

Understanding How Definitions of Identity are Established and Altered When Literary Works are Translated to Film

Christine Carter-Huffman
The State University of New Yorks at New Paltz
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ABSTRACT:

This paper analyzes the translation of two different stories from their original story in the form of literature to their corresponding adaptation in film. The poem “The Man from Snowy River” translates to film, *The Man from Snowy River*; and the novella, *Story of Your Life* translates to the film, *Arrival*. Australian identity and human identity, respectively, are altered once translated across the different genres of a poem to film and a novella to film. These genres have intrinsic components specific to each type, which shape how the story is told and perceived. The medium of literature creates an intimate connection between the text and the reader, but the intimacy ranges between poem and novella. A film shifts its storytelling as we now see and hear the story in dramatic ways through a Hollywood style narrative. Parts of each story is lost once translated, but there is information gained when they are compared. Furthermore, the two stories differ in their more specific genres of fiction and science-fiction. By analyzing form, genre, and the components native to each piece of work, there is an understanding of what life was like when each work was created and what values, perspectives, and intentions are important for the author to show to the reader. This paper will show how the audience’s expectations, the details delivered, and the ultimate messages are shaped and altered throughout each piece of work.

KEY WORDS:

English, Digital Media Production, Genre, Identity, Language, Literature, Film, Rhetoric, Perspective, Poem, Novella, Film, Othering, The Man from Snowy River, Story of Your Life, Arrival, Banjo Paterson, Denis Villeneuve, George T. Miller, Ted Chiang.

The poem “The Man from Snowy River” (1890) by Banjo Patterson helped define and establish Australian national identity in the 19th century, and the corresponding movie *The Man from Snowy River* (1982), directed by George T. Miller, shows how identities are created by looking at how a hero is constructed in cinema. In a similar way, the novella *Story of Your Life* (1998), by Ted Chiang, and the corresponding science-fiction movie, *Arrival* (2016), directed by Denis Villeneuve, tell us more about how human identity is shaped when comparing language and communication between heptapods (a type of alien) and humans. Each work dramatizes a change in perspective on the so-called “other,” that leads to a greater self-understanding. This investigation explains the impact that literature can have on the world and how such works reflect the world back to us. Both paired stories express the concept of the “foreign” juxtaposed to the “civilized” characters. By looking at the evolution of how “foreign” and “civilized” are defined in these works, we see perspectives change to be more conscious and nuanced when setting definitions to how we perceive particular characters. Understanding the inter-dependent nature of these seemingly simple categories of familiar and unfamiliar impacts our constructed definitions of *ourselves* and *others* within a society, and what results from these formulations.

Particularly, “The Man from Snowy River” (poem and film), and *Story of Your Life/Arrival* demonstrate the way these genres, poetry vs. film or novella vs. film, are able to present Australian or human identity, respectively. In each work, identity is defined in opposition to the “others,” the *foreign* or *non-human*. Rhetorical choices involving the use of language establish difference, but also provide a means of communication between diverse sets of characters. By examining what characters say about themselves and about those with whom they interact, we can see how their perspectives change. They come to know themselves better by means of their

relationships with those they confront. Genre becomes a key determiner in laying out expectations for the reader/viewer, but those expectations should not be black and white; we are to understand how genre is factored in the rhetoric of a text, and should pay attention to the intention of each component in the particular genre for us to broaden our viewpoints on who we believe are the powerful and the weak; the “civilized” and “uncivilized,” and identity as a whole.

In written form, Patterson’s “The Man from Snowy River” and Chiang’s *Story of Your Life*, present those considered “foreign,” the Australian bushmen and the extra-terrestrial, are figures who are *powerful* from the *beginning* of the story even though they are shown as inferior in some respects. From the start, the characters who are mysterious, inspiring, and knowledgeable are the *others*. In “The Man from Snowy River,” the others are the ones who show their knowledge to the reader, proving they are essential to Australia. In *Story of Your Life*, the others (aliens) teach their skills to the protagonist Louise; she sees the heptapods as essential for humans to gain new perspectives and understandings of the world. In both cases, the others are not seen as threatening by the end of their tales. When these stories are translated to film, where the dramatic perspectives become the focus, showing who is powerful and who is not builds dramatic tension. The film *The Man from Snowy River* made the bushman *othered* to show a stark contrast between the poor and the wealthy. In *Arrival*, the heptapods are othered when they are considered to be a threat against humanity to show the superiority of humans over aliens. By ultimately looking at the characters who are considered “outsiders” as the ones who are knowledgeable, strong, and the heroes of the stories, our understanding changes to think of the “other” as someone more than who we first thought them to be. As a result, the definition of who is superior and inferior expands, allowing us to examine ourselves in relation to this imposed

framework. Thus, literature can provide a different perspective for us to know better the dynamics of the human psyche, how identity can be determined, holistically, and our own socially constructed position in the world.

This schema is contrasted to the film versions of *The Man from Snowy River* and *Arrival*, where the “outsiders” are seen as *weaker* in the beginning, and where they have to go through struggle in order to be more accurately perceived as strong and knowledgeable in the end. This is an act native to the Hollywood narrative style called catharsis. The audience wants to see improvement and growth of the protagonist, because the genre prompts this expectation, for them to be considered accomplished, a hero. The movies examine knowledge as a key determiner in who is powerful. Genre is important to look at, as well, since the characteristics of film can further embellish or shape a character. As a result, and when following the expectations a Hollywood film narrative typically asserts, we see the protagonists as underdogs who prevail in the end. We expect, and do eventually see, how in the story’s ending, the characters *save* something important. The underdog, Jim Craig, in *The Man from Snowy River*, saves the society by using his knowledge and skill. In *Arrival*, the heptapods save the world through their knowledge of language to create a universal language that unifies human civilization and, in the case of the film, deters war.

