DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 458 648 CS 510 661

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TITLE Narrative Translation across Cultures: From the "Bhagavad Gita" to "The Legend of Bagger Vance."
PUB DATE 2001-11-00
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Communication Association (87th, Atlanta, GA, November 1-4, 2001).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cross Cultural Studies; *Cultural Context; Discourse Analysis; *Films; *Novels; *World Literature
IDENTIFIERS *Bhagavad Gita; Narrative Text

ABSTRACT

Religious narratives can and do cross borders through communicative practices and arenas that span cultures. The ideas and conceptual tools enshrined in another culture's stories can be appropriated in one of two ways by another culture--either through using such a text to denigrate the originator culture or to adapt the ideas within to the new culture's ideological superstructure. It is this latter version of cultural appropriation that can be seen at work in the novel and film adaptations of the "Bhagavad Gita," both entitled "The Legend of Bagger Vance." What is interesting are the changes that occur to this very philosophical and religious narrative, the "Bhagavad Gita," in the hands of western publishing and film systems. This paper argues that as the narrative translation of the "Bhagavad Gita" gets deeper into western media systems, the narrative of the book and film increasingly becomes bereft of monistic, eastern "content" and is instead replaced by "western" notions of God and individual projects/goals. To substantiate this claim of increasing westernization of the narrative in important philosophical and religious ways, the paper first examines some grounding theory in narrative research and then focuses on each text--the "Bhagavad Gita"; the "Legend of Bagger Vance," the novel; and the "Legend of Bagger Vance," the film. (Contains 48 references.) (NKA)

Narrative Translation Across Cultures: From the *Bhagavad Gita* to *The Legend of Bagger Vance*

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-Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association, Religious Communication Association, Atlanta, Georgia, 2001.

Narrative Translation Across Cultures: From the *Bhagavad Gita* to *The Legend of Bagger Vance*

Introduction

Religious narratives can and do cross borders through communicative practices and arenas that span cultures. This process can spawn "translation" of word and idea into a more familiar idiom, especially in terms of ideological and political systems that are dominant in one culture as opposed to those in another (Cheyfitz, 1991). The ideas and conceptual tools enshrined in another culture's stories can be appropriated in one of two ways by another culture—either through using such a text to denigrate the originator culture, or to adapt the ideas within to the new culture's ideological superstructure. It is this later version of cultural appropriation that one sees at work in the novel and film adaptations of the *Bhagavad Gita*, both entitled *The Legend of Bagger Vance*.

Stephen Pressfield's novel, "The Legend of Bagger Vance" (Pressfield, 1995), was based on the ancient Hindu philosophical narrative, the *Bhagavad Gita*, in its use of spiritual paths to enlightenment ("The Legend of," 1995). Employing golf as a metaphor, this book and the movie based on it can be seen as culturally modified "translations" of the ancient narrative of the *Bhagavad Gita*. What is interesting, however, are the changes that occur to this very philosophical and religious narrative at the hands of western publishing and film systems. As a book and a film, it is designed to meet the needs and expectations of the American audience, and as such is changed in ways that reflect this recipient culture. This inquiry argues that as the narrative translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* gets deeper into western systems of media, the narrative of the book and film forms increasingly becomes bereft of monistic, eastern "content" and is instead replaced by "western" notions of God and individual projects/goals. It is in this light that the study of religious/philosophical communication can benefit from examining this sequence of texts—Pressfield has expressed his desire to imitate the *Bhagavad Gita*, yet increasingly western notions (both overtly and covertly) insert themselves into the finished narrative translations. As the adaptation gets to the widespread film version, the narrative's notions of deity are incredible subdued and westernized, and conceptions of the world and action are individuated and competitive in nature. In order to further substantiate this claim of increasing westernization of this narrative in important philosophical and religious ways, this inquiry will first examine some grounding theory in narrative research, and then focus on each text—the *Bhagavad Gita*, "The Legend of Bagger Vance" (the novel), and *The Legend of Bagger Vance* (the film).

Cultural Inflections of Narratives

Much productive research on narratives and the audiences they accommodate has been done under the auspices of Walter Fisher's (1984; 1985; 1987) "narrative paradigm." In his seminal work, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*, Fisher finds that all human communication is narrative in format, indicating that this means that they evaluate narratives for "good reasons" for belief and/or action. These good reasons are determined through two criteria, narrative probability and narrative fidelity. Narrative probability refers to

> formal features of a story conceived as a discrete sequence of thoughts and/or action in life or literature (any written or recorded form of discourse); that is, it concerns whether a story coheres or "hangs together," whether or not a story is free of contradictions. (1987, p. 88)

Narrative fidelity, the external criteria of audience judgment, "concern[s] the 'truth qualities' of a story, the degree to which it accords with the logic of good reasons: the soundness of its reasoning and the value of its values" (p. 88). Thus, auditors determine "whether or not the stories they [the audience] experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives" (p. 64). A reader can see warrants for action and belief from the characters and situations *if they can identify with them.* Fisher argues that

> we *identify* with an account (and its author) or we treat it as mistaken. We identify with stories or accounts when we find that they offer "good reasons" for being accepted. . . . Reasons are good when they are perceived as (1) true to and consistent with what we think we know and what we value, (2) appropriate to whatever decision is pending, (3) promising in effects for ourselves and others, and (4) consistent with what we believe is an ideal basis for conduct. (p. 194)

Thus, Fisher's position is that texts argue for certain actions, beliefs, or specific ways of being in relation to the audience that is attending to them. Given the correct conditions, the audience will identify with these reasons within the narrative and adopt them in undertaking future projects and actions. What is of most importance, though, is the implication that narratives that respond to audience experiences, needs, and values will typically be more accepted than novel, shocking, or too "foreign" ones (Stroud, 2001a; 2001b; 2001c).

