

'Pinky Madam' on Screen: Condensation and Expansion in the Cinematic Rendition of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Abstract

The discourse surrounding fidelity in adaptation studies has been a perennial subject of debate, rooted in the inherent challenge that a film adaptation faces in remaining entirely faithful to the original text due to the shift in the medium. Linda Seger's theory of condensation and expansion challenges the notion of fidelity, asserting that adaptations necessitate the omission and addition of details to present characters or plots from a cinematic perspective. The film adaptation of *The White Tiger* (2021) extensively employs condensation and expansion techniques, particularly in the portrayal of Pinky, an Americanized woman raised in New York, who emerges in a different light as a mentor and supporter to the main protagonist, Balram. This characterization diverges from Adiga's novel, underscoring the transformative power of condensation and expansion in cinematic adaptation. Therefore, this paper seeks to undertake a comparative analysis of Pinky Madam's character in the novel and the film, exploring the nuances of condensation and expansion techniques.

Keywords: Adaptation; Condensation; Expansion; Pinky Madam.

Introduction

According to George Bluestone, the filmmaker, when embarking on the adaptation of a novel, doesn't actually convert the novel itself due to the inevitable transformations that occur. Instead, what takes place is a form of paraphrasing the novel – treating it as raw material (62). This challenges the fidelity discourse, which advocates for faithful adaptations of novels into films. Despite both novels and films serving the dual purpose of entertainment and education, they differ significantly in their modes of

delivery. Robert Stam supports this perspective by introducing the concept of “automatic difference,” suggesting that achieving complete fidelity between cinematic renditions and original texts is unattainable due to inherent disparities in the medium. This implies that variations in the medium are essential to evoke the imaginations of readers, creating an authentic feel for the story and characters. Linda Hutcheon further reinforces this stance, emphasizing that film adaptation is an inherently creative process, regardless of strict adherence to the original plot.

Adapting novels into other mediums is often a complex undertaking, as it is widely recognized that:

It’s the job of the screenwriter to bring the book to life on the screen, but the very act of telling the story of the book on film will change the book. If an adaptor were to worry about being absolutely faithful to the book, scene for scene, the resulting film would...be a bomb. The fundamental job of the screenwriter is to reach inside the story to its essence and to find a new way to tell it filmicly. (Lake 409)

Geoffrey Wagner’s classification of adaptation into three types provides filmmakers with the opportunity to engage in a creative process and liberates them from strict fidelity constraints. These categories include transposition, which involves a meticulous and faithful adaptation of the original text; commentary, characterized by intermediate adaptations with minor modifications to the storyline or characters; and analogy, where adaptations feature significant changes in both time and plot. Adapting a hundred-page novel into a two-and-a-half-hour film requires a screenwriter to modify and condense scenes, as not every part is pertinent to the cinematic narrative. The structure of the original text must be adjusted to ensure the film adaptation’s accessibility to the audience, inevitably leading to a compromise in the novel’s original content. This meticulous process makes film adaptation a careful and intricate endeavor. Viewers observe the addition and omission of scenes, with filmmakers sometimes excluding minor characters or altering character traits to emphasize their impact in a distinctive manner.

To rationalize the necessary structural adjustments during the adaptation of a novel, Linda Seger introduces the concepts of “condensation” and “expansion” in her work, *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into the Film*: “The nature of condensing involves losing material. Condensing often includes losing subplots, combining or cutting characters,

leaving out several of the many themes...” (Seger 23) Expansion entails incorporating new information and scenes into the storyline and character ensemble. Evaluating a film adaptation’s faithfulness is challenging because filmmakers have employed these strategies from the early stages of adaptation research to achieve “the balance between preserving the spirit of the original and creating a new form” (Seger 35).