Through analyzing the effects of genre itself within “The Man from Snowy River” and *The Man from Snowy River*, the mechanics behind the words and images given must be considered again as the same one-story is translated between mediums. A literary critic who analyzes genre, Heather Dubrow, states further that genre functions like a “code of behavior” that is made between the author and the reader (2). Dubrow allows us to understand that there are

expectations set in each text we analyze that control our outlook on each work. She also prompts us to see each piece as a dialogue between the author and reader and to note the specific intentions the authors extract from the genre their work is in. Both types of text, poem and film, bring a sense of empowerment, valiance, and mythology to the reader as an impetus for proving that the Australian bushmen are more than who they are perceived to be by the dominant leaders and storytellers of the society. Specifically, in the ballad-style poem, “The Man from Snowy River,” the literary techniques promote Australian nationalism, reveal the intricacies of being a bushman, and highlight Australia’s natural beauty as statements of power that are intrinsically given to the “foreign.” Paterson’s poem describes the “othered” bushmen as strong from the start by defining identity and Australian nationalism through specific wording and phrasing that support the bushman as valiant and important. Language such as “mustered,” “he was hard and tough and wiry,” “courage,” “his bright and fiery eye,” and “and the proud and loft carriage of his head,” promote strong spectacles of the bushmen (lines 6, 21, 22, 23, and 24).

Meanwhile, the film, *The Man from Snowy River*, upholds conventions of mid-twentieth-century, Hollywood-inspired movie-making. Unlike the poem, it focuses on a love interest, class, and coming-of-age as symbols of power only once the “foreign” go through struggle to find their success. As a full-length feature film, Miller’s narrative has a much grander scope and involves visual elements to tell the story. Although made in Australia, the film uses a Hollywood-style narrative to dramatize the elite and the bushmen as antithetical to each other; the elite are more haughty and the bushmen are displayed as nearly homeless. Both stories work to exemplify Australian identity for the audience: the poem enlightens and supports the power already held by the bushman and emphasizes it further, while the movie shows an increase in

power gained through earning respect. Importantly, the comparison of these versions, in the translation of the same story from a poem to a movie, show how information is lost as the rhetoric and the story itself intrinsically changes between mediums. In turn, the audience can understand how language is malleable and questionable when trying to preserve the truth of a story. Our expectations of the genre must be examined for us to understand how genre intentionally operates.

In *Story of Your Life*, language is important as it translates to the film, *Arrival*. The power dynamics change as the same story is translated from the genre of a novella to that of a film. Literary narratives tend to be more personal than the film narrative. We are in the internal perspective, Louise's psyche, either through omniscient narration or the protagonist's inner monologue of the narrator or the protagonist; we are not voyeurs looking in on the characters as seen in film. The textual version of *Story of Your Life* displays the humans learning from the heptapods in a more empathetic manner, while the film shows the humans teaching the heptapods in a more forced way. The novella describes the humans thinking pedagogically in response to the information they gather from the heptapods. In the film, the "civilized" and "uncivilized" characters are more harshly dichotomized. The humans in the novella cherish the heptapods, learning everything they have to offer, but the humans in the film initially view the heptapods as a threat.

The genre of a novella uses a fluid story structure and brevity to tell the story. These components create a distance that is reflected in the written language and Chiang's descriptions written by Chiang. Chiang's word choice is very matter-of-fact, enabling the heptapods to be seen in a pragmatic light. The language used by the narrator is empathetic towards the heptapods:

“To be fair, the heptapods were completely cooperative” (187). The use of the word “completely” makes for a caring and considerate notion, rather than a statement of fact. Supportive emotions are expressed by the humans in their description of the heptapods. Conversely, the Hollywood narrative uses catharsis to show the heptapods earning power progressively through the film for the audience to watch the underdogs prevail in the end. Film is allowed to be dramatic and embellished, which further influences the audience to see a greater dichotomy between the powerful and the weak characters. The film concretely shows how power is separated through intentional cinematic techniques. The camera angles, the cuts, tones in dialogue, sound effects, etc., all have an impact on creating power dynamics. In one scene in *Arrival*, the humans meet the heptapods for the first time. There is a wide shot of the glass where the heptapods are enclosed in. The sound effects mimic the heptapods’ speech: it is loud, ominous, and distorted. We hear big thuds alluding to the heptapods’ footsteps heard off-screen while we see the juxtaposed close-ups of the characters, Louise, Ian, and Colonel Weber, shaking in fear. The screen cuts intermittently from the scary, immense aliens walking towards the glass, and the humans staring in fear trying to compose themselves. There is a cut to Louise’s clenched fist as she steps back when the heptapods make their final leaps forward. Lastly, the protagonists’ fear is affirmed when we hear the tones of the characters’ voices. They stutter, take long moments to think about what they are saying, and breathe heavily (00:32:21-00:32:55). The cinematography persuades us to see the aliens as daunting. We are given a close up of the humans, but we never see the viewpoint of the aliens. All what the audience sees is the intimidation the humans feel when they are confronted by the aliens. The audience takes this vantage point as the determiner for how they expect to see the aliens next in the film.

The plot points and catharsis is what changes the audience's perspectives, because we are proven wrong later when the aliens are helpful, even crucial to saving the humans from war. By comparing the novella and the film, we understand how the mechanics behind a literary work and a film further emphasize the meaning of power and how it is displayed. The novella displays identity in relation to Louise, the heptapods, and the concept of free-will. It is personal to Louise's psyche where we experience a more empathic understanding of her relation to the heptapods. Meanwhile, the film shows identity in relation to humanity, as the heptapods play a role in shaping the human world, thus deterring it from war. Film's visual impact causes there to be a disconnect between the audience and the first-person perspective of the characters. Instead, we can see the characters' facial expressions; the actions they make; and the verbal understandings of how each characters operate, but we cannot fully understand them because we are not in their minds. Thus, the audience is placed in a third-person perspective as we *view* the world the characters live in from a camera lens.

The Man from Snowy River

"The Man From Snowy River" advocates for Australian nationalism to forge an Australian identity, and it embraces the wild animals and the nature of Australia to prove that the "civilized" and "uncivilized" can coexist. The poem's major power is its word choice. Paterson writes, "Where the hills are twice as steep and twice as rough, / Where a horse's hoofs strike firelight from the flint stones every stride, / The man that holds his own is good enough," to express that the people and animals are powerful and unique to Snowy River, albeit the mountains are (lines 33-36). His rhetoric propels the readers to believe that both humans and animals thrive *together* through hard work and struggle. Paterson's description of the main character, the man from

Snowy River, is mysterious enough to conjure a mythical image of him. He has no name, adding to his mysticism, and is described as being independently robust; he can “hold his own good enough” on treacherous land (line 36). Here, everything is described in exaggerations to support the strength and power of the bushmen, nature, and animals.