One way to approach the study of cultural texts that transmit across cultures is to examine how it is *adapted* to the needs and interests of the target culture. While an expansive research has accumulated concerning the adaptation of literature into film (Cunningham, 2000; Kline, 1996; Levine, 1996; Metz, 1999; Pellow & Hug, 1999), few have examined the translation of religious/philosophical texts into the grasp of another culture's media production systems. McMullen and Solomon (1994) have found that political and social issues often come into play in how directors and screenwriters adapt novels. Reynolds (1993) finds that the adaptation must conform to the needs of the modern audience for spectacle and visual display, often at the expense of deep content. Cooper and Descutner (1996) point out that

> Filmmakers choose what to include and exclude from the literary source material, as well as what to highlight or downplay. They make such choices in light of the ends they want their films to realize, and primary among such ends is commercial success, particularly for mainstream films. Implicit in these ends are interests that transcend merely aesthetic or historical considerations. For example, paramount among such interests is satisfying the audience's expectations, which entails honoring cinematic conventions and affirming cultural norms with which the audience is familiar. (p. 228)

Stroud (2002), extending this insight, finds that the narrative paradigm can be heuristically valuable in examining popular texts (especially mythic and religious ones) to discern the values and themes that a culture finds as "good" or "desirable." Thus, a well-funded ($70 million) film such as the *The Legend of Bagger Vance* and a popular novel such as "The Legend of Bagger Vance" (50,000 copies sold in the first printing alone) merit an examination of what they say about modern American culture and the values it is willing to invest time and money in ("The Legend of," 1995; Velarde, 2001). What is even more interesting is the opportunity for a look at what an alternate message would be—in this case, the base message that informs the book and the movie is an ancient Indian narrative, the *Bhagavad Gita*.

The paper will analyze these texts in how they progressively become more "westernized" in their message as they get farther into modern, mass-mediated forms of communication in America. Koller (1985) and Smith (1986) have indicated that a main function of religious and mythical texts (such as the *Bhagavad Gita*) is to convey positions on the composition of the world (including the nature of the divine and humanity) and to indicate a way to "salvation" or "enlightenment" (the preferable way to act). These two main categories will first be examined in terms of the narrative of the *Bhagavad Gita*, and then be examined in the forms (or lack thereof) in "The Legend of Bagger Vance" and *The Legend of Bagger Vance*. In the latter text, particular attention will be paid to what replaces elements of the former two texts, especially in terms of religious and philosophical connotations. In doing such an analysis, some tentative conclusions can be drawn about the societies and audiences that shape and reshape such religious/philosophical narratives.

The *Bhagavad Gita*

As the *Bhagavad Gita* is a text removed in time and space from this culture's ordinary discussion of religion, this section will first discuss some background considerations and then examine its narrative in terms of the constitution of the world (i.e., the divine and the human) and the proffered path to enlightenment (i.e., enjoined action). While many excellent translations of the *Bhagavad Gita* exist (Deutsch, 1968; Edgerton, 1995; Johnson, 1994), the translation to be used to in this inquiry is Easwaren (1985). References to this text will be made by chapter and verse number (i.e., 4:12).

Context

The *Bhagavad Gita* has been an important text in its own right; as Minor (1986) indicates, it is the most translated book in the world after the Bible. It also was reputed to be Gandhi's favorite

text, one that he read on a daily basis. Radhakrishnan (1998) adds that it is the most popular religious poem in Sanskrit, and Deutsch (1968) and Zimmer (1989) argue that it is a crucial piece of Hindu religious/philosophical work because it synthetically combines many previous themes into its narrative. This relatively short work is situated in the midst of a longer, more literary work entitled the *Mahabharata* (Babbili, 1997). This epic is eight times larger than the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* combined. The focus of this larger work was a power struggle between two factions of a warring family, the Kurus. Eventually, this family is drawn to war; this is where the *Bhagavad Gita* begins. Set against the backdrop of war, the dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna provide the audience with access to ideas covering all human existence. Arjuna begins to question whether he should fight his own family, even if the war appears to be for a just cause; he throws down his magical bow and refuses to fight. Krishna, the godhead manifested as his charioteer and friend, consequently counsels him, and the dialogue focuses on this thematic persuasion covering the nature of the world and how one should act to achieve enlightenment.

Constitution of the World

The *Bhagavad Gita* (circa 200BCE) posits a world that is integrally connected in the divine persona itself, Krishna. The ancient *Upanishads* and their doctrine of Brahman as ultimate reality come through in this latter text (Pati, 1997), although it is now connected with the theistic description of Krishna. Arjuna is told that his worries about killing his opposing family members is unfounded, as Krishna states,

> One man believes he is the slayer, another believes he is the slain. Both are ignorant; there is neither slayer nor slain. You were never born; you will never die. You have never changed; you can never change. Unborn, eternal, immutable, immemorial, you do not die when the body dies. Realizing that which is indestructible, eternal, unborn, and unchanging, how can you slay or cause another to slay? (2:19-21).

The illusion of the individual self is truly an illusion at a higher metaphysical level—that which is real is the Self that connects all things. Krishna reveals to Arjuna, "I am the true Self in the heart of every creature, Arjuna, and the beginning, middle, and end of their existence" (10:20). Krishna is that which links all individuated forms of life to each other; he states, "The birth and dissolution of the cosmos takes place in me. There is nothing that exists separate from me" (7:6-7) and that "all the different qualities found in living creatures have their source in me" (10:5). Thus, Krishna is the source of all qualities and creatures because he is that which is their true Self—their individuation is an illusion that one must not cling to (2:19-21).

