

## ADAPTATION OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS INTO FILMS: THE DARK SIDE

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**ABSTRACT:** *To what extent our innermost feelings can be revealed through our works? The unbearable face of human being cannot be hidden and what a director shot in a film may reveal the real sense of what is hidden from our eyes. Thus directors sometimes try to hide their dark side behind such interesting movies after having modified the events of the original text to achieve their end. This paper, however, is an overview about the technique of adaptation which varies from one adaptationist to another depending on the historical background of the screenplay writer. Although the director succeeds to project what is on one side of his curtain, he fails to hide what is on the other side that discloses his innermost feelings*

**KEYWORDS:** Dark side, Shakespeare, adaptation, Vishal Bhardwaj, Sadism, Masochism

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### INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I start from where I ended my last essay on media and literature which presented the relationship between the content of a literary work and its modified version after adaptation into films. The core of which was the role of the mass media which consisted of various layers of meaning superimposed on one another. I enhanced the study with two specific instances those served as illustrations; 'Best Defense', a Hollywood movie based on Robert Grossbach's novel *Easy and Hard Ways Out* (1974) and 'World War Z'; another Hollywood movie based on the New York Times bestseller and an apocalyptic horror novel *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* (2006) by Max Brooks. I argued that directors who adapted literary works into films deliberately modified the motifs to achieve their ends. This opinion I would still defend and can modify it somewhat in the light of what has been said so far, even though the directors themselves might have been bemused by it. The former study focuses on Hollywood films whereas the focus of this study is on the Bollywood's. I restrict myself to the Bollywood director Vishal Bhardwaj who is known for his admiration of William Shakespeare's works and his adaptation of *Macbeth*, *Othello* and *Hamlet* in what he calls 'Maqbool', 'Omkaara' and 'Haider' respectively.

The director started his first adaptation of Shakespeare's plays in his 2003 hit 'Maqbool' which was based on the tragedy of *Macbeth*. He returned with 'Omkaara' in 2006 as his adaptation of the tragedy of *Othello*. Then he evaporated for almost eight years to show himself again with 'Haider' in 2014 as a new adaptation of *Hamlet*, the most popular of Shakespeare's tragedies.

Though, his last adaptation has been hailed as "one of the most important movies of the year" (qtd. in Pandey A1+), the local and international newspapers poured their polemics on his work by looking at its content as having been modified to serve the "focus of battle between religious conservatives and creative artist" (Burke A1+), in what they called "India's Culture War" (Burke A1+); the political and religious arguments in his adaptation which I am not going to discuss. BBC interrogated "Why is 'Indian Hamlet' controversial?" and the New York Times described the Bollywood director Vishal Bhardwaj's philosophy of adaptation as a means to make his name by adapting Shakespeare into films, using the plays to reflect the violence and vicissitudes of modern India (Vaibhav A1+). In my opinion, it is not, indeed, to reflect the violence and vicissitudes of modern India, as the New York Times states, but to reflect the director's uncontrollable stream of innermost feelings; the idea which I am going to project.

What others have said about Vishal Bhardwaj's three adaptations I shall not repeat; because my aim is to look at his adaptations from a psychoanalytical perspective; the study which they have ignored. In other words, I shall not discuss what Bhardwaj's religious or political intensions in his three adaptations are, insofar as shedding light on the event those reflect his dark side after adapting Shakespeare's three tragedies in particular, i. e. what makes the director change the theme of the original text and turn it into a religious or political one is not my concern. The director knew very well, on the one hand, that Othello committed a mistake which left him in repentance and Shakespeare's poetic justice was finally achieved. On the other hand, Macbeth's excessive ambition, as it seemed, gnawed the throne of kingdom in which he lived luxuriously and Hamlet's mother was torn between reluctant intimacy with her son and feelings of guilt. What the director's philosophy of adaptation is, and what type of truth Bhardwaj looks for after more than four centuries ago since Shakespeare wrote *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* are two noteworthy questions to be raised. These two questions search to meet the demands of the twenty-first century spectators, and the correlation between the events of the Elizabethan era and the situation of our current time.

Terry Eagleton in his book *On Evil* calls evil as an "Obscene Enjoyment" and argues that: "Human consciousness cannot nip behind itself, since when we reflect on ourselves it is still we who are doing the reflecting. Our sense of the murky regions from which consciousness springs is itself an act of consciousness, and thus already remote from that realm" (22). In such a way, Bhardwaj's consciousness could not be hidden as the murky of his region reflected although he defended himself in a more than one interview. If stream of consciousness is a way of writing that tries to record a character's ideas and feelings as they are allegedly experienced in the character's mind, this means that there is sometimes no logical sequence and no distinction between several levels of reality and imagination (Wagner 542). That is perhaps why the director's stream of consciousness does not seem to be revealed through any of his characters but through the theme of his adaptations.

We may think that Bhardwaj looks for such controversy to achieve his ambition of fame through drawing the others attention. This assumption, which is close to the fact, will take us to think that the director tends to achieve his commercial grossing by sustaining Shakespeare's literary works; the idea which is defended by the New York

Times. His commercial thinking might have been sparked after gaining the international acclaim in his first adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in 2003 though the film did not achieve high grossing. To avoid contradicting ourselves by assuming the director's tendency to commercial profits though the film did not achieve high grossing, we can defend our opinion by stating that winning the international acclaim, however, encourages him to proceed with the adaptation.

