

(Re-)interpretations and (re-)creations in contemporary Afrikaans cinema: adapting popular non-fiction into popular film in *Vergeet My Nie (Forget Me Not)*

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Abstract

Afrikaans film adaptations offer exciting opportunities for exploring the productive tensions between the source material and the adapted work. In this article, the authors aim to explore, by way of a case study, which key processes informed the screenwriter's adaption process in writing *Vergeet My Nie* (Prinsloo, 2019). The authors also explain key concepts that help to retroactively reframe the screenwriter's process, specifically (re-)interpretation, (re-)creation and fidelity. This process is critically contextualised in the feature film collaborations between *Huisgenoot*, The Film Factory and kykNET, which operate within specific Afrikaans cultural and industrial structures. This article demonstrates how creative challenges of (re-)interpretation, (re-)creation and issues of fidelity can be overcome to deliver an adaptation that appeals to a popular mainstream viewership.

1. Introduction

This article opens with a critical contextualization of the *Huisgenoot*-Film Factory-kykNET feature film collaborations, *Vir die Voëls* and *Vergeet My Nie*, followed by a case study of Tarryn-Tanille Prinsloo's adaptation process focussing exclusively on *Vergeet My Nie* (Prinsloo, 2019). This article acknowledges the gap in adaptation studies where "the stakeholders, institutions, commercial arrangements" of an adaptation that "govern the flow of content across media" have often been neglected (Murray, 2008b:6). At the same time, we hope to also acknowledge Leitch's (2008:69) point to move away from one-on-one comparisons between the source material and the adaptation and to instead provide insight into the creative writing process that informed the various products. In doing so, we aim to avoid what Murray (2008a:4) justifiably calls "the frankly unilluminating finding" that there are both similarities and differences between source material and adapted work.

In certain studies of Afrikaans film adaptations, scholars have focused on adaptations of youth novels and Afrikaans novels. With regards to the latter, Du Plooy (2014:126) focuses on *Roepman* (Eilers, 2011) - and specifically the male body in the film- while also broadening her scope to address adaptations of stage plays. Adendorff and Van Dyk (2014) also focus on *Roepman* (Eilers, 2011), and use specific scenes from the film to explore the creative choices and techniques involved in the adaptation process. Adendorff and Van Dyk (2014) explore how the film *Roepman* (Eilers, 2011) maintains fidelity to the novel it is based on. Here, Adendorff and Van Dyk (2014:640) refer to the spirit of the narrative that needs to feature in the adaptation. In *Roepman*'s case, novelist Jan van Tonder was asked whether the adaptation successfully captures and replicates his intent. On the notion of faithfulness to the source material and fidelity criticism, more recently Van Niekerk and Van der Merwe (2020:110) demonstrate that Christiaan Olwagen's Afrikaans feature film adaptation *Die Seemeeu* (*The Seagull*, 2018) "confirms the theoretical view that the subjectivity of the adapter is all-important" in translating and adapting source material into a new cultural and political context. Van Niekerk and Van der Merwe (2020:122) add that Olwagen's adaptation links stylistically and ideologically to his other feature films, thereby cementing his status as contemporary Afrikaans auteur.

Vergeet My Nie (Prinsloo, 2019) as a case study differs from the above articles in a number of ways, firstly by not focusing predominantly on fidelity. Secondly, this article examines the adaptation process from a unique kind of source material: a personal autobiographical narrative published in a popular magazine as a competition entry. This narrative would form the basis of the feature film screenplay *Vergeet My Nie* (Prinsloo, 2019). Thirdly, the screenwriter, Tarryn-Tanille Prinsloo, here critically reflects on her own adaption processes. As demonstrated by the critical contextualization that introduces the case study, the authors acknowledge and describe the production dynamics between various stakeholders (*Huisgenoot*, kykNET and The Film Factory) that inevitably in many ways informed the final film version released in cinemas in 2020.

2. A critical contextualisation of *Vergeet My Nie*

2.1 *Huisgenoot* and the popular imagination

Steyn (2016:486) comments on “[t]he vitality of the Afrikaans language in the commercialized sphere” as demonstrated by the popularity of *Huisgenoot*, which at the time of Steyn’s writing had “the highest circulation figures of all magazines in the country”. The magazine targets a mostly white readership, having had an important role in “the process of imagining the Afrikaner nation into existence” (Steyn, 2016:491). Founded in 1916, *Huisgenoot* nonetheless focuses on broad mass-market content that appeals beyond a historically conservative white Afrikaans readership (Wasserman, 2009:74). Part of the magazine’s appeal is located in its evocation of attractive lifestyles, personal tragedies and against-the-odds triumphs, or, put differently by way of Chrostowska (2010:64): “The *poignancy* of nostalgia in the modern world stems from a coincidence in it of excitement and suffering, salvation and self-sacrifice” (emphasis in original).