Not only does this imagery enhance our understanding of this man, but the structure of the poem also amplifies our emotional connection to the poem. The poem is formatted in ABAB, CDCD format (an aid to memorization), where the stresses, alliteration, and repetition embody the essence of a horse galloping (a technique used to promote excitement when reading). The poem goes, “And the Snowy River riders on the mountains make their home, / Where the river runs those giant hills between; / I have seen full many horsemen since I first commenced to roam, / But nowhere yet such horsemen have I seen,” with alliterative consonants, “River, riders,” “mountains make,” and “river runs those giant hills between,” and soft vowels and consonants, “And,” “I,” and “on,” and “Snowy,” “Where,” “seen,” “since,” form a circular rhythm (lines 37-40). Paterson even uses personification for the readers to relate to the story better. He mentions that riders “raced away towards the mountain’s brow” as though the foothills form a human face, a witness (line 42). Paterson is intentional with his words and rhythm because he wants the readers to feel enlightened about how magnificent the bushmen, the land, and the animals are. There is barely any room in between the civilized or uncivilized because no class is exposed here. The only wealth that is determined is the wealth one gains through experience and using one’s skills. The horses coexist with humans and contribute to the power that is embedded within the bush. The poem essentially displays a utopian connection between creatures and land, ultimately promoting a love for the country.

The film makes it clear that there are two viewpoints on what is important in creating an identity for Australia. Wealth and skill are compared, as in industrialization and an ostentatious display of expensive objects and buildings versus loving one's country for its natural beauty. There is also a contrast between such wealth-derived status and a mythologized "horsemanship" ability. Harrison is a man who became wealthy by winning a horse race; his wealth is monetarily determined along with materialistic power, whereas, Clancy and Jim Craig are mountain men, the most skilled horseman in the bushland. Their wealth is later determined in terms of skill and knowledge they both have. Craig ultimately uses those attributes to save the society when herding wild horses, importantly the colt, back to the town.

The movie allows us to see how status depends upon comparing strengths and weaknesses as demonstrated by the secondary character, Clancy. The horseman's first impression of Clancy is that he was not anything special, just another horseman. But once Frew speaks up about Clancy's skills, his status rises. The poem differs in that the power of the horsemen, Clancy and the man from Snowy River, shown through the rhetoric of the language, embody charisma and skill by using the bushland to aid them to become better riders. The poem teaches us that skill overpowers status in that money can only get you so far, but having skills can be far more of value.

In *The Man from Snowy River*, five lower-class bushmen are talking about another who is of the lower class, Clancy, but they compare him favorably to the other horsemen; he is someone who is considered magical. The audience is led to see how Clancy brings mythology to the term "horseman" and to the lower-class as a whole. The discussion these horsemen have proves that a

“horseman” is regarded as inferior, but Clancy is an exception who shows that higher status is given to the horsemen through his gifts and skills:

Curly: Who is he, some type of top rider this Clancy bloke?

Frew: He’s no rider. He’s a horseman.

Curly: What’s so special about Clancy then?

Frew: I told you, he’s a horseman.

Frew: A Horseman? Clancy is not just a horseman, he’s a magician. A genius (Miller 00:24:34- 00:24:58).

This conversation not only shows how the bushman, Clancy, is degraded at first for being a horseman, but, ultimately, his status is seen as superior to the other horsemen when we understand that he is different from the rest: he is more skilled. The categorizing of status differs from the poem in that the magical essence of Clancy is already given to him and is not questioned.

On the other hand, the poem expresses the strengths of the horsemen as people who are superior to an upper-class horse rider, that being Harrison. The horsemen are perceived to be powerful and skilled right from the start, with no question of how status plays a role in the way he is perceived:

There was Harrison, who made his pile when Pardon won the cup,

The old man with his hair as white as snow;

But few could ride beside him when his blood was fairly up -

He would go wherever horse and man could go.

And Clancy of the Overflow came down to lend a hand,

No better horseman ever held the reins;

For never horse could throw him while the saddle girths would stand,

He learnt to ride while driving on the plains. (lines 9-16)

Here, the poem focuses on the differences between Clancy and Harrison; Clancy's status is determined by his abilities while Harrison's status is determined by his luck and wealth. The poem's rhetoric makes homage to the legend of a bushman whose skills outmatches anyone's wealth. Clancy's reputation measures up as a mythical bushman, powerful in his own ways.

In the film, a conversation between Harrison and horseman Clancy proves to the audience that power and progression of gaining wealth are not the essence of what is important for Australia's future. There is a dichotomy between the values of nationalism, according to each man:

Harrison: Here's to those long-gone days on the trail.

Clancy: Well, for me they're not long gone, so here's to their future.

Harrison: Aw, there's no future there, Clancy.

Clancy: I wouldn't swap the sun-lit plains for all the tea in China. They are a vision splendid.

Jessica: Clancy! How romantic.

Harrison: Romantic? Your brain's gone soft. We've got the railways and the roads now.

Mr. Paterson, we can ship refrigerated beef to the markets of England, Europe. That's where the future lies. (Miller 00:28:48-00:29:05)

A demonstration of Australian nationalism is considered either finding the beauty in the country or trying to develop the country through unprecedented successes to gain wealth. Harrison

believes that being a world leader-- “one of the great food-producing areas in the world”-- is necessary for Australia to grow as a country (00:29:22). Harrison even believes that the devotion to the Australian countryside impedes industrialization. In response to Clancy saying “you have it all under control,” Harrison continues to say, “Yes I have. Except for those mountains, and if I had the capital, I’d run fences up there--” (00:29:24). The poem does not speak of the mountains in the pejorative light as the film does. The poem expresses the coexistence of the mountains and the creatures: “And the Snowy River riders on the mountains make their home” (line 38). In the film, the character, Banjo Paterson, an elite, takes the opposite perspective and proposes a toast: “To our two romantics. To one who sees what is, and one who sees what can be. Lord grant that they two are compatible” (00:29:42). In this way, both Harrison and Clancy have their ideals of Australian nationalism.

