

## The Blue that Faded: The Adaptation of *Cobalt Blue* through Hutcheon's Lens

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### Abstract

The process of adaptation is creative and compromising. According to the *Theory of Adaptation* developed by Linda Hutcheon, the adaptation of a work into a different medium, such as a novel to a movie, is dictated by the capabilities and constraints of a specific medium, the demands of its audience, and the exigencies of a cultural and commercial economy. This paper discusses how *Cobalt Blue*, a novel of queer interiority and family disruption by Sachin Kundalkar, was adapted into a 2022 Netflix film of the same title, directed by the author himself.

Although the movie retains the skeletal plot of the book, a brother and sister falling in love with the same paying guest, whose departure destroys their family, has for different tone, structurally different, and emotionally more intense. Such changes are not incidental. They are symptomatic of the shift of a telling medium (novel) to a showing medium (film), of subjective intimacy to aesthetic surface, and a local narrative to a global product.

Based on the theory of Linda Hutcheon, this paper claims that the adaptation of *Cobalt Blue* changes the radical interiority of the novel into a cinematic impressionism-distorting or obscuring its underlying affective and queer politics. This paper concentrates on three concepts related to Hutcheon, namely medium specificity, audience reception and market pressure; it reveals that adaptation is never neutral, but a product of its form, audience and context.

### Introduction

The critical concept of adaptation has long since outgrown the naive binarism of “faithfulness” and “unfaithfulness”, between the act of translating one medium into another, to a more complex sense of what is at stake in the act of a work being translated across form, mode, and cultural context. Adaptation as Linda Hutcheon notes in *A Theory of Adaptation* is a product as well as a process: a process of creation and re-creation, appropriation and transformation. To put her formulation, adaptation “a creative and interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging” (Hutcheon & O’Flynn, 2013) and, at the same time, negotiating modes telling, showing, interactivity in which the medium is itself meaning. Perceived thus, the process of making literature into film is not merely a question of story moving off the page to the screen, but a relocation of narrative, affect, form, and audience expectations, which can alter the meaning, politics, and affective charge of the original.

Adaptation scholars in recent years have attempted to expand the field even more. As an illustration, the volume *Queer/Adaptation: A Collection of Critical Essays* (2019) discusses the overlap between adaptation studies and queer theory, and both adaptation and queerness are simply resistant to rigid hierarchies of origin and authenticity: “to identify something as an adaptation is to recognise it in relation to something else that seems more original, more authentic. Similarly, to identify something as queer is to place it in relation to what is assumed

to be ‘normal’ or ‘straight’” (“Queer/Adaptation,” 2019). A new empirical study by Kornelia Boczkowska of the experimental found-footage film *Horsey* has shown how adaptation can transform not only narrative but also gender and desire, “the experimental found footage film recycles Hollywood films ... to represent human–animal relations, linking to gender and masculinity” (Boczkowska, 2024). These changes indicate that the theory of adaptation is currently also concerned with the migration and transformation of not only the medium and the storey, but the identity, desire, form, and context. Meanwhile, the study of queer literature adaptation is relatively thin and would prefer to emphasise the way in which commercial and cultural and formal pressures soften the radicalism of source texts. As an example, a study on film adaptation of queer literature claims “the act of ‘coming out’ can be facilitated through cinema as it can normalise queer identities through its visual narratives” (Johri, 2024).

In this developing theoretical discipline, the work of Hutcheon is foundational. Her model focuses on three overlapping dimensions: medium or form (What? and How?), audience reception (Who? and Why?), and context (Where? and When?). By emphasising the specificity of the medium, she emphasises the role of the material affordances of a medium (such as the interiority of a novel vs the showing of a film) in adaptation. With reception to audiences, particularly distinction between knowing and unknowing audiences, she emphasises the invitations of adapted texts to audiences to engage in repetition (familiarity) and difference (novelty). And by focusing on context, she demonstrates the role of cultural, commercial, technological and institutional pressures in creating and receiving adaptations. This three-dimensional model would be highly applicable to an analysis of the migration of a work such as *Cobalt Blue* since the queerness of the novel, its interiority and local specificity confront the showing logic of global streaming cinema and the market pressures.