Rabe (2016:58) confirms that *Huisgenoot* offers an “entertainment-focused popular type of journalism”; in such an approach, it is economic sustainability and profit, and not a conscious nation-(re)building project that is a strategic priority for the publication. Indeed, the only idealism that had remained from the magazine’s earlier decades was, as Froneman (2004:77) describes it, a desire for an increase in circulation. *Huisgenoot* is a brand of certain Afrikaans cultural appeal in its own right. This shift was prefigured in 1978 when the editor at the time, Niel Hammann, envisioned a magazine with an emphasis on popular content and which saw television not as a competitor but as a collaborator (Rabe, 2016:74). This intermedia approach would later crystallise in *Huisgenoot*’s television and film collaborations with Afrikaans cultural behemoth kykNET. In the case of two feature films *Vir die Voëls* (*For the Birds*, Krog 2016) and *Vergeet My Nie* (*Forget Me Not*, Velts 2020), readers and viewers could explore different facets of the stories in a transmedial manner: watching the films; (re)reading the original *Huisgenoot* accounts that formed the basis of these films; keeping up with the real-life inspirations of these films in the form of online interviews and television content and reading the novelisations of each of these films. As Wasserman (2009:70) contends, the “strong economic position of the Afrikaans audience can be seen as the motivating factor behind a range of media initiative that had the effect of privatising Afrikaans culture for access by a paid audience” – in this sense, the paying audience is the loyal *Huisgenoot* readership whose commitments to Afrikaans popular culture extend to their viewing options, especially as facilitated and endorsed by the magazine (also see, for instance, *Huisgenoot*’s influence on taste-making, cultural values and identity in Afrikaans music as per Pretorius (2013)). It is this paying audience who would hypothetically be the audience for the films *Vir die Voëls* (Krog, 2016) and *Vergeet My Nie* (Velts, 2020).

2.2 *Huisgenoot*, kykNET and The Film Factory: a collaboration

As a highly salient part of the “Afrikaans culture industry”, kykNET, in Steyn’s (2016:499) view, has become “the largest Afrikaner-majority enclave today” and it produces and strengthens “certain existing, separatist tendencies”. While these tendencies may be quite pronounced in print, their film collaborations with The Film Factory, *Vir die Voëls* (Krog, 2016) and *Vergeet My Nie* (Velts, 2020), repackages the 1970s and the 1990s as nostalgic experiences of personal triumph and tragedy against the backdrops of respectively the South African Border War and the expatriate (even gap-year) experience in London. As Jennifer Delisle (2006:389) writes, “[n]ostalgia is a slippery word; it can be experiential – based on one’s own personal memories – or it can be cultural – based on collective memories or cultural myths”. A nostalgic experience is often personally and collectively resonant. There is an economic imperative in the potential profitability of products that aim to evoke nostalgia given nostalgia’s “potential for profit” (Chrostowska 2010:52), as visible in *Vir die Voëls*’ wartime and other period details, and in *Vergeet My Nie*’s use of specific songs (see below) to evoke positive feelings in broad recognition of the hypothetical young Afrikaans-speaking individual’s expatriate experience (this individual would now be a middle-aged viewer).

With the above framing in mind, the South African film production company The Film Factory has collaborated with the Afrikaans magazine *Huisgenoot* on two feature films, *Vir die Voëls* (Krog 2016) and *Vergeet My Nie* (Velts 2020). Both films were developed and adapted from readers’ submissions to the magazine and were made to appeal to a broad viewership. According to the National Film and Video Foundation (2016:13; 2020:9), *Vir die Voëls* grossed an impressive R 8 541 773 at the box office, nearly three times more than other major Afrikaans releases *Jou Romeo* (*Your Romeo*, Velts 2016) and *Sy Klink Soos Lente* (*She Is Like Spring*, Van Rooyen 2016). The film earned R 4 727 479 in its opening weekend alone (Opperman, 2016:1). By comparison, *Vergeet My Nie* grossed R 3 710 344 upon its initial release which fell outside of the holiday season. Released theatrically on 14 February 2020, the film’s box-office underperformance can partially be ascribed to the increasing interventions in response to a global pandemic that necessitated a South African national lockdown in March 2020.