For Banjo Paterson, the writer, nationalism means embracing one’s country by learning how to coexist with the mountains. As stated in the poem, “For the bushmen love hard riding where the wild bush horses are / And the stock horse snuffs the battle with delight” (lines 7-8). The bushmen find hard work to be the reward. This is similar to the movie, but the love story underlying the film is part of the motive for Jim Craig, the main character, and “mountain man” to ride, ultimately taking away from the pureness of Craig’s nationalism. The love story, so typical of Hollywood-style films, does not appear in the poem. In the movie, the bushmen practice “breaking” horses in order to adapt and get around in rocky terrain. The film expresses the same goal for embracing the country, but the Hollywood narrative interrupts the true intent by the main character, Jim Craig: he fancies the daughter of Harrison and wants to prove Harrison wrong about his assumption that the mountain men are “mongrels” (00:30:33). The

film's narrative causes the audience to see Jim embody two types of heroism at the end of the movie: what it means to be a mountain man, but also risking his life to finding the missing horse in hopes to forge his way towards Jessica, Harrison's daughter and the one Craig fancies. After he has accomplished the impossible task of herding the wild horses into captivity, Jim Craig explains why he rode:

Harrison: Jim, I promised a hundred pounds. It's yours.

Jim Craig: That's not why I rode.

Jim Craig: There are a dozen good broodmares in that mob. I'll be back for them.

(Craig looks to Jessica)

Jim Craig: And for whatever else is mine (01:39:26-01:40:00).

Jim explicitly shows how money is not the motive for the bushmen to work hard, albeit survive; they do it because of their love for riding and a good rider being the epitome of a bushman. The poem parallels this notion. However, the film glorifies the love narrative and adds that as one of the key parts of the film. This is implicitly described when Craig says he will be back "for whatever else is mine." One conquest narrative, also defined as a love narrative, that determines manhood, is the relationship between Jim Craig and Jessica, but another conquest narrative is Craig's and the horseman's love for horses and the land.

The ending of the film additionally reveals another marker of success obtained by the bushmen: finding gold. This is another glamorous Hollywood ending. Harrison's desolate brother, Spur, (who does not exist in the poem), finds gold within his home built into the mountainside. At the very end of the film, Spur and Jim Craig have a discussion about their futures and Spur mentions his discovery. One can take the viewpoint that this is a sign of

nationalism because Spur trusts the country and sees hope and beauty within the nature of Australia. But this is a more idealistic, even fairy-tale-esque, Hollywood approach. The poem, unlike the film, sees success as something *legendary*, even pinpointed to a hero who is exemplified as a person to learn and look up to, rather than materialism and wealth, such as gold. The poem ends by saying, meta-textually, “The man from Snowy River is a household word today, / And the stockman tell the story of his ride” (lines 103-104). This is where a name, and the essence of the legendary man is created. Becoming *someone* is the prosperity achieved. Heroism and nationalism are the successes, and we see the man from Snowy River as a representation of what is important to society.

Additionally, the film strays far from the poem as the film does not use much from the original storyline. A critic, Brian McFarlane argues that “the film takes little from Paterson’s poetry other than the title, and Paterson’s words are not integrated into the film’s narration. Rather, Miller’s adaptation favours spectacle and melodrama” (qtd. in Louise 29). This is a consequence of adapting literature to film of this style. Even so, the genre of the film further takes away from Paterson’s true intention. The film is a coming-of-age story in the realistic fiction genre.

The viewer sees the progression of going from a character with little power to much, because the story’s motive is for Craig to find power and agency; the audience expects to see growth and a happy resolution. In Mark Axelrod’s article, “Once Upon a Time in Hollywood; or, The Commodification of Form in the Adaptation of Fictional Texts to the Hollywood Cinema,” he explains clearly the conventions of realistic fiction:

What reader/viewers tend to compare consciously or unconsciously are the veritable cornerstones of traditional “Realistic” fiction; that is, story line and character, and how these fictional idioms are conveyed; namely, through a linear narrative that has correct proportions of agitation and resolution coupled with a dialogue that propels the story line toward its inevitable, and usually obvious conclusion. (201)

The realistic fiction film genre inevitably gives the audience a sense of familiarity when presenting them with this film narrative. The audience would be disappointed if the film ended with Craig in the same state without any knowledge or skill gained. The theme of gaining knowledge and growing as a person is still prevalent in the poem, but because of the genre, the audience does not necessarily expect a coming-of-age narrative. The audience views the poem as motivation or empowerment. If the poem ended with the death of the main character, the audience wouldn't be as shocked as they would if this happened in the film. Rather, the audience might take away their own positive light from the poem, even find heroism if the main character had died for his country or for what he values.

As Heather Dubrow mentions in the chapter “The Functions of Genre,” “we should remind ourselves just how much the choice of a particular genre influences (and, of course, is influenced by) decisions about content, tone and form” (10). Miller upholds the customs of the Hollywood narrative. Specifically, this is a coming-of-age story meaning that Jim Craig must earn everything he wants through his process of maturation for the viewers to become more attached, empathetic, and understanding of him. This genre sets Craig up as being someone who is naive, therefore inferior to the other characters. Specifically, this is the opposite of the poem version of this story. The film's audience must go through catharsis in order to really empathize

and see Craig in a new, redefined light of him being a man. Critic Dan Golding discusses the importance of Jim's character in his article "The Man from Snowy River": "to prove himself and complete his coming-of-age narrative, Jim must find and recapture the colt;" capturing the colt represents his transition from boyhood to manhood (119). Moreover, the film romanticizes the narrative of Jim Craig, setting the horse, who represents the nature of the Australian countryside, against him. As a result, Craig seems like the victim that the viewers are cheering for; we want him to capture that horse, while the horse is displayed as the perpetrator for Craig's defeat in the moment. Importantly, the film acts in contrast to the poem: The film dichotomizes the "civilized" and "uncivilized" characters, but further separates the "uncivilized" by showing a power dynamic between Jim Craig and the horse. The horse is seen as a creature lower than Craig, which suggests that nature and the creatures of the bush are not cohesive with the world of humans. Simply, it is the humans that have ultimate power over the animals and countryside.

