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BREAKING THE AFFINITY BETWEEN THE TWO NARRATIVES: *THE ACCIDENTAL BILLIONAIRES AND THE SOCIAL NETWORK*

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Abstract:

This study is an examination of two art forms, literature and film by applying Plato's concept of Mimesis. The hypothesis based on the adaptation of literary works in order to create films that reflect the essence of the literary text is put to test. The readers and the critics establish an affinity between the literary text and the film based on it. Art forms can never be the same therefore they can never be related. Each and every artist perceive reality quite differently and their personalities are built on these perceptions and experiences. The autonomy of any work of art irrespective of its source need be appreciated. This study tries to break the affinity between the novel The Accidental Billionaires and the film The Social Network based on the idea that an artist's imitation of reality results in the shadowy representation of truth. Both the novel and the film do not present the real Facebook story but a story fabricated to entertain the audience which results in the destruction of reality and defamation of certain individuals.

Key Words: Power, Reality, Art forms, Film, Novel.

Literature and film are two different art forms. They have their own unique perspectives and operate at two different levels. Very often people try to create an affinity between the narratives of literature and film. This is indeed a wrong approach towards understanding the essence of these art forms. Both literature and film complement each other but that doesn't mean that they are quintessential in the existence of the other. These two art forms can sometimes be detrimental to reality. Reality here means the facts or the actual events that are often adapted into novels and films. These art forms are expected to portray these events in a true light. If ever they try to deviate from the truth, these art forms become fantasy. Such kind of art forms aim to deliver pleasure to the audience. In some cases, it often led to the deterioration of the factual events and defamation of certain individuals.

Plato was concerned about how truth could be conveyed by art forms. It has been stated in Wikipedia that: Plato's theory of Mimesis explains a distinctive feature of art forms. In *Ion*, he states that poetry is the art of divine madness, or inspiration. Because the poet is subject to this divine madness, instead of possessing "art" or "knowledge" - *techne* - of the subject, the poet does not speak truth as characterized by Plato's account of the Forms. He realised that it is indeed the theatrical devices and rhetoric that captured the minds of the audience rather than the truth. Every artist is subject to divine madness. This divine madness compels the artists to perceive reality in a different way. The writer feels himself transported to a different world where he can exercise his power of creativity in order to create something unique. This uniqueness in art is in fact the result of its removal from reality. The concept of reality is inexplicable. The abstract ideas like truth, love, liberty etc exists in the world of ideas. In concrete reality we witness a shadowy representation of these ideas. Therefore, the truth concerning all things lies somewhere else. It is beyond the grasp of an artist.

A writer is expected to convey the truth about things. But it is not possible to represent reality as such. Therefore, he resorts to the method of imitation. Imitation is a wider concept. Imitation is a process in which the artist tries to imitate the ideas from the 'world of ideas' which in concrete reality are mere shadows. Sometimes this imitation would lead the artist to create a world of fantasy. A writer may assume the role of a magician to create an unreal reality. He uses his power of imagination to create new worlds. Imitation is thus an inevitable aspect of creation.

This theory of imitation is carried to extreme levels by the writers. Today certain writers get carried away from their subject matter. They have transformed the 'imitation' of reality to the 'distortion' of reality. They show no mercy in dealing with real life stories. They are no more concerned with truth. Their sole aim is to provide entertainment. They try to divert the readers away from reality. If the artist or the writer fails to imitate reality then his work is no more realistic but a piece of fiction. There is a general tendency among the writers to showcase their work as representing truth while the work is nothing but an imaginative world created by them. The shadowy representation of reality which characterized the earlier works is non-existent now. The art forms are no more concerned with reality. The artists enjoy great liberty in bending the truth to their whims and fancies. The works which appear under the title 'biography' or 'autobiography' is no more a representation of truth but a fictional world set in a realistic framework.