Released on 25 November 2016, *Vir die Voëls* benefitted from a theatrical release that coincided with school vacation, the spirit of the holidays and the public’s ability to pursue an increase in leisure time. At the time of writing, *Vir die Voëls* held a 7.9/10 average on the Internet Movie Database (2021), while *Vergeet My Nie* stood on 5.8/10, with around 200 fewer user ratings than its predecessor.¹ Likely, the former film’s period setting in small-town South Africa and its air of nostalgia contributed to higher audience numbers, while the latter film’s appeal to the popular expatriate setting of London (while itself constituting a specific period) did not offer the same dramatic promise. In her film reviews, Reney Warrington (2016; 2020) points out that while *Vir die Voëls* addresses weighty themes around the border war,

alcohol and family abuse, *Vergeet My Nie* is, in her view, too much of a made-for-profit cultural product with a made-for-TV aesthetic.

Starring Simoné Northmann and Francois Jacobs, *Vir die Voëls*, directed by Quentin Krog, is based on the real-life story of Irma Humpel and Sampie de Klerk. The film is set in the late 1970s and details Sampie's attempts to convince the fiercely independent and free-spirited Irma to marry him. There is a similar character dynamic at work in *Vergeet My Nie*. The Film Factory website (2020) describes *Vergeet My Nie* as follows:

After a dreadful break-up, a strikingly cultured student stuck in the small town of Potchefstroom, packs her bags for the adventure and bright lights of London. She falls head over heels in love with a very attractive, barefoot Namibian, but allows her fears to get the better of her. When he knocks on her door years later, with promises of horizons and a life together, she can play safe and choose the alluring city lights, or she can risk it all for sunsets, sand dunes and barefoot-love.

The film stars Marguerite van Eeden and Sean-Marco Vorster in the romantic leads, with Fiona Ramsey in a key supporting role as the mentor figure Vivienne.

The initial appeal in adapting stories available in the press and the public record is in the original story's specific character details about identifiable individuals; their backstories (to inform the character biographies) of the individuals in question; and how these stories came to public attention. In the cases of *Vir die Voëls* and *Vergeet My Nie*, *Huisgenoot* hosted two competitions for readers to submit their true-love stories to the magazine. The winning entry would detail how, against the odds, true love won the day as the couple ended up together. This story would become the basis of an Afrikaans feature film backed by kykNET and the industrially dominant Gauteng-based production company The Film Factory. The first competition was in 2015 and the release of *Vir die Voëls* in 2016 aligned with *Huisgenoot's* centenary celebrations. The winners of the second competition were announced in August 2018, with *Vergeet My Nie* set up as a Valentine's Day release in 2020 (see Fockema, 2018). Both films would enjoy considerable exposure in *Huisgenoot's* pages in the build-up to each film's release. For instance, for *Vir die Voëls*, in their 1 December 2016 edition *Huisgenoot* ran a two-page article entitled "Dis Pure Ons op die Skerm!" ("That is totally us on screen!") to market the film by explicitly claiming an authenticity for what viewers could expect on screen by quoting such authenticity from the real-life individuals on whose stories the film is based (Fockema, 2016:22–23). The 15 December 2016 edition of *Huisgenoot* carried a full-page advertisement for the film; the layout of this advertisement suggests a movie poster modelled on a *Huisgenoot* magazine cover. Similarly, *Vergeet My Nie* enjoyed substantial print and online exposure (via Netwerk24); the table below offers a selection of key stories published online before and after *Vergeet My Nie's* theatrical release in South Africa. Table 1 below indicates *Huisgenoot's* investment in promoting and maintaining awareness of *Vergeet My Nie* in its many forms: novel, film, and real-life account.

Table 1: *Vergeet My Nie* (Velts, 2020): selected promotions and stories in *Huisgenoot*.

