Cognitive Dissonance Of Movies: A Case Study Of Absurd Literature (The Metamorphosis)

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Abstract

Teaching literature is challenging because it requires a thorough grasp of philosophical foundations. To grasp the whole story, learners and instructors must engage in some theorising (Chambers and Gregory, 2006). This task is made more difficult and time-consuming by absurd literature. To address this issue, movies have been employed as a source of visual help for students, since it is seen to be an effective technique for overcoming obstacles to learning. "Using movies in the classroom is an excellent strategy to reach people's emotive domain, foster reflective attitudes, and connect learning to experiences," says the author (Blasco et al., 2015). Movies, like novels, allow pupils to imagine the lives of people and their points of view. The current study used an experimental case study methodology with sixteen (16) individuals. The experimental group viewed the video while the controlled group listened to the audio. The researcher gives a two-hour presentation to both groups after a lunch break provided by the researcher. The following day, the participants' comments are recorded using the interview approach. Because students have never studied "The Metamorphosis," a pre-test is not feasible, thus a one-shot case study technique is used. Constructive coding of the replies is done, and the Gery Tyan and Russell Bernard theme identification approach is utilised to look for recurrent and overlapping patterns in the participants' responses. Repetitive and comparable patterns having a linguistic relationship to the issue under investigation have been identified and assessed using a theoretical framework (2003, p.90-95). Movies include lived experience, as does the visualisation process; phenomenology is a perspective from which lived experiences may be appropriately understood, hence interpretative phenomenology is used for this project. This study is also a continuation of current cognitive stylistics efforts in the field of cinema studies, and it explores the link between films (adaptations of literary texts) and learners' perceptions. This study examines the ineffectiveness of movies non
the context of ludicrous literature. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge in the fields of cinema studies, cognitive stylistics, and literary teaching approaches in this manner. This study is especially noteworthy since movies are increasingly being utilised in academic settings. Movies are adaptations of literary works, but they do not capture the emotional and psychological significance of philosophical books. Because absurd literature is more empathic than expressive, it's difficult to envisage and instil the intended impression in students. These adjustments may sometimes confine and confine the student to tight quarters, preventing them from thinking beyond the predetermined visual barriers. This study looks at the cognitive dissonance that movies cause in pupils, who are unable to think beyond the visual enigma that has engulfed their heads. The movie becomes a trap, limiting students' ability to digest ridiculous literature and record its influence on cognitive level in order to properly comprehend ludicrous tragedy.

**Keywords:** Cognitive Dissonance, Movies, Absurd Literature, Interpretive Phenomenology

**Introduction**

Kafka is one of the most prominent writers of the 20th century who did not receive much fame in his lifetime yet huge critical acclaim just followed his funeral ceremony as Max Brod published his prominent works right after his death denying his last will. Max Brod betrayed his friend by refusing to burn his literary pieces yet providing a chance to the whole world to read and appreciate the surrealistic treatment of the dilemma of modern man who is devoid of metaphysical, spiritual, and religious roots. Nearly 10,000 research works have been done till 1970 (Rhodes & Westwood, 2016) to comprehend multivariate perspectives popping up from the complicated and puzzling narrative of Kafka's text. “Reading Kafka is a puzzling experience. Impossible events occur with an air of inevitability, and no explanation is forthcoming” (Robertson, 2004, p.26). The Metamorphosis narrates the tormenting tale of transformation as Gregor Samsa changes into a gigantic bug that alters the whole socio-familial scenario. This sudden conversion of the protagonist without any logical presumption leads towards the absurd and chaotic situation in which all characters suffer from existential agony and bewilderment.