Novels and films are two art forms which go to extreme levels in their representation of so-called reality. Novelists are dreamers and the Directors are practitioners of fantasy. Novelists are descriptive in nature while the Directors are dramatic. Novelists are concerned with the beauty of words and use flamboyant language to describe events to such an extent that it almost seems unnecessary. Directors are concerned with the pictorial beauty. They are engaged in creating visual effects rather than presenting the truth. Thus, art forms are no more an imitation of nature to some extent. They have evolved during the times. Even the concept of imitation had undergone change.

The purpose behind the use of flamboyant language, descriptive narration, visual effects, etc is to create an interest in the audience. They justify their act of bending truth by presenting their art forms as offering an escape route from the harsh realities of life. It is fair and just so long as it remains true to this purpose. But in certain works of art we see a distortion of reality and the defamation of individuals. This does not exhibit the essence and purpose of art. This area requires a research. To understand these features of art forms, a study of novel and film will be beneficial. A biased representation of events can be witnessed in the novel *The Accidental Billionaires* and the film *The Social Network*. *The Accidental Billionaires* is a novel by Ben Mezrich. To be precise, it is a biographical drama. Mezrich claims to have gathered information for the novel from a dozen of legal documents and interviews. This brings into question the depiction of events in the novel. From the very beginning of the novel, we witness a biased representation of the Facebook story. Mezrich presents most part of the story from Eduardo Saverin's perspective. He sympathizes with the character and his tribulations. The central character of Mark Zuckerberg is given least importance when compared to the representation of other characters. Mark Zuckerberg is said to have not cooperated with Mezrich in the creation of this novel. Zuckerberg disagrees with Mezrich's presentation of the Facebook story.

Mezrich presents Mark Zuckerberg as a meek Computer genius. Only a few passages are presented from Mark's perspective. Mark Zuckerberg is described as "autistic" by a character in the novel. And Mark Zuckerberg's meteoric rise is presented as a result of his revenge on his girlfriend. Moreover, the Harvard University students especially the men are presented as seeking money or power to impress their girlfriends. This representation takes the readers away from the real Facebook story. Mezrich did not give us a logical and objective presentation of the founding of Facebook.

In his presentation of other characters too, Mezrich is biased and inaccurate. The Winklevoss twins worked in the rowing team but none of the information relating to their participation in university rowing

competitions were given in the novel. And they are presented as aggressive in nature. Sean Parker's role in removing "the" from "The Facebook" is not mentioned in the novel. Moreover, Sean Parker is presented from the perspective of Eduardo Saverin. Thus, the readers do not get an accurate picture of Sean Parker. The rumours regarding chicken cannibalism and Eduardo Saverin's part in it is not made clear in the novel. Mezrich's inaccuracy extends even more when he presents Volleywag being discussed by a student in 2004 while it was really set in 2006. The incident of the Koala fest held on a yacht owned by a founder of Sun microsystems in the book didn't even happen in real life. Thus, Mezrich's presentation of the founding of Facebook is inaccurate.

The film *The Social Network* by David Andrew Leo Fincher is a dramatic presentation of the founding of Facebook. The first scene presents Mark's breakup with his girlfriend. In the novel Mark's proposal is turned down by the girl. This creates confusion among the audience regarding the authenticity of the event. In the film, Mark is presented as a Machiavellian character. He is cunning and seeks vengeance. This stands in contrast to the meek computer genius depicted in the novel. Eduardo Saverin's rebellious nature is presented in his meltdown scene at Zuckerberg's office which differs from the sympathetic presentation of his character in the novel. The Winklevoss twins are depicted as honourable gentlemen in the film. Sean Parker's contribution to the founding of Facebook is made clear. The controversy concerning chicken cannibalism is presented accurately in the film. The lawsuit concerning Mark stealing the idea of the Winklevoss twins and suspending Eduardo Saverin's share in the company is also presented. The climax scene in which Mark sends a friend request to his ex-girlfriend exposes his pathetic situation. Though he has become a billionaire, he has lost his true friend Eduardo Saverin and the love of his life. Such was the conclusion put forward by the movie.

