

## Reconstructing Narratology in Two Works: Joyce's *The Dead* is Adapted in Iranian Cinema

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### Extended Abstract

#### 1. Introduction

Adaptation studies, as a new branch in comparative studies, has been subject to various reviews and criticisms. Although the negative attitude of Iranian directors towards adaptations as a secondary profession has been ameliorated nowadays, there are still many directors who try to avoid adaptations. As one of the most recent Iranian adaptations of western literary works, Mosaffa's "The Last Step" [*Pelle-ye Akhar*, 2012] is based on Joyce's (1882-1941) "The Dead" (1992) and Tolstoy's (1828-1910) "Death of Ivan Ilych" (1886). However, this film adaptation is mostly based on Joyce's short story, rather than Tolstoy's novella. Thus, this paper will explore the changes in the narration of the short story and Mosaffa's adaptation. "The Last Step" is concerned with the life of a high-conflict couple, Khosro and Leyli. The movie starts with Leyli's incessant laughter after the death of her husband and the audience will gradually find out the cause of this laughter her and emotional detachment. "The Dead" also narrates the story of the conflict and emotional detachment of a couple. Nonetheless, the linear, third person, omniscient narration of the short story turns into the nonlinear narration of Mosaffa's adaptation. The movie is narrated through the narrative voice-overs of the two main characters (Leyli and Khosro) though Khosro is more authoritative in his narration. The findings of this study show that the (un) conscious effects of a male adapter on narration has resulted in the changes in narration.

#### 2. Methodology

The current study is qualitative in nature. Benefitting from Gerard Genette's ideas about focalization, this paper investigates the changes applied to narration in the shift

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from the written text to the movie. The significance of these shifts and modifications are also discussed and analyzed. Introducing the three types of focalization (i.e., external, internal, and zero) as well as the four different types of narrative, based on the narrator's level and relation to the story (i.e., extradiegetic-heterodiegetic, extradiegetic-homodiegetic, intradiegetic-heterodiegetic, and intradiegetic-homodiegetic), Genette's theory of focalization provides us with an appropriate tool to compare the literary work with its adaptation through a narratological viewpoint. The aim of this comparison is to reveal the significance, causes, and consequences of these narratological changes in "The Dead" and "The Last Step".

### 3. Discussion

Usually, in the move from a novel to a film, the increase in the visual dimension and the decrease in the aural dimension are expected. However, the two narrative voices express the emotions, decisions, past experiences, and intentions of the characters in Mosaffa's "The Last Step". The narrator is not an omniscient one and each character's feelings are expressed through another character's narrative voice, while the narrator of "The Dead" is a third person omniscient narrator, who is aware of all characters' emotions, feelings, and past experiences. The narrator does not interfere with the storyline and he is aware of all characters' feelings and experiences almost equally; also, he is not a character in the story, thus one can call this narrator heterodiegetic. On the other hand, the film adaptation is narrated through the voice-overs of its two main characters. The male character is privileged over the female one. Even the female narrator mainly describes the male character's feelings, rather than her own. Therefore, one can call the narrative of this movie as homodiegetic. Furthermore, based on Genette's focalization types, the omniscient narrator of "The Dead" is close to zero focalization and that of "The Last Step" is close to internal focalization, in which one or two of the characters narrate the story.

Besides, based on Genette's discussion over the different levels of narration, Khosro's narrative voice recounts the story of his alienation from his wife and his death, in which the narrative voice of Leyli plays the role of a narrator. Thus, his narrative is one level higher than that of Leyli and is considered as extradiegetic-homodiegetic. Yet, Leyli's narrative, who mostly recounts Khosro's story except in the scene of her confession, is called intradiegetic-heterodiegetic.

### 4. Conclusion

The findings of this study show that the third person omniscient narrator of "The Dead" turns into the first person narrative voices of the two main characters in the movie. Thus, the extradiegetic-homodiegetic narrative voice of Khosro, which narrates his own story, is one level higher than Leyli's intradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrative voice. Therefore, while it seems that both these male and female characters have narrative voices, it is Khosro, who plays the main role in attracting the audience's attention, winning their sympathy, and having the higher level of narrative voice. One can conclude that the (un)conscious effects of a male adapter on narration has resulted in the marginalization of female role and brought

audience's sympathy with the passive male protagonist of this movie, Khosro. Despite the complex narration of the movie, the change in narration has made the characters' recognition easier for the audience.

**Keywords:** Adaptation, Narratology, Focalization, The Last Step, The Dead.

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