Krishna reveals his divine form to Arjuna in Chapter 11, a horrifying vision that Arjuna wishes to escape from. Krishna, upon assuming his cosmic form of world-encompassing destroyer and creator, exclaims "I [Krishna] am time, the destroyer of all; I have come to consume the world. Even without your participation, all the warriors gathered here will die…I have already slain all these warriors; you will only be my instrument" (11:32-33). The only permanence and true reality is that of the Self; all else (especially empirical selves) are transitory and not truly real in persistence or as the basic units of the world. Arjuna, upon witnessing this vision, states, "You [Krishna as ultimate Self] pervade everything; you are everything" (11:40), further extending this notion that Krishna, as godhead and as Brahman, is the underlying reality that connects all individuated creatures. Krishna, in detailing one who is enlightened of this metaphysical fact, tells Arjuna, "He alone sees truly who sees the Lord the same in every creature, who sees the Deathless in the hearts of all that die" (13:27). Thus, enlightenment is connected to realizing the metaphysical constitution of the world, through its unity with the supreme godhead, Krishna. It is this Self that unites all living creatures and that composes their true personality qua conscious being. Individuals and the deity are not truly separate; while Krishna is not exhausted by all created things, all created things partake in Krishna.

Path to Enlightenment

Enlightenment in this text concerns diminishing the clinging to the empirical, individuated self and gaining a realization/union with the ultimate Self (Krishna). Individuals who are too attached to their individual projects, desires, and goals are all caught up in the illusion of the empirical self—Krishna remarks, "All actions are performed by the *gunas* of *prakriti* alone. But he who is deluded by egoism thinks, 'I am the doer'" (3:27). The *gunas*, or strands, are the material

constituents of the natural world (*prakriti*), and are not the true source of consciousness—Self assumes that guise. These material forces seemingly predetermine (through material causality, psychological dispositions, mental states, etc.) what an individuated self is going to do; there is no "I" that is acting for his/her individual projects, goals, and desires. Arjuna is told that action is an unavoidable part of this ever-changing, material world; Krishna points out, "If, centered in egoism, thou thinkest 'I will not fight,' vain is this thy resolution; *prakriti* will compel thee" (18:59). The brute forces of the material world will force Arjuna into the war regardless of whether he wants to fight or not; on a another interpretation, one can read this as indicative of the inevitability of the pending war, regardless of whether Arjuna participates. Either way, the material forces, not Arjuna's true Self (the Self of all beings), is the real actor. Action must be taken by all individuals, and renunciation from the world of action is not an option, as "there is no one who rests for even an instant; every creature is driven to action by his own nature" (3:5). This (material) nature affects the tendencies one has in acting; thus, one can become enlightened in various ways and various degrees of difficulty depending on the path one chooses.

Krishna presents three paths to an enlightened state of recognizing that one's true Self is the Self of all beings and is Krishna. The paths of knowledge (i.e., meditation, etc.) and devotion (worship) are both broached as putative ways for individuals with certain dispositions to reach Krishna and become united with the ultimate Self. For people of action like Arjuna, however, Krishna elucidates a novel path involving non-attached action. Given that all creatures must constantly act, one can foster certain mental dispositions that do not enwrap one in the illusion that action is truly the result of an individuated, empirical actor (the self)—as Krishna says, "seek refuge in the attitude of detachment and you will amass the wealth of spiritual awareness" (2:49). Individuals who can act without attachment to the results of their action are on a path to enlightenment; Krishna points out "They are forever free who renounce all selfish desires and break away from the ego-cage of 'I,' 'me,' and 'mine' to be united with the Lord [ultimate Self]. This is the supreme state. Attain to this, and pass from death to immortality" (2:71-2). The main path to enlightenment, then is acting with knowledge of the constitution of the world (united in Self) and without fostering an ego-growing dependence on the results of empirical actions. In the context of the war the *Bhagavad Gita* prefaces, Arjuna is told to "act selflessly, without any thought of personal profit" (3:9) and to "fight! But stay free from the fever of the ego" (3:30). One must "always perform the work that has to be done without attachment, for man attains the Supreme by performing work without attachment . . . thou shouldst perform action also with regard for the maintenance of the world" (3:19-20). An individual in this scheme does his or her duty in a given situation because it maintains the world qua necessary action, and more importantly helps minimize the ego-cage of the empirical self.

The *Bhagavad Gita* offers Krishna as the supreme deity and constituent element of all beings. This metaphysical union of creatures with creatures and with the ultimate being in the Self is an important hallmark of this text. In light of this metaphysical scheme, ontological horizons are shaped by a plan of action that minimizes the self through non-attachment to results. This narrative emphasizes actions that cohere to social duty since they can be separated from individual desires (i.e., one is born into them in the ancient Indian situation) and can be used to minimize the self created out of desires, goals, and specific projects reliant upon these "fruits" of action.

"The Legend of Bagger Vance"

Steven Pressfield's (1995) novel is openly based upon the *Bhagavad Gita*, and he sees it as "a modern (20th century) retelling of the Hindu religious text" ("The Legend of," 2001, p. 2). Pressfield (2000) finds that there is timeless wisdom in the *Bhagavad* Gita and that he would like to convey that to western audiences through a familiar sport, namely golf. How his novel affects this wisdom in the process of translation, however, will soon be examined, after its context and content are illustrated.