07 February 2020	Promotion for the novel of the film written by François Bloemhof.
13 February 2020	Irma Humpel, the real-life inspiration for the eponymous character in <i>Vir die Voëls</i> (2016) pens a letter to Mardaleen and Hugo, telling them about the exciting time – “the experience of a life-time” – that lies ahead for them (Fockema, 2020).
14 February 2020 <i>Vergeet My Nie</i> in theatres	Mardaleen Derks explains how the film about her life made her fall in love with husband Hugo all over again.
	<i>Huisgenoot</i> editor Yvonne Beyers thanks Mardaleen and Hugo for their inspiring story, and thanks The Film Factory for making the film and thanks kykNET as <i>fliekvennoot</i> (film partners) (Beyers, 2020).
21 February 2020	<i>Huisgenoot</i> visits Mardaleen and Hugo on their farm in Namibia.
28 February 2020	<i>Huisgenoot</i> features a promotional article on the film’s nostalgic 1990s soundtrack.
	<i>Huisgenoot</i> staff share their favourite scenes from the film.
20 March 2020	Director André Velts regales readers with behind-the-scenes tales, specifically highlighting how the production team overcame certain challenges during production and how to maintain the film’s period aesthetic (Coetzee, 2020).
04 July 2020 <i>Vergeet My Nie</i> available for home viewing.	Mardaleen and Hugo Derks reflect on life after <i>Vergeet My Nie</i> .

Quentin Krog had previously directed the big-budget adaptation of Leon van Nierop’s bestselling novel *Ballade vir ’n Enkeling* (*Ballad for a Loner*, previously a popular Afrikaans language television series) in 2015 to considerable box-office success, also for The Film Factory. Krog is also credited for the *Vir die Voëls* screenplay along with Sean Robert Daniels and Tina Kruger. Daniels would later sustain his collaboration with The Film Factory as contributing screenwriter for *Stroomop* (*Against the Current*, Botha 2018) and the police comedy *Thys & Trix* (Krog, 2018), the latter again a writing collaboration with Krog and other writers. The screenplay adapted Irma de Klerk’s competition entry *Slim Vang Sy Baas* (2015), and Tina Kruger would also collaborate with François Bloemhof on the novelisation of *Vir die Voëls* (Bloemhof & Kruger 2017). Kruger had previously worked as a writer on the

feature film romantic comedy-dramas *French Toast* (Krüger & Stolp, 2015) and *Leading Lady* (Pretorius, 2014). As the first, commercially-minded creative collaboration between *Huisgenoot*, kykNET and The Film Factory, *Vir die Voëls* demonstrated a critical and commercial viability for such collaborations and made possible the production of *Vergeet My Nie*.

In contrast to Kruger above, Tarryn-Tanille Prinsloo's feature film writing started with the drama *Treurgrond* (*For This Is My Blood*, Roodt, 2015) and would later include a horror, *Siembamba* (*Lullaby*, Roodt, 2017) as well as two films that centred on young women's experiences of love and loss respectively: *Trouvoete* (*Itching to Get Married*, Roodt 2015) and *Mignon 'Mossie' Van Wyk* (Roodt, 2016). Prinsloo's propensity for woman-centred romantic narratives in which career ambitions need to be brought into alignment with romantic desires positioned her as a suitable choice to write the similarly-themed *Vergeet My Nie*.

It is clear that in these adaptations several writers are adapting the same story for different media (print, film) and that these adaptations speak back to each other. These various adaptations can be best described as distinct yet complementary (re)creations (see below). Across the adaptations and (re)creations, authorship ranges from the autobiographical to feature film screenplays and novelisations, featuring different writers at every stage. Between *Huisgenoot*, kykNET and The Film Factory there would have been numerous sources of input in the pre-production phase on the feature film screenplays and their development to ensure that the best – which is to say, most broadly appealing and potentially popular – screenplays are written.

3. Adapting *Vergeet My Nie* from published personal narrative to feature film

Director André Velts made his feature film debut with the Afrikaans language romantic comedy *Knysna* in 2014. The youth-oriented drama *Die Pro* (*The Pro*, 2015) and *Jou Romeo* (*Your Romeo*, 2016) established the director's propensity for broad commercial entertainment until the release of the drama *Raaiselkind* (*Riddle Child*, 2017). All three of these films are adaptations. *Die Pro* (Velts, 2015) is based on Leon de Villiers' acclaimed novel, which won three major literary awards between 1997 and 1998: the Sanlam Beginner's Prize, the Scheepers Prize for Youth Literature and the MER-award. *Jou Romeo* (Velts, 2016) is an Afrikaans language adaptation of William Shakespeare's tale of star-crossed lovers by way of similar American teen fare such as *Ten Things I Hate About You* (Junger, 1999). The film was adapted into a novel by Fanie Viljoen in 2016 and published by Tafelberg. *Raaiselkind* (Velts, 2017), which explores the impact of autism on a family, was based on the acclaimed 2001 novel by Annelie Botes.