Presenting as a commentary, *The White Tiger*, a cinematic adaptation of Aravind Adiga’s novel directed by Ramin Bahrani and featuring Adarsh Gourav, Rajkumar Rao, and Priyanka Chopra Jonas, explores modifications in plot and character dynamics as the three-hundred-and-twenty-one-page novel condenses into a two-hour-and-five-minute film. The movie’s distinct cinematography and narrative structure have garnered global recognition. Both the film and the novel follow a similar storyline, depicting Balram Halwai, a impoverished villager who learns to drive in pursuit of economic opportunities. Despite his efforts, Balram realizes that monetary gain does not liberate him from the societal constraints of poverty in a corrupt environment. Consequently, he resorts to drastic measures, such as murdering his master, stealing money, and establishing a taxi company named Ashok, ultimately breaking free from the societal confines described as the “Rooster Coop” (175).

Before delving into the techniques of condensation and expansion, it’s crucial to understand their manifestations within the plot. An instance of condensation in the novel occurs during the scene where Balram witnesses his mother’s death and her subsequent cremation. However, in the film adaptation, this scene is condensed, with the portrayal of Balram witnessing the cremation of his father instead of his mother. In the film, there is no mention of Balram’s mother; instead, it is his father whose character receives expanded focus. Additionally, the character of Ashok undergoes expansion when Balram observes him stepping out of his car. This scene provides insights into Ashok’s background, as Balram notes that he is the son of the Mongoose. Witnessing this, Balram summons the courage to pursue driving lessons with the aim of becoming Ashok’s chauffeur. In contrast, in the book, Balram initially learns driving to provide for his family and only encounters Ashok in his job search later on. In the novel, there is no scene depicting Balram meeting Premier Wen Jiabao. This encounter is entirely absent from the original text. However, in the film adaptation, the filmmakers chose to add this scene as an expansion of the plot as well as an expansion of the character of Wen Jiabao. This addition serves to provide additional context or depth to the narrative, potentially emphasizing themes related to Balram’s aspirations, societal commentary,

or geopolitical dynamics. Though the film has many examples like this, what is most crucial is to experience the scenes visually. In the film, the inclusion of visual elements such as scenes depicting roosters and their cages, zooming out from Kusum's face to reveal her large family, and depictions of village life, dilapidated hospital conditions, and skyscrapers owned by the affluent, standing in contrast to beggars lining the roadside, provides viewers with a richer sensory experience. These visuals add layers of detail and context to the narrative, allowing the audience to immerse more fully in the story and setting. Despite the brevity of these scenes, they convey complex ideas and themes effectively, without the need for extensive explanations or dialogue. This combination of expansion and condensation techniques enhances the cinematic experience by appealing to both the visual and narrative senses, creating a more immersive and engaging viewing experience for the audience.

While many characters in the film align with their counterparts in the novel, the portrayal of Pinky, an Americanized woman and Ashok's wife, undergoes significant alterations in the film, emerging as a mentor and supporter to the protagonist, Balram. This paper aims to scrutinize and compare Pinky's role in both the novel and the film, particularly in the context of the film's application of Linda Seger's condensation and expansion techniques.

Pinky Madam: A Portrait of Positivity

To accommodate the storyline within the film's duration and shape the character's portrayal in a positive or negative manner, superfluous scenes linked to the character are removed using the condensation technique. This approach leads to transformations in the character of Pinky. In contrast to the novel, where Pinky's description is followed by references to "the image of the goddess in the Birla Hindu Temple in New Delhi" and "Sita" by Balram, the film adaptation offers a more compassionate view of her character as the narrative unfolds (Adiga 46). Through the condensation of certain scenes, the filmmaker highlights the evolution of Pinky's character, emphasizing her positive attributes as the story progresses. In the film, the filmmaker's intent is to depict Pinky as a supportive figure to Balram, the main protagonist, and consequently, scenes portraying her as an assertive, self-indulgent, and "cruel mistress" who despises and mocks Balram are omitted (Victoria and Swamy 103).