The film makes it so that we see the supposed inferiority of the bushmen, and through a cathartic, Hollywood experience, feel more emotionally attached and supportive of them. Once power is gained, the bushmen define elements of their worthiness but in ways that support the love of life, wealth, and happiness. Similarly, the Hollywood blockbuster, *Arrival* compares the "civilized" and "uncivilized" by looking at who is "knowledgeable" versus who is "ignorant" in terms of linguistic ability or capacity to communicate, and how this dictates who is considered powerful. The Hollywood narrative of *Arrival* provides the audience catharsis as well as displaying the heptapods as creatures who have to prove themselves to be seen as powerful, similar to Jim Craig having to prove his abilities to become a man.

***Arrival* / "The Story of Your Life"**

Arrival sets forth the idea of the familiar by proposing language as a concrete sign of what makes us civilized. Our constructed language and ideas of what is civilized are set in juxtaposed categories of civilized being good or correct and uncivilized being bad. Ian Dohnelly, the main male character in the film, expresses that “language is the foundation of civilization. It is the glue that holds a people together,” which assumes that if heptapods do not have language then they are not civilized, therefore “othered” (Villeneuve 0:16:17-0:16:35). However, Ian is proven wrong once it is revealed that the heptapods have a non-linear language consisting of ink squirted into space. When language determines what is considered civilized or not, this creates a standard for the viewers, and the familiar, that being linear language humans are accustomed to, is equated with the truth. Conversely, we don’t see truth in the heptapods simply because the humans force their constructs on them immediately. The humans want to teach the heptapods *their* language, cutting off the heptapods’ agency. The ostensible truth of Ian’s notion builds a greater sense of the *constructed* correctness. The audience would not expect to see the heptapod’s language that can be understood and function in the same way human language does. The standards set by humans makes them choose what is real and what is not based on our constructed ideas of what determines civilization or not. Based on our conventions, we then create an unfamiliar sphere that dichotomizes humans from the foreign, which enables us to define who can be civilized or not. All of this leads us to see how the genre of science fiction exaggerates the means of who is considered “othered,” as heptapods are to be so “othered” that they are only constructed through the lens of humans and the systems they generate, such as language.

Arrival's story revolves around how the concept of time— the past, present and future— determines the way one sees and understands the world, or understands knowledge itself. Most importantly, the genre of cinema makes this story more cohesive and in-depth because time is articulated through creative cinematic techniques. Uniquely, part of Louise Bank's power is her ability to know a copious amount of information about language, but later on, her power stems from her ability to read the future and think about life episodes that transpire simultaneously. She is the heroine who is seen as powerful, but her power is not in competition with the heptapods. It is the power to stand up against humans who want to destroy and not make the effort to understand the heptapods' purpose on earth and how they communicate. Once Louise understands the heptapods through their means of communication, she understands herself and the world better. In the end, the heptapods show they are not ignorant creatures and aren't "uncivilized," thus proving the human's impressions wrong; the heptapods are the ones who end up saving the earth from world war, and teach the humans more insight into their language, even giving Louise a greater understanding of herself because of the language she derives from the aliens.

The heptapods help Louise realize she can read the future once she understands and thinks through their linguistic system. Louise has a lot of visions of the future. She hears her daughter, Hannah, speak to her and Louise envisions glimpses of them together, yet none of her hallucinations had happened in her life yet. They are reflections of what is going to happen. Through this ability, Louise is able to look into the future and gather information needed to help her in the present. Her mission in the film is to stop China, and ultimately the world, from attacking the heptapods, under the guise that the heptapods were supposed to be a threat against

all of humanity. Language operates as a portal to advancing through processes in order to understand the world more in depth. Tied along with the genre of film, we expect to have a crisis, climax, decision, and resolution. One major part of the film was through these four plot points. Importantly, time is experienced differently for Louise and the heptapod through the unique comprehension of language and thoughts. The novella describes a little bit about how language works through Gary/Ian Donnelly's questions: "So they can read a word with equal ease no matter how it's rotated," Gary said. He turned to look at the heptapod, impressed. 'I wonder if it's a consequence of their bodies' radial symmetry: their bodies have no 'forward' direction, so maybe their writing doesn't either'" (186). Chiang explains how the heptapods' language is non-linear, hinting at the later understanding of how *time* is conceptualized non-linearly, as well.

We understand better how time works in the film. Time is the outlet for knowledge. Louise has a vision of being at a gala celebrating the unity of the world, where she is talking to General Shang of China and she has a glimpse into the future. He gives her valuable information to help her in the present. He came up to her saying that he is very grateful for her phone call to his private number. Her knowledge of calling his private number is absent in present time, but her present time mindset is morphed in the future time period. The general shows her the number and she memorizes it for what she is about to do in present time. During present time, she realizes that she must make a call to General Shang and discuss what they talked about at the gala. At this moment, the climax is forming; she has to talk to the general before the United States military comes to stop her or potentially shoot her. This twist is only created in the film and not mentioned in the novella. The film gives us a deeper understanding of time, language,

and knowledge that the novella lacks because we can visually see the alien's language and the actions of Louise moving through past, present and future through visually, distinctive segments. Since the film goes more in depth in this respect, we understand the heptapods to be the promoters in creating the unity within the world because of the gift of their language. The film shows how physically the heptapods are able to change the world by showing Louise that she can see the future and that she could essentially save the world through the heptapod's practice of language, once she thinks as they do. The book does not mention this, but rather explains how the heptapods helped the humans learn about themselves through analyzing their way of communication. The novella talks less about the worldly meaning of language in relation to the knowledge gained by the humans, but rather simplifies, individualistically the impact of acquiring knowledge from the heptapods. Louise narrates how humans are learning from the heptapods, rather than how the film explains the tactic to make the heptapods learn from the humans. She explains, "That would depend on how cooperative the native speakers were. They'd almost certainly pick up bits and pieces while I'm learning their language, but it wouldn't have to be much if they're willing to teach. On the other hand, if they'd rather learn English than teach us their language, that would make things far more difficult" (Chiang 167). Louise expresses the differences in learning language verses teaching it. Her learning their language expands her knowledge on how the heptapods operate, thus aiding her to understand how other creatures operate as means to reflect back to her perception of the world and herself.