Vergeet My Nie marked Velts' return to *Knysna's* romantic light entertainment. It too would be an adaptation, in this instance of a personal published narrative in *Huisgenoot*. Upon reading Tarryn-Tanille Prinsloo's screenplay for the film, Velts personally contacted the real-life individuals Mardaleen and Hugo for photographs and anecdotes about their lives. He would reference these materials for further guidance in assembling an appropriate film aesthetic by, for instance, aiming for the exact replication of specific places (such as Mardaleen's room in her student residence) thereby aiming for a high level of historical verisimilitude (Afrikaans Films, 2020).

During our discussion of Tarryn-Tanille Prinsloo's page-to-screen adaptation process, we draw on and examine *Vergeet My Nie* (Velts, 2020) as a case study. A case study may "offer depth and comprehensiveness for understanding a specific phenomenon, enabling inductive and rich description" (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006:262).

As a case study, this discussion offers valuable information on specific creative processes that may constructively inform other individuals' creative processes while not making any authoritative claim to generalisability.

Adaptation studies traditionally favour the analysis of fixed, canonical works over analysing the creative process *per se*, thereby suggesting a bias towards unified media such as the source text and the final adapted film, away from the adapted screenplay that occupies the space between them (Sherry, 2016:3). Sherry (2016:11) posits that "the screenplay is a text that *exists* to be interpreted and remediated", whereas literary texts such as the novel and short story demonstrate the *potential* for adaptation (emphases in original). However, rather than considering the screenplay for adapted work as a blueprint, Sherry (2016:11) argues that there is a sense of liminality and a state of flux implicit in screenwriting as a potential area of exploration for future adaptation studies. Below, the authors critically reflect on this state of flux implicit in the writing process of the *Vergeet My Nie* (Prinsloo, 2019) screenplay against Hutcheon's (2006) two-step process, as well as Cahir's (2006) aesthetic rubric concerning notions on fidelity.

Adaptation theory inherently warrants discussions around source material, where most often the source material is a literary text adapted for the screen i.e. in feature film adaptations. Stam and Raengo (2004:45) explain, however, that "virtually all films, not only adaptations, remakes, and sequels, are mediated through intertextuality and writing" while Leitch (2003:150) questions the difference between a film's relation to its literary source and its relation to the screenplay. In the case of *Vergeet My Nie* (Prinsloo, 2019), the source material was the short story, *Op 'n Fiets deur die Sneeu* submitted by Mardaleen Derks in 2018 for the *Huisgenoot* Competition (Anon., 2017). Bloemhof's (2020) novel of the same title, is based on a draft of the *Vergeet My Nie* (Prinsloo, 2019) screenplay; Bloemhof's writing process coincided with the screenwriting process at a time when a locked version of the screenplay was imminent but not yet realised. Here already a productive dynamic occurs as

Price (2010:54) regards each screenplay draft as an adaptation of the previous draft, thereby suggesting that a film is in effect an adaptation of the screenplay. Accordingly, the screenplay can provide clarity regarding the *process* of adaptation. As Boozer (2008:1) explains, the “composition of the screenplay illuminates the evolution of ideas that will determine the film production’s relationship to its source text”. Therefore, this section in actuality deals with three adaptations, *Vergeet My Nie* (Prinsloo, 2019), *Vergeet My Nie* (Bloemhof, 2020) and *Vergeet My Nie* (Velts, 2020) with *Op ’n Fiets deur die Sneeu* (Derks, 2018) serving as the source text.²

Bloemhof (2020:3) echoes notions intrinsic in adaptation discourse stating that “the director has to present the content by using a visual as well as cinematic language” whilst a novelist can re-imagine the inner thoughts and feelings of characters. This emphasises Desmond and Hawkes’ (2006:35) explanation that when adapting a literary text for the screen, “the unfixed becomes fixed in exact screen images suggested by the screenwriter but ultimately selected by the director”. In his Foreword, Bloemhof (2020:3) further posits that he used the screenplay as a departure point for writing the novel, acknowledging that the approaches to writing books and films differ significantly. Desmond and Hawkes (2006:34-35) delineate that these differences arise since “the text’s verbal language and the film’s pictorial and aural language have distinct qualities prohibiting the exact replication of a text on screen”, or in this case of a book based on a screenplay that was adapted from a short story.