Context

This novel concerns the struggles of Rannulph Junah (R. Junah, a cognate to Arjuna), a World War I veteran who is summoned (rather forcibly) by his hometown of Savannah (Georgia) to play in an epic golf tournament that is to relieve the depression-era misfortunes of the town. His

opponents are the mighty golfers, Walter Hagen and Bobby Jones, against whom the reclusive Junah seems to hold no contest. At the constant instigation and advice of his caddy and mentor, Bagger Vance (similar to "Bhagavan," a Hindu term for "Lord"), he competes in the contest and eventually finds his "authentic swing." This story is framed by the narrator of Hardy Greaves as an older man telling it to a dismayed medical student (Michael)—Hardy was a young boy who assisted Vance and Junah in that fateful golf contest. Toward the start of the recounted golf tournament, Junah gives up and retreats to a secluded part of the golf course, convinced he cannot win and that this is a worthless contest anyways. Bagger Vance then sets to persuade the golf "warrior" Junah to fight this battle and to learn some important lessons about the world and enlightenment in the process.

Constitution of the World

Through the "education" of Junah at the hands of Bagger Vance, certain conceptions of the world, humanity, and the deity (Bagger Vance) are advanced in this novel. Humanity and the world are integrally tied up in this story; when Junah begins to doubt his ability to regain his "swing" and to succeed at the golf contest, Vance begins to teach him about the nature of the world and the humans in it. For each person, there is "one authentic Swing that is ours alone. . . . Each player possesses only that one swing that he [sic] was born with, that swing which existed in him before he ever picked up a club" (p.74). This swing "has no objective reality of its own, no existence at all save when our bodies create it, and yet who can deny hat it exists, independently of our bodies, as if on another plane of reality" (p. 76). The swing is equated with the soul by Vance, although he prefers the label of "Authentic Self," (p. 76). This Authentic core of each person appears to be divided per person since each Swing/Self is unique to each person—at one point, Vance calls them "Authentic Selves" (p. 77) and as even being different between identical twins (p. 73). Vance even refers to Wordsworth, and indicates that individuals are born "already possessing a highly refined and individuated soul. . . . Our job here is to recall that soul and become it. To form a union with it" (p. 76).

His teaching to Junah is that one should realize the nature of the Authentic Self/Swing and of the world as it relates to human life. Junah's problem, according to Vance, was that "he thinks he is Junah" (p.114), a seeming state of ignorance over who Junah really is (the identity with his Authentic Self). This higher-level knowledge of how Junah conceives of himself is integral to his finding his swing and succeeding at this game. As Vance points out, "this war is not between you [Junah] and your opponents, or even you and the course . . . this battle like Reality itself takes place on a higher plane. The plane of the Self . . . . That higher battle is the one you are losing, Junah. It is why you are losing here" (p. 126). Thus, Junah's sorrows on the golf course are directly linked to his inability to peel away the layers of ego and find his authentic Self/Swing, something that each person is born with.

As the match progresses, Vance eventually reveals to Junah and Hardy the "Field," the situation in which the embodied soul finds itself enmeshed in. When Hardy is granted a vision of the Field by Vance, he could see the course and flow of forces involved with one of Jones's puts—he perceived "force lines, which I felt intuitively to be gravity or some form of supragravity, coursed as visibly as mercury around and down the slopes" (p. 143). This was the Field, and the individual Self is the Knower of the Field. The Field seemed to be composed of lines of force that were outside of experienced space and had an intentionality of their own—they penetrated all things and vibrated "in some keen cosmic harmony" (p. 145). Vance sums up this whole picture by stating, "Know that all that is flows from the union of the Field and the Knower" (p. 145). The player can search the Field, and if he or she is enlightened as to its metaphysical nature, can find their Authentic Swing. It is "as if before each swing lay an infinitude of futures, every possible way the shot could be struck, and yet pulling stronger than all others was *that which was most excellent*" (p. 146, emphasis in original). This was the player's Authentic Swing, the core of their personality that lay as a potentiality to be discovered by them through enlightened action.

Another important aspect to the world that emerges in this novel is the godhead, Bagger Vance. Vance, while taking the human form of Junah's spiritual mentor, is later revealed to be the divine Lord of all creation. Vance is portrayed as all-powerful, knowing all the wars to be fought past and future, and also was the teacher of the ancient rishis (sages) in India. Vance grants Hardy

and Junah a vision of his cosmic form in the novel, freezing time and space, and granting the two individuals the grace needed to witness his terrible form and survive. Hardy sees him as "in some horrific cosmic form rending the earth as if it were a bauble" (p. 202). Even in the face of such terror, Vance assures the two humans with his limitless love. He addresses the queries of Junah and Hardy, stating "I come again in every age, taking on human form to perform the duty I set myself. I return to right the balance of things" (p. 205). Vance's cosmic existence is transcendent, as he points out "Before Time was, I am. Before Form was, I am . . . . I am the Field *and* the Knower. Everything that is, is brought into being and sustained by me" (p. 205). As distinct from the above indications, the Individual Self is now portrayed as part and parcel of Vance—he is all, including the Field and the Knower (individual soul/Self). Vance states that he is "by your side always" (p. 207) and that Junah should continue down the enlightened path realizing Vance's divine form. Vance, contrary to earlier descriptions of the Self, now seems to unite all individuals and the Field itself in his totality—he is the Self of all beings.

Path to Enlightenment

Vance teaches Arjuna (and Hardy) about the way to spiritual enlightenment, which seems to be constituted by acting in a way informed by the metaphysical structure of the world and the divine Vance himself. Vance enumerates three stages through which a soul passes in order to reach their Authentic Swing. First, a "pure state of unconsciousness" (p. 77) is reached, in which the actor does not think about what he or she is doing. This is equivalent to having faith in the existence of your Authentic Swing. Second, one becomes "self-conscious" that they "possess an Authentic Swing but we can't repeat it" (p. 78). This constitutes some type of knowledge of the swing's existence, however. This stage of striving without felicitous outcomes can be overcome with the third, and quite rare, stage, called by Vance "Enlightenment" (p. 78). In this stage, one surrenders to the Self fully, and as such, becomes possessed by their Authentic Swing.