Teaching literature is a difficult task as it involves an in-depth understanding of philosophical underpinnings. It demands some theorization on the part of learners and teachers to comprehend the whole narrative (Chambers and Gregory, 2006). Absurd literature makes this process more laborious and difficult. To cater to this difficulty, movies have been used as a source to provide a visual aid to the learners as it is considered a good strategy to overcome the obstructions that hamper learning. “Using movies in teaching is an effective way to reach people’s affective domain, promote reflective attitudes, and link learning to experiences” (Blasco et al., 2015). Just like books, movies let students vision the lives of characters and their perspectives. From the very conception of cinema, many theories from different quarters started popping up regarding cinema and its impact on the mindset of viewers. Cinema is not only a tool of entertainment but it a vehicle for propagating and supporting certain ideas. Cognitive theories have
also been presented regarding the cinematic impact on the viewers’ mind style (Bordwell, 2011 p.357-59). Bordwell realized four kinds of meaning embedded in the whole process. Referential meaning solely encompasses constructed world of cinema. Implicit and explicit both are thematic meaning but implicit is not stated clearly. Symptomatic meaning is largely dependent on the viewer as the rhetorical aspect causes a multiplicity of meaning. Bordwell integrated film studies with cognitive science and cognitive stylistics is a later development of his theories (Colm, 2011 p.317-321).

Taheri in her doctoral thesis develops a methodology comprised of the concept of schema, speech act theory, and cognitive film theory to study the character impression formation. This model tries to grasp the understanding of the character from social and narrative knowledge along with pragma-linguistic knowledge. This research also unfolds multimodal discourses generated by cinematic characterization (2018). In confirming the connection between literature and psychology, Freeman (2000, p.253) suggests that literary texts are “the products of cognizing Minds”, and he describes interpretations as “the products of other cognizing Minds in the context of the physical and socio-cultural worlds in which they Have been created and read” (cited in Glotova, 2014: 245). According to Woldemariam (2015:18), Cognitive stylistics places cognition and contextual effects at the heart of its analytical space. Both formalist and functionalist stylistic models place the sentence and the text respectively at the center of their analysis. They are chiefly text-immanent models. The cognitive stylistics model, however, is a departure from textualist to contextualist stylistic interpretation of a text.

This project also is a continuation of ongoing cognitive stylistics endeavors in the realm of film studies and this project unearths the relationship between movies (adaptations of literary texts) and learners’ perceptions. This research further evaluates the inefficiency of movies in the case of absurd literature. In this way, this research will add to the existing plethora of knowledge in the realm of film studies, cognitive stylistics, and literature teaching methodologies. This research is also significant as movies have been used more often in an academic setting. Movies are adaptations of literary texts but these don’t encompass the core value of philosophical texts that are emotionally, and psychologically laden. Absurd literature is more empathetic rather than expressive so it becomes too difficult to visualize and inculcate desired effect in the learners. At times, these adaptations curb and restrict the learner to close quarters so they are not able to think beyond those set visual barricades. This research is an investigation of cognitive dissonance that is induced by movies.

Current research is an experimental case study design in which there are sixteen (16) participants of M.A. English part 2 of Government Graduate College Bhakkar. These participants are divided into two groups comprised of four males and four females in each group. Participants are selected randomly and groups (controlled and experimental) are allocated on a random basis. Movie and audiobook have a duration of 85 minutes and 103 minutes respectively. The controlled group listened to the audio group yet the experimental group watched the movie. After a lunch break
sponsored by the researcher, 2 hours lecture is delivered by the researcher to both groups. The next day, the responses of the participants are recorded through the interview method. A pre-test is not possible as students have not studied “The Metamorphosis” before so a one-shot case study method is adopted.

Constructive coding of the response is done and the theme identification model of Gery Tyan and Russel Bernard is used to observe recurring and overlapping patterns prevalent throughout the responses of the participants. Repetitive and similar patterns that have a linguistic connection with the phenomenon under study have been figured out to assess them with a designed theoretical framework (2003, p.90-95). Deciphered themes have something vital regarding objectives and core issues of the study by creating patterns in the texts which help in data interpretation and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Movies encompass lived experience and the visualization process also involves lived experience; phenomenology is a standpoint from where lived experiences are interpreted properly so interpretive phenomenology is adopted for this project.

**Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

Movies are a good resource for teaching literature to students as movies showcase all those emotions that readers may not able to comprehend while reading a novel or a drama. Movies attempt to depict the fiction in true spirit yet at times it becomes difficult for directors to portray the intended effect as imagined by the author. The Cherry Orchard is a classic example of this situation when Chekov was annoyed by a director for the wrong depiction of his play. According to Chekov, the play was comic but the director changes the whole course by picturing it as a tragedy (Borny, 2006).