This paper argues that the adaptation of Sachin Kundalkar novel *Cobalt Blue* into the 2022 film bearing the same title (released worldwide on Netflix, directed by the author) is an example of adaptation being non-neutral. Although the movie retains the general storyline, a brother and sister falling in love with the same paying guest, who leaves, thereby breaking the family, the movie still changes the tone, structure, pacing, and the affective register. These changes can be attributed to the medium-specific transformation of novel (telling) to film (showing); to the local and global target audience; and to the market pressures of aesthetic surface, economy of affect and consumable feeling. It is in Hutcheon that we can observe how the radical interiority of the novel, the queering of family, desire and secrets, becomes cinema impressionism: glances, colour, gesture, more than long interior monologue or overlaying psychological breakdown. This change is not an accident or incident: it is symptomatic of the nature of adaptation.

As discussed in the following, the paper will first describe the salient features of the novel and the adaptation choices of the film, with a focus on major changes in form, tone and affect. It subsequently uses the three dimensions proposed by Hutcheon (specificity of medium, reception by the audience, and context/market) to unravel how and why such changes take place. The paper concludes with some thoughts on what this specific case study adds to the larger discussions regarding the adaptation of queer literature into a global streaming-film space, and what is lost when interiority and queerness are refracted through the showing medium.

### Hutcheon and the Politics of Adaptation

Linda Hutcheon, in *A Theory of Adaptation* (2013) offers an alternative conception of adaptation that does not diminish it to a derivative or inferior form of its source. Instead, she argues that adaptations are interpretive, creative, autonomous objects. Hutcheon notes that “Although adaptations are also aesthetic objects in their own right, it is only as inherently double or multilaminated works that they can be theorized as adaptations. ... An adaptation’s double nature does not mean, however, that proximity or fidelity to the adapted text should be the criterion of judgment or the focus of analysis” (Hutcheon & O’Flynn, 2013b). This position forms the main quote that challenges the scholars to avoid the principles of fidelity and instead, focus on the adaptations as narratives with dual vectors, both the antecedent text and the subsequent form, in an ongoing negotiation.

Hutcheon outlines adaptation using a triadic line of dimensions: medium or form (the What? and the How?), audience reception (the Who? and the Why?), and contextual variables (the Where? and the When?). She assumes that adaptation is both a process (involving creation, interpretation, transposition) and a product (the adapted text itself), a duality that she cites as a form of double vision. As explained by Hutcheon “Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication” (Hutcheon & O’Flynn, 2013c). Therefore, it is a locus of creative negotiation and not a slave imitation.

Concerning the politics of adaptation, Hutcheon states that in a vacuum, “Neither the product nor the process of adaptation exists in a vacuum: they all have a context – a time and a place, a society and a culture” (Hutcheon & O’Flynn, 2013d). This realisation anticipates power, identity, and ideology questions, i.e. what is chosen or not chosen, who controls the medium, addressing the audience, and how meaning is created in media platforms.

Hutcheon also emphasises that different media have different affordances. An example is that a novel generally appeals to the reader more with interiority, reflection and inner monologue, and film appeals more to visual representation, gesture and flow of time. As a result, the interiority of prose needs to be externalised, visualised or elided when a novel is transformed into a movie. These changes have the potential to change or lose the affective register, subjectivity, and sub-textualities of the original text a political issue of acute relevance in adaptation to minority or queer subjectivities, where subtle expression can be crucial to the original text.

A case in point is making the novel *The Danish Girl* (2000) a film of the same title in 2015. The imaginative inner world of the trans protagonist of the novel is transformed into the cinema of visual metaphor and melodrama. This transformation anticipates the questions of authenticity, embodiment and the spectacle of trans identity, hence showing how the demands of a medium transform meaning.