Vance conveys that there are three paths to the Authentic Swing. One can reach their Authentic Swing through discipline, involving hard work and perseverance at golf, or one can also study the game in a mental fashion and follow the path of wisdom. Finally, one can tread the path of love and absorb the swing though love of the game. All three of these paths rely on one thing, Vance argues—"That of surrender. Surrender of the Little Mind to the Big Mind, surrender of the personal ego to the greater wisdom of the Self" (p. 80). Thus, this novel offers a way for individuals like Junah to reach an enlightened realization of the world and his role in it by following these paths that minimize the personal self and helps maximize one's unity with their Authentic Self, identical with their Authentic Swing. After revealing his cosmic form, Vance finally advises Junah to "rest in me. Enter the Field like a warrior. Purged of ego, firm in discipline, seeking no reward save the stroke itself. Give the shot to me. I am your Self, the Ground of your being, your Authentic Swing" (p. 207). Thus, while individual Selves are portrayed as separate and unique at some parts of the novel, other parts portray the path of salvation as leading to unity with the Self of Vance, common to all creatures. Toward the end of the novel, Junah has the opportunity to "look the other way" when his golf ball illegally moves, an unfortunate incident that will cost him a crucial stroke and possibly the contest. In spite of the pleading of Hardy, Junah informs the officials and is penalized per the established rules. Vance tells Junah upon seeing this brave and selfless act, "In this hour, you have reached me" (p. 230). Vance then leaves, knowing that Junah has internalized the lessons of minimizing the desires and drives of the ego in favor of unity with one's Self. Fortunately for Junah, he continues on to tie the two great golf champions at the end of the spectacular match.

The Legend of Bagger Vance

By the very nature of the capitalist structures surrounding modern American film production, changes must be made to original literary sources to accommodate technical and content demands (Chatman, 1990; Reynolds, 1993). While the book changes the message of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the film, *The Legend of Bagger Vance* (2000), radically alters the message of the book in order to meet the demands of the individuals and companies producing this film and the audiences that are likely to "consume" it. While the film is recognized to be radically different from the novel, it still operates from the basis that the novel establishes (Rosen, 2000; Rosen, 2001). The director, Robert Redford, has indicated that he wanted to make the story of the film such that it will inspire modern audiences

in these troubled and often cynical times (Redford, 2000). Thus, certain changes are bound to occur to make the final film version more suitable for mainstream western audiences. Before such analysis is given, it is profitable to examine the context and content of this filmic version so as to ground a comparison of all three narratives at issue.

Context

The film version of the novel alters Pressfield's story line in a few key aspects. Initially, a love affair-gone-stale between Junah and Adele (the owner of the golf course and sponsor of the golf tournament) is inserted. This romantic theme is developed through the entire movie, and at the end of it, Junah emerges with the love of Adele renewed and invigorated through his miraculous come back and tie in the contest. Additionally, the narrative frame of Hardy Greaves qua old man telling the story to the dejected medical student has been reduced to Hardy's voice over at the start of the film, throughout the film, and at its conclusion. Instead of telling the story to the medical student, he tells it to the audience after his character on the screen collapses due to a heart attack on the golf course. His story takes the form of a justification for why he puts himself through this golf-induced torment—his wife used to ask, "Why play a game that seems destined to kill you?" One last important change that one notices between the film version and the novel is the reduction of mystical monologues/statements by the Bagger Vance character. Indeed, Vance's long relation in the novel with Junah has been eliminated, and he instead emerges out of the dark night and offers to caddy for Junah for "five dollar guaranteed." The key struggle on the golf course and dramatic tie at the conclusion of the contest are preserved in the film version of this story, but some analysis of how this adaptation presents (or fails to present) the world, humanity, and the character of Vance is necessitated.

Constitution of the World

The filmic presentations of the characters, their motivations, and the town all combine to produce a conception of the world that seems quite removed from the novel version of this story. More emphasis is laid on monetary gain, as Junah is pictured as gambling for money when Hardy first approaches him concerning playing in the golf contest. The monetary destitution of Hardy's father is also foregrounded, including scenes of Hardy being embarrassed by his father having to sell his shop and sweep streets to earn money. Latter in the film, Hardy attempts to get Junah to agree that his dad's employment is not worthy, to which Junah strongly retorts "Grow up Hardy . . . Your daddy is out sweeping streets because he took every last dime he had and used it to pay off every man and woman he owed . . . Your daddy stared adversity in the eye, and he beat it back with a broom." Individuals seem to be highly motivated by personal gain—Junah's golf victories are recounted, but his greatest victory is claimed to have been "winning" the love of Adele. The other golfers are portrayed as highly competitive and quite successful at their games, too. At the start of the competition, Junah looses his nerve and flees in his truck. Instead of Vance convincing him to "fight," however, it is the cheering of Savannah residents along side the road that move Junah to continue the match against his superior opponents. The denizens of his town thought he could win, and so Junah is turned back toward the battle by this encouraged victory. The portrayal of people through the film appear to highlight the accomplishment or failure to gain goals they have or had, leading one to infer the metaphysical nature of the world as individualized to the extreme.