The novella contrasts with the film due to its ability to just tell a story in simple terms, focusing less on the power dynamics and more on the importance of knowledge. Since the story is written and not watched, language is very important in giving more information that would

otherwise be given through actions in the film. The fault here is that the film can describe the same circumstance of communicating to the heptapods, but the actions done by the characters are replaced by words, which cuts out important information that personally describes the characters. By explaining the events through actions, the understanding of the motives, feelings, and intentions behind those actions become ambiguous. It is the language that is very important to telling an intimate story, which is what we come to understand in the novella. Even the title exemplifies the intimacy expressed in this mother-daughter story. The title is the *Story of Your Life* which is in reference to the mother, Louise, telling the story of her daughter, Hannah's life. The entire story is a narration addressed to her daughter on the day she is conceived. Louise explains Hannah's whole life in the one day, because Louise has knowledge of the past, present, and future at once. Storytelling is important to preserve the events that happened, because language is what becomes Hannah's life. Louise has knowledge that her daughter is going to die before deciding to have a baby or not. The only parts left of Hannah is the memory and the story of her told by Louise because of the power she has to have the language just as the heptapods do.

Ted Chiang's language hints to a more empathetic approach in showing the similarities and differences between the civilized and uncivilized. His wording gives the readers a better understanding of the respective intentions and conception that the heptapods have and the humans have, respectively. Louise speaks to how she would rather have the heptapods lead the terms on which they communicate to humans. The novella opposes the film's approach: "In the days that followed, they readily taught us their language without requiring us to teach them any more English" (Chiang 187). Chiang acknowledges and even considers the heptapods to take care of the feelings of the humans by not forcing the humans to have to do all the work of

learning and teaching language to the heptapods. Chiang's wording of "readily" and "without requiring us" are euphemistic descriptions that show, through the narration, that the humans consider and empathize with the heptapods by acknowledging the kindness the heptapods exhibit.

As opposed to the novella, in the film we only see the humans trying to get as much information out of the heptapods in the quickest way possible, even aggressively. At one point, the humans set off a bomb because they could not get any information from the aliens because they stood complacent with their assumption that the aliens are a threat. Colonel Weber, the main force to promote the concise, expedited approach in speaking to the heptapods, explicitly states that time is of the essence. His intentions are perceived to be insensitive, when truthfully, there is no clear understanding of his emotions towards the state of affairs. Weber confronts Louise by saying, "Dr. Banks, is this really the right approach? Trying to teach them how to speak and read? That's gotta take longer" (00:39:33-00:39:42). From the audiences' perspective, Weber seems to be inconsiderate of how to properly deal with other creatures, especially extraterrestrial, "ominous" ones. And his hurried attitude underscores the irony of Louise's eventual ability to see and understand all of her life experiences simultaneously. For Louise, there is no reason to rush— all events happen at once.

The distinction between literary narratives and cinematic narratives factors in Frank McConnell's book, *Storytelling and Mythmaking*, where he speaks about the components of each narrative style. First, he explains that a "Literary narrative, [...], always begins with the perception of the individual, the suffering, passionate, isolated consciousness, in reaction against the outer universe of both society and unthinking, inhuman physical reality" (5). We view

literature intrinsically from a personalized consciousness of the characters, but we are given information that obscures the world around us, or around the characters, as a means to engage our senses to see the world uniquely. This can be understood better when looking at the poem “The Man from Snowy River” and the novella *Story of Your Life*. First, “The Man from Snowy River” gives us an isolated consciousness from the narrator as the outer world is described in the literary form of imagery. We are told the emotions we should feel, instead of vicariously experiencing the emotions felt by the characters as seen in film. These emotions personalize the world in which we are immersed. This is opposite to film as we are given the context of the outside world, while the narrative tries to relate to the audience through the perspective of the psyche. Thus, literature tries to examine the world from a narrator or characters that can relay an outside perspective to the readers. For example, Paterson describes the man from Snowy River through metaphors and descriptions at a distance: “And he raced him down the mountain like a torrent down its bed, / While the others stood and watched in very fear” (lines 71-72). This description takes away from the psyche of the man from Snowy River, and obscures it through a third-person lens. The mechanism behind the narrator is to provide context, relativity, and a better understanding of the story being told, as the reader cannot see visuals to obtain the information given.

The Story of Your Life offers a similar experience through its narration. The protagonist Louise states that,

I and the linguists at the other looking glasses met via videoconferencing to share what we had learned about the heptapod language. The videoconferencing made for an incongruous working environment: our video screens were primitive compared to the heptapods’

looking glasses, so that my colleagues seemed more remote than the heptapods. The familiar was far away, while the bizarre was close at hand. (187)

Again, the readers are presented with distance between the consciousness of the characters and the environment around them. Through the means of literature, we are given a distance that brings a greater awareness to the outside world. The videoconferencing cannot be shown to us, as in a film. It is described further as it is being analyzed by the characters where we can understand the effects and interpretations the characters have of specific objects. This is how we know that the videoconferencing was not a conducive environment to work in for a verbal text.

Film operates from an outsider perspective, striving to emulate a more personalized, even psychoanalytic view of the characters. We are to see the objects for what they are, but to hone in on the characters as being obscure and unique. McConnell describes the efforts of film to be the opposite of literature: “But in film the situation is, essentially and significantly, reversed. Film can show us *only* objects, *only* things, *only*, indeed, people as things. Our activity in watching a filmed narrative is to infer, to construct the *selfhood* of the hero who might inhabit the objective world film so overwhelmingly gives us” (5). In *Arrival*, an instance of questioning and proving knowledge of the character is the motivation for them to keep their strength in a situation that can result in vulnerability. For example, Colonel Weber questions the approach Louise has in extracting information from the heptapods. The conversation deals with authority and trust, in which Louise has to outsmart Weber in order for him to consider her as strong. Weber confronts Louise’s tactic of teaching the heptapods when nothing has resulted thus far:

Colonel Weber: Everything you do in there. I have to explain to a room full of men whose first and last question is, "How can this be used against us." So you're gonna have to give me more than that.

