

GENERIC INTEGRITY AND FIDELITY IN THE ADAPTATION OF UNBROKEN: A BIOPIC OF AN UNYIELDING SURVIVOR

Dr. Umara Shaheen^{*1}; Dr. Nadia Anwar²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities, COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore Campus;

²Acting Dean, Institute of Liberal Arts, Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, UMT, Lahore.

^{*1}ushaheen@cuilahore.edu.pk; ²nadia.anwar@umt.edu.pk

Corresponding Author: *

Received: 30 March, 2024

Revised: 30 April, 2024

Accepted: 18 May, 2024

Published: 31 May, 2024

ABSTRACT

The present study aims to analyze the film adaptation of Hillenbrand's bestselling book "Unbroken: A WWII Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption" (2010) as portrayed in the biopic "Unbroken: The Unbelievable True Story" (2014). The selected movie depicts the remarkable life of Louis Zamperini, an Olympic runner and Army Air Forces bombardier, who endured extensive abuse and dehumanization as a Prisoner of War (POW) at a Japanese war camp during WWII. While staying faithful to the book, the movie also adheres to the conventions of two modes of adaptation: transposition and commentary, aligning with the medium specificity approach. The researchers discuss the biopic's narrative time frame, narrative structure, and historical accuracy, upholding its generic integrity and independence.

Keywords: Biopic, creative non-fiction, faithful adaptation, transposition, commentary.

INTRODUCTION

The lives of all great people may not epitomize the glitz and glamour peculiar to celebrities, but they often prove to be highly inspirational for posterity. Such exemplary personalities are characterized by gallantry, perseverance, resilience, and devotion. Their inspirational life stories often motivate writers or filmmakers to produce memorable biographies or biopics. Pender (2024) describes biography as a multifaceted genre that combines literary studies and history and delves into psychology. It significantly contributes to democratic culture and history. Biographies of artists, writers, and performers help us understand the influences, methods, circumstances, and impacts of their creative work on both the artists and their audiences.

The biography genre, in terms of its features, objectives, and level of acceptance by readers and critics, has been characterized by instability (Esper & Hilla, 2015). From the appreciation of famous people through the portrayal of their lives to inspire readers in the sixteenth century (Schmidt, 2003) to the selection of individuals who made history seem 'arbitrary' and 'dangerous' in the 19th century

(Motta, 2000, p. 2), biographies have achieved resurgence in the publishing industry of contemporary times, a significant number of which were even hailed as the best-sellers. For example, Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* (1550) and John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* (1563) were popular biographies of the sixteenth century that focused on secular lives as opposed to the traditional focus on the lives of churchmen before the Middle Ages. James Boswell's *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791), based on his personal interaction and creative imagination, contributed significantly to the development of this genre. However, in the 19th century, the focus shifted to hagiography associated with Roman Catholicism, highlighting the miraculous deeds of the saints. In the 20th century, with the advancement in Sociology and Psychology, the art of biography writing also flourished. Lytton Strachey's exceptional work *Eminent Victorians* (1918) played a key role in revolutionizing the art of biographical writing, which later paved the way for biographers to follow his witty and loose style by portraying the subjects' real lives. In recent years,

biographies have become more detailed because of the plethora of accessible material in the form of photographs and documents which drape a rather drab narrative with one of sensational discourse, e.g., Milford's *Savage Beauty: The Life of Edna St. Vincent Millay* (2001), Williamson's *Borges: A Life* (2004) and Isaacson's *Steve Jobs* (2011).

Laura Hillenbrand's *Unbroken: A WWII Story of Survival, Resilience and Redemption* (2010) (henceforth *Unbroken*) is an apt example of a bestselling biography of contemporary times revolving around the life of an Olympic distance runner and WWII Prisoner of War (POW), Louis (also called Louie) Zamperini whose fortitude and resilience of body, mind and spirit leaves indelible impression on the readers' minds. Inspired by his "extraordinary tale of survival," Angelina Jolie, film actress, and director, became determined to bring Zamperini's great story to life. The core message that acted as an incentive for Jolie to take on the task of carving out a virtual space for real life was that when faced with obstacles, one had to "rise to the challenge, not be overwhelmed by it" ("*Unbroken: The Story behind Louis Zamperini*," 2015, January 18).

Ever since the film was released, it has aroused controversy about its fidelity to the book among critics, especially in blog writing (Hamaker, 2014 & Schroeder, 2015). Moreover, being a biopic, despite Oscar voters' favorite (Cheshire, 2015, p.2), it does not enjoy the status of a genre instead, it is categorized within the parameters of traditional genres, such as Western, musical, war film and costume drama, etc. (Cheshire, 2015, pp. 3-4).

Giles Hardie (2013) believes that biopics cannot be successful if their makers do not select a "genuine" genre for storytelling because just as a biography can serve as a shelf where you can find a book, likewise a biopic is also a form of movie which emphasizes other themes through a life story. It is not a narrative (as cited in Cheshire, 2015, p. 4). Jolie's *Unbroken* (2014) is also discussed more in terms of "war film" than a biopic (Mcneill, 2016, February 04; Thompson, 2014, Dec. 26; Hongo, 2015, Oct. 22). Therefore, to counter such arguments, the present study aims to focus on *Unbroken* (2014) as a representative of its genre by indicating the factors which determine the generic suitability of *Unbroken* (2014) as a biopic. It also examines the extent to which the film *Unbroken* (2014) stays faithful to

Lara Hillenbrand's book *Unbroken* (2010) in terms of its plot, characterization, and setting.

