist and transformative paradigms, knowing that often culture is the subject of change and criticism that is addressed by the Western filmmaker. The positive reception of *Apocalypse Now*, based on Coppola's representation of American patriotism and the glamorous scenes of war captured through the eyes of American soldiers, reveals that his main target audience is the one that harbours the most interest in such themes. This, by consequence, shows a weakness in Kline's suggested standards, as they fail to consider the influence of cultural differences and their impact on an international viewership.

The importance of interpreting intercultural scenes in film adaptation remains an important decisive factor in the appraisal of adaptations. It is an element that computational models should factor in, as Nicoal Braida contend in her article, *On Distant Viewing (2024)*: "Following Stuart Hall, images have culturally coded elements that require decoding. In other words, visual and other messages are interpreted differently depending on the cultural background of a person. Images and their interpretation through algorithms and [schematic models] are thus subjected to cultural norms too" (Braida, p 61). Due to this, Kline's model overlooks the influence that the diversity of the interpretive communities adds to the appraisal of multicultural adaptations.

VI.2. Peer-Pressured Reception Blurring the Boundaries between Professional and Casual Criticism

It is challenging to determine the overall value of a film adaptation, particularly given

that the quality of a cinematic production largely depends on the subjective opinions of a diverse audience. It is one thing to assess the viewability of a film based on its cinematography, which, I admit, a film's pleasing aesthetic output can and does, at times, serve as a sufficient criterion to determine its success rate. However, completely ignoring the method of storytelling in carrying the production is, in my opinion, on most occasions, detrimental to any adaptation's enjoyment. A recent case in point comes to my mind when considering this kind of discourse. Zack Akers and Skip Bronkie's horror screenplay, *GOAT (2023)*, was adapted into the 2025 film, *Him*, starring Marlon Wayans. The gory, amalgams of violent scenes visualised in this recent adaptation have been greatly praised for their unsettling symbolic images, but at the same time, heavily criticised for the distracting effect they had on the film's narrative[38]. The original source material does not go to such lengths in its depiction of Conor's suffering and merely highlights a fraction of the supernatural events that the film entails. Similarly, Lynch's 1984, *Dune*, suffered from the same problem, putting a greater emphasis on capturing the alien feel of the story made the filmmaker lose track of what needed to be considered a plot priority concern in the narration of a motion picture.

In the context of travel productions and diasporic stories, the cultural and societal imprint of a text on which the adaption is based on, often supersedes such stylistic features, as iconic British filmmaker, Alfred Hitchcock, famously stated in a 1997 interview: "…There are three things that count in [making a successful film], the script, the script and the script." (qtd. Jones, Graham, p 55). The multi-cultural nature of travel narratives vouches even more for the validity of Hitchcock's statement, as most viewers of this genre usually expect to see nuanced, diverse interactions dictating the course of the story's progress. At the same time, the

[38] See Jason Kleeberg's blog review entitled "*Him vs. GOAT*": https://www.forcefivepodcast.com/blog/him-vs-goat

intercultural dichotomy between Western protagonists and the non-Western interlocutors is bound to highlight a strong disparity within the audience's views owing to the bearing difference of their ethnic, racial, and political persuasions. By consequence, Intercultural Controversies have always had the potential to chase down films of this nature in the form of long, generational contrasting connotations to the debates. Such a difference inevitably renders the scenes of dialogue in these adaptations into inconstant interpretations of the characters' balance in authority exercised throughout in their starring scenes, while coloured by the vantage point of each group of viewers. Nevertheless, an overwhelming number of online, public reviews that lean towards either the defence or the attack of a popular movie is often argued to be the most trustworthy scale of a cinematic adaptation's quality.

Today, a general consensus over the favourability of a film is largely determined by the sum of impressions that can be collected from the consumers' reviews found on the internet. The impact of the growing digital sphere on the overall field of humanities justifies Moretti's distant approach to analysing narratives. More importantly, it stresses the importance of Jauss' theory on the role of readers and viewers in evaluating a production based on their attributed breakthroughs, and Fish's acknowledgement of the diverse approaches that interpretive communities share in evaluating the quality of a text/film.[39]

Knowing that readers' response theories have served as a foregrounding basis for distant reading, the field of the humanities has come to embrace online criticism as part of its organic interdisciplinary evolution; more studies on digital reception are now being used to advance our general understanding of distant reading. Underwood describes this change as another stage of "blurring disciplinary boundaries" (Underwood, p 531). By looking at the growing exposure of online communities' reception and online journal stances on films, it is possible to generate

[39] Refer to Chapter Two, p 82.

models of peer-influence within such communities and highlight their levels of control over film adaptations' positive longevity.

The reputation of databases like *IMDb*, *Rotten Tomatoes*, and *Letterboxd*, just to cite a few examples, has grown over the years due to the powerful influence the public meta-scores model has been generating in opposition to the restraints of corporate promoters and paid journalists. The reviews of the latter groups had previously served as go-to references that used to help sway the decisions of hesitant viewers when contemplating which movie ticket to buy on their way to the nearest film theatre. This traditional method of film marketing, by consequence, often bolstered the popularity of certain movies over others and helped them get integrated into a celebrated catalogue of mainstream must-watch productions. It is true that the reviews of field specialists are still used as reliable marketing strategies, especially when seeing the opinions of Hollywood celebrities and their favourite movie lists crawl into the front cover pages of different published media outlets, like that of *People's* magazine[40], yet film databases have become an essential online venue for both cinephiles and casual watchers. Marc Verboord describes the now overwhelming presence of online public databases as a strong point of erosion in the once easily identifiable differences in film reception between professional critics and casual consumers. He writes:

[40] Despite the fact that *People* is a magazine that mainly publishes celebrity scoops and stories about the American glamourous lifestyle, there have been special editions in which film recommendations were featured as the main marketing point of this popular weekly outlet. This includes the recent *Reasons to Love California* special edition with *25 Essential Movies* featured on the front cover. See: Reasons to Love California Special Edition." *People*, Meredith Corporation, 21 Mar. 2025, pp. 45-52.