In terms of process, Tarryn-Tanille Prinsloo, followed a similar adaptation approach to some contemporary theorists by first focussing her attention on the key events, characters and settings provided by Derks (2018) in *Op ’n Fiets deur die Sneeu* thereby identifying what would need to be translated or transposed to another medium, since the story is ultimately realised in the discourse (Desmond & Hawkes 2006:39). Seymour Chatman (1980:19) clarifies “story as *what* is depicted in a narrative and discourse as to *how*” (emphasis in original).

Regarding this discourse of the narrative, Cahir (2006:97) writes that the goal behind adaptation is not a literal transfer from the written word to the recorded image, since works created for the former do not always work for the latter, and vice versa. Instead, the goal of adaptation is to locate and utilise audio-visual correlatives that convey and communicate aspects of the source material. As demonstrated in the discussions below, this was the case with transferring Derks’ (2018) written story to a screenplay ultimately meant for the screen. As the screenwriter, Prinsloo was required to ‘translate’ the words into images not only by interpreting the source material but also by developing it further to optimally serve its intended audio-visual format. To critically reflect on *how* Prinsloo approached this process, she considers a similar deconstruction format to the one suggested by Deutelbaum (2016:29-44).³ Concurring with Deutelbaum (2016:29-44), the sections below suggest that refashioning a text involves multiple steps and varieties of re-creation than are described by Hutcheon’s (2006) two-step process.

3.1 Adaptation as (re-)interpretation

At the outset of the adaptation process for writing the screenplay, *Vergeet My Nie* (Prinsloo, 2019), it was clear that despite having to ultimately (re-)create events and characters, certain key components needed to be (re-)interpreted first. *Op 'n Fiets deur die Sneeu* (Derks, 2018) is mostly a retelling of Mardaleen and Hugo's love story through the first-person point of view of Mardaleen Derks. She recounts her memories by pointing out what Prinsloo regarded as key descriptors in terms of mise-en-scène; primary and secondary characters; and events and places associated with the period of activity which the characters occupied.⁴

Considering events and places through an interpretation of Mardaleen's written personal narrative, it was clear that the city of Potchefstroom, a primary location during the film's opening act, was represented by the student residence, *Vergeet My Nie*, and two student communes, Huis Bolyf and Huis Onderlyf; Hugo's white Citi-Golf; Bourbon's and Viking's Loft, two popular social spaces for students; student parties to the sounds of popular artists including but not limited to Rodriquez, Nirvana, Koos Kombuis and Valiant Swart. Characters from Potchefstroom mentioned by Derks (2018) and featured in the screenplay included the 'untouchable' legend, Hugo Derks (Sean-Marco Vorster), her friend, Willem (Christopher van der Westhuizen) and best friend, Juliene (whose name is changed in the screenplay to Lara Hattingh, played by Kenley Swart). Drawing on Mardaleen's written personal narrative and knowing that she eventually leaves South Africa for the United Kingdom, it was important to depict Potchefstroom as a socially vibrant place that, for all its ostensible quality of life, also needed to come across as suffocating. Her dream of travelling and exchanging the small-town ambience of Potchefstroom for the cosmopolitan diversities of London was another determining factor.

Prinsloo condensed Mardaleen (Marguerite van Eeden) and Lara's long and winding road that ultimately led them to Huis Konnetie. Here her arc crosses with that of Hugo, who – along with a couple of other South African expatriates – was also staying in Huis Konnetie. Although Prinsloo already introduced the characters through a meet-cute simulating Mardaleen's real-life memory, it is only in London that Hugo's character begins to occupy a literal and metaphorical space in Mardaleen's life-world. To describe and demonstrate their relationship challenges and pleasures, Prinsloo centred on Mardaleen Derks' phrase *tuimeldroërliefde* (literally, tumble dryer love). For Derks (2018), the reference of *tuimeldroërliefde*, which strategically features sporadically throughout the novel and the film, represented and best described her and Hugo falling in (and out of) love and navigating the challenges and pleasures of romantic pursuits (e.g. a jealous Hugo getting into a bar fight after a man shows interest in Mardaleen or their late-night strolls across London Bridge where he gives her the nickname Jakkals (Fox)⁵). Derks' (2018) personal narrative recounts mornings where Hugo would bring her coffee and drop off her warm tumble-dried laundry just before she got out of bed; however, this gesture is merely hinted towards in a brief moment in the film.