Research Questions

The study attempts to address the following questions:

- 1 How closely does the movie *Unbroken* (2014) reflect the situations, characters, and setting depicted in Hillenbrand's book *Unbroken* (2010)?
2. What are the implications of the modifications involved in adapting the selected biography to meet the specific needs of the movie?

Literature Review

Adapting material from one medium to another is not new because writers, playwrights, producers, directors, and composers have been adapting material for ages to contextualize their current socio-political, artistic, and religious-cultural realities. Its importance lies in reconstructing the source text of the past through the lens of the present. Therefore, one of the burning questions about adaptations is how they offer relevance to contemporary circumstances (Kinney, 2013). To be successful, adapted films must entertain the sensibilities of the present. For example, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) by Jane Austen has been adapted several times. However, to grab the attention of the modern audience, the film *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2016) by Burr Steers was adapted from the novel *Pride and Prejudice and Zombie* (2009) by Graham-Smith. This palimpsestic adaptation confirms the requirements of topical contextualization. The reason for giving a new dimension to the story of the five sisters is that portraying women as bold and thinking individuals is not new to modern readers. In contrast, it was intellectually stimulating for readers in 1813. Adaptation is usually criticized for being "secondary" or "inferior" to the source text, which many critics, including Hutcheon (2013, p. XV), deny completely. However, it becomes difficult for us to think of a text in isolation from its source text when we know its existence. Therefore, when a work is called adaptation, we are announcing its relation to a prior text, due to which Gérard Genette (1982, p. 5) regards the adapted text as a "second-degree" text. However, Hutcheon and O'Flynn (2013, p. 6) believe that adaptation should be treated as an independent and autonomous text because it has its aura and spatiotemporal vistas.

Giannetti (2008) believes that converting a literary text into a film requires more skill and discipline than making a film based on original screenplays. The main problem he identified is not the reproduction of content but the degree of fidelity with the source text. He categorizes literary adaptations as literal, faithful, and loose adaptations, which, according to him, is a simplified classification because most adaptations fall in between (Giannetti, 2008). Loose adaptations take only the idea, character, or situation from the literary source and then develop that situation or idea independently, e.g., *Into the Woods* (2014), directed by Rob Marshall, which was inspired by the Grimm Brother's fairytales of 'Rapunzel,' 'Jack and the Beanstalk,' 'Cinderella' and 'Little Red Riding Hood.' Faithful adaptation tries to recreate the literary source in filmic terms by keeping it as close to the original spirit of the book as possible, e.g., *Life of Pi* (2012), directed by Ang Lee, adapted from the novel of the same name. Such adaptations tend to preserve essential characters, scenes, and tone of the original source (Giannetti, 2008). Literal adaptation refers to replicating the original text and is usually possible with stage plays, e.g., David Wellington's award-winning *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1996). Such adaptations become easy for the adapter because of similar modes of action and dialogues in both film and drama. However, mere recording of the play would not make the process of adaptation exciting for the adapters as he would not be contributing anything to adaptation, even in terms of spatio-temporal landscapes (Giannetti, 2008, pp. 444-5).

Geoffrey Wagner in *The Novel and the Cinema* (1975, pp. 222-223), inspired by Bela Nalaze's film theory, classifies adaptations into three modes: transposition, commentary, and analogy. Transposition, according to him, is the literary text directly given on the screen with minimum perceptible interference, e.g., *Wuthering Heights* (2011), directed by Andrea Arnold and screen played by Andrea Arnold and Olivi Hetread. This explanation resonates with Giannetti's requirements for faithful adaptation. *Commentary* refers to the mode of adaptation where an original situation or idea is taken and either intentionally or unintentionally altered in some respect, which can also be called a re-emphasis or re-structuring (Wagner, 1975). He does not regard it as infidelity or violation. Rather, it results from the different intentions on the part of the filmmaker. For example,

Mira Nair's *Namesake* (2006), an adaption of the book of the same title (2003), does not show the protagonist Gogol living with the parents of his girlfriend (he is shown staying there for a few days), because, in the Indian culture, a boy living with the girl's parents is mildly unacceptable. It also indicates a complete rejection of Indian identity on the protagonist's part. So, Mira Nair seems to cater to the Indian viewers' expectations by modifying the story. The most liberal kind of category is the analogy, which is similar to Giannetti's perception of loose adaptation as it is "a fairly considerable departure" (Wagner, 1975, p. 227) from the original one, e.g., Brad Bird's *The Iron Giant* (1999) based on Ted Hughes' *The Iron Man* (1968) is a radical departure from the novel. The plot revolving around Iron Man fighting a repulsive space creature is altered. The only plot element retained in the film was the giant-sized robot eating metal as food.

As most types of adaptations defined by various theorists have standard features, Linda Hutcheon's classification is no exception. She categorizes adaptation into three types: (i) An acknowledged transposition of a renowned work, (ii) a creative as well as an interpretive act of appropriation, and (iii) an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work (Hutcheon & O'Flynn, 2013, p. 8). As a *formal entity or product*, Hutcheon considers adaptation as an evident and detailed transposition of a particular work. This "transcoding" may involve a transfer from one medium to another (a poem to a film), e.g., Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* (2004) based on Homer's *Illiad*, an epic war poem or a shift of genre (an epic to a novel), e.g. Margaret Atwood's novel *The Penelopiad* (2005), inspired by Homer's *Odyssey*, or a change of frame and context, e.g. Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) inspired by Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) which altered the spatiotemporal setting of the novel. While as a *process of creation*, the journey towards adaptation always involves "(re-) interpretation and then (re-)creation," popularly termed as appropriation. Adaptation as a process of reception refers to intertextuality experiencing adaptations as palimpsests finding links with other works that have similar features (Hutcheon & O'Flynn, 2013, p. 8). Tired of the discussion on fidelity, Stam (2000) proposes to move beyond. He shows serious reservations about the concept of fidelity for multiple reasons. He questions the possibility of strict fidelity since the change of medium brings a change in the