Hutcheon distinguishes between knowledgeable and ignorant audiences: the ones that are knowledgeable about the source text and those that are ignorant, approaching the adaptation with a blank slate. She insists that the enjoyment of adapting is partly the pleasure of repetition with variation, “recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation; so too is change” (Hutcheon & O’Flynn, 2013e). This two-sided mode encourages viewers to make comparisons, fill gaps or be surprised, thus adding to the interpretive experience.

The stakes of such reception can be particularly high in queer literary adaptations. The watering down or sanitisation of queerness can be frowned upon by a knowing audience and be unheard by an uninformed one. As an example, the 2004 novel *Geography Club* was adapted into a 2013 film, which was criticized as simplifying queer characters and modifying plot lines so that the film could attract a broader audience, change the plotlines and portray of identities. This is an illustration of the politics of adaptation that is influenced by the expectations and reception of the audience.

Among the most important contributions to Hutcheon is her argument that contextual elements such as historical, sociocultural, economic, and technological elements should be pre-empted with form. She claims that adaptations are a product of their time and form, and a film version of a text in the 1950s will have different standards and limitations than a streaming-platform version of the same text in the 2020s. In queer adaptations, commercial and cultural logic tends to encourage normalization, assimilation, or sanitisation of radical source material.

An example is the recent adaptation of the 2024 film *Queer* of the same title of William S. Burroughs novel, which was adapted by Luca Guadagnino. The critical discourse mentions that the novel expresses a raw and self-deprecating experience of homoeroticism that is deeply tied to the 1950s, the film in question re-contextualises it in a more romanticised visual culture that can appeal to a wider audience. In the view of Hutcheon, this mutation demonstrates how market forces, audience demands, medium limitations, contextual influences, mediate the process of adapting the novel, and thus reconfigure the novel interior subjectivity to fit a global film market and modern queer-aesthetic sensibilities. Moreover, in her definition, Hutcheon describes adaptation as “an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works ... a creative and interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging ... an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work” (Hutcheon & O’Flynn, 2013f). This definition points out that the process of adaptation is not often neutral or smooth; choices on what is salvaged, transformed or reframed, are ideological choices.

Where literary texts that focused on queer interiority, family disintegration, secrecy, or marginality are translated into film, the politics of such a migration should be subject to strict scrutiny. The transition of novel-telling to film-showing runs the danger of reducing a personal interior to a gesture surface. The need to attract the masses can soften subversive or radical factors. Global streaming context can require narrative economy and affective clarity over complexity.

Therefore, the framework by Hutcheon encourages the scholars to pose the question: What do we lose or gain in the shift between page and screen? What is the target audience (local/regional or global)? What are the cultural, economic, institutional pressures that influence the adaptation? What is the impact of medium-specific constraints (time, visual grammar, pacing) on the affective logic of the original? In the film version of *The Danish Girl*, the interiorized world of the trans protagonist, is, in part, translated into a visual spectacle of visualisation of transformation within an art-house aesthetic, thus making the politics of interior queerness turn to exterior acknowledgment.

The queering of *Fire Island* (2022), a loose adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, is an example of how the source text is queered not only in its representations of its characters but also in its marketing and its relation to its audience. One may therefore assume that the adaptation lays aside its emphasis on the textual migration to identity marketing.

In his theoretical framework, Hutcheon slots the process of adaptation as an inherently political one, it is never neutral or only fidelity-focused but is oriented in the first place towards transformation. In queer literary adaptations especially, the alterations in medium, audience, context, and market often lead to the radical interiority of the original text being negotiated by the logic of visibility, commercial interests and global distribution. Such outcomes can have a certain aesthetic merit, but they are subject to compromise, erasure, re-framing the queer politics that gave life to the original. The lens provided by Hutcheon therefore encourages academics to question these changes, to distinguish what is adapted, what is salvaged and what is eventually discarded.