Some indications are given that humans are linked to the natural world, however. Redford's penchant for beautiful nature shots comes through quite clearly in this film, with much focus being directed to lovely and stunning landscapes. This does seem to be employed to emphasize some sort of connection between the warring golf players and the lush natural surroundings offered by the golf course. One important scene hints at this integral connection between individuals, their Authentic Swings, and the world. Vance and Hardy are out at night measuring the course, when Hardy asks if Junah can win. Vance responds, "If he can find his Authentic Swing" while Hardy putts a ball and misses. He continues, "Inside each and every one of us is one true Authentic Swing. Something we were born with, something that is ours and our alone. Something that can't be taught to you or learned, something that gotta be remembered. Over time the world could rob us of that swing and get buried inside us in all our woulda's and coulda's and shoulda's. Some folks even forget what their swing is like." Vance instructs him to close his eyes and keep swinging the club; his words repeat

and echo over each other, as he tells Hardy "you can't make that ball go into that hole." Shots of the night and of the nature constitutive of the golf course are used, along with Vance stating "Keep swinging that club till you're part of the whole thing. It's a good thing," at which point he drops a ball in front of Hardy's swinging club and it is hit right into the hole. Here we see the Authentic Swing introduced as a unique part of each person, and something that cannot be taught, but something that must be discovered. Later in the film, Vance is questioned about Junah's problems, to which he responds, "He thinks he's Rannulph Junah." A town elder responds, "He is Rannulph Junah," to which Vance yells, "He is and he ain't." This is indicative of the bivalent nature the film posits about the world—individuals are still separated even up to the level of their Authentic Swing, but are in some sense related at a more profound level than that of ego identification.

The character of Bagger Vance holds a special role in this film, but seems to lack the divine aspects that he has in the novel and in his counter part, Krishna. He appears out of the dark night and becomes the comical, yet seemingly profound guide/caddy to Junah—upon being hailed by Junah in their first (night) encounter, Vance responds that he is "just a man...taking in some of God's glories." It is this guide that reveals (or teaches) Junah about the "Field," an important component of the world. Toward the end of the golf contest, Vance says that it is time "for you [Junah] to see the Field," and asks him to focus on Bobby Jones while he is taking practice swings. The music and the cinematography slows down, as Vance states

> He practicing swinging, almost like he's searching for something and then he finds it. Feel that focus. He got lots of shots he can choose from. . . There's only one shot that's in perfect harmony with the Field. . . one shot that's his Authentic Shot. And that shot is going to choose him. There's a perfect shot out there trying to find each and everyone of us. What we gotta do is get ourselves out of its way and let it choose us. He in the Field.

The Field surrounds all individuals and offers their wills different "shots" or actions to choose from—in this case, Vance reveals that there is a perfect shot (Authentic) that is trying to choose us. Vance appears to know about all of these aspects of the world, but seems to hold no divine power over the world. After this showing of the Field, Hardy's narratorial voice indicates that Junah kept asking questions about the Field, but Vance acted like nothing had ever happened and responded with comments about player's socks and the drying of tobacco leaves.

In a scene in the player's locker room, Vance tries to tell Junah a humorous story "about overcoming adversity," but Junah responds that this contest is just a game anyways and he doesn't want to win. His depressed state causes him to tell Vance that every soul is born alone, and then God takes everything away from these lonely souls when they die. Vance responds that "That's a sad story, Mr. Junah" and continues to mimic the tragic nature of the world that Junah proffers. Two important things become noticeable here: first, Vance appears to be separate from "God," as he remarks about the story as an ordinary listener, not one of its key characters, and second, the story echoes the film's portrayal of individuals (souls) as ultimately separated. At any rate, God as the divinity is seemingly separate from Vance, as in this story and in some other comments the narrator makes during voice-overs.

Toward the end of the film, Vance reveals his love for Junah as Junah is interrupted from moving his ball illegally from its resting place in the woods. Upon seeing Vance, he disclaims all of his suffering and burdens, to which Vance responds, "each soul has a burden . . . I'm right here with you. Time for you to come out of the shadows. You ain't alone ... I'm right here with you. I've been here all along." Vance seems to offer perpetual companionship, support, and love, although not the divinely backed version evidenced in the novel or in its precursor, the *Bhagavad Gita*. When Junah reports his ball moving and assesses a penalty on himself at a crucial point in the match, Vance embraces him and proceeds to walk off down the coastline. More of his profound nature is hinted at the very end of the film when Vance reappears, albeit to the heart-attack stricken Hardy (as old man) who stands up (alive, or as a spirit?) to witness him waving at him. Vance is a mysterious, powerful guide, but he seems to fall short of the role of god that the novel foists upon him.

Path to Enlightenment

Vance does provide Junah with some insight into the path towards enlightenment. Instead of the multiple paths offered in the novel, the film version of this narrative portrays only one path to

enlightenment, one that involves becoming one with the Field and letting one's Authentic shot choose that individual. In their first encounter, Vance tells Junah that the "Rhythm of the game is just the rhythm of life. Trick is to find your swing. You lost your swing. We gotta find it. Somewhere in the harmony of all that will be [Junah finally hits a ball well], all that was, and all that will be." The state of enlightenment, then, is finding one's unique swing. As told to Hardy, this swing is unique to each person and is something that cannot be taught or learned, but must be remembered by the individual in question.