adaptation automatically (p. 55). He moves on to inquire whether adapters seek to ensure the fidelity of the film to the plot of the novel, the physical description of its characters, or its author's intentions. Regarding the author's intentions, he questions the "intentional fallacy" nurtured by the author. At times, though, writers may not be aware of their latent intentions, which an adapter might discover (p. 57). Therefore, Stam concludes that adaptation should be faithful to the essence of the medium of expression rather than the source text. The "Medium-specificity" approach can help us look at the conventions of a particular medium, e.g., film. Like many other film genres, biopics are judged on the basis of their fidelity to the subject they want to portray. The following is a detailed discussion of biopics' characteristics, their status as a genre, and the issue of fidelity to the historical events depicted in the film.

Biographical films or biopics

Custen (1992, pp. 5-6) defines a biopic as a film that depicts "the life of a historical person, past or present," in which the real name of the protagonist is used. It is a genre whose characteristics "shift anew with each generation." As per its definition, a biopic cannot be based on the life of a fictional character, and it does not have defined features because its dynamics change in every era and with the change in the preferences of the producers. Cheshire (2015) dismisses all the films that are "inspired by" a real person's life since the filmmakers tend to weave fictional stories around the characters, e.g., *The Terminal* (2004), whose source is 18-year (1988-2006) stay of Mehran Karimi Nasseri in Paris-Charles de Gaulle Airport, France. He also excludes the "thinly veiled bio-pics" where characters' names have changed but are considered to be based on a famous person, such as *Last Days* (2005) by Curt Cobain and *The Master* (2012) by L. Ron Hubbard. Christie (1992, p. 288) defines biopic as "'life[-]picturing' discursive modality" because, as a discourse, it presents life stories through textual and visual modes. Epstein (2011, p.1) also endorses Christie's (1992) view that recently, films have begun to be studied as discourse intensely and systematically. Despite being incredibly popular at the box office as well as at award ceremonies, it is astonishing to notice that there have been few significant books (e.g., Custen's *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History*, 1992;

Bingham's *Whose Lives Are They Anyway: The Biopic as Contemporary Film Genre*, 2010; Cheshire's *Bio-Pics: A life in pictures*, 2015), on biopics which involve critical writing.

Custen (1992) focuses on Hollywood films produced between the 1930s and the 1960s. According to him, in 1991, when he was writing, the genre of biopics was in decline. In fact, since the 1960s, the genre has been reduced to a minor form. Dennis Bingham (2010) laments the popularly established inferior status of biopics as a genre having set conventions and developmental stages. He points out that even the term biopic is a pejorative term. As a genre, though, it was specifically associated with major studios such as Warner Bros, Twentieth Century Fox, and MGM during the Hollywood studio era (1930s-1960s). He believes biopic is a "genuine, dynamic genre and an important one." It "narrates, exhibits and celebrates" a person's life to show, inquire, or question how important he/she is to the world (Custen, 1992, p. 10), which the current study attempts to reinforce by highlighting how *Unbroken* (2014) portrays the life of Louise Zamperini. Miller, as cited by Chandler, also argues that "particular genres develop, frame and legitimate particular concerns, questions, and pleasures," which help in strengthening the bond between different parties involved in the production and reception of a genre.

Treating biopics as an independent genre, Bingham (2010) traced the "evolution and life-cycle changes of the genre." He also classifies biographies of men and women as belonging to different genres (p.2). Films about men have gone from "celebratory to warts-and-all to investigatory to post-modern to parodic." On the other hand, biopics of women are characterized by stories of suffering and victimization owing to the cultural trends bent on restricting women's space in the public sphere (Birmingham, 2010, p. 10). The developmental stages identified by Bingham (2010) include a classical celebratory form to warts-and-all, producer's genre to an auteurist director's genre, e.g., *I Shot Andy Warhol* (1996) directed by Mary Harron, who partially imagined and modified the life story of Valerie Solanas's failed attempt of murdering [Andy Warhol](#). Harron chose to base her film on Solanas because she could relate to her frustration and unhappiness, and just like her, she disliked men's treatment of women (Kaufman, December 3, 2009). The next stage routes from investigatory to parodic, in which the very notion of heroism is mocked, e.g,

in order to focalize the lives of the marginalized, such as African Americans, feminists, or Third World inhabitants, by using the conventional and mythologized form in a positive way which had been used for their marginalization. The last stage identified is a neo-classical period, which started in 2000 and is characterized by all forms of biopics mentioned above (Brimingham, pp. 17-18).

Cheshire (2015) presents several case studies which shed light on the uniqueness of this genre and its sub-genres. However, he also draws attention to the much-debated question about whether a biopic is a genre in its own right (Cheshire, 2015, p. 3). Despite being depicted by Bingham as an essential genre, contradictory views about the generic suitability of biopics still exist because of issues related to historical inaccuracy and limited creativity. She is of the view that, unlike other genres, biopics share no familiar codes or conventions as they can be set and molded anywhere and at any time. Their standard and crucial feature is the depiction of the life of an "important" person (Cheshire, 2005, p. 4). Cheshire's study examines the key issues surrounding the resurgence, narrative structure, and subject representation. He also groups films according to professions specific to singers, writers, sportsmen, politicians and academicians. Ed Harris's *Pollock* (2000) depicts the life of a painter; Hooper is *The Damn United* (2009) is based on the life of a footballer, Brian Clough; and Howard is *A Beautiful Mind* (2001) portrays the life of a mathematician, John Nash.