We have seen how Bharadwaj in three of his adaptations seemed to have been interested in the scene of woman's treachery that led to murder after a series of intrigues. The three heroines in the adapted films, who are not originally Bharadwaj's but Shakespeare's, sound to be presented completely submissive to their instinct and attached to the vice accordingly. Is there any much to celebrate in that? That is the question and what to celebrate in showing the mother, daughter or the mistress as treacherous? It is just to show the woman is disloyal and accusing her of sexual scandal. Indeed, quite why the director tends to involve the engaged woman in vice, and why he tries to say that the engaged woman is betrayer are another two questions those support our assumption of the director's deliberateness of creating controversy. Anyone who has tried seriously to examine the contemporary postcolonial theory is frequently tempted to conclude that "the distinction between everything written and those things written to evoke feelings as well as to express thoughts, have been blurred" (Christina 148). Thus I have become convinced that the directors try to change literary language and regenerate new themes to suit their own purposes as artists; the purposes those varied from one director to another as to reveal their religious, political, social and/or ideological background. T S Eliot puts it: "[The author] is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living" (42).

The prolific studies on man's nature confirm the notion that man seeks pleasure and avoids pain. Nowadays, this fact seems to be reversal of reality as man seeks pleasure through pain only by either torturing others or oneself. This is the dark side of human being which psychologically described as sadomasochism. In broad sense, there are not any serious differences between a sadist and a masochist as both are hedonist and the only difference is that the sadist enjoys torturing others and the masochist enjoys by torturing himself. The means of torture is varied and it is not necessary to use a whip or a sharp instrument to get pleasure through pain. That is perhaps why restraint, repression and inhabitation are all internal conflicts of Bhardwaj's characters. Humiliation and pleasure through watching the tortured person are also portrayed with high concentration in these films. There are different ways of pleasure through pain, and these may be some of them. In sadistic views, we have seen the characters who were brutal and violent became happy "at least with the sense of feeling content with their lives" (Eagleton 2003: 112). Freud divides Masochism into three forms: moral, feminine and erotogenic. Respectively, they have been defined "as a certain attitude toward life, as the expression of femininity, and as a peculiarity of the mode of sexual excitation" (Reik 9). In the light of moral masochism, we have seen how the characters burden themselves with pain and misery in a dark desire to expiate their sins. The guilty mother committed a suicide instead of being punished by her son is a representative example of this form. A man character is beaten, insulted bound and humiliated for and by a woman. We have also seen him completely submissive by a

woman. In a reference to the feminine masochism, the man has been shown gaining intensive sexual desire from these behaviours. But also the films contain different scenes favouring a form of sexual excitation in a reference to Freud's erotogenic form of masochism. Some certain affective processes such as giving a slap, a serious way of pointing a gun at the paramour, a daughter's confessing elopement and wounding oneself to tempt the paramour can overlap into the field of sexual stimuli. It is not to be doubted that these examples are representatives of masochism.

Now, let us turn to the plays of George Bernard Shaw in an analysis of some well-known English texts. Mendoza, in George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*, tortured Straker by exposing face to face his love to his sister Louisa, while Straker was listening powerlessly and unable to comment since he was captured by Mendoza. Shaw's Marchbanks in *Candida* told Morel frankly: "I love your wife" (Shaw 132) in a way seemingly to show pleasure and pain at the same time. We may interrogate: which of the characters stand for George Bernard Shaw; is it Mendoza and Marchbanks on the one hand of torturing or Morel and Straker on the other hand of being tortured? If we want to know what Shaw was like, i.e. sadist or masochist; we may cast him for the part of Mendoza and Marchbanks to show him sadist since he wanted to enjoy torturing Straker and Morel. In the same way we could cast the playwright for the part of Morel and Straker to show him masochist since he sought pleasure through torturing himself. This truth is applicable to Bhardwaj's characters in his three adaptations. We have already seen that character like Nimmi, in his 2003 hit 'Maqbool', secretly loved Maqbool, the right hand of Jahangir Khan, the don who truly loved Nimmi and how she encouraged Maqbool to kill Jahangir Khan at night while he was in bed next to her. We have also seen character like Dolly, in his 2006 shot 'Omkaara', who appeared in front of her father to confess her elopement with Omkaara who challenged her father to marry her in spite of him. Ghazala, Haider's mother and Hillal's wife in Bhardwaj's third film 'Haider' (2014), conspired to let her husband be driven to his end and she found singing and laughing with her brother-in-law, Khurram, by her son Haider.

The good news is that Vishal Bhardwaj is compared with George Bernard Shaw and William Shakespeare; this is because the bad news is that if we cast Bhardwaj for the part of Dolly, Nimmi, Ghazala, Omkaara and Khurram he will be categorized sadist otherwise he is masochist if we cast him for the part of Haider, Dolly's father and Maqbool. In short, there is a difference between believing in sadomasochism and being a sadomasochist. Someone can believe that there are sadomasochistic affects in his work without being a sadomasochist. Everyone of us is a sadomasochist since we all harbour some sadomasochistic feelings. Therefore, it might be early, in an essay of this length, to say that the director suffers from sadomasochistic symptoms but the spectators will be able to decide in his next shot.

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**Films which reportedly depict the stereotypes include:**

- Maqbool – 2003
- Omkara – 2006
- Haider – 2014

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