Louise Banks: "Kangaroo." In 1770, Captain James Cook's ship ran aground off the coast in Australia and he led a party into the country, and they met the aboriginal people. One of the sailors pointed at the animals that hop around and put their babies in their pouch, and he asked what they were, and the Aborigine said, "kangaroo."

Weber: And the point is?

Louise Banks: It wasn't till later that they learned that "kangaroo" means "I don't understand." So, I need this so that we don't misinterpret things in there. Otherwise, this is gonna take ten times as long. (00:39:47-00:40:33)

Louise's knowledge is displayed in a pompous but humorous manner. Interestingly, the story of Cook's sailor is a myth. Louise stated this myth as true to prove a point to Weber. The film focuses on the thoughts and actions of Louise for us to see how her shrewdness, even though it was a made up story, aids her to be seen as powerful in the eyes of others. From that moment, Weber allows her to continue to practice her approach in interacting with the heptapods.

Similarly, in *The Man from Snowy River* we see the knowledge, understanding, and judgements of Craig as important factors, just as we did with Louise. Rather than in literature where we are given more information of the outside world for us to internalize the story to a greater degree; in film, the psyche of the character is targeted more in the storytelling process. Clancy questions Jim Craig on his knowledge of riding. This is for the audience to see the strength Jim has gained as his identity changes from being a boy to a man. At this point in the

film, the colt was let loose by the antagonists. Harrison thinks that Craig was the culprit. Clancy comes over to Craig to explain the situation and to lure Craig to help out. Craig knows that Harrison is not fond of him, so he is not easily inclined to help out. Clancy questions Craig's knowledge on riding to prompt him to see an analogy between riding and being a bigger man:

Clancy: What's the first thing you do when a horse bucks you off?

Jim Craig: You don't let him beat you. You get straight back on.

Clancy: Well.

Craig: No Clancy.

Clancy: Well that's a shame, Harrison is blaming you for it.

Craig: Me? And you expect me to go back and help him? It's asking too much of a man.

Clancy: Man, did you say? (01:24:30-01:24:35)

Clancy sees that Craig has the capability of riding that no one else has, and that he would be an attribute in catching the colt. This scene is important because it shows Craig on the border between boyhood and manhood. Clancy galvanizes Craig to be the bigger man: confident in himself and headstrong. These are attributes of a man, albeit, a *hero*. The genre of film enables the audience to see the construction of who a hero is and what makes them weak or strong. It is our priority as an audience to distinguish and define a hero. We are shown this ultimatum as a formula to consider Craig's morals. Will he be the bigger man and save the colt even when he is wrongfully blamed and disliked by Harrison, or will he act petty by leaving the task to the town and take no part in the hunt for the colt? The instance of these power dynamics that construct the ethics of the characters.

Rebecca Louise shines light on how power dynamics in film are vulnerable to parody. She states, “Written at the time when Australia was developing a distinct identity as a nation, Paterson’s poem suggested to readers that all Australians, regardless of class, shared a unique land and a common spirit” (26). Her insight into how Paterson uses his ballad to generate a nationalist spirit reflects on the dichotomy between the essence of Paterson’s poem and the later story translated into the film. She states, “Despite poetry’s general move away from the mainstream, popular cinema’s use of poetry to express opaque or inchoate emotions at key moments has become common enough to give rise to parody” (23). This is prevalent in some major scenes within the film *The Man from Snowy River*. Specifically, Miller creates power dynamics set between the humans and the nature of the bush when Jessica falls off the mountain during a storm. With respect to the coming-of-age narrative, Craig has to save Jessica in order to prove himself a man worthy to Jessica’s father, Harrison. Dan Golding speaks about the stylistic effects of cinema on *The Man from Snowy River*. He explains how surrealism helps shape emotions in the film:

Secondly, once Jim rescues Jessica from the mountainous storm, we see a startlingly fantastical shot of the pair riding literally on clouds. Though most of this shot of Jim, Jessica and the horse has been unaltered, a layer of clouds has been superimposed at the horse’s feet. The overall effect is something like a cartoon, with a prancing horse carrying two satisfied lovers along a dreamlike bed of atmosphere. This, the most startlingly surreal image in a film otherwise dominated by appeals to period authenticity, reveals *The Man from Snowy River*’s phantasmagoric treatment of its horses, and its modulated visual regimes. (119)

Although Miller's intention is to convey the mysticism of the countryside, he continually displays the humans as superior to the nature and animals. This enables the viewers to see the main character's identity change throughout the film in terms of a *man*, or at a greater sense, a human, to be powerful because he, Jim Craig, conquered the countryside and knows the ins-and-outs of it, a skill no one else has. Also, the components of cinematography, the coming-of-age narrative, and the romanticism of the countryside that enhances our view of Craig, so we see him more as a glorified hero.

Contrarily, the poem does not separate the power between the humans and the countryside/animals. Rather, Paterson describes them as features that are codependent with one another. In addition to Paterson's personification of the nature, such as the "mountain's brow" or the echoes in the gorges "fiercely answered back," he establishes the unity of the bushmen and nature through the similar description/experience they both gain (lines 42, 59). Paterson writes about the aspects of the countryside that the humans appreciate, "If once they gain the shelter of those hills" (line 48). Furthermore, he continually affirms the love the horsemen have for the mountains, "But they saw their well-loved mountain full in view / And they charged beneath the stock whip with a sharp and sudden dash" (lines 54-55). These two lines express the power the mountains have over the horsemen, but also the human ability expressed as the horsemen gallop through the rigorous bushland.