Despite the rising controversy about the status of biopics as a genre, several research studies have been conducted on its different forms or subgenres, e.g., musical, artistic, political, and royal biopics. Especially, a great number of political biopics depicting the lives of politicians, rulers, and monarchs have been produced in recent years, e.g., Steven Spielberg's *Lincoln* (2012) and Cadwick's *Mandella: Long Walk to Freedom* (2013). The main reason is that biopics are closely linked to current events, and they provide an opportunity to interpret historical events from the perspective of contemporary times. *Unbroken* (2014) also presents an interpretation of the historical events in WWII related to the bilateral relationship between America and Japan. Most films highlight the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; this film, on the other hand, focuses on the mistreatment endured by the

American soldiers as prisoners at the hands of the Japanese army.

The issue related to the accurate depiction of historical events has always served as a criterion for critics to judge the worth of the film. Rosenstone (1995), famous for his historical films, differentiates between fiction and history by saying that even though both tell stories, the story extracted from the latter is the true one. However, he questions if this needs to be a 'literal' truth and "an exact copy of what took place in the past?" and replies by stressing that "[i]n film, it can never be" (p. 69). "Invention" is crucial because it helps the filmmaker summarize vast amounts of data as well as symbolize complexities that, otherwise, are difficult to show. The images shown in the film are invented and true. He also adds that they are true because they symbolize and condense large amounts of data and convey the overall meaning of past events, which can be documented, verified, and argued (as cited in Bingham, 2010, p. 9). According to Catherine Parker (2002), biographies or biopics are usually found between fiction and history. Therefore, Rosenstone's idea of "invention" does not violate historical truth. Rather, it stems from the desire to see biographical and historical figures alive before us. Filmmakers sometimes see the need to complete history by filling in what did not happen, but the viewer might want it to happen (Bingham, 2010, p. 8). Although biopics must be based on reality, there can be little room for invention to present a complete picture of history. *Unbroken* (2014) also modifies some of the incidents from Zamperini's life, which will be discussed in the following pages.

The film *Unbroken* (2014)

Unbroken (2014) depicts the life of Louis 'Louie' Zamperini, an Olympic runner and a prisoner of the Japanese army during the Second World War. The film is based on Laura Hillenbrand's bestselling biographical book, published in 2010. Angelina Jolie, as mentioned earlier, inspired by Zamperini's indomitable spirit of never yielding to hardships, directed and co-produced the film in 2014. While explaining the reason for making this film, she expressed, "I felt, as a human being, I need to walk in this man's footsteps" because she wanted to know what was required to be a better person who could stand against all odds. Her passion for the film was summed up by Matthew, her co-producer, as obsession (Block, 2014, December 12). The film's

screenplay is written by Joel Coen, Ethan Coen, Richard LaGravenese and William Nicholson. Besides Angelina Jolie, the production, which is worth \$ 65 million in budget, is co-handled by Matthew Baer, Erwin Stoff, and Clayton Townsend. The lead role of the feisty and rebellious Zamperini was played by a not-so-popular British actor, **Jack O'Connell**. Whereas Domhnall Gleeson was shown as Russell "Phil" Phillips, the pilot of the bombardier, the omnipresent, the cruelest of all the Japanese captors, Mutsuhiro "The Bird" Watanabe was played by Miyavi (Takamasa Ishihara), a Japanese musician.

The film revolves around Louie, a US airman and bombardier whose plane crashed into the ocean of Ohio during WWII due to mechanical failure. He, along with two survivors, Phil and Mac, makes his way to the lifeboats. The film shows how the three struggle to survive, knowing that they have limited rations. Their situation gets worse with the passage of time as they are bitten by bugs and faced with dehydration. During their struggle to survive, they have to eat albatross, which they vomit up later. They are attacked by sharks along with airplanes, which they mistake as those out for their rescue.

After surviving for 47 days on the raft, Louie and Phil are captured by Japanese army officers and sent to a POW camp where they are treated inhumanly, first by a doctor called the Quack and then by a Japanese captor, Mutsuhiro Watanabe, nicknamed the Bird. The Bird is a sadist and takes a special interest in Louie, knowing that he is an Olympic runner. Louie tolerates the atrocities as a POW for more than two years, including numerous beatings, starvation, and tiring daily tasks. Finally, when the war ends, Louie and the other prisoners are set free, and the film ends with Louie's reunion with his family.

In the film, there are occasional flashbacks showing Louie as a young Italian boy living in Torrance, California, who steals, drinks, and smokes, to the disappointment of his family. His brother, when he sees him running fast, decides to train him to be a runner. With time, Louie becomes a successful distance runner, earning the title "The Torrance Tornado." In the [1936 Summer Olympics](#) held in [Berlin, Germany](#), Louie came in 8th but set a record for speed in the final lap in the 5,000-meter race.

Unlike the book, Louie's post-war life is not covered in the film. At the end of the film, a slideshow covers the main incidents of his life, including his promise,

which he made in the raft, to devote his life to God, his forgiveness of Japanese captors, and his carrying of the torch in the Olympics held in 1998 in Japan. Louis died on July 2, 2014, three months before the film's release.