In the novel, when Balram mispronounces 'pizza' and 'mall', both Ashok and Pinky mock and laugh at him. This episode suggests that Pinky delib-

erately underscores Balram's lower social status and the subpar education he received during his upbringing. However, the film omits any scenes related to these words, underscoring the filmmaker's intention to portray Pinky Madam's character without any negative connotations.

Pinky: A Symbol of Empowered Independence

At the novel's outset, Balram describes Ashok as kind and gentle, except for an incident when he punches Pinky in the face. However, this specific detail is absent in the film, where Pinky is portrayed as a strong and independent woman who cannot tolerate her husband's aggressive behavior. As the film progresses, this portrayal becomes more apparent. Unlike the novel, the film does not depict the moment when Balram comments on Pinky playing badminton in pants, as the director aimed to emphasize Pinky's psychological traits rather than her physical attributes. While the film includes scenes directly related to Pinky's bold sexuality, it is evident that these instances also showcase her self-sufficiency, nonconformity, and individualistic nature as a woman. In the film, the emphasis is on establishing a mental connection between the audience and the character. Therefore, when leaving the cinema, the audience carries with them a portrayal of Pinky that transcends explicit sexuality, focusing more on her down-to-earth personality. Hartanto mentions in her essay:

Pinky Madam, in her object position, becomes subject who dominates a man... through her sexuality.... who controls man's desire. Even, in her passiveness, a woman with her sexuality is able to torture a man. In this novel, a woman's sexuality not only becomes problem for a man but also becomes a tool to dominate a man. (187)

Her capacity to influence male characters is evident through the technique of condensing material, which involves omitting minor characters that do not significantly contribute to the storyline's progression. Uma, a minor character and former lover of Ashok is absent in the film, as her inclusion would only extend the runtime without substantially impacting the lives of the main characters. This absence affords Pinky more narrative space in the film, allowing for the expansion of her character and positioning her as a dominant figure over the main character, Ashok. Despite Pinky's departure in the end, her influence lingers in Ashok's mind. Another character absent in the film is the golden-haired girl Balram encounters at the brothel with the assistance of Vitiligo Lips man. Balram's fixation on Pinky's sexuality and her influence prevents him from entertaining thoughts

about other women. The omission of Uma and the golden-haired girl emphasizes Pinky's dominance over Ashok and Balram, emphasizing the expansion of her character.

Notably, the film highlights Pinky's control not only over Ashok and Balram but also over other male members of the family. In a chapter, Balram mentions that Pinky Madam was never part of conversations, yet in the film, she actively declares the decision to go to Delhi to address the income tax fraud matter. Following the discussion, Balram, who overheard them, questions, "Where did Pinky Madam's aggression come from?" (*The White Tiger*, 30:50-30:51). Significantly, this scene and dialogue are not present in Adiga's novel, underscoring the narrative space devoted to Pinky's character.

Pinky Madam: Kindness Personified

The elevation of Pinky as a crucial and influential character in the film is an integral aspect of the expansion process. In one of her Instagram posts, Priyanka Chopra Jonas sheds light on her portrayal of Pinky in the film adaptation, stating, "Pinky is the catalyst of change for Balram. She lights the fire that ultimately leads him down a different path than the one he is on...but is that path the right one?" (Sharma). As viewers, we unmistakably witness Balram's trajectory towards success as an entrepreneur. While Balram complies with Pinky, her indirect influence becomes evident when she consistently encourages him to break the barriers of caste system, compelling him to confront his low-class status.