When Vance is showing the Field to Junah through Jones's practice swings, Vance advises Junah to look at the flag "with soft eyes. . . See the place where the tides and the seasons, and the turning of the earth all come together. Where everything that is, becomes one. You got to seek that place with your soul, Junah." The path to enlightenment is to act (i.e., swing) by minimizing one's self and seeing the unity of nature and one's self. This is the "harmony with the Field" that Vance mentions to Junah as what lets Jones hit so well—indeed, "There's a perfect shot out there trying to find each and everyone of us. What we gotta do is get ourselves out of its way and let it choose us." It is this harmony and focus that Junah displays on the last crucial shot of the contest; by "being in the Field," the noise of the crowd fades away and a path to the hole lights up on the darkened green. He is in the Field, and has become in harmony with it such that his Authentic Swing/shot can choose him. Luckily for Junah, his putt goes into the gullet of the hole and ends the match in a phenomenal three-way tie. The last scene of the film reifies this notion of focus and harmony with the Field, as the stricken (older) Hardy stands up (perhaps as a spirit) and sees Vance waving to him from the sand dunes separating the course from the beach. Hardy's voice over remarks that "I play, I play on; play for the moments yet to come. Looking for my place in the Field." As Vance told Junah when he was about to alter the position of his ball while in the woods, "What I'm talking about is a game, a game that can't be won, only played." Hardy, whether dead or alive, is still playing and searching for his harmonious resting place in the Field from which all his actions can naturally follow (i.e., be Authentic). This putative lesson applies to all golfers, as well as audience members, since Vance's "game that must be played" can also be seen as referring to life, an arena with no winners or losers, but just players.

Implications

The narrative translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* into "The Legend of Bagger Vance" and then into *The Legend of Bagger Vance* holds important insights for cultural adaptations of foreign narratives. One can see how the narrative was changed as it penetrated deeper into audience-centered, mass-marketed media systems in the west. As Stroud (2001c; 2002) points out, narratives such as myths and religious stories will cater to the values of their intended audience, or will fade away quickly. Some important changes occur in the novel and film versions of this story that traces back to ancient India that comment upon our culture and the biases inherent in narrative adaptation. Following the preceding analysis, some implications and conclusions regarding this inquiry will be given concerning the nature of the world and the path to enlightenment, and how the cultural inflections of media systems influences each version accordingly.

Constitution of the World

In order to insure some amount of positive reception from audiences, a narrative and its designers must take measures to insure it accommodates an audience's conception of narrative fidelity. In terms of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the eastern notions of holism and radical monism are quite evident. Even the introduction of Krishna as a theistic focus is forced to accommodate the previous *Upanishadic* thoughts on the interconnection of reality. Individuals are seen as essentially the same at a deep metaphysical level, i.e., they all are part of Krishna—indeed, the "Knower" in all beings is Brahman/Krishna, and all else is just material nature. Even material distinctions involve group cohesion; one need only witness Krishna's pleas for Arjuna to uphold his station in society and to do his duty as a warrior to see that the individual comes second behind group, and at a higher metaphysical level, the Self that unites them all (Krishna). This notion of interconnection of Self has been quite influential in India, making the *Bhagavad Gita* one of the most popular Hindu texts over the past two thousand years (Cross, 1994).

In contrast to this, one can observe how the novel, "The Legend of Bagger Vance," and the film, *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, both shift away from such an eastern notion of Self and instead situate western conceptions of personhood and action within this narrative frame. In both versions, the self is encapsulated in the surrounding situation of a golf contest, with monetary gain and personal pride at stake. The western emphasis on pulling one's self up by their bootstraps appears to be evident here—the town of Savannah and all its people are gripped by the Great Depression and money is of high priority. "The Legend of Bagger Vance" does highlight the unity of individuals in their Authentic Self and in Bagger Vance, but it also portrays a conflicting picture of each person having their own unique Authentic Swing. After Junah finds his own Authentic Swing from the Field, he is able to play well; when his ego and arrogance overcome him, his play swoons. Either way, the finding of one's swing has large consequences *for how one performs in tasks they wish to succeed at*. Even in the novel, the focus is ultimately on finding the key to succeeding at this golf tournament for Junah.

The film, being supported by major motion picture companies and commercial interests, is even more extreme in its diminishing of monistic notions of self. Only hints are given of ultimate oneness, and even these are couched in talk of finding *one's* Authentic Swing. The separation continues to a fundamental ontological level, in that each person is individuated and has his or her own individual swing that they were born with. The device of Vance as godhead is not even employed to unite these Authentic Selves into on Self as the novel does. Instead of sending contradictory messages, like the novel version, the film adaptation seems totally westernized in that it posits unique "zones" or "swings" that each player needs to find in order to excel at their task, life, etc. Even at the end, the risen Hardy indicates he plays in an effort to search for *his* place in the Field, indicating that the Field and one's interaction with it is individuated/unique and also performance related, in that individuals can exist outside of it (they don't have their Authentic Swing, but still exist and strive toward their goals).

The aspects of divinity are also affected by the emersion into culture that each of these texts is subject to in adaptation. Krishna is definitely divine and all-powerful, and yet contains within himself all beings. In a similar fashion, some parts of "The Legend of Bagger Vance" indicate that Vance is all-powerful and that he subsumes all beings with his love and knowledge. "The Legend of Bagger Vance" does seem to privilege western conceptions of the deity, however, as references are made to "God" separate from Vance, and even Vance takes on characteristics of the Judeo-Christian (and Islamic) God in that he is portrayed at points as granting grace to his separated followers. Gods in the western traditions tend to be separate from humans in an ontological sense (Campbell, 1988; 1990); the novel avoid the monism and strong union of all creatures in Krishna for a weaker connection between the Selves of the players and the Self of Vance. The film, however, is even more extreme in eliminating any hints that Vance (or God) is identical with all creatures. Redford, overtly or covertly influenced by western tradition, seems to separate the hero (Junah) from any inkling of divinity; instead, he follows a "hero-quest" model, remarking about the novel version of his film, "It's the classic journey of a hero who falls into darkness through some disconnect with *his* soul, and then of his coming back into the light with the help of a spiritual guide" ("About the Production," 2000, p. 1). Redford's emphasis in the film version is true to the standard hero-quest model in that it focuses on a human hero overcoming challenges, not on the pure metaphysical nature of the world (Campbell, 1973; Volger, 1998; Voytilla, 1999). The emphasis of the filmic retelling is on a widely acceptable competitive "resurrection" of the protagonist, something that can be easily modeled in general by most western audience members. Getting western audiences to accept (i.e., believe and/or spend money on) narrative reasons for a monistic version of the world is an incredible feat; *The Legend of Bagger Vance* instead goes for the easier target of getting audience members to identify with a protagonist who is facing overwhelming odds, bad luck, but through focus can gain goals and rewards for his individual self. As Redford indicates, he fashions the film adaptation to make Vance a "'coyote trickster'. . . [which] means you're never really going to know what this character's up to—the very person who is going to describe the mysteries of life to you is himself a mystery" ("About the Production," 2000, p. 3). Vance becomes less of a god, and much more of a mysterious, comical guide for Junah [and the identifying audience]. This is much more amiable to general