Similarly, at times movies limit the cognitive abilities of the viewer and confine the imaginative faculty to the visual depicted within the movie. One cannot think beyond those visuals and the emotive element of the fiction gets fade away. In this study, films have been viewed from the cognitive perspective to comprehend the relationship between movies and the perception of the learners. Movies are sorts of traps that limit the perceptual abilities of learners. Movies are adaptations of literary works, but they don't capture the emotional and psychological significance of philosophical books. Because absurd literature is more empathic than expressive, it's difficult to envisage and instill the intended impression in students. These adjustments can sometimes confine and confine the student to tight quarters, preventing them from thinking beyond the predetermined visual barriers. The purpose of this study is to look into how movies might cause cognitive dissonance. This study examines the ineffectiveness of movies in the context of absurd literature. This research will contribute to the body of knowledge in the fields of cinema studies, cognitive stylistics, and literary teaching approaches in this way.

The current study is an experimental case study in which two groups have been made by random selection. There are sixteen participants in this experiment that are divided into two groups. There
are equal number of male and female students in each group to cater to the gender issue in this study. All these participants are students of M.A. English Part II of Government Graduate College Bhakkar where the researcher teaches Modern Drama and Literary Theory. In this study, the impact of the movie on the cognition of the learner is measured with comparison to the students who attend audiobook session. The duration of the movie and audiobook is 85 and 103 minutes respectively that is not a big difference. There is only one cinematic version of The Metamorphosis available so the researcher does not have a choice regarding the movie yet the audiobook having the translation of David Wylie is selected as it is most widely used in academic settings across Pakistan (it is part of GCU, Faisalabad syllabus).

The one group of the students watched the movie in the conference room of the college yet the other eight students listened to an audiobook in their classroom in the presence of the teacher. This activity is followed by a lunch sponsored by the researcher for the refreshment of the students. After a lunch break, a general critical lecture on the different dimensions of The Metamorphosis is delivered by the researcher.

The next day, the responses of the participants are recorded through the interview method. In the interview, students are asked to relate themselves with Gregor Samsa and describe their emotive states while reading or watching. They are further inquired to describe the impact of transformation on the family of Gregor Samsa. Students have to produce a one-pager response on the agony and psychological plight of the protagonist and their emotional journey with the protagonist.

Constructive coding of the response is carried out, and the Gery Tyan and Russel Bernard theme identification model is used to identify recurring and overlapping patterns that appear throughout the responses of the participants. Repeated and similar patterns that have a linguistic connection to the phenomenon under investigation have been identified and can be evaluated using a theoretical framework that has been developed (2003, p.90-95). The themes that have been deciphered have something important to say about the objectives and core issues of the study because they create patterns in the texts that aid in data interpretation and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Movies contain elements of lived experience, and the visualization process itself contains elements of lived experience; phenomenology is a perspective from which lived experiences can be properly interpreted, and interpretive phenomenology is the perspective chosen for this project.

No pre-test is given to the students as they were not familiar with the topic under study so a one-shot case study method is adopted in which only a post-test is conducted and responses have been collected. An analysis is based on the comparison of the responses of both groups to observe the differences prevalent in their understanding. Data is interpreted and analyzed with the help of the interpretive phenomenological standpoint of Martin Heidegger. There are two reasons for the selection of interpretive phenomenology. Firstly, Kafka is an existentialist writer and Secondly, the interview is designed to observe the lived experiences of the participant while listening or
watching regarding The Metamorphosis. As Allan Pushkin says about the interpretive process, “Interpretation is an act of imagination and logic. It entails perceiving importance, order, and form in what one is learning that relates to the argument, story, narrative that is continually undergoing creation” (2000, p.8).