In *Vergeet My Nie*, London was showcased in various popular tourist destinations such as Buckingham Palace, Hyde Park, Piccadilly Circus, London Bridge and Trafalgar Square.⁶ While the film locations align with the tourist gaze of the English capital, it also represented the lifestyles of numerous young Saffas (a colloquial expression for a person from South Africa) (De Villiers, 2020:[sp]) living and working in London. Prinsloo utilised the characters' status as Saffas for contextual purposes, and not as a thematic focus. The focus was on the burgeoning and later more manifest romantic relationship between Mardaleen and Hugo. Later, the film shifts to a third primary location, Cape Town (another popular international tourist destination), where the Mother City's lights symbolised everything Mardaleen thought she needed to be happy: the city exists, for the character, as a constructive intersection between the local (represented earlier by Potchefstroom) and the global (represented by London).

Another key event that required (re-)interpretation was Mardaleen's parents' divorce after her father's affair. Such events need to be considered in terms of information reveal: at what point does the viewer learn something new about a character, and how does this new knowledge change how the viewer might understand the character? In the screenplay, Prinsloo used her father's infidelity to ground Mardaleen's fear of commitment. This fear, viewers understand, negatively informs her views on romance and impedes her romantic relationships. Often in the screenplay, Mardaleen is written as the cynical moralist in contrast to her counterpoint, the optimistic and tolerant Hugo. In a screenplay where there is no major external villain to threaten the protagonist, the antagonist is located in Mardaleen's fears and insecurities. Mardaleen's parents are for the most part absent from the screen, while her relationship with them is further developed and contextualised in the screenplay through audio-visual correlatives such as telephone conversations and postcards.

According to Sherry (2016:6), the challenge in writing an adapted screenplay is not transposing the movement of characters, place, location or other elements of physical action whilst remaining faithful to the source material, but rather in "the *specificity* of literary devices found in first-person, conscious, internal narration; or the third-person, omnipotent narrator with their expositions on the thoughts, musings and unconscious compulsions of various characters" (emphasis in original). Dialogue, along with diegetic and non-diegetic sound, could be regarded as some of the most essential elements of screenwriting, which in some cases could be transposed directly from the text as source material to the screenplay. Although *Op 'n Fiets deur die Sneeu* (Derks, 2018) is written from a first-person perspective along with providing some direct lines of dialogue, Prinsloo and Bloemhof re(interpreted) these lines elsewhere throughout the screenplay and novel respectively. Whereas Bloemhof (2020) predominantly uses the dialogue from the screenplay draft, he also meaningfully (re-) interprets a character's internal dialogue through, for instance, a close third-person point-of-view: "Dit voel asof sy al een hierso is wat 'n las met haar saamdra..." [It feels as though she's the only one here carrying a burden with her...] (Bloemhof, 2020:11).

One of the challenges in writing a dynamic adaptation is that the interior lives of specific individuals need to be somehow externalised in action and characters' behaviour (Lucey, 1996:13). Much of the music used in the film, such as *Lalie* (1990) and *Lisa se Klavier* (1990) by Koos Kombuis and *Bubblegum on my Boots* (1996) by the Springbok Nude Girls, was intentionally written in the screenplay to contribute to the film's period details and to externalise the characters' interiorities.

3.2 *Vergeet My Nie* and adaptation as varieties of (re-)creation⁷

At the end of Bloemhof's novel, Mardaleen reflects in a post-narrative note as follows:

There are some large differences between me and Hugo's real life, and how it plays out in the screenplay and therefore also the novel. With this process, I realized that no one's circumstances can simply be retold - there are all sorts of creative changes that need to be made to make everything work!⁸

This reflection captures the productively volatile nature of adaptations as existing from a variety of (re-)creations. Following Cahir (2006:186), the process of translating a short story like *Op 'n Fiets deur die Sneeu* (Derks, 2018) to a screenplay that will ultimately be interpreted for the screen, presents a challenge due to its inherent brevity. At the essence of their love story is the tug of war between Mardaleen's infatuation with the dynamic opportunities of the city and Hugo's love for the peace and tranquillity he associates with the horizons of Namibia. When giving screen life to this romantic character tension, including most of the important actual events, the characters, time jumps and location changes into a 116-page screenplay required a significant amount of (re-)creation. Writing the screenplay, Prinsloo found that she was inevitably required to explore reasons, methods and means through which the screenplay (and film) could extend (and in some cases condense) the original literary source logistically as well as cinematically. To navigate this, certain moments needed expansion, such as Mardaleen's role as carer for Vivienne, a story arc that served to highlight Mardaleen's career goals and determination to be an independent woman. Other events such as Mardaleen's relationship in Cape Town were omitted.