> …many people across the world have gravitated towards new media as a means of gathering information, entertainment, and culture. Increasingly, internet users are bypassing institutional gatekeepers and experts (like retailers, journalists, media critics, and scholars) for the content generated by their counterparts. More than just eroding the authority of traditional experts, this turn to participatory practices puts pressure on the underlying system in which institutionally embedded professionals decide what is artistically valuable or legitimate in our society. (Verboord, p 921-922)

It seems nowadays that there is stronger trust built between peer individuals interacting online, compared to that of consumers and elite promoters, even though a majority holding the former label are people who choose to maintain complete anonymity by concealing their personal backgrounds behind different, custom pseudonyms. One simple main reason behind this visible shift in the public trust is the reciprocal communicative model that online communities offer. Diana Gavilan weighs in on the subject in a study of this highly online-coded phenomenon. She explains:

> Subjects may change their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviours as a result of interactions with others who may be perceived as equal (…). When making a decision, users are in a goal-oriented mode that favours an easy information processing approach. Ratings are easy-to-process information that can be easily employed as a quick summary of a large quantity of information and help in establishing a selection of criteria e.g: [giving a film a 4 on a scale reaching up to 5 stars] (…) The author of the online review receives the reactions and feedback of peer users providing him with evidence of reality (Gavilan et al., p 47)

What is even more noteworthy is the massive monumental effect that such reviews have come to exercise over the revenues of films, almost predicting their long-run performances−If not deliberating on how much profit these theatre releases will sustain over the course of the months and years following their first local box office openings[41]. The ratings on such websites are an essential modern form of recommendation that has even affected the reviews of specialised Academic critics and journalists alike. This is more evident by the noticeable transmutation of online articles and reviews that have come to adopt different aspects of these databases, especially ratings and community feedback.

Online film reviews might be described by some people as the more in-depth, higher valued, published columns, reviews and articles of well-versed specialists in filmography when juxtaposed with the consumers' reviews. Nevertheless, borrowing Ilona K.E. de Jong and Christian Burgers' referral term to them, they remain a type of "word of mouth" (p 7), written opinions that display traces of subjective annotation, usually slightly more subtle than those expressed by public viewers. Not to undermine the effect that such texts have on the consumers' choice of watch, according to De Jong and Burgers' study, the boundaries that differentiate the two forms of reviewing have grown less transparent and autonomous in recent decades. In other words, the factors that once helped maintain the peripheries between academic articles, online reviews, and consumers' opinions, separate, have turned less traceable in the current time, argue the two researchers.

[41] Jeremy Berg & M. Jordan Raddick discuss the forecasting potential that online film data bases like *IMBb* might have by analysing its role on both past and recent films' financial profits. For more information, read: Berg, Jeremy, and M. Jordan Raddick. "First You Get the Money, Then You Get the Reviews, Then You Get the Internet Comments: A Quantitative Examination of the Relationship Between Critics, Viewers, and Box Office Success." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, vol. 34, no. 2, Apr. 2016, pp. 101–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/10509208.2016.1156426

By borrowing some of their suggested standards of criticism, which are supposed to separate professional analysis from non-professional ones, I attempted to compare **38** different types of reviews and film evaluative texts. The purpose behind this is to trace down the growing peer-pressure influence of the consumers' opinions on that of popular film journal and magazine articles, as well as published academic writings that are oriented for more specific research purposes. The two tables below showcase the level of incorporation of arguably two of the most prominent format-related factors that define the casual consumers' reviews featured in online public communities. These, I suggest, are: **(1) the rating scale and recommendations** used to determine the overall quality of a film, and (**2) the subjective opinion** that highlights the personal viewing experience or feeling towards any production.

Due to the popularity of these two components often shared in the concise opinions of public databases, many critics and film specialists have come to adopt them over the years in their own more in-depth analyses of films. The graphs below attempt to encapsulate the number of reviews and assessments published outside the public-consumer-based online communities, which have been affected by the modernity and simplicity of such systems of judgment.

Adaptation	**Academic Articles/Reviews**	**Critics' Articles and Reviews**	**Online Interviews with Peer Filmmakers**
Heart of Darkness	2	4	0
Apocalypse Now	3	4	3
A Passage to India	4	3	2
Dune Parts 1&2	4	5	3
	14	17	8

Table 2: Number of Critical Film Evaluations Collected on each Case Study

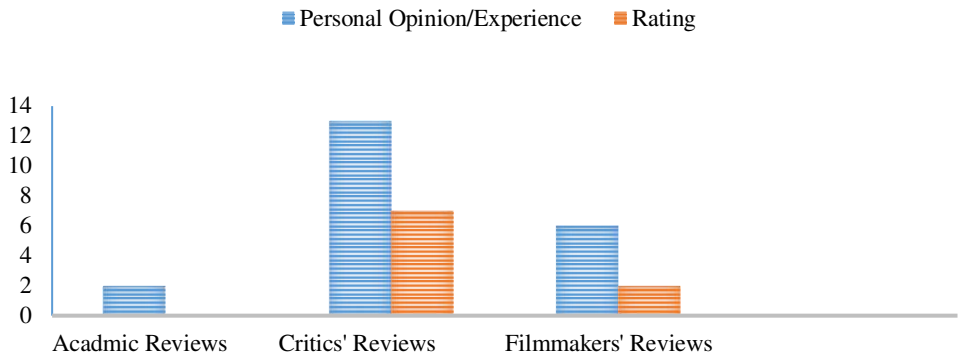


Figure 3: Subjective Opinions and Ratings based on the Number of Collected Reviews

Upon first examining some of the publications and statements made by professional critics and filmmakers whose diverse yet rich backgrounds attest to their experience in film criticism, it is quite clear that their opinions offer a more seasoned sense of familiarity with filmmaking, like that of American film scholar Marsha Kinder. In her 1979 review, stating that:

> *Apocalypse Now* is claustrophobic for it restricts us to Vietnam, to the war, to the madness, to the nightmare vision, and to the obsessive consciousness of its anti-hero. It is precisely because this claustrophobic pressure is so intense and the building of the momentum so powerful that some of the slower, more symbolic scenes at Kurtz's compound don't work-they temporarily slacken the pace and relieve the pressure on the audience". (Kinder, p 20)

In contrast to this line of cohesive analysis of the work, a consumer's review discussing a similar theme of war psychosis in the film, trespasses all linguistic filters and highlights instead the raw, often emotionally driven words based on personal viewing experience. This 1999 short piece, posted by a registered member on *IMDb's* website attest to this as the author opens his review by rhetorically asking a question and immediately offering an answer to it: "So just how insane is *'Apocalypse Now'*? Well, let's say that it is the kind of film that makes

you want to bang your head…"[42]. He concludes his online post by giving it a 9/10 score, as is customary to do so within such rating-driven systems of reviewing communities.

The amount of information is also explained in a significantly richer and more specialised vernacular in Kinder's text, but looking at the recent critical online magazine who rely on a number of professional journalists, there seems to be more perceptible shared attributes between the two types. In fact, 7 out of 14 professional online reviews from the ones I have collected included subjective takes or shared details about an individual's viewing experience. The 2020 review of *The Ringer* online magazine, authored by film critic and writer Brian Phillips, manifests this same tendency to share a potentially relatable experience with the reader. He shares: "I'd watched *Apocalypse Now* only once, on a rented VHS tape; I'm not sure I was out of my teens—so I decided to watch it again to see how my memory held up (…) I especially remembered it being very loud (…) I do stand by my initial judgment on one point. *Apocalypse Now* is loud" (Phillips). Not to discredit or diminish the content of Phillips' review, in fact, the writer provides a well-detailed and researched publication, but one can sense the overlapping voice of the consumer as well as the professionalism of the standard journalist conveyance style.