### **Contextualizing *Cobalt Blue*: Text, Author, and Cultural Moment**

First released in Marathi in 2006, and translated into English in 2013 by Jerry Pinto, Sachin Kundalkar's *Cobalt Blue* occupies a unique space in the modern Indian literary discourse with its subtle expression of queer interiority, family portraits, and subtle but radical politics of desire. The novel is a product of a long tradition of modernist introspection and domestic realism of the middle classes in the Marathi literary tradition, but it sets itself apart by a bifurcated narrative form that does not regard queerness as spectacle or pathology but as an emotional texture. The story in the novel is segmented into two sections narrated by two brothers, Tanay and Anuja who are in love with the same unnamed paying guest. Their similar but diverged stories form a fractured, mirrored fabric within which Kundalkar delves into the theme of desire, secret and boundary of familial intimacy.

This story structure lies at the heart of the novel: through providing two interior monologues, *Cobalt Blue* places queerness in the context of the wider range of longing, loneliness, and loss. The voice of Tanay, in the form of a confession prose, is the one of a queer self-struggling with love and self-identification in a heteronormative family. By comparison, the section by Anuja expresses betrayal and incomprehension. Collectively they expose the imbalance between knowing and unknowing-the difference between what can be said and what must remain unspoken. The paying guest, in whose absence the narrative is framed, is not so much a figure as a catalyst, a man through which suppressed desires, gendered demands and emotional addictions are revealed.

The novel by Kundalkar is thus a part of a critical moment in Indian literature, wherein the issues of sexuality, interiority, and modernity were taking on a new form of visibility. In the mid-2000s, authors like R. Raj Rao, Hoshang Merchant and subsequently Vivek Tejuja and Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar began to pre-empt the queer voices of Indian English and localised literatures. But at least in tone and form, *Cobalt Blue* is different: its queerness is not hostile or proclamatory; it is interred in domestic realism and in restraint. The refusal of closure as the end of the novel being signalled by silence, as opposed to resolution, is an indicator of a politics of affect that values ambiguity above assertion.

The work is greatly adapted and centred on the author himself. Kundalkar is a successful filmmaker and screenwriter in Marathi cinema whose works, including; *Gandha* (2009) and *Aiyyaa* (2012) are marked by an interest in the sensory experience, gendered frame of reference, and a lack of linear narrative. His status as a filmmaker and novelist makes the adaptation process more complex: when he co-directed a 2022 Netflix film, *Cobalt Blue*, he was, in effect, adapting his own inner literary voice to a visual form of expression that he already dominated. This unique case when the novelist is his own adapter heightens the questions concerning

authorship, intent, and medium specificity posed by Linda Hutcheon. According to Hutcheon, “adaptation is not a slavish copying; it is a process of re-interpretation and re-creation” (Hutcheon & O’Flynn, 2013g). This re-creation of his own work by Kundalkar therefore enters into the realm of authorship and alienation: he is forced to exteriorize, visualise, and globalise an internal narrative that has its origin in the language and cultural closeness of the Marathi home.

The cultural moment of the adaptation is also important. The film, which was released on Netflix worldwide in 2022, came at a moment when the Indian streaming industry was experiencing a radical growth, characterised by the transnational distribution of local stories and a sensitive approach to queer content. The reading down of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code in 2018 to decriminalise same-sex relationships had provided a new representational terrain but market and censorship pressures still determined how same-sex lives would be presented onscreen. The international release of *Cobalt Blue* in this climate placed it in a balancing act: would it be desirable to portray queer intimacy, or would it be necessary as an international outlet to make it aesthetically palatable?

Critics observed that the movie, though visually lavish, diluted the ugliness and self-exploration of the novel. What had been the diary of self-discovery was, in the medium of film, the tale of beauty and sadness expressed in the palette and the music and gesture. The title *Cobalt Blue*, a chromatic motif, changed direction to be not metaphor of emotional density but visual aesthetic. This aestheticization reflects what Hutcheon describes as the “performative mode” of film adaptation where narrative interiority is forced to be manifested through the visual display of sensations. The politics of this change are essential: the interior queerness of the novel, which is interred within words and non-speech, is brought to the forefront of the emotional in the visual medium.