**Analysis and Discussion**

Learning is a powerful instrument and a beacon that illuminates the path to reaching our objectives and achieving life success. However, through the medium of film, it will be incredibly appealing and successful for all disciplines, particularly literature. As a result, most experts believe that actual videos, rather than textbooks, are more inspiring and useful for teaching literature. In addition, movies provide several educational benefits, such as helping students memorize vocabulary, pronounce words correctly, speak like a native speaker, and improve their overall learning experience. "One of the greatest strengths of video is the ability to communicate with viewers on an emotional, as well as a cognitive, level," Crose (2013) stated.

In this current research, the responses of the participants were divergent. Group b that watched a movie respond to the questions in a more clear and certain way. On the other hand, Group A imbibed the impact of absurdism and they were feeling uncertain and confuse. Six questions were planned and responses were analyzed by a constructive coding technique by reading and re-reading those responses. Certain themes have been drawn from all responses that help in understanding the mindset of both groups and their perspective regarding the fiction.

A table is drawn by considering all those responses that are listed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Audio-Book</th>
<th>Movie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Do you know what's happening in the story? What are your thoughts on the story?</td>
<td>Confusion, Uncertainty, Pessimism, Trauma, Depression, Absurd</td>
<td>Clarity, Cartoon Movie, Relating with Gothic Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>What are your thoughts on Gregor's true identity?</td>
<td>Human, Brother, Son, Salesman, Kind-hearted, passionate</td>
<td>Insect, Loafer, Eating Habit, Burden, Loathsome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>What are your thoughts on Gregor's reincarnation?</td>
<td>Struggle, Mystic Journey,</td>
<td>Animal life</td>
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Knowledge and Thoughts on Story: Gregor Samsa, the main protagonist, transforms into a gigantic bug and his self has changed altogether. Gregor's situation changes from one page to the next and every move he makes depends on how all the other characters are reacting to his condition. As Robertson says,

Reading Kafka is a puzzling experience. Impossible events occur with an air of inevitability, and no explanation is forthcoming. Gregor Samsa is turned into an insect, without knowing how and why. Joseph K. never learns the reason for his arrest. The other K. never reaches the Castle and does not understand why he cannot meet the official who (perhaps) summoned him there as a land surveyor (2004, p.26).

The participants also feel the same anxiety while listening and watching The Metamorphosis. There is a difference of opinion of both groups when they were asked about the storyline of the novella. Group B was certain about the narrative and plot of the story as the movie provided them with clear symmetry of all events and they were able to organize all details without any confusion. Visual aid helped them in comprehending the absurd panorama. Group B discusses the story in terms of gothic fiction, clear absurd vision, and animal cartoon experience as the transformation of Gregor Samsa for them was more like cartoon transformation or supernatural effect.

Group A had a different experience in the absence of visual aid and they perceived this transformation on the philosophical and psychological level. They also felt confusion and uncertainty as the transformation was not an easy experience to comprehend. One student responded, “Gregor died alone because his family did not want to take care of him again, and his family feel free after he passed away”. Pessimism and the element of trauma can be witnessed in many such narrations passed by the respondents.
**Gregor’s Identity:** Martin Greenberg in his essay, *Gregor Samsa and Modern Spirituality*, establishes that Gregor Samsa is under economical suffering and due to the monotony of his tiring routine has been forced to restrict him to a mere animal self. “Gregor’s humanity has defeated in his private life as much as in his working life” (Greenberg, 2007, p.21).

Group A comprehended the vision as propounded by Martin Greenberg as they conceived Gregor as Brother, Son, Salesman, and Human more importantly even in his transformed version. The identity of Gregor as a kind-hearted, compassionate, and loving son and brother remained intact in the cognition of Group B as they experience transformation on a more philosophical level. Identity as a human being, going through tough times remained intact till the end of the story.

Group B, on the other hand, took Gregor as a cockroach and insect from the beginning. They conceptualize it with the help of visual aid. So they responded to the question of identity in terms of Gregor as an insect and they focused on the eating and roaming habits of insects. They further sympathize with the family and conceive Gregor as a burden. The participant from Group B says, “Gregor is transformed into a cockroach and becomes a burden for his family. He is just roaming in his room freely and exploring his new animal self yet family suffers a lot”.