Furthermore, the poem portrays the essence of the Australian countryside as the cohesion of the bushmen, land and animals. But the film goes further to separate the Australian bushmen and the actual bush from their Anglo-Australian counterparts. In the film, Jim Craig falls off the prized colt he is capturing. The director, Miller uses the film's cuts to create a jarring

representation of the main horse. As an effect, the viewers see the horse as evil, scary, or angry as the quick consecutive cuts in the frame zoom in on the horse's startling face to conjure a malicious intent. In the scene, Jim becomes injured by the black colt who then is depicted as a scary horse towering over him. The next cuts present a series of unnerving images of the colt's face and eyes as each shot zooms in closer to the horse. "It is as though the audience has been brutalised as much as Jim, and as though this were the film's own doing as much as the horse's through this violent rupture with the diegesis," states Golding (119). Miller specifically took the perspective of showing the horse as evil as the main character is defeated. Part of Miller's intentions puts Jim Craig on a higher pedestal because we are supposed to empathize with Jim and see the horse as destructive in order for us to want to root more for Jim to succeed by capturing the horse.

Interestingly, the translation from "The Story of Your Life" to *Arrival* reveals a greater moral behind the story by comparing the humans to the creatures, similar to how *The Man from Snowy River* compares the humans to the horses. *Arrival* sends a worldly message rather than a personal understanding in the novella. The genre of science fiction further emphasizes the abilities of comparing the heptapods to the humans. Specifically, Bran Nicol states that, "the story, as I have suggested — and indeed as *all* science fiction ultimately is, as much as it is about other worlds and species on the surface — is deeply concerned with humanity, with what makes us human" (116). Nicol's point expands the argument that science fiction is a way of contrasting the "othered" in order to bring more light to humanity. This is prevalent when we see that the main problem is a human problem. What is centric about this story is the ability for the humans to solve the unknown. More so in the film, we are presented with the threat of the heptapods,

where ultimately, Louise Banks is the one who gains the main insight: “that the gift of the heptapod’s language enables Banks to see what will happen in the future” (Nicol 118). Nicol also makes the point that the civilized relies on the uncivilized to define itself and to learn how they each operate in the constructed world, just as we see in *The Man from Snowy River*. In this instance, the humans rely on the heptapod to help them understand how language works. It is precisely because of the science fiction genre that embodies the “unknown,” where the narrative of film causes us to ultimately find the answers to the unknown. This translates to the unknown as the ignorance of how communication and language work, as well as the goal: to reach an understanding of the unfamiliar ways the heptapod communicate.

Additionally, critic Carl Freedman suggests that science fiction is similar to historical fiction. He continues to say that it is the defamiliarization that sets the present apart from the past: “science fiction inserts that present into a dialectical play between identity and difference, constructing society as mutable and determined by complex causes in a way similar to the historical novel” (qtd. in Page 156). In a sense, *Arrival*’s science fiction narrative creates distance by emphasizing the dichotomy between the familiar, humanity, and the unfamiliar, the heptapods. As this relates, *Arrival* is made obscure through the science fiction narrative and allows for the audience to notice how even the present is not realistic. The present is only a facet of the entire story that is formulated into a captured piece of history as the story continues to be told. The present is only temporary. As a viewer, we are there to analyze the cause and effect of the story’s narrative. Fredric Jameson continues to say that science fiction allows us to be more conscious of how we view the present and the past. “More recent science fiction fulfills, he claims, “the important purpose of making us aware of our ‘mental and ideological imprisonment’

in the present, by ‘dramati[zing] our capacity to imagine the future’ as radically different from our current moment,” and we are to expect that this genre will shock us by telling the stories about unique creatures we may have never thought could be similar to us (qtd. in Page 156).

By looking at genre, form, and the intents of the authors in the same stories translated from literature to film, we understand that art is an arbiter of our culture. Fictional pieces are created to tell us a story that is deemed important and we are to take away important insights that mold our perceptions of the world. The translation of these stories reveal similarities, but there are also differences that make us question why information is important enough to stay or why did it need to change, and what are the impacts of this. These stories tell us about ourselves, they shape our understanding, and impact us cognitively and emotionally. Identity is an important element focused on when seeing these translations. Understanding Australian identity and human identity were expressed in both stories in literature and in film.

When looking at how a story is written or created, we are given more insight on how the authors and the society at the time view specific people, creatures and concepts in the world. In *The Man from Snowy River*, we are shown how people view monetary wealth as important, condemning the bushman for anything they have to offer. It isn’t until we realize their skills are essential for society to function, that we understand knowledge and skills are just as valuable to society. The audience can understand how both the bushmen and the elites need each other to successfully exist. Similarly, in *Story of Your Life*, we are prompted to understand that knowledge gained from any level is important. Louise views the heptapods to be important in her learning of the world and growth as a person. This affirms that all types of life are important to the world because each teaches us new perspectives and insight.

In *Arrival*, we are shown a feminist perspective presented by a male author. Many films in modern day try to take the perspectives of the marginalized in order to promote the stories that have been missing from our canon. Both these stories aid us to question why we haven't yet read or seen these perspectives from our narrators or protagonists, where we should go further and ask ourselves what other stories are missing. For example, we are not given the narratives of the indigenous people in Australia in "The Man from Snowy River," we are only shown the stories of the white Europeans who colonized the land. Also, in *The Story of Your Life*, we are told an intimate feminist tale of a mother and a daughter, but it is written by a male author. In *Arrival*, we are shown an empowering feminist story, but it is of a white female; the other races are given little to no voice.

Fictional stories are important for us to preserve ideas and thoughts of the times they were created in. There is a responsibility of literature and film to tell a story that provokes thought, and ultimately makes us question and reflect back on ourselves and the world. The creators of these stories enlighten the readers or viewers about specific information they believe important to tell and it is for the reader to decipher what they believe is truthful and right or questionable and inaccurate. These stories are not didactic, but are created to show us ways of being through their unique perspectives. They are maintained in original verbal form, but once translated to film, pieces of information are lost while additional features of plot and character development are revealed to the audience. As a critic of literature and film, one can pinpoint how the same story changes, especially when breaking down the mechanics of the genre. The critiques of Australian national identity and human identity contrasted with animals and nature and extra-terrestrial beings, respectively, inform us about what society was like in time the

stories were created. This includes which perspectives and social groups were dominant. We can compare the past and the present so we understand how people viewed the society, people, and the world. Importantly, we see how these standards have continued or changed throughout time, and it is the mere fact of art, literature and film, that promotes new perspectives and ways of thinking to expand our definitions of life and how things are to be.

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