Ratings and recommendations, too, have turned into attractive, shining ornaments in such publications. BBC's Film critic, Ali Plumb, rates Villeneuve's 2021 *Dune* (Part One) as 4 stars out of 5, describing it as almost a perfect movie, except for its cliff-hanging ending. His conclusion read as follows: "'It's remarkable, it's absolutely admirable, it's a very impressive achievement, but I cannot argue with those that think of it as a greatly extended prologue of a film we are yet to see 4/5" (Plumb). Although academic articles have not been affected as much

[42] This is among the most upvoted reviews on *IMDb* posted by an online anonymous individual. To read the entire post refer to this link: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0078788/reviews/?featured=rw0166152

by the beguiling, loose, and simplified format of online community reviews, 2 out of the 14 collected articles semi-reservedly employed the technique of identifying the author with the consumer and passing arguments by as convincing statements curated according to the former's feelings towards the studied film. Philip Bockentin, for instance, exclaims in his research *Shifting Sands: Men, Masculinities and Nature in Denis Villeneuve´s Dune: Part One (2021)* that: "We [as audience] must appreciate the diverse distribution selected by Denis Villeneuve in his version. Villeneuve courageously introduced in *Dune* a more ethnocentrically sensitive perspective, one closest to the original materials." (Bockentin, p 25).

Filmmakers, too, have become adamant about sharing their own personal experiences in interviews about watching other films. Spike Lee shared on several occasions his prideful moment of being among the first in line to go watch *Apocalypse Now*, while having kept the movie ticket as a souvenir[43]. Quentin Tarantino, again one of the most forceful directors about other movies, used his own sort of rating system by calling, "*Rocky* the people's movie of the year… but *Apocalypse Now* his own personal favourite movie of that same year" (Tarantino, 15:00-20:24)

Decade	**Academic Articles/Reviews**	**Critics' Articles and Reviews**	**Online Interviews with Peer Filmmakers**	
1980-1990	3	3	/	6
1990-2000	2	1	/	3
2000-2010	3	/	/	3
2010-2020	5	2	/	7
2020-2025	7	6	6	19

Table 3: Number of Collected Film Evaluations Sorted per Decade

[43] See Spike Lee's ceremonial speech during *the 50th AFI Life Achievement Award to Francis Ford Coppola*, which premiered in 18th of June 2025: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2KujVk1k4Y, and his interview during *Coppola's Megalopolis New York Premier in 2024*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=88P4s4uIE8M.

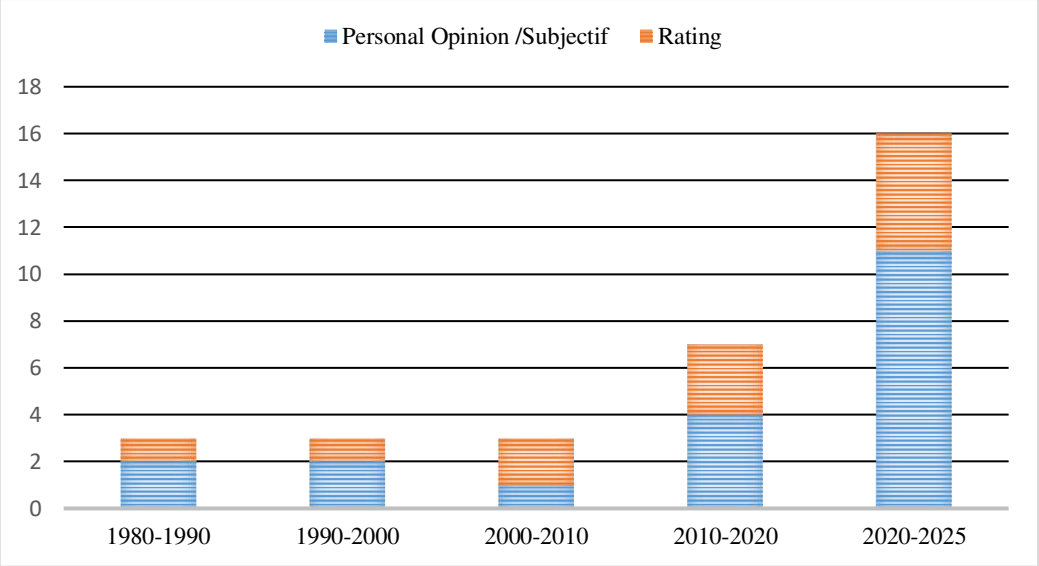


Figure 4: Public Database Features' Incorporation in Other Review Types per Decade

What is also noteworthy is the gradual increase of such features, noticeable in the more recent published online evaluations. **Table 2** showcases the same number of collected publications, but by this time sorted by decade. Despite the limited data I was able to gather on older adaptations' reviews, there is still a visible spike, as demonstrated in Figure 4, pertaining to the dependency on consumer database moves**.** The lack of findings I faced when researching older online journal reviews, most particularly related to Roeg's televised screening of *Heart of Darkness*, is due to the lack of online traffic reception back in the 80s and 90s. However, the more recent collected online articles in the 2000s still indicate a visible incorporation of rating systems and subjective experience sharing throughout what some would still refer to as professional online journalism in the 21st century.

Based on these findings, it is possible to conclude that film reviews have, too, known a parallel blurring of boundaries between elitist and casual assessments. The impact of online interface simplicity introduced by databases like *IMDb* and *Rotten Tomatoes* should be acknowledged as the main reason for such a breakdown of professional restraints. With that being said, having an academic background or experience in the field of film journalism is still

considered a more sought-after asset in the authors of such critical publications, as it adds more knowledge and credibility to the review.

VI.3. Obscuring Reality by Dialling up the Science Fiction Solipsism of the Artist

It is quite common to observe a political scurry of criticism chase down artistic expressions created in different formats after their release, gradually latching onto the more palpable of thoughts expressed in a not-so-fine print or a not-so-subtle exhibition. It has become nowadays even more common for consumers to dig out the old skeletons of once well-celebrated writers, showrunners, filmmakers, and other celebrities who have been praised for their craft, just to be later exposed for a presumably malicious attack or insensitive comment nudged in between the layers of entertainment projects that they were once part of. However, continuing the chase of condemnation down the line of history, some argue that such accusations have evolved into something less of a deserved judgmental treatment and more into a personal vendetta of audiences driven by their distasteful experiences or impressions of the art or the artist. What cancel culture has come to represent is not merely the pitchfork purging of past, overtly racist or hateful statements; it has extended its reach to the plausible, underlying, invisible messages that such persons of interest may have intentionally embedded in the cracks of their words or behaviours.