Meanwhile, the adaptation of *Cobalt Blue* is part of a larger international trend of a “festival aesthetics” in queer filmmaking, aesthetics that are visually disarming, emotionally desensitising, and packaged to be consumed by cross-cultural audiences. This aesthetics is not politically neutral: as Hutcheon reminds no adaptation is without its context, its time and place, its society and culture. In that vein, the film by Kundalkar is not merely an adaptation of his novel but a compromise between the local (Marathi, middle classes, queer domesticity) and the global (Netflix, cosmopolitan spectatorship).

*Cobalt Blue* is a narrative that lives at the intersections of various contexts: literary (Marathi modernism and queer realism), authorial (a novelist adapting his own text) and industrial (global streaming economies). It is to put into context that these forces determine how these forces drive it out of text to film. In the framework of Hutcheon, it can be observed that the adaptation does not simply transfer the content of the novel, but relocates it to a new cultural and economic ecology. Then the question is not whether this film is loyal to the novel of Kundalkar, but what the changes in the film tell us about the politics of realising the queer interiority in twenty-first century India.

### **Medium Specificity: From Interior Monologue to Visual Impressionism**

One of the most important points that have been made in the book *A Theory of Adaptation* by Linda Hutcheon is that all adaptations are preconditioned by the material imperatives of the medium they are being made in. Hutcheon defines this principle by saying, “is repetition, but

repetition without replication". As a result, a novel and a movie, though sharing a narrative premise, work by entirely different expressive means: the former is mostly narrative, whereas the latter is mostly descriptive. The prose-cinema transposition in *Cobalt Blue* reveals exactly this morphologic change, the shift of a composition whose framework was based on inner monologue and introspective narration to one whose expression uses almost all the language of visual impressionism. The novel by Kundalkar takes its power in the protracted, confessional tones of its two discursors Tanay and Anuja, whose alternating passages form a personalised map of queer desire and familial division. Those inner voices are changed into visual images, especially the ubiquitous colour of *Cobalt Blue*, and into silence, movement, and looks by the 2022 film adaptation, directed also by Kundalkar. By such a transformation, the adaptation shows what Hutcheon defines as the "medium specificity" of film, its "showing mode," which "engages the eye, the ear, the skin even, in ways that language cannot.

The interior monologue of Tanay in the first half of the novel welcomes the readers to his personal world of desire and self-realisation. It is also written in the second person, addressing his absent lover directly as a letter though it will never be posted, "You had a way of looking at things which seemed sharp, perceptive, *Cobalt Blue*" (Kundalakara, 2016). The language is melodious and sensuous, but undoubtedly interior--it is in thought and not in conversation or action. The thoughts of Tanay are recited in recursive sentences, circling the words colour and sensation "Yesterday, when a *Cobalt Blue* smudge of wall ended up on my hand, I wiped it on my trouser without thinking" (Kundalakara, 2016). This seemingly insignificant photograph serves as a metaphor of the remains of intimacy the afterprint of another life on one own. The prose of the novel allows such gradual psychological stratification of emotional rhythms, which resonate with the inner processes of consciousness. Equally, the following narration by Anuja puts the same events in the distorted reflection of understanding and pain, "You took away my brother, and then you left us both empty" (Kundalakara, 2016). Both narrators are talking in isolation, and the bifurcated nature of the novel, two voices that never come together, is its architectural manifestation of loss.

The process of adapting this interior architecture to the film inevitably shifts the register of experience. Where the novel is a realm of thought, the film must make emotion real on the surface, in the visual and aural texture of film. Hutcheon says that "an adaptation's double nature...does not mean that proximity or fidelity to the adapted text should be the criterion of judgment" (Hutcheon & O'Flynn, 2013h). The movie, therefore, cannot be interpreted as a failure of fidelity but an experiment of remediation- a course of action that tries to transform inner voice into image. Cinematic version by Kundalkar realises this conversion with the help of visual impressionism: a language of colour, gesture, and silence. *Cobalt Blue* permeates the frame, in the form of notebooks, walls, clothes, and a repeated visual effect in which the water and blue paint in one of the scenes pour down the steps of the family house and convert domestic space into an abstract painting. This series, which is not in the novel, externalises the psychological breakdown of Tanay in a sensory tableau, whereas the colour which served as metaphor in prose becomes, in the film, symbol and spectacle.