The film opens with Pinky driving the car while intoxicated, with Balram and Ashok as passengers. In this scene, Pinky's line from the novel, "Everyone in India drinks and drives" (Adiga 159), is omitted, perhaps reflecting the filmmaker's intention to avoid portraying India as a country with lax law enforcement, considering the global audience. Unlike the novel, where Pinky expresses negative views about India, the film does not depict her as holding such sentiments. She is more troubled by morally reprehensible citizens who have sown discord in society. When a beggar child tries to sell Buddha figurines before the accident scene, Pinky exhibits kindness in contrast to other characters. She purchases three Buddhas from the girl, and when Balram attempts to prevent her from touching the car, her empathetic nature surfaces as she admonishes him with phrases like "Don't be rude" and "Can't speak to a kid like that" (*The White Tiger* 57:47-57:59). In the novel, Pinky's interaction with Balram concludes when she leaves him in the middle of the road after asking him

to buy the figurine. Notably, Balram keeps the same figurine on his desk after attaining wealth, showing her lasting influence on him. As viewers, we recognize Pinky as a character with the power to alter the course of events, evident from the film's opening scene. The significance of the character Pinky is reflected in the substantial role assigned to international actor Priyanka Chopra Jonas.

Pinky Madam: A Mentor in Disguise

In the film, the introduction of Pinky to Balram occurs when Ashok refers to Balram as "Half-baked," criticizing his education and deeming him unfit for the educated class of the country. Pinky objects to Ashok's remark, stating, "Okay, now you're being a jerk. He's standing right there" (*The White Tiger* 24:10-24:11). While her response is brief, it accentuates the influence and authority Pinky wields in the film. In the novel, Pinky remains silent after Ashok's "Half-baked" comment, conveying a sense of disappointment and her reluctance to challenge the system.

A similar scenario unfolds in the film, where Ashok calls Balram "filthy" due to "paan" stains on his shirt. However, an additional scene follows, emphasizing Pinky Madam's positive attitude toward Balram. During their conversation, she shares details about her life in America: "Do you know what my parents do in America? They run this shitty little bodega in Jackson Heights, selling beer, paan, and porn. I used to do my homework in the basement... I got out, Balram" (*The White Tiger* 51:47-52:03). The inclusion of this information in the film expands Pinky's character, allowing viewers to delve deeper into her persona, fostering empathy and understanding from an emotional standpoint. These lines reveal Pinky's genuine sentiments, filling a gap in the novel concerning this aspect. Despite having spent much of her life in America, Pinky shares commonalities with Balram's unfortunate background. This similarity helps validate their intangible connection. Ultimately, Balram defies the established system's rules and finds a way out while still remaining a part of the same society, mirroring Pinky's journey. Adiga, in the novel, withholds information about Pinky's private life, presenting her solely as Ashok's wife—an Americanized woman with no further identity—diminishing the impact of her character. The film, however, highlights the adversity of Pinky's life before moving back to India, showcasing her as an independent working woman with a disclosed profession as a doctor of chiropractic.

Regarding Pinky's character and her profession, which Adiga never included in the novel, the executive producer Mukul Deora provides in-

sight:

We wanted to add layers to Pinky Madam so she would be a more realistic and empathetic person, like giving her a backstory as a Doctor of Chiropractic who was keen to practice what she had learned. (Hornik)

In the film, when Balram responds to Pinky's inquiry about his life aspirations by expressing his dedication to serving his master Ashok, Pinky responds by challenging the idea of servitude. She shares her perspective on caste and recounts leaving her life in America to marry Ashok, despite Mukesh's opposition due to the caste system. Pinky becomes the motivational force behind Balram's desire to carve a path towards the life he envisions, breaking free from the master-servant dynamic. The film portrays Pinky's strong aversion to the established caste system, evident in her rebellious attitude and aggression towards it. She declares, "You should be finishing your education, starting your own family...this caste system thing is total bullshit" (*The White Tiger* 51:32-52:13). Balram eventually transcends the limitations imposed by the caste system by taking extreme measures, such as murdering Ashok.