Oftentimes, the valorisation of online criticism over art is bound to include the far-fetched assumptions of a chastising hater, exercising their power of opinion over the rest of the consumers. Realising the role that viewers play in preserving the integrity of an enjoyable narrative passed down into their adaptations, Filmmakers have come to incorporate strategies of sensitisation in their films, erasing the old conjured tracks of potential dissension over the original author's messaging. Political correctness is one of the most prevalent strategies of sensitisation today, especially in Anglo-American film adaptation. It also happens to represent

the culmination of both the public's environmental change and the severity of reactions to different contemporary concerns. Jitaru describes the issue from the adapters' point of view by calling it a:

> [T]ranscultural [process] that involves changes in racial and gender politics (…). According to customs and mores, adapters are often charged with the difficulty of filtering a source text of elements that the target culture might find offensive, controversial, or irrelevant. (…). As political issues, ideologies, and currents have temporal fluctuations, the adapted versions might vary accordingly. (...) [P]ossible dissimilarities in ideology, philosophy, religion, national culture, gender, or race can open gaps that must be bridged by the script writer and director through a complex range of physical elements of frame composition. (Jitaru, p 3-4)

This continuous labour of filtering every possible offence, even the potentially ill-placed comments of writers, eventually morphs into a censorship of personal differences that revokes the individuality and originality of artists. Signs indicating either the author's or the adapter's imprint in the new, remodelled can no longer be traced in the midst of processed scenes and unemotional, ubiquitous dialogues.

I believe that no genre has ever acknowledged or attested to this fated congeniality in overall storytelling more than science fiction ever has. The fictional world built upon speculations about the future, or in the virtual realities channelled through the eyes of its main characters, all bring attention to the facets of utopian/dystopian sameness. Disch makes note of this in his book, saying;

> Writers tend to consider distinction and originality as virtues, but they are anathema to publishers, who value those writers most who can be depended on to turn out product at regular intervals, product that will move through the channels of circulation at a dependable, steady rate. As with fast-food restaurants (…), *the Star Trek franchise has been a gold mine for almost everyone concerned (...).* What this translates to in terms of the present and likely future of the [SF] genre is more of the same and more of the sameness. This is not my opinion only, but the received wisdom of those working in the field: editors, agents and writers. (Disch, p 211-212)

What this means for any Intellectual property, whether of a novel publication or film production, is a visibly growing assiduity to what successful writers and filmmakers have been making in the last century and copying their homework at face value. Many people might argue that this only paves the way to the death of all entertainment forms as they continue to follow the breadcrumbs of past revenues, but for the SF genre, this focus on future societal homogeneity opens up a wider space for new sub-scaled, concealed original stances on the world of tomorrow. In the so ever predictable cyberpunk worlds of virtual reality, drug abuse, automated lifestyles, alien colonisations and the cynical but inevitable subversion of humanity in its traditional sense, imagination becomes the tool of self-defence that protects the personal scrutiny and solipsistic tendencies of the artist. Disch illustrates this by using some of Robert Heinlein's novels as a core example:

> The notion that the whole world exists only in the imagination of a protagonist much resembling Heinlein is recurrent in his work, as are plot devices that allow all the characters in a book or story to be "cloned" from the Heinlein surrogate. *The Number of the Beast*, which culminates in a parody of an SF convention entitled (…) where all of Heinlein's favorite characters from his own books and those he's made his own by having read them have gathered from the various universes where all fictions, but Heinlein's especially, have been made flesh. The purpose of the gathering is to celebrate Heinlein's divinity. (p 221)

There is clearly a universal egotistical desire shared by writers to immortalise themselves through their published writings. Heinlein does so by trying to blend himself in within his fictional worlds, and the science fictional set of unique novums allows him to do so without seeming irrational. This also could be compared to Frank Herbert's tendencies to insert fragments of himself into the Duniverse, displaying traits of himself more noticeably at times than others. Brian Herbert recounts an occasion where his father expressed feeling connected to Stilgar in terms of environmental passion and strong political opinions he has cultivated over the years about the oriental culture and the desert (B. Herbert, p 177). Others suggest a less virtuous personification of the author, and a more self-absorbed one featured in the omnipotent observer characters who watch over Paul from an outer dimension and are only teased in *Dune: Chapterhouse*.

The debate over which literary passages manifest solipsism on the part of the author the most proves to be less divided and more agreed upon when searching for other authors' contributions in genres that are closer to their concurrent reality. Much of the criticism that Joseph Conrad and E.M Forster had received after publishing their novels revolved around their light dissimulation of real personal events, mimicked on paper with only minor details changed. Lean's *Passage to India*, for instance, operates on a limited fertile soil of fantasy and hyperbole;

the trial of Aziz and Forster's actual trip to India compels the adaptation to a realistic foundation. Each character's storyline progress is constantly reminded by the fact that the world in which the characters exist during a known period of Anglo-Indian colonialism and manifests different motions is only barricaded by a small fence of reality. In contrast, *Dune's* outer space, futuristic foundation is one that is significantly far more distant from reality.

The success of the Sci-Fi formula on screen is more perceptible and evident when looking at the gradual increase in Hollywood's market share over the last few years. The figure below is a report published by *The Numbers'* database:

