

ТЕОРІЯ І ПРАКТИКА УСНОГО ПЕРЕКЛАДУ

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THE PERFORMANCE OF ADAPTATION AS A CULTURAL TRANSLATION IN *THE BEEKEEPER OF ALEPPO* AND *THE KITE RUNNER* STAGE ADAPTATIONS

Adaptation has become an increasingly important field within contemporary literary and performance studies, particularly in discussions of cultural exchange and representation. Moving beyond earlier approaches that emphasized fidelity to the source text, current adaptation theory regards the process as a creative reinterpretation that allows stories to cross linguistic, geographical, and cultural boundaries. This perspective is especially relevant in postcolonial contexts, where adaptation serves not only to relocate narratives but also to question established modes of representation. Matthew Spangler's stage adaptations of *The Kite Runner* and *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* demonstrate how theatre can engage with ethical witnessing, cultural translation, and the representation of refugee experiences.

Traditional adaptation criticism largely assessed adaptations in terms of their faithfulness to an original work. More recent scholarship has challenged this approach. Linda Hutcheon describes adaptation as "repetition without replication," emphasizing its creative and transformative character, while Julie Sanders views adaptation as a process through which narratives acquire new meanings in different artistic and cultural contexts. From this perspective, adaptation should be understood as an independent creative practice rather than a secondary version of an existing text.

These theoretical perspectives provide a useful framework for examining Spangler's dramatic works. Instead of simply transferring the novels to the stage, the adaptations reshape narratives of migration and displacement for contemporary audiences through theatrical performance. This approach reflects Homi Bhabha's concept of the "Third Space," where identities and cultural meanings are continually negotiated rather than determined by fixed origins. The

stage consequently becomes a space in which experiences of migration are reinterpreted through cultural interaction and performance.

An important aspect of *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* is the collaborative process behind its adaptation. Matthew Spangler worked closely with the Syrian writer and academic Nesrin Alrefaai, whose cultural knowledge and personal experience contributed to the development of the play. As a result, refugee experiences are presented through informed collaboration rather than from a solely external perspective. A similar process informed *The Kite Runner*, where Afghan cultural advisers participated in key artistic decisions throughout the adaptation. Such collaborative practices challenge traditional ideas of individual authorship by presenting adaptation as a collective process shaped by intercultural dialogue.

The collaborative nature of these productions also shapes the representation of refugee characters. Rather than reducing them to symbols of suffering or humanitarian crisis, the plays portray individuals whose identities are formed through memory, relationships, and personal agency. Characters such as Nuri and Afra in *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* are presented as complex figures whose experiences cannot be confined to simplified narratives of victimhood. In this way, the stage creates opportunities for audiences to engage with refugee experiences through empathy while recognizing their social and cultural complexity.

The formal features of both adaptations further reinforce their postcolonial dimension. Fragmented chronology, shifting geographical settings, and discontinuous narrative structures reflect the instability associated with displacement and forced migration. Instead of relying on linear storytelling, the plays reproduce the uncertainty, loss, and emotional disorientation experienced by displaced communities. These dramatic strategies invite audiences to experience migration not only as a political issue but also as a deeply personal and psychological reality.

Cultural translation represents another significant dimension of these adaptations. Although adaptation inevitably involves linguistic translation, cultural translation extends beyond language itself to include values, beliefs, symbols, and emotional meanings that are negotiated across different cultural contexts. The plays therefore seek to communicate refugee experiences without erasing their cultural specificity, encouraging dialogue between diverse audiences while preserving the complexity of the original narratives.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's critique of representation further emphasizes the ethical challenges involved in this process. She argues that marginalized voices may remain unheard even when represented with sympathetic intentions. This perspective highlights the responsibility of adaptors to create conditions in which refugee experiences can be articulated without being appropriated or simplified. Adaptation thus becomes a space where dominant narratives may be

questioned and alternative perspectives can emerge. By positioning characters between languages, cultures, and identities, the plays challenge fixed ideas of belonging and encourage audiences to reconsider common assumptions about migration and displacement.

Language provides a particularly revealing example in *The Kite Runner*. Although English is the primary language of performance, selected passages in Dari are retained at key emotional moments. These linguistic shifts preserve elements of cultural memory and identity while reminding audiences that translation can never entirely replace the cultural context from which a story originates. Language therefore functions not only as a means of communication but also as an expression of cultural continuity and resilience.

Overall, *The Kite Runner* and *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* demonstrate how theatrical adaptation can operate as a form of postcolonial cultural practice. Through ethical representation, collaborative authorship, and cultural translation, the plays challenge dominant narratives surrounding migration and forced displacement. Drawing on the theoretical perspectives of Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Linda Hutcheon, and Julie Sanders, this paper argues that adaptation is not merely the transfer of a narrative from one medium to another but a creative process that generates new cultural meanings and ethical perspectives. These stage adaptations ultimately illustrate how theatre can foster dialogue, critical reflection, and greater awareness of contemporary refugee experiences.

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