Both the novel as well as the film focused on the dramatic presentation of events concerning the founding of Facebook. They deviated from the truth. Both these art forms failed to present Mark Zuckerberg's genius in the creation of Facebook. They focused on his personal life rather than giving an accurate picture of the founding of Facebook. They underestimated Mark Zuckerberg's vision. Mark Zuckerberg is indifferent to both the novel as well as the film. He finds them as a corrupt representation of his story and favours *The Facebook Effect* by David Kirkpatrick. As Kirkpatrick had access to the Facebook staff, he was able to collect materials for his novel. The novel represents the history of the Facebook. While focusing on the founding of Facebook, it captured its growth throughout the years in the novel. In the novel, Mark Zuckerberg was not just a Harvard university student but a genius who transformed Facebook into a global social networking site.

In Mezrich's novel, Zuckerberg was an insensitive person who was self centered and accepted no help from others. He was more like a machine. "Sometimes," Mezrich tells us, talking to Mark "was like talking to a computer" (Jacobs). Zuckerberg didn't cooperate with Mezrich because he knew that the novel will never be concerned with facts. As his publisher has said, "This book isn't reportage. It's big juicy fun" (Harris). Mezrich pays lack of attention to the dates, locations, and names which results in the creation of a novel that is not authentic. Inaccuracy is at the center of Mezrich's novel. *The Accidental Billionaires* does not represent a great piece of literature but a work of fantasy. By discarding truth, the novel has lost its significance. The film tries to capture the varying aspects of Mark Zuckerberg's character. It leaves a greater impact on the audience. The film was concerned with the depiction of emotions and the dramatic portrayal of events. The Facebook Effect remains an accurate account of the Facebook story as it presents the story by maintaining a neutral stand on the events.

Thus, *The Social Network* based on the novel *The Accidental Billionaires* is not a film that stays true to its source. *The Accidental Billionaires* is not a true representation of the Facebook story. Both these art forms present the Facebook story from their own unique perspectives. Their sole aim was to entertain the readers and the audience rather than inform them about the founding of Facebook. During this pursuit

to create an entertaining art form, they tarnished many personalities. This exposes the destructive nature of art. All artistic creation is a form of imitation according to Plato. Here imitation is a technique adopted by the artists and each and every art form is distinct from the other. No art form can remain true to its source. During the process of imitation, it loses its touch with its source. The final product will be a different work of art. Every art form is autonomous and needs to be studied separately as advocated by New Criticism.

Though it has adapted its content from a source text, it does not matter. The film *The Social Network* is based on the novel *The Accidental Billionaires* but in reality, they share nothing other than the subject matter of the founding of Facebook. The events described in the novel as well as the movie are quite different. This is because the creator of the novel and the movie are different. They are two different individuals. Therefore, they perceive reality differently.

'Divine madness' a phrase used by Plato to describe the artistic inspiration or that the creative ability is unique. It is not possible for all artists to share the same thoughts. Therefore, their works differ. No matter from whatever sources they collected their content, the final product will be unique just like the artist who wrote it. William Wordsworth's definition of poetry is noteworthy. "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility." A writer's feelings and perceptions influence his work to a great extent. Therefore, the film *The Social Network* based on the novel *The Accidental Billionaires* has no real connection with its source material. Director David Fincher's thoughts are different from the author Ben Mezrich's thoughts. Both the Director as well as the author manipulated the Facebook story to entertain the audience and the readers. During this process they lost their touch with truth. Their work of art turned into something destructive resulting in the defamation of certain personalities. Therefore, it is always advisable to consider the facts, while creating a biographical piece of art no matter what the sources are. The divine madness experienced by the artist gives way to the imitation of a work of art. It should be based on facts and achieve their ultimate goal of entertaining the audience. Each and every piece of art is therefore different and thus we break the affinity between the two narratives, *The Accidental Billionaires* and *The Social Network*.

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