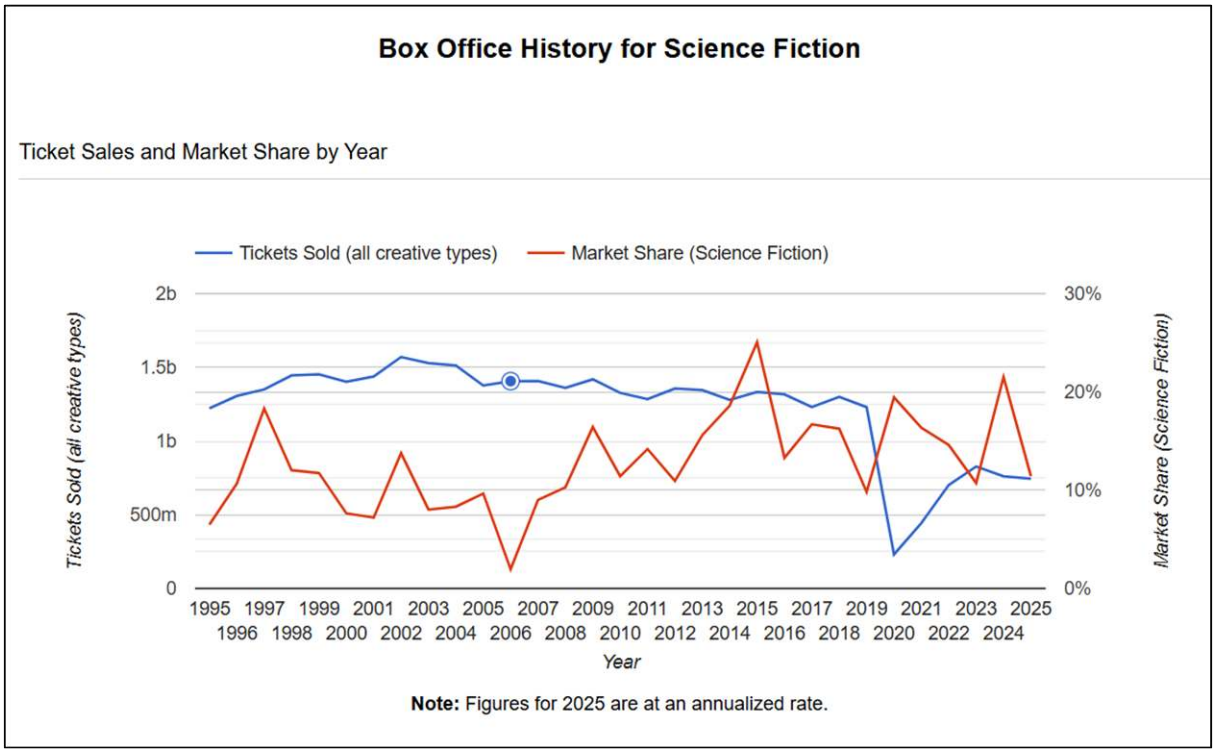


Figure 5: *The Numbers*' Diagram of SF Films' Profits based on Market Share and Sold Tickets per Year

Despite the undeniable hold that streaming platforms have come to exercise, especially during the 2019 pandemic, it is surprising to see ticket sales climb back slightly above the 10 per cent market share. This proves a steady resuscitation of SF moviegoers, especially between 2023 and 2025. Russel Blackford adds that the genre's growing appeal is partially owed to Marvel's superhero movies' record-shattering financial success, which might have helped

slowly introduce the non-sci-fi heads to the science fiction stories' versatile potential (p 39). In addition to this, the coming back of classic space travel epic sequels like *Star Wars: Rogue One (2016)* and *Solo: A Star Wars Story (2018)* have brought waves of new fans, and the interest only spiked from there, as Blackford also notes: "Cultural ubiquity and bewildering variety characterize twenty-first century science fiction. The contemporary genre includes a teeming diversity of movements, manifestos, styles, and sub-genres" (p 43).

Although there have been no clear mentions of percentage figures that could encapsulate the recent increment of these cinematic adaptations, I would still assume that they have been thriving exponentially in the last decade. I purely venture this on the basis of new releases, both in film and TV series format. The recent well-acclaimed first season of *Three Body Problem* (2024), an American adaptation of Liu Cixin's famous alien invasion trilogy (2008-2016), and the critically acclaimed adaptation of Edward Ashton's cyber-punk travel novel *Micky7* (2022), re-imagined into Bong Joon Ho's alternate cinematic universe, *Mickey 17* (2025), illustrates this recent flourishing. However, my research in this regard faces limits in terms of providing the needed data to support the validity of my assumption. Because of this, further analytical research on the rising number of science fiction cinematic productions, and more so, on the overall SF cinematic adaptations' expansion in the 21st century, is recommended to reach a sound final conclusion.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I attempted to assess the quality of the filmed versions of my case studies based on Kline's schematic model of an ideal adaptation to the test. I have found that *Dune* and *Apocalypse Now* are close candidates for that title. However, upon further examination, I found that Kline's paradigms manifest a significant lack of consideration for the culturally coded reception of audiences, especially pertaining to the changes recorded in the 'pluralist and

transformative paradigms'. Based on Stuart Hall's contributions to the acknowledgement of the diversity of multi-cultural identities in artistic publications, especially diasporic stories, it is difficult to determine the idealness of a motion picture without accounting for the different impressions of multi-cultural audiences regarding film adaptation's cultural changes.

Hall's ideas might not have been intended as a direct critique of film productions or distant reading, but as journalist, Angela Prysthon argues: "[Hall] paved the way for many film theories that did not perfectly fit the models established by the film studies and the immanent critique, who were not satisfied with the conventions of pure and simple film analysis…" (Prysthon, p 86). Computational and schematic studies should not ignore or dismiss the importance of multiculturalism under the pretext that they are much more fundamentally used in close reading. Although this makes the agreement over which important components and assets are expected from a quality adaptation more complicated to discern, it remains among the key variables in the improvement of the art.

Nevertheless, the importance of the data collected from online reception constituted an important source of complementary data in the chapter. In the continuously extending human efforts of erasing the dividing line that has long existed between art and ideal reality, an allusive state of entertainment is instead more foreseeable for future cinematic adaptations, one devoid of creativity and personal taste. When film adapters continue to yield to the tethering anatomy of audience criticism, only pursuing the green, secure fictional areas where levels of general censorship and approvals can be attained, the story presented on screen proves to be overall less interesting and engaging. In such cases, adaptations are featured as cultureless, less eventful, and more artificial versions of the original books. The entertainment factor in such politically correct stories' retellings becomes lost under the weight of essentialist peer-pressured online reviews. As negative criticism has proven to be a strong contributor to the demise of re-imagined beloved stories on screen, signs of malicious instigations and rallies

continue to shift the consumers' attitudes towards such art forms. Furthermore, the power exercised by online communities' shared opinions is evident in the overlapping of words and structures witnessed in the more specialised forms of film assessment.

At the same time, the spurring increase of SF overall motion picture releases in the last few decades indicates a growing interest of both film directors and consumers in such a genre. While holding on to the cynical fated extinction of humanity as we know it today, partly due to the seamless attempts at cultural and political erosion of borders, the hypothetical future worlds exhibited in such works still shine bright through the personal imagination of their visionary curators. And through this organic need for a personal creative wit for fictional world building, an opportunity to disguise fragments of individual convictions about the world persists in such a manner. In other words, SF adaptations only wrap the undesirable hubris tendencies of Western writers and filmmakers into the fabric of their story, rendering them into an isolated artistic necessity instead of a controversially perceived statement. Compared to Roeg's *Heart of Darkness* and Lean's *A Passage to India,* Villeneuve's *Dune* demonstrates its seamless stand on both gender equality and the neo-colonial position of the West as part of the semi-lucidity and futuristic novums that the 'Deniverse' embraces and explores on a three-dimensional audio-visual scale.

Conclusion to Part Two:

In this part, I explored the levels of efficiency by which different novelists and film adapters operate when addressing their multi-national audiences. By utilising both close reading and distant reading, I was able to reach a set of complementary findings about the importance of utilising the extent of artificiality granted by the properties of each storytelling genre. Compared to the semi-realism and magical realism through which the travel narratives of Conrad and Forster are introduced, the science fiction genre has proven its ability to distract and disarm readers' tendencies to nitpick cultural and political plots. At the same time, the growing post-colonial awareness and the multiplicity of hybrid interoperations have made it difficult for Western writers to completely avoid being called out for their imperialistic intents and implied colonial advocacies.