This medium shift is a significant change in the character of Tanay. He is a talkative and self-questioning person in the novel who continuously questions his desire and belonging, "How did I acquire those habits? Perhaps that's what happens during the forging of a relationship... You adopt some of the other person's habits" (Kundalakara, 2016). These lines represent the textual closeness of confession; the reader feels thought as it develops. In the movie, the same

point is depicted visually. The audience sees Tanay imitating the style of smoking used by the paying guest or his page turning technique but the psychology behind such gestures is not spoken. Tanay maintains his poetic style, “You left without a word, but your colour stayed on me”, but they seem to be occasional rather than ongoing. The use of impressionistic montage and a minimal amount of dialogue in the film can be seen as an intentional adoption of the visual grammar of the art of film, and at the same time, it limits entry into the inner logic of Tanay. His silence, although aesthetically effective, runs the risk of reducing the richness of his queer self-realisation about which the novel speaks in the form of introspection.

What is even more telling is the transformation of Anuja. The second point of view she provides in her diary-like narration in the novel re-teller is a second view of the novel; she represents the second view of adaptation, which Hutcheon would call the double vision, when repetition is a companion of difference. Her voice reveals the gendered aspect of lust and the disintegration of the family. The film, on the contrary, reduces the subjectivity of Anuja to the gaze of Tanay to a large extent. As critics have noted, “axes the multiple perspectives, giving us only the world that Tanay sees, imagines, and wetly dreams” (Prathyush Parasuraman, 2022). The outcome is a visual unification, which defines cinematic unity at the cost of dialogic structure of the novel. The idea of Hutcheon “the medium itself constitutes meaning” is directly illustrated here: the transformation of plurality of the text into the unity of the visual form changes not only form but ideology. The movie privileging of one, male gaze restates a common cinematic hierarchy that the novel had disrupted through its two-storey telling.

Even dialogue is a product of this change. Sentences in the novel are elliptical and meditative and are organised around thoughts and not speech. The movie, in contrast, has very meagre, sparse dialogue, Tanay hesitantly confessing, He was different, or Anuja yelling once, “You both lied to me”. These are emotionally charged lines that exist in a greater emptiness. Whereas the language is used to uncover in the novel, the silence is used to hint in the film. The visiting guest, who is largely silent in both versions, is even more abstract in the film- an embodiment of absence and not a character. His silence is a reflection of the aesthetic of the film itself: the interior becomes gesture, the psychological becomes visual rhythm.

The overall impact of the specified transformation can precisely be defined as cinematic impressionism in the current study. The film by Kundalkar is an expression of affect in the form of texture, in the play of light on the wall surfaces, in the palaces of blue and the slow rhythm of the movement of camera shots. Instead of being mediated as confession, the desire of Tanay is perceived by the audience as a visual atmosphere in its pure form. This mode of sensory replacement has a very specific effect: it becomes affective, can be shared internationally, both linguistically and culturally, which is especially significant when it comes to a global Netflix audience. However, it also reforms the politics of representation. The radical interiority of the novel, a queer voice that speaks to the domestic world, has been re-packaged into an aesthetic of melancholy and beauty that can be recognised by an international art-house audience. The process of re-interpretation and re-creation has, in fact, taken place following the Hutcheon model, but the meaning of re-creation, again, depends on the demands of surface, speed, and visibility by the new medium.