western audiences, immune as they are from overt religious messages and from monistic eastern views. The deity is absent and westernized in the ultimate film version, and Vance's character is reduced to such an extent that the National Council of Hindu Temples has voiced its worries over a misrepresentation of their ideas and religious conception ("Hindus Upset," 2000; "Holy Shot," 2000), given the posited connection Pressfield puts between "Bhagavan" (Lord Krishna) and "Bagger Vance" (a comical/mystical caddy in the film version). Additionally, the fundamental unity of the Self in deity and the world gradually disappears as the narrative tracks deeper in more expensive and more widespread American modes of production and distribution (i.e., cinema).

Path to Enlightenment

The reasons for action that these narratives offer to their respective audiences also differ in important ways. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the emphasis on enlightenment through action is quite evident, as Krishna repeatedly proffers non-attached action as a way to foster one's association with him (Self). The actions enjoined to the audience are based upon this holiness in the world and between beings, and as such is not far removed for Indian audiences (ancient or modern). The story on action, however, changes significantly in the progression from novel to film, mainly through the emphasis it places on the metaphysical and physical significance of action. The novel still holds shadows of the *Bhagavad Gita*'s emphasis on non-attached action, even discussing it in self-sacrificial terms at points. Vance implores Junah to use his advice and paths of finding his Authentic Swing to reduce the "Small Mind" and instead to emphasize the "Large Mind" (Authentic Self). Like the *Bhagavad Gita*, the emphasis on action being conducive to the spiritual improvement of the individual through helping him or her realize that their individuality is ultimately illusory, the novel aims for an improvement of Junah through action, or as Vance puts it in the beginning of the work, "entering the spirit by way of the flesh" (p. 33). The novel, however, does place a capitalist, monetary frame behind the improvement, and allows shades of individual triumph and success to shine through into the narrative. Whereas the *Bhagavad Gita* is very useful as a spiritual text because it mainly focuses on the larger issues of metaphysics and the unity of the world, the religious and philosophical reasons for action in the novel are oriented more toward the pragmatist western audiences who will be familiar with monetary conquests and the need for financial gain via individual initiative.

The Legend of Bagger Vance explodes this theme even more, much to the expense of any type of religious or philosophical undertones. Instead of tying non-attached action or searches for one's Authentic Self (tied to all others), the film portrays the reduction of Junah's ego as a necessary step to *properly build it up again*. The audience leaves seeing the main protagonist start the match faltering because he lacks his swing, succeed when he finds his Authentic Swing, fail when his arrogance overpowers his Authentic Swing, and ultimately succeed when he displays honesty and individual initiate albeit with a touch of humbleness. The spiritual improvement of the character is a mere means to the end of improving his golf game—the real goal is apparently the winning of the golf contest (which Junah does), the regaining of lost love (which he does), and the development of personal honesty and skill in achieving one's future goals (he leaves tying the two great golfers of the era). One must "play on" in the Field, as the elder Hardy narrates, so an individual who is aptly prepared with their Authentic Swing will be more successful (like Junah at the conclusion of his golf match). Will Smith, the actor who played the Vance character in the film, provides a telling commentary on this shift away from the spiritual end of enlightenment to more of individual success and triumph in attaining goals over others; he states,

> It's not about golf! The lesson he's [Vance] trying to teach is the search for the authentic swing. The concept of the authentic swing is the zone. Michael Jordan scored 63 points in Boston. He was in the zone that night. The movie asserts that that's the place that athletes need not be by accident. ("Will Smith," 2000, p. 60)

Like star athletes, individuals are urged by this film to improve themselves by finding their Authentic Self. The reason why is so that they can excel at whatever they desire—be it career, sporting dominance (like Michael Jordan), relationships, etc. Finding one's "zone" that leads to success like the lighted path leads to the eighteenth hole for Junah is the underwritten message of *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, a significant departure from the ascetic tendencies in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Perhaps this

is why reviewers noticed that the film and the book are "the story of how a man rediscovers his soul and overcomes adversity" (Ansen, 2000, p. 80), emphasizing the overcoming of obstacles to personal growth and individual success. Instead of noticing any linking of humans, the divine, and nature, viewer of the film where left wondering "who Bagger Vance was, emerging from nowhere and vanishing back into it" (Simon, 2000). As is seemingly demanded by the mainstream American audiences and the companies/directors who cater to them, the narrative of *The Legend of Bagger Vance* is saturated with western notions of deity and action emphasizing personal accomplishment, whereas the original work (the *Bhagavad Gita*) emphasized the monistic unity of the world and deity, and a path of non-attached action that lead to enlightenment. Culture truly does affect how narratives are translated and adapted, and differing levels of systemic control (i.e., the film industry) exert an even greater homogenizing affect, at least in terms of religious and philosophical themes that are offered to general western audiences.

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