On the one hand, the recent film adaptations of *Dune* (Part One and Two) present a stronger case of cooling down the accusatory insinuations that have previously targeted Herbert's novel, calling out its insensitive treatment of the Arab culture and the Islamic religion. Through Kline's adaptation paradigm, Disch's notion of SF's concealment potential, and the data collected from different sources of online criticism (both from casual viewers and professional critics), the wide audio-visual range that the genre offers on film has proven to be much more welcoming to the creativity and subjectivity of its directors, when those characterised properties are fully utilised.

General Conclusion

In this research, I investigated the important artistic and sociocultural conjunctions in which travel novels and their film adaptations intersect. In the first chapter, I sought to outline an inclusive definition of travel literature by tracing its malleable attributes and its growing significance in the academic field. After closely analysing the affinities that exist between travel writings and the dominant human creed that has been constructed about the outside world over the last few centuries, I discovered that the gap separating travel fiction from travelogues and memoirs is thinner than what is most commonly believed. As truthful accounts of long expeditions have been initially cursed with the lack of excitement and fervour that readers would often long for in the tales of conquest and discovery of unknown territories, the writers conveying such accounts had to glorify their experiences abroad in order to serenade their audiences. This was achieved so consistently that many of the genre readers believed even the most far-fetched descriptions of Western heroism. Because of this, travel texts, over time, have taken a more creative route, indulging the imagination of their authors and hiding reality under layers of thematic artificiality in different spreads, leading to their unbalanced closeness to reality.

To unsuspected modern readers, these stories reflect much of the artistry of their storytellers, but to the more discriminating ones, they reveal vital views held by their creators. Novelists hiding behind the subtlety of their imagination, addressing even the most sensitive matters of their time, conveyed their rants and passed them off as just another set of fictive specks belonging in the background of their world-buildings. Many Western writers who dabbled in the genre turned travel fiction into a marketing tool, meant to erase public suspicions about their invasive interactions in the foreign world. This brought new forms of identity borders into the awareness of the public, necessary to their safety from the threat of such stereotyped aborigine natives in Africa, the East, and even the Middle East. The colonial

disparaging nature that latched itself onto later novels dealing with non-Caucasian cultures led some critics, like Debbie Lisle and Edward Said, to theorise about the inherent effect of imperial perception, both consciously and subconsciously undermining the existence of darker races and emphasising instead the land on which they live.

These supposedly ingrained approaches used in the description of white travellers resulted in new forms of adaptation, which I tackled in chapter two. Western travels transcended their original textual realms and reached new artistic heights by having their narratives re-created and re-produced on screen. However, as the audio-visual medium expanded the genre's dimensions of storytelling, the fictional fabric of these textual stories, now proliferated and fleshed out, up to the standards of modern receptions, presented new forms of vague messages. Both politically and culturally charged, but still bathed in abstract Hollywood glamour, these new re-creations of classical texts chose to indulge in the liminality of borders. Motion pictures oscillated between fictional details, appeasing in their address to the general viewers, and opinionated reality, softened and normalised by the craftsmanship of its artists, yet resolved to maintain its privileged Western gaze over the rest of the world. The study of the readers and viewers' reception of this craftsmanship has expanded from close reading of text criticism and analysis of its adaptations to a distant reading in which data mining has brought further insight into the impact of the maturing of these narratives' consumers.

This lesson on exploiting political correctness in the creation of well-acclaimed art was assimilated from the trials and errors of multi-cultural expressions. In the third chapter, I explored Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, its adaptations and the evolving receptions that each artistic version of re-iteration had received as a realistic fictional story that became one of the most influential works after the simmering anger of public opinion made its stronger appearance at the dawn of the post-colonial discourse. The adaptations of the text could not escape Conrad's controversial account of the African landscape, even when attempting to

change the foreign subject matter in Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*. The new imperial gaze of an American war eventually caught the attention of scrupulous critics, who would continue to reprimand this inherent disparaging of other nations. Following the same track, Coppola's film was criticised for depicting Vietnamese characters as no more than a 'Yellow Peril', an artificial enemy on which American heroism could lay its justice beating. The adaptation, thus, was suspected to be a hidden marketing scheme highlighting the American war as both an altruistic and charismatic field for the entertainment and appeal of the local youth.

The spectrum of the privileged gaze hid further under the cervices of fictional narratives, including that of E.M Forster, *A Passage to India*. In chapter four, I contend that even by exploiting the drabs of magical realism to criticise the stubborn traditional bickering of the East. Forster's genuine efforts in capturing India without objectifying its culture are still reprimanded for the besmirching effects they have on some of the more commonly misunderstood landmarks of India. Lean's televised adaptation, on the other hand, glamorises the country while highlighting both its exotic and extravagant territorial aspects. His story loses its momentum by the end of the film as it draws back from the initially showcased interest in the Anglo-Indian improving relationship and instead shifts its attention to Adela and Fielding's potential romance. The contagious orientalised body of Western portrayals is still brought up in the reviews of this additional presumable empathic travel narrative, highlighting similar mistakes of offence committed against the Eastern environment.

The fifth chapter of my research reveals that the role of science fiction in reshaping the narrative setting is much more effective than other realistic genres, especially when writers attempt to weigh in on heated, past, and controversial discourses. Herbert's saga, *Dune,* tackles a large range of relevant subjects, from political and cultural hierarchies to religious and economic ones. It even includes a personal environmental stance on the fate of Earth's depleting natural resources, by diving deeper into futuristic concepts and the ambiguous

systems of living on planet *Arrakis.* Herbert covertly states his piece of mind while concealing those opinions under a dense artificial world of trans-humans, sandworms, and prophetic figures. Nevertheless, some literary cracks and unmindful disguises are still exposed in the novum-dependent storytelling, especially when referring to Islam and Arabs as the colonised and deeply religious, foreign natives of his planet; a population that eventually turns into the army of its coloniser, Paul Atreides.

Villeneuve's version of *Dune* reinforces the potency of science fiction by harmonising Herbert's utmost phantasmagorical descriptions with the power of cinematography to expand the dimensions of those details. The 'science fictional lies' that Disch refers to shine best when transmitted through the audio-visual medium, and *Dune's* CGI, accompanied by the well-devised performances of the multicultural cast, brings a strong verisimilitude to the world-building of the source material. More importantly, the adaptation is able to thrive on the core thematic tale of Herbert, emphasising the storyline of Paul's revenge and his ascendance to the position of emperor without the need to address Herbert's light orientalised rants. Upon its release, both *Dune (2021)* and *Dune Part Two (2024)* were well received, and much of the critical nitpicking was directed at the artistic approach and production decisions that prioritise visual showcasing over explaining the unfamiliar rules of the planet and its inhabitants to the viewers.