Finally, the fact that *Cobalt Blue* is no longer a novel, but a film, offers a good example of how Hutcheon argues that the process and product of adaptation are inherently non-neutral, “Neither the product nor the process of adaptation exists in a vacuum; they all have a context a time and



a place, a society and a culture”. The reliance on visual impressionism in the film is more than a question of taste; it is actually a negotiated mediation between the interiority of the novel language of Marathi and the universal norms of streaming film. The transfer of interior monologue to visual manifestation also brings in its advantages and losses: the enrichment of sensuous immediacy at the cost of introspective profundity. The cobalt colour, which was a colour of inner thinking, is now flooding the screen with an aesthetic beauty that alienates the audience at the same time. In the structure of analysis offered by Hutcheon, this metamorphosis is the ultimate manifestation of the dual bind of adaptation: it aims to express that which cannot be discerned at all in the immediate language, and in the process, changes the nature of that which was once so closely familiar.

#### Market and Cultural Economy: Streaming, Visibility, and Sanitization

When the shift of *Cobalt Blue* to film testifies to the aesthetic implications of medium specificity, it points, too, to the economic and ideological constraints that influence adaptation to the global streaming ecosystem. This contextual embeddedness is seen in the 2022 Netflix adaptation of *Cobalt Blue*. It appeared at a historical turning point when Indian cinema and television were experiencing a paradigm shift: the post-2018 period, following the decriminalisation of same-sex relations in the Indian Penal Code of Section 377, was accompanied by the widespread development of streaming services, which tried to internationalise Indian storeys. In this conjuncture, the aesthetic and affective decisions of the adaptation could not but be informed by what Hutcheon calls the “institutional and market determinants” of media and audience.

The international platform that Netflix operates serves as both a visibility site and a sanitisation mechanism. On the one hand, its transnational scope enables a queer narrative written in the Marathi language, which used to be confined by language and cultural barriers, to spread to the audience on the other side of the world. Conversely, the exigency of accessibility, brand cohesion, and global legibility affect form and content with a homogenising effect. The adaptation of *Cobalt Blue* depicts this two-fold logic. Although the novel is laced with the particulars of Marathi family life, its textures of middle-class conservatism, its tacit knowledge of silence and shame, the film introduces a visualised, linguistically hybridised variant of the latter. The conversation is fluidly moving between English, Hindi and Marathi; mise-en-scene is focused on aesthetic and universalism and not regionalism. These decisions simultaneously expand the scope but also align the film with what media scholars call the global art-house vernacular a model of slow pacing, minimal dialogue and visual melancholy that fits the needs of international festivals and streaming audiences.

The politics of this change are not just in the area of representation but also in the economies of desire and affect that streaming service sells. The net effect of Netflix branding *Cobalt Blue* as “delicate story of love and heartbreak” is that its net radicalism returns to a set of languages of romance that are universal. Conversely, the politics in the novel are based specifically on the rejection of universality: it is queer and domestic, introspective. Tanay confessing, “I have no words for what I feel; it is not love as others know it”, the novel posits a queer interiority that cannot be defined in any normative way. The movie however, rearranges this personal lexicon into a repertoire of identifiable, digestible tropes: diffused lighting, colour symbolism, music prompts and slow-motion looks.

The framework by Hutcheon assists in clarifying the fact that the issue of such sanitisation is not only about individual choice but also about the mediation at the systemic level. As seen in the example of *Cobalt Blue*, algorithmic curatorial practices, audience analytics and translatability are dictated by the economics of streaming that dictate that the story needs to be local enough to stay authentic and global enough to travel. The outcome is a disciplining of affect in a subtle manner: explicit sexuality is substituted with abstraction; family confrontation is blunted into lyrical melancholy; and the political charge of queer secret is turned into a sadness aesthetic. The cobalt colour that used to symbolise emotional density is now a branding tool to itself- visually vivid, globally readable and affectively neutral.

Meanwhile, the very presence of the film *Cobalt Blue* on Netflix is an indication of a new form of visibility of Indian media culture. Its international publication adds to what Shohini Ghosh (2019) terms “platform queerness” a mediated visibility that both empowers and limits the articulation of queerness. The streaming media enables filmmakers to circumvent the conventional censorship systems that would have limited theatrical release, but in its place introduces market modulation instead. It is not the radical expression of queer desire but its stylised expression that is permitted. In this way, visibility is a containment, a regulated light that makes queerness palatable to the national and international viewers.