There are mixed reviews of the film by critics and viewers. After one year, the film was screened around the world except for Japan because it was branded "racist" by a right-wing campaign. Nationalists castigated Jolie for hating Japan (McNeill, 2016, February 4). *The Guardian* reports that the Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact, a Japanese organization, branded the movie as "immoral" for its portrayal of the Japanese guards' mistreatment of POWs (Rabin, 2014, p. 2). Nationalists submitted a petition on the website Change.org, which received more than 8,000 signatures owing to the movie's being "contradictory to the facts" (Child, 2014). Viewing it as an adaptation, Shroeder (2015, January 1) calls it a "broken" adaptation of the book because it does not include important incidents of Zamperini's life, especially post-war experiences. He believes that the adapter, Angelina Jolie, a novice director, could not transfer the book's greatness to the film. However, Hamaker (2014, December 23) calls it an "effective recreation and evocation of Hillenbrand's book."

There has been limited exploration of *Unbroken* (2010) as a biopic in its own right. Most reviews focus on its merits by comparing it to the book it is adapted from. This study discusses the film not only as an adaptation but also as a representative of its genre, specifically as a biopic.

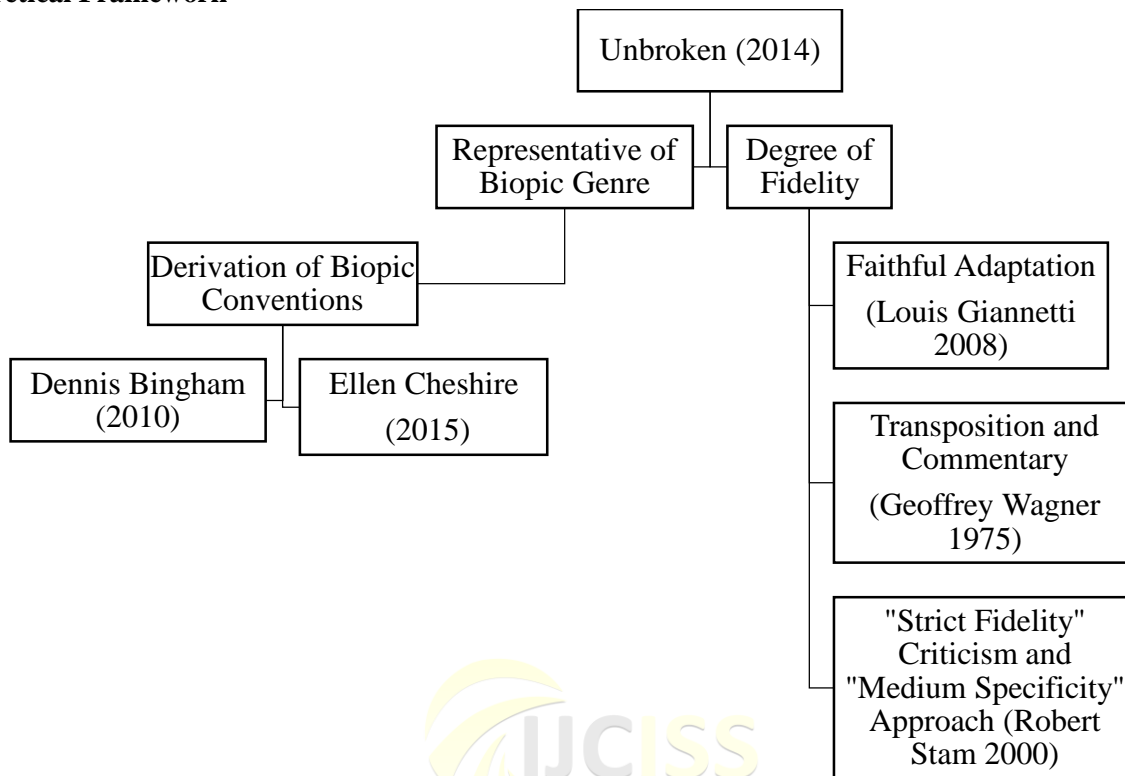
Critical Orientation

In this study, the film *Unbroken* (2014) as an adaptation of Laura Hillenbrand's book *Unbroken* (2010), is examined with respect to Giannetti's (2008) concept of faithful adaptation and Wagner's (1975) two modes of adaptation, i.e., transposition and commentary (See Figure 1.0). *Transposition* refers to adapting a literary text to a film with minimum perceptible interference. In contrast, *commentary* refers to altering some of the features to re-emphasize certain aspects of the source text. The film under analysis falls in between these modes. The film will also be discussed in relation to Stam's (2000, pp. 55-59) criticism of "strict fidelity," focusing on the "medium specificity" approach, emphasizing the need to be faithful to the essence of the medium rather than to the source text. The

discussion on the film will help authorize it as the representative of its genre, “biopic,” focusing on the

codes and conventions derived from Denis Bingham (2010) and Cheshire (2015).

Theoretical Framework



Unbroken (2014) as an adaptation

The analysis of the film situates it under the category of faithful adaptation, which, according to Giannetti’s (2008, p.443) definition, refers to an adaptation being as close to the source text as possible despite the medium-specific alterations. For example, the book and the film are based on the life of Louis Zamperini, an Olympic runner and POW in WWII, focusing on his perseverance and resilience in difficult times. As a 137-minute film cannot cover every incident described in the book consisting of 350 pages, the film includes selective scenes from the book trying to present the essentials that help underscore the message. The main incidents included in the film are Louis’ portrayal of childhood as a troublemaker, his record-breaking race in the Southern California Track and Field Championship in 1934, his participation in the 5000-meter race at the 1936 Olympics where despite being placed eighth, he broke another record by running the final lap in just 56 seconds, his survival on a raft for 47 days, his mistreatment by Japanese camp guards especially “the Bird,” and his return to homeland and reunion with his family. So, the major events are

covered in the film, but his post-war life was reduced to the slide show at the end.