In chapter six, I attempted to further support these claims by using a distant reading approach outside of the adaptations' thematic structures. Combining Kline's ideal adaptation paradigms with the numerical figures of influential criticism collected from diverse online sources (of casual publications and professional ones) allowed us to outline the amount of influence such interpretive communities have on the performances of these adaptations. These findings also contributed to the synthesis of the relationship that exists between different types of travel narratives: semi-biographies, magical realistic novels, and science fiction novels, and

concluded that the closer the art is to the audience's reality, the higher the possibility of it receiving political and cultural backlash. Due to their overtly expressed intercultural and political agendas, the former two genres of films have become more prone to the negative peer-pressured forms of hate, including that of professional journals and academic outlets. The growing tendencies of using tantalising consumer database features to reach a greater number of readership and article clicks has become more of a priority than delivering a genuine, well-researched review.

Overall, when comparing the previous attempts of adjustments that the cinematic adaptations of Lean, Roeg, and even the hyperbolic appropriation of Coppola's war codded film, Villeneuve's *Dune*, I believe it is the closest form of cosmopolitan cinematography, but it can only be described as such if one is willing to omit the possibility of genuine cultural idiosyncrasy. The interest by which some Western directors may hope to prove their respect for other cultures in their exhibition of border-crossing tales could still be achievable. Knowing that Hollywood's most authoritative executives and higher-ups remain an outside influential factor that continues to be overlooked, even by most popular press reviews. In the meantime, science fiction stands as the equivalent of highly fine print when conveyed into a motion picture.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Hybrid Film Critics and their Aggregated Online Reviews

The body of film adaptations' assessments that I have collected to generate the data featured in **Figures 1 and 2** represents variations of both online sources and downloadable academic documents. The most vital of which are those published by journalists who possess both a scholarly experience in analysing cinematic materials and a history of active posting on online database communities (or affiliation to such communities) like *Letterbox*, *Rotten Tomatoes* and *IMDb*. Among those whom I depended on, I mention:

- Glenn Erickson is a film editor and online critic who has been a member of the *Online Film Critics Society (OFCS)* for over 25 years. His columns are mainly featured on his website, DVD Savant Talk, and have been aggregated by Metacritic and *Rotten Tomatoes*. I included the following review in my analyses:

  Erickson, Glenn. "Heart of Darkness Warner Archive Collection." *Savant DVD*, 10 Feb. 2014, www.dvdtalk.com/dvdsavant/s4417hear.html.

- Steven Allan Spielberg is a monumental American Filmmaker, whose reviews of other films gathered from his interviews have been aggregated by *Metacritic*, his recent interview with Denis Villeneuve has been shared by *Variety* reporter Zack Sharf, and was included in my analysis:

  Sharf, Zack, Spielberg. A, Allan "Steven Spielberg Tells Denis Villeneuve That 'Dune 2' Is 'One of the Most Brilliant Science-Fiction Films I've Ever Seen" *Variety*, 27 Mar. 2024.variety.com/2024/film/news/steven-spielberg-dune-2-brilliant-science-fiction-movie-ever-made-1235953298. Accessed December 2nd, 2025.

- Peter Bradshaw is a British author, chief film journalist for *the Guardian* magazine, and an active reviewer on *Rotten Tomatoes*. The article I used for my analysis:

  Bradshaw, Peter. "Dune: Part Two Review – Second Half of Hallucinatory Sci-fi Epic Is Staggering Spectacle." *The Guardian*, 3 Feb. 2025, www.theguardian.com/film/2024/feb/21/dune-part-two-review-denis-villeneuve. Accessed December 7th, 2025.

- Michael Phillips is a film journalist for the *New York Times*, *MTV News,* and *The Ringer*, and an active member of the *Metacritic* database. The article I used for my analysis:

  Phillips, Michael, "A Journey Back Into the Nihilistic Hellscape That Is 'Apocalypse Now.'" *The Ringer*, 14 Aug. 2020, www.theringer.com/2020/08/14/movies/apocalypse-now-summer-blockbuster-francis-ford-coppola. Accessed December 9th, 2025

- Roger Ebert was an American journalist for the book The Great Movies (2002), a film journalist for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, and the first of his profession to win a Pulitzer Prize for criticism. He later made his own blog for reviews called *RogerEbert.com,* and after his passing away, his reviews were aggregated by various metascore databases to calculate his rating scores. The article I depended on for my analysis:

  Ebert, Roger, "*A Passage To India* Review." *RogerEbert.com*, 1 Jan. 1984, www.rogerebert.com/reviews/a-passage-to-india-1984. Accessed on November 13th, 2025.

Appendix B: The Legitimacy of Reports Issued by *The Numbers* and *Box Office Mojo*

Online databases specialised in tracking and gathering information on film budgets and overall revenues have grown exponentially in the last few years. In my research, I have relied on the publicly disclosed sets of data(s), mainly detailing the film's performances at the American box office and in later (still growing) international sales of movie tickets. The two main sources that I have included are *The Numbers* and *Box Office Mojo by IMDbPro*. On their platform, *the Numbers team*, describes their process of data collecting as being directly connected to the reports of film studios, "…we get our information from the source (…) We talk to the studios every day about their changing plans (…)We're the company the studios send their numbers to, and we're the first to publish daily, weekend, and weekly numbers." These websites also use their own logistic models of gross predictions based on the initial reports of box office profits. The accuracy with which they operate has been researched by several academics. Nahid Quader and other researchers have attempted to study just how reliable their models of predictions are. In their 2017 article, "*Performance Evaluation of Seven Machine Learning Classification Techniques for Movie Box Office Success Prediction,*" They noticed small disparities in the accuracy of the different learning algorithm models of prediction used by the subject databases. The percentage of those predictions slightly varies depending on many factors, including the impact of public reviews and marketing campaigns of the films.

The Ringer's journalist, Shaun Raviv, describes these predictions as a similar version of sports analysis over future games. In his article *Moneyballing the Movies: How the Box Office Became a Sport* (2018), he explains that: "...*The Numbers and Mojo* are essentially box office versions of Baseball-Reference, which relies on data from early baseball tomes and the suggestions of stat heads (…) to populate their historical findings. But not all Babe Ruths are created equal." This implies that there is an overall agreement over the risk of relying on

sources in their appraisal of a film's future lucrative success. Such an Intel remains a highly difficult thing to predict with a guaranteed level of accuracy. With that being said, the computational research invested in these types of predictions often makes an appealing set of bets worth checking. Consumers of these sets of data sources are, therefore, still advised to keep a healthy amount of reserved doubt when browsing any of their reports.