The scene also serves as a reminder of Balram's initial aspirations for education, offering a glimpse into the innocence of his school life at the beginning of the film. It prompts the audience to reflect on Balram's thwarted ambition to read and write, constrained by societal pressures that led him into servitude. Throughout the film, Pinky remains a mentor figure for Balram, guiding him to alter the trajectory of his life. Unlike Pinky in the novel, who treats Balram harshly, the film portrays Pinky as a kind-hearted woman offering straightforward advice. This contrast enhances the impact of Pinky's influence on Balram's character evolution, providing viewers with a tangible display of the lessons she imparts indirectly. In this context, the following observation by Megha and Mathew is noteworthy:

Bahrani's screenplay, however, also takes time to develop Pinky's cursory characterization and brief presence in the novel, transforms her into one of the story's essential characters changes her from the unsparing entity in the book to the most delicate individual in Ashok's family; and underlines her importance by projecting a significant star in the cast.(p. 261)

Concerning the amalgamation of characters, Seger discusses the practice

of merging or blending characters, involving the attribution of one character's dialogue to another:

Combing characters does not necessarily mean adding up the qualities of two characters and giving them to one. It might mean cutting one character, but taking a line of dialogue or action of that character and giving it to another. (p. 204-205)

The director purposefully employed the technique of combining characters to highlight the significance of Pinky's role. In the film, the lines originally spoken by Ashok when Balram becomes the victim of the accident case are delivered by Pinky in an emphatic tone: "They have a contact at the police. No one reported seeing what I did, so they don't need you anymore" (*The White Tiger* 1:13:03-1:13:15). This contrasts with the novel, where Adiga silences Pinky's voice during this scene, with only her slamming the door and running inside the room as visible actions. In the film, Pinky's aggression becomes evident when she grabs the collar of Ashok's father after he kicks Balram, demanding, "Why would you hit him like that?" (*The White Tiger* 1:13:31-1:13:32). This scene compels the audience to perceive Pinky as a sympathetic character. Notably, the grabbing-the-collar scene was absent in the novel, highlighting the expansion of her character through her actions and dialogues in this particular scene.

In the airport scene, Bahrani employs a parallel technique to underscore the significance of Pinky's character. Pinky requests Balram to drive her to the airport, expressing her resolve to end her marriage with Ashok due to the morally depraved nature of him and his family. Diverging from the novel where Pinky maintains silence during this scene, the film introduces a nuanced touch: "a couplet from the book, running in Balram's head, a peach of a line – 'I was looking for the key for years, but the door was always open' – comes from Pinky here, on her way to the airport, as she leaves her husband forever" (Thakur). While this marks Pinky's concluding scene in the film, her last lines significantly allude to the substantial role designated to her character, leaving a profound impact on Balram's psyche and serving as a catalytic force for him to metamorphose his modest existence into a prosperous one as an entrepreneur. The filmmaker strategically designates Pinky as a mentor for this transformative task, rendering her dialogue visible to the audience to attract attention and underscore the importance of these lines. This method is employed to portray Pinky as a character of notable significance, imbued with conflict and emotions, thereby amplifying her role.

Conclusion

In the broader panorama of the film's adaptation, *The White Tiger*, thriving thirteen years after its critical acclaim and recognition with the Man Booker Prize in 2008, continues to captivate audiences through its cinematic interpretation. The film breathes life into the novel's characters, utilizing techniques such as condensation and expansion to bestow upon them distinctive personalities. A sagacious examination of the film unfolds a conspicuous transformation in Pinky's character relative to the book, presenting her in a more positive light. This approach, beyond being laudable, proves essential for the creative adaptation of the novel. By applying these techniques to other characters in comparative research, one can delve into the intricacies of transforming literature into cinematic art. Through the cinematic lens, the filmmaker elevates Pinky's role and endows her with kindness and empathy, proffering the audience a fresh and nuanced perspective on her character. In contrast to the novel, the film directly conveys Pinky's emotions to the audience, fostering a deeper and more nuanced level of engagement and empathy. Ultimately, Pinky's portrayal in the film emphasizes the importance of reevaluating her character independently of the preconceived notions established in the book.

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