Most of the reviewers criticized the film because it did not cover Louie’s post-traumatic stress and then redemption in the form of religious conversion and forgiveness to his enemies. In an interview, Angelina Jolie gave a reason for not including this part as she found it disrespectful to try to adjust that in the last 15 minutes. She added that it was not a theme that could have received less time. However, an effort was made to cover this gap by showing Louie’s inclination towards religion, which was reflected in his church attendance all the way through as a little boy (Horn, 2015, January 01).

The analysis of the film with respect to Wagner’s (1975) modes of adaptation –*transposition* and *commentary* reveals that even though the film is true to the spirit of the book, apart from the missing scenes, there are some changes that lend to it a slightly different color from the book. In the film, Louie’s career as a track runner starts accidentally as he gets caught looking up at girls’ dresses under the bleachers at his high school. In order to save himself, he starts running, leaving all the track runners

behind. It is then that his elder brother decides to train him as a runner. However, according to Hillenbrand, the situation that led to the start of his career portrays his character in a more positive light. Some ninth-grade girls wanted to organize an interclass track meet, and "Louie was the only male who looked like he could run" (Hillenbrand, 2010, p. 9). They persuaded him to participate in the race, but as he was placed last, he hid under the bleachers out of embarrassment. The coach's comment about his inability to run prompted his brother Pete to train Louis, who initially "hated running" (p. 10). As he improved in the subsequent track meet, he also started to enjoy the applause from the spectators. The film falls in between transposition and commentary since the above-mentioned scene was altered intentionally, perhaps to dramatize Louie's start of the running career. Here, Rosenstone's concept of "invention" plays a crucial role, according to which films are made to make viewers see what they want to see (Bingham, 2010, p. 8). The scene that made Louie's brother train him as a runner was "invented" by the filmmaker, perhaps to add interest in or sensationalize the film.

Another significant difference that can be noted in the film is the portrayal of Japanese guards, especially "the Bird". Mutsuhiro "The Bird" Watanabe is not portrayed as cruel in the film as in the book. For this reason, Jolie's casting for the role of the Bird can be challenged and questioned. Even though Miyave, the Japanese guitarist, tried to do justice to his role, his appearance did not suit the exigencies of the role. A comparison of the Bird's picture given in Hillenbrand's book with Miyavi's appearance in the film reveals a detectable difference. Moreover, a major portion of the book is devoted to the Bird's atrocious behavior, even though the chapter describing him is titled "Monster." He is described as a "psychopath" by Tinker, a prisoner of war. At the same time, Hatto, a POW, comments that "He did enjoy hurting POWs" and "He was satisfying his sexual desire by hurting them" (Hillenbrand, 2010, pp. 194 & 197). According to Jack Brady, another POW, "He was the most sadistic man I ever met" (Hillenbrand, 2010, p. 198). The book also describes him as being capricious as he starts weeping in the middle of his beatings.

In the film, a few incidents are mentioned, e.g., the punching scene in which all prisoners were told to punch Louise, the beatings at night, and the famous

scene in which Louie was told to hold a heavy beam over his head with a warning that he would be shot on dropping the log. There can be several reasons why there was more focus on Louie's perseverance than the Bird's cruelty. One possible reason is time limitations that restrict the span of Louie's life. Miyavi, who played the Bird in the film, in one of the interviews, recaptured how Angelina Jolie persuaded him for the role with the vision of building a bridge between America and Japan as both countries have long held animosity since WWII (Daniele, 2015). However, despite her efforts, the screening of the film remained banned for one year for being "anti-Japanese" and "racist" (McNeill, 2016, February 4). The main reason for this can be attributed to the less focus given to Louie's religious devotion and forgiveness.

The "commentary" mode helps filmmakers re-emphasize certain aspects of the book in the film by modifying scenes. In this respect, two scenes from the film exemplify the modification that re-emphasizes Louie's indomitable spirit and the Bird's cruelty. In the punching scene, only Louie was shown getting punched for stealing food, while in the book, three more prisoners got punched around 220 times. Since the film focuses only on Louie, he gets punched alone. In another instance in the book, knowing that Louie was an Olympian, Quack, the doctor, directed the starved Louie to run a race with a Japanese runner, but in the film, it was the Bird who did so.

Robert Stam discusses fidelity from a different perspective. He criticizes "strict fidelity" and advocates a "medium specificity" approach, proposing that an adaptation should be faithful to the essence of the medium rather than the source (Stam, 2000, pp.55-58). Stam questions fidelity and inquiries about the criteria for proving whether a film is faithful. For example, he asks whether it is the plot or physical description of the characters it should be faithful to. Another important question that Stam raises is to what extent an adaptation reflects the author's intentions or whether he/she is aware of these intentions. Regarding Hillenbrand's intentions, it is difficult to ascertain whether she wanted to pay tribute to Louie Zamperini only or wanted to highlight the cruelty of the Japanese army as a response to criticism of America for destroying Nagasaki and Hiroshima. She, perhaps, wanted to bring both America and Japan close by conveying the message of forgiveness through Louie's example.