Résumé :

Cette thèse analyse les interactions géopolitiques et culturelles incluses dans les histoires de voyage publiées par les écrivains occidentaux. Dans leurs descriptions de grands périples à travers les frontières et explorant des terres étrangères, ces romanciers en viennent à inclure les populations autochtones comme victimes de la colonisation, comparant leurs modes de vie, qui sont relativement différents, à ceux de leur propre pays d'origine. Parallèlement, le soin apporté à leurs descriptions des destinations visitées et à la dimension fictionnelle de leurs récits leur permet de formuler des jugements et des critiques à l'égard de ces cultures. Tout en atténuant les accusations de racisme de leur public, ces écrivains explorent même les territoires sacrés des lieux emblématiques en Afrique, en Orient et au Moyen-Orient. S'intéressant à ces démarches, cette recherche vise à évaluer la sincérité et l'efficacité de leurs stratégies de représentation objective aux yeux des générations de lecteurs et de critiques toujours plus variées dans leurs jugements. Cet intérêt s'étend également aux adaptations cinématographiques qui cherchent à transposer ces récits multiculturels au grand écran. De par leur influence et leur popularité, les romans, dont le degré de véracité documentaire diffère en thèmes et sujets, continuent de captiver les cinéastes hollywoodiens. Des œuvres classiques et appréciées comme *Au Cœur des Ténèbres* de Conrad, *La Route des Indes* d'E.M. Forster, et même l'épopée de science-fiction plus récente de Frank Herbert, *Dune*, ont été adaptées au cinéma en tirant parti de leurs personnages fascinants, de leurs événements palpitants et de leurs paysages panoramiques visuellement prometteurs. Les modifications apportées par les adaptateurs sont également essentielles à cette étude, car les choix d'exclure ou d'ajouter des scènes soulèvent des questions quant aux motivations de ces réalisateurs sous-jacentes. En s’appuyant à la fois sur une lecture rapprochée et une lecture distante de la réception et des performances de l’ensemble de cas étudiés au fil du temps, mon travail soutient que l’égocentrisme occidental et les propos dénigrants envers les « autres », dont l’identité raciale

et religieuse est ambiguë, continuent de ressurgir en raison du regard impérial hérité que les artistes occidentaux portent sur les communautés marginalisées. Cependant, en s'immergeant davantage dans les univers fantastiques de la science-fiction, « le politiquement correct » devient plus facile à mettre en œuvre par les cinéastes. Le genre offre aux artistes un refuge naturel et intuitif pour s'exprimer sans craindre les attaques hostiles des critiques influencées. Cependant, en raison de la nature de la longue utilisée dans l'écriture des romans, les effets de dissimulation de la science-fiction fonctionnent mieux sur le format court et beaucoup plus direct du film, comme l'illustre la modération des critiques négatives concernant la dernière adaptation en deux parties de *Dune* par Villeneuve. Mon travail soutient que le film représente un exemple d'une stratégie implicite pour produire une expression artistique universelle non provocatrice.

Mots-clés : récits de voyage, frontières, adaptations cinématographiques, critiques des pairs, regard privilégié, mensonges de la science-fiction

الملخّص:

تُحلّل هذه الأطروحة التفاعلات الجيوسياسية والثقافية المضمَّنة في أدب الرحلات الذي نشره الكتّاب الغربيون. فمن خلال وصفهم لأسفارمختلفة تعبر الحدود وتستكشف أراضي أجنبية، يُدرج هؤلاء الروائيون الشعوبَ المضطهدة بأوصاف توحي على تعاطفهم وانتقداهم لطغيان الاستعمار، ويقارنون أنماط حياتهم المختلفة نسبيًا بأنماط الحياة التي عاشوها في بلدانهم الأصلية. في الوقت نفسه، يتيح الاهتمام المعمق في توثيق الوجهات التي تمت زيارتها وبالبعد التخيلي للسرد الذي يشهره هؤلاء الكتّاب إصدار أحكام وملاحظات شخصية تجاه تلك الثقافات. وبينما يعملون على تخفيف حدّة الانتقادات والاتهامات بالعنصرية الصادرة عن جماهرهم، لا يتردّد أي منهم في استكشاف الأراضي المقدّسة للمعالم الرمزية في إفريقيا والشرق الأوسط. وانطلاقًا من الاهتمام بهذه المقاربات، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقييم مدى صدق وفاعلية استراتيجياتهم في التمثيل الموضوعي في نظر أجيال متعاقبة من القرّاء والنقّاد الذين تتنوّع أحكامهم على نحو متزايد. ويمتد هذا الاهتمام أيضًا إلى الاقتباسات السينمائية التي تسعى إلى نقل هذه السرديات المتعدّدة الثقافات إلى الشاشة الكبيرة. وبفضل تأثيرها وشعبيتها، لا تزال الروايات—التي يختلف مستوى مصداقيتها التوثيقية من حيث الموضوعات والقضايا—تجذب صُنّاع السينما في هوليوود. فقد جرى تجسيد أعمال كلاسيكية ومحبوبة مثل **قلب الظلام** لجوزيف كونراد، و**طريق عبر الهند** لإي. إم. فورستر، وحتى ملحمة الخيال العلمي الأحدث لفرانك هربرت **كثيب** ،سينمائيًا بالاستفادة من شخصياتها الآسرة وأحداثها المشوّقة ومناظرها الطبيعية البانورامية ذات الإمكانات البصرية الواعدة.كما تُعدّ التعديلات التي يجريها المُقتبِسون عنصرًا أساسيًا في هذه الدراسة، إذ إن قرارات حذف مشاهد أو إضافتها تثير تساؤلات حول الدوافع الكامنة لدى هؤلاء المخرجين. من خلال الاعتماد على كلٍّ من منهجيات القراءة القريبة والبعيدة لدراسة الاستقبال الذي لاقته كل من هذه النماذج وديمومة شهرتها عبر الزمن، يجادل هذا البحث بأن التمركز الغربي حول الذات والخطاب المُسيء تجاه «الآخرين»—ذوي الهوية العرقية والدينية الملتبسة—يواصلان الظهور نتيجة النظرة الإمبريالية الموروثة التي يحملها الفنانون الغربيون تجاه المجتمعات المهمَّشة. غير أنّ الانغماس في عوالم الخيال العلمي يجعل تطبيق «الصوابية السياسية» أكثر يسراً بالنسبة لصنّاع الأفلام؛ إذ يوفّر هذا النوع ملاذًا طبيعيًا وبديهيًا للتعبير الفني من دون خشية الهجمات العدائية للنقّاد المتأثّرين .ومع ذلك، بسبب الخصائص الروائية المشجعة على التعمق في السرد، فإن تأثيرات التمويه التي يوفّرها الخيال العلمي تعمل على نحو أفضل في الصيغة القصيرة والأكثر مباشرة للفيلم، كما يتجلّى ذلك في اعتدال حدّة الانتقادات السلبية الموجّهة إلى أحدث اقتباس ثنائي الأجزاء لفيلم **كثيب** من إخراج دينيس فيلنوف. وتخلص هذه الدراسة إلى أنّ الفيلم يعد مثالًا على استراتيجية ضمنية تهدف إلى إنتاج تعبير فني عالمي غير استفزازي.

الكلمات المفتاحية :أدب الرحلات، الحدود، الاقتباسات السينمائية، نقد الأقران، النظرة المميَّزة، تمويهات الخيال العلمي.