**Gregor’s Reincarnation:** Gregor Samsa is one such character that is going through suffering, death, and rebirth cycle. ‘Samsa’ name also suggests close resemblance with samsara as Michael P. Ryan (1999) researched this phenomenon in his article *Samsa and Samsara: Suffering, Death, and Rebirth in The Metamorphosis*. Michael P. Ryan proposes a hypothesis that Kafka might have consciously chosen this name for his major character or his unconscious agencies might have played their role and in this way Samsa’s spiritual side is visible. Samsara can be overcome by moksha (liberation) from Maya (illusion). Maya captivates one mind by overwhelming desires and ambitions which Samsa has. He is worried about material problems which imprison him and keep him away from his spiritual self.

Both groups comprehended the phenomenon of reincarnation quite differently. Gregor’s life is symbolized with journey, struggle, mystic, and mysterious endeavor by Group A yet Group B were not able to shed the impact of bug vision. Group B took Gregor as an animal and did not associate anything worthwhile with him. They confined him to a bug and insect.

**Identification with Gregor:** Group A identified with Gregor easily as the participants took the transformation as a precursor of economic and psychological pressure. They also did not figure this transformation realistically but on a symbolic level. So they related their traumas with Gregor and envisioned a reflection of their life in the plight of Gregor. They used the connotations of trauma, family issue, and socio-economic problem while discussing the transformation of Gregor. Group B on the other hand felt fear and uncertainty while identifying with Gregor after watching his animal self and sorry plight.
Cognition about Family: According to Bloom, Gregor himself wants to disappear as he knows that his newly acquired being is becoming a burden for the rest of the beings. He begins to fast and later on beetle carcass proves to be flat, dry, and empty. His physical transformation wrenches him from his humanity, victimizes him, and finally forces him to quit his being-in-the-world and end his existential relationship of being-with-one-another (2007). Group A also second the notion of Harold Bloom by labeling Gregor’s family as an unkind and discouraging one. Group A further showed displeasure from the parents of Gregor for being indifferent towards their son. On the other hand, Group B found the family of Gregor as supportive and kind as they looked after the insect. The participants did not consider the insect as Gregor but they thought it was only a cockroach that has become a burden for the family.

Being a Family of Gregor: As already mentioned above that Group A was able to identify with Gregor so they showed sympathy and compassion in the role of the sibling. They felt the trauma and depression through which he was suffering so they showed care in their response. The participants in Group B were not able to conceive themselves as brother or sister to a bug. As one respondent says, “As a normal human being, we have senses in our body and enjoy a healthy life. All of a sudden when a change occurs, and a change so big when one changes into a cockroach. It is terrific and horrible. Not imaginable. It is hard to serve on it. I would not like to.” Fear and tension are a prominent elements in the responses of Group B.

Conclusion

Literature and film are two distinct mediums, and as a result, there are some significant and basic distinctions between them. However, the two have a complicated relationship because they share several key characteristics. From the outset, filmmakers have looked to literature for inspiration, and cinematic adaptations of literary works are now commonplace. Teaching literature through movies is also a common practice and it is also helpful in the case of realistic literature. The cinematic version certainly supports the cognition in case of comprehending the descriptive details mentioned in the fiction and socio-historical environment prevalent in the backdrop of fiction.

In the case of absurd fiction, the whole situation changes as the study indicates. Two groups responded divergently on so many instances and it is obvious that the cinematic version of the story limits the cognitive faculty of the leaner and they just imagined Gregor as a bug and insect. They were not able to locate the human self in Gregor after transformation and they became the party with the family against Gregor. Contrary to this, Group A did not consider Gregor as an animal completely. They always regarded him as a human being with a deformity and disability. That’s why they always sympathize and philosophize his sorry plight.

The current study reveals that absurd literature cannot be comprehended with the help of cinematic version only as visual aid curb the cognitive and imaginative faculty of the learner. So it is seen that Group A performed well in understanding the character of Gregor and his anguish but Group
B was not able to break free from the visual cobweb that limits their understanding of the fiction to the close quarters as designed by the director of a cinematic version. There is a possibility that the cinematic version may help after reading or listening to a particular text but that aspect was not addressed in this study.

References