She also sheds light on the views of one of the Japanese captors, i.e., the Bird, who believes that it was the war that made him commit cruel acts; otherwise, in a normal situation, he would never have done that (Hillenbrand, 2010, pp. 331-332) which resonates the very message conveyed in Thomas Hardy's anti-war poem *The Man He Killed* (1909). Hence, it is difficult to ascertain what the author's actual intentions were; moreover, the audience or viewers might have different interpretations.

As for the "medium specificity" approach, Stam advocates fidelity to the essence of the medium of the adapted text. Film is a multilayered medium that uses two modes of expression: image and sound. The image offers great opportunities for "condensing significance" because the character's description and action details spread over two pages can be shown within a single shot through lighting, color, and composition. On the other hand, "prose is constrained by a sequential, piece by piece, mode of presentation" (Montgomery et al., 2007, pp. 301-302). Several detailed descriptions, which are summed up in a few scenes, especially Louie's childhood experiences, his career as a track runner, his experiences as an airman, and his mistreatment at the hands of the Bird, are not described in as much detail as found in the book. Following the "media specificity" approach, this reduction is suitable for film medium because 20 hours of reading is reduced to 2 hours and 17 minutes.

Another convention of the film is "easy intelligibility," which we can see in the scene modified in the film describing how Louie's brother decided to train him as a runner (Montgomery et al., 2007, p.297). As the film focuses on showing rather than telling, *Unbroken* exemplifies excellent cinematography by 11-time Oscar nominee Roger Deakins. There are excellent mid-shots, medium close-ups, and close-ups covering water scenes, especially Louie's life on the raft and attack by sharks, aerial shots showing bombardment, etc. So, the film conforms to the film conventions by locating its generic strand within a medium specificity approach.

Unbroken (2014) as Biopic

There has been a controversy regarding the status of biopics as an independent film genre (Bingham, 2010, p. 11 & Chesire, 2015). The film *Unbroken* (2014) has mostly been discussed by critics as a war film rather than a biopic. The present study discusses

the film as a representative of its genre, i.e., biopic having codes and conventions. The first convention of biopic is that it revolves around the life of a real person (Cheshire, 2015 & Bingham, 2010). The films are "inspired by" real persons, but having fictional stories does not fall into this category. Moreover, thinly veiled biopics in which the protagonist's name is different from the real person described in the film also do not belong to this category. *Unbroken* (2014) fulfills this criterion by portraying Louie Zamperini's life, a real-life inspiring figure whose exemplary life conveys perseverance and resilience.

Another convention of a biopic is that its protagonist must be an essential person (Cheshire, 2015) who has done something interesting in life (Bingham, 2010, p.7), usually a "known" person. However, there are biopics of little-known people as well, e.g., *Erin Brockovich* (2000) is a biopic of a person of the same name who brought down a Californian water company single-handedly. Whether known or unknown, the person must do something uncommon that makes him different from others. Louie Zamperini became popular after Hillenbrand's book, characterized by marked features of his personality, including his unyielding nature and indomitable courage, which made him stand out among others.

Earlier, biopics involved subjects with flawless personalities. This trend has changed considerably, whereby personalities are shown in their full color, including their character's weak side. Bingham (2010) traces the development of biopics from melodrama to warts-and-all, portraying real persons' weaknesses along with their distinguishing qualities. Louie, as a child, was a troublemaker and thief, but his childhood period is depicted together with the stages of his life in which he showed great strength.

As far as the narrative time frame is concerned, there are biopics that portray the protagonist's life from the cradle to the grave, e.g., *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* (2013) or one-week duration of *The Queen* (2007). It depends on the significance of that period in the life of a person that is worth capturing. In *Unbroken* (2014), the time frame is Louie's childhood until his reunion with his family at the end of WWII. The film focuses on his career as an Olympian, his strength and perseverance during 47 days on a raft, and his sufferings as a POW during WWII. The incidents in the following period until his death are mentioned as a slideshow. Hence, it can be said that the focus of a biopic can be a whole life or a significant period of one's life.

As for the narrative structure, Cheshire (2015) outlines four types which include: (1) taking a chronological view according to which a film starts at a high or low point and then there is a flash-back to the beginning to see how that success or failure is reached; (2) taking a beginning-to-end-view of a short period of one's life; (3) throwing the viewer back and forth as present incidents trigger memories or (4) creating a complex non-linear structure combining facts with fantasy which violate the expected norms of a biopic. *Unbroken (2014)* follows the third type of narrative structure in which the film starts at a critical point in history, i.e., during the war period, and then viewers are thrown back and forth, showing Louie's childhood period, his career as an Olympian, and experiences as POW.

Another aspect of a biopic is the extent of historical accuracy required in a film. According to Bingham (2010), every biopic needs to have a basis in reality; however, "deviation and omission" are permitted in order to create a "compelling film" (Cheshire, 2015, p. 12). As biopic falls in between history and fiction, the element of "invention," according to Rosenstone (1995, p.69), can be there at times to summarize a lengthy situation or avoid complexities. *Unbroken (2014)* is based on a real story, but it has an element of invention mentioned above, positioning the film as commentary.

The last characteristic of a biopic is that it has become an auteurist director's genre (Bingham, 2010). Angelina Jolie, director of *Unbroken*, is famous for her charitable work, especially in war-stricken areas. Her first and second directorial projects are based on war, which shows that she wants to create a discourse out of the horrible effects of war. Moreover, Miyavi, who played the Bird in the film, said that she attempted to bring America and Japan close through this film (Daniele, 2015).