Furthermore, the narrative structure as well as the pacing of the film is also affected by the economics of streaming. The demand of instant emotional impact, which is essential to retention in a digital attention economy, forces filmmakers to prioritize affective legibility over ambiguity. The linear order of the film and the compression of time is in stark contrast with the incoherent, reflective temporality of the novel. The business logic of the platform reacts the narrative form by making it more accessible and emotionally immediate.

In this regard, the adaptation of *Cobalt Blue* can be understood as an allegory of globalisation itself: a text of radical interiority transformed into a marketable visual item. Its move out of the sphere of Marathi literature and into the Netflix user interface represents the larger contradiction of queer visibility in the streaming era: representation is broadened, but not in depth to aesthetics and marketability. The cobalt colour scheme of the film, its stilted acting and lack of overt sexuality are all examples of what Hutcheon would call the “compromise between invention and institution”.

Therefore, in the context of the contextual model of Hutcheon, it becomes possible to see that, in addition to being an adaptation of a novel, *Cobalt Blue* is a negotiating act between art and industry, the local and the global, politics of queerness and aesthetics of visibility. Its page to platform migration shows that the streaming age is not a matter of medium but of market an act of creation that is always shadowed by the demands of circulation, consumption and control.

## Conclusion

Adaptation as Linda Hutcheon argues “an act of both repetition and creation” (Hutcheon, 2006) and is a negotiation that is never-ending between form, audience, and context. This negotiation is clearly demonstrated by the transition of the 2006 Marathi novel of the same title by Sachin Kundalkar into its 2022 Netflix film adaptation in the film version of *Cobalt Blue*. Since the beginning of its history, this paper asserts that the adaptation refreezes the radical interiority of the novel, which is marked by a specifically queer, introspective, and locally focused outlook, into a kind of cinematic impressionism propelled by the visual, affective, and commercial necessities of streaming culture. Using the three categories of medium specificity, audience reception, and contextual determinants suggested by Hutcheon, adaptation can be perceived not as a form of betraying the source, but as a complex form of translation, which functions at semiotic, ideological, and economic levels.

The language of interiority is the strength of the novel. By the tactical turn of first-person accounts, *Cobalt Blue* explains the intricate layers of queer desire, secrecy, and family breakdown in an upper-class Marathi family. Its emotional impulse is the medium of prose which provides the ability to dwell in the mind and thus question selfhood by means of language. The interior monologue in the film adaptation, however, has been transformed into a visual and sound experience: desire is expressed in silence, colour, gesture, and rhythm. The cobalt colour, which previously served as a symbolic labelling of the emotional remnant, takes a new form of the leading role as the aesthetic of the film, turning the layers of the psychological surface into the painterly one. It is what Hutcheon is saying when she writes that “the mode of engagement changes meaning” the medium of film as a showing medium cannot reproduce interiority, but can redefine it through the medium of sensory immediacy.

However, the visual poetics of the film cannot be dissociated with the circumstances of its production. The adaptation is not only a change in medium but also a change in the cultural economy, a transition between Marathi literary modernism and a global streaming spectacle. The transnational platform of Netflix both magnifies and deflects the transnational aspect of *Cobalt Blue*, it grants queer Indian narratives visibility and, simultaneously, exposes them to the demands of the market in terms of accessibility and aestheticism. As a result, the radical voice of the novel becomes a world commodity, now one of the beautiful melancholies, as critics have dubbed it, that travels best across national borders but runs the risk of losing its subversive closeness.

In the theoretical framework developed by Hutcheon, the work of *Cobalt Blue* is disclosed as a paradigmatic example of adaptation that works in both directions: in terms of compromise and creative invention. The paradox of the modern adaptation practise is embodied in its transmutation, in the transformation of a textual medium into a visual one, of a locally grounded narrative into a globally circulated product, where the need to change form to survive in the media markets inevitably creates a similar change in meaning. The aesthetic taste and the reserved execution of the film, expressed in the very cobalt surface, are both signs of its success, as well as traces of the loss of the deeper, interior blue that could have been expressed by words only.

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