Conclusion

Unbroken (2014) is mainly true to the spirit of Hillenbrand's *Unbroken (2010)*, but it does not replicate all situations in the book. Some scenes fall between transposition and commentary (Wagner, 1975). The altering of the scenes reveals the filmmaker's attempt to emphasize Louie's traits, which makes him more endearing to the viewers. The film also conforms to Stam's (2000) medium specificity approach as several scenes are omitted, reduced, and modified for easy intelligibility. *Unbroken (2014)* conforms to the conventions of biopic as a genre. It revolves around a real and

important person, Louie Zamperini, covering a time frame from childhood to reunion with the family at the end of WWII. However, the slideshow includes major details of his later life till death. The narrative structure is non-linear, throwing viewers back and forth in time. Having an element of the invention, it does not merely recount facts but focuses on the biographical truth of Zamperini's life, highlighting his importance to the world.

References

- Beck, B. (2005). It's a gift: Ray, The Incredibles and lives of greatness. *Multicultural Perspectives*,7(3), 20-23.
- Bingham, D. (2010). *Whose lives are they anyway?: The biopic as contemporary film genre*. Ne Jersey, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Bingham, D. (2011). Woody Guthrie, warts-and-all: The biopic in the new American cinema of the 1970s. *Auto/Biography Studies*,26 (1), 68-90.<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2011.10846798>
- Block, A. B. (2014, December 18). *Making of 'Unbroken': Angelina Jolie fought "uphill battle" in bringing true story to screen* [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/making-unbroken-angelina-jolie-fought-758081>
- Chandler, Daniel. (1997). An Introduction to Genre Theory. Retrieved from http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/intgenre/candler_genre_theory.pdf.
- Cheshire, E. (2015). *Bio-pics: A life in pictures*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Custen, G. F. (1992). *Bio/pics: How Hollywood constructed public history*. New Jersey, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Daniele, S. (2015, January 16). *Unbroken-Interview Jack O' Connell and Miyavi (Takamasa Ishihara)*[video file] Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izBcNZUepNY>
- Epstein, W. H. (2011). Introduction: Biopics and American national identity—*invented lives, imagined communities*. *Auto/Biography Studies*,26 (1), 1-33.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2011.10846795>
- Esper, D. S. & Hilla, C. V. D. (2015). The biography genre: A proposal of work from the rewriting process. *Acta Scientiarum. Language and Culture*,37, 103.Doi: 10.4025/actascilangcult.v37i2.21710
- Giannetti, L. (2008). *Understanding films*. New Jersey, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Hamaker, C. (2014, December 23). *Unbroken adaptation works but waters down redemption* [Blog post] retrieved

- from <http://www.crosswalk.com/culture/films/unbroken-film-review.html>
- Hillenbrand, L. (2010). *Unbroken: A WWII story of survival, resilience and redemption*. New York, NY: Random House Inc.
- Horn, J. (2015, January 1). *Angelina Jolie relies on 'sweat equity' in making 'Unbroken'* [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/envelope/la-et-mn-en-angelina-jolie-20150101-story.html>
- Hutcheon, L. & O'Flynn, S. (2013). *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kaufman, A. (December 03, 2009). Decade: Mary Harron on American Psycho. *IndieWire*. Retrieved from <http://www.indiewire.com/2009/12/decade-mary-harron-on-american-psycho-55696/>
- Marciniak, M. (2007). The appeal of literature-to-film adaptations. *Lingua ac communitas*, 17, 59-67.
- Mcneill, D. (2016, Feb. 04). *Unbroken: Angelina Jolie war film accused of being 'racist' and 'anti-Japanese'* [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/unbroken-angelina-jolie-war-film-accused-of-being-racist-and-anti-japanese-a6853941.html>
- Miller, C. R. (1984). Genre as social action. *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70: 151-67.
- Minier, M. (2014). Definitions, dyads, triads and other points of connection in translation and adaptation discourse. In K. Krebs (Ed.). *Translation and Adaptation in Theatre and Film*, pp. 13-35.
- Motta, M. S. (2000). O relato biográfico como fonte para a história. *Vidya, I* (34), 101-122.
- Pender, A. (2024). Biography, History and Democracy: Contemporary Writing about Australian Lives. *Journal of Australian Studies*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14443058.2024.2335616>
- Peschke, I. (2015, March 14). *Film Unbroken delivers powerful message of perseverance and forgiveness* [Blog post]. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ingrid-peschke/film-unbroken-delivers-po_b_6445872.html
- Schmidt, B. B. (2003). Biografia e regimes de historicidade. *Métis: História e Cultura*, 2 (3), 57-7
- Schroeder, D. (2015, January 1). *A broken adaptation to Unbroken* [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://davidmschroeder.com/2015/01/01/a-broken-adaptation-to-unbroken/>
- Stam, R. (2000). Beyond fidelity: The dialogics of adaptation. *Film adaptation*, 54-76.
- Unbroken: The story behind Louis Zamperini who inspired Angelina Jolie to make a film [Blog post] (2015, January 18). Retrieved from <http://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/real-life/true-stories/unbroken-the-story-behind-louis-zamperini-who-inspired-angelina-jolie-to-make-a-film/news-story/545a5c1bfc07ac3bcb20b17b4b2e536c>
- Wagner, G. A. (1975). *The novel and the cinema*. New Jersey, N.J: Rutherford University Press.
- Yau, W.P. (2016). Revisiting the systemic approach to the study of film adaptation as intersemiotic translation. *Translation Studies*, 9, 256-267. DOI: 10.1080/14781700.2016.1178595