Prinsloo's initial (re-)creation started with changing the identities of most characters except for Mardaleen and Hugo. Stephanie (Leché Joubert) and Albert (Rikus Strauss) are fictitious characters created to represent the fact that three couples in the house ended up married. Their impromptu wedding provided a unique mixture of emotions ideal for the screenplay leading up to where Mardaleen is interrupted by Thea's arrival moments before telling Hugo about Cape Town. Thea (Amalia Uys) was a conflation inspired by Natasha, Hugo's girlfriend at that time, from Namibia and Mareli, another character who stayed in Huis Konnetie. The surprising yet inevitable interruption by Thea served a dual purpose: up to this point, Thea has featured in the film only through her letters to Hugo, some of which Mardaleen has read

following her suspicions regarding Thea and Hugo's relationship (a similar feeling noted by Derks (2018) towards the real-life Mareli). Secondly, Mardaleen has previously tried to tell Hugo about the job offer in Cape Town which will, to her mind, break Hugo's heart. When she tries to tell him again at the wedding, Thea interferes. Although Mardaleen befriends Thea towards the end of the screenplay, the character's arrival suddenly reminds her of the differences between herself and Hugo and how much is at stake for her if she stays. This, along with Vivienne's encouragement and her fears of rejection and commitment sends Mardaleen spiralling, ultimately causing her to end things with Hugo and accept the job opportunity in Cape Town.

Although some moments align with Derk's (2018) account, most of the catalysts such as Braam (Mardaleen's cheating boyfriend), Vivienne and Dieter, large parts of the rising action, and some of the denouement were fictional. Mardaleen's career as confirmed by Derks (in Bloemhof, 2020:161) was (re-)created for the screenplay since a job at a publishing house rather than at a large insurer's marketing department made more thematic and stylistic sense.

Dieter (Pietie Beyers) represented Pieter, Hugo's real-life cousin who married Noleen (an unfeatured character from *Huis Konnetie*), whereas the screenplay and film show him marrying Lara (representing Juliene, Mardaleen's real-life best friend). Unlike Dieter, Pieter did not pass away following a long illness. The screenplay necessitated a strong enough force for Hugo to travel to Cape Town to reintroduce him into Mardaleen's world after their acrimonious last encounter. Similarly, Dieter's funeral logically ensured that Mardaleen and Hugo's paths cross one last time in the aftermath of their disastrous weekend in Namibia (also recounted by Derks, 2018).

Derks (in Bloemhof, 2020:161) explains further that although she cared for several elderly women during her time in London, Vivienne was a fictitious addition. From a screenwriting perspective, Vivienne Tiffit embodies the traditional mentor figure, encouraging Mardaleen to pursue her career, convincing her to follow her heart, where in this case her career *is* the heart. Here, Prinsloo anticipated viewers' responses to Vivienne as a humorous figure who may frustrate the viewer, as she keeps advising Mardaleen towards a destiny that is in tension with the viewer's romantic expectations. More importantly, Vivienne's storyline allowed Prinsloo to develop Mardaleen's character and her relationship with Hugo away from the cluttered and noisy *Huis Konnetie*. Initially, the erotic romance novels that Vivienne has Mardaleen read provide some comedy relief, later they show the conflation of Mardaleen's worlds (lived and imagined) as seen in the scene where she imagined a shirtless Hugo as a hero from one of Vivienne's novels. Deliberate dialogue and consecutive cuts between scenes such as Hugo and Mardaleen's intimate encounter on London Bridge followed by Mardaleen excitedly reading "I wanted to rip his clothes off...My body wanted his hands all over me..." from Vivienne's novel, further suggests a romantic tension indicative of Mardaleen's internal dialogue.

The couple's London farewell was an equally important event (re-)created in the screenplay. In reality, a miserable Hugo and Mardaleen said their goodbyes at a bus stop in London whilst hugging each other in the rain "without exchanging phone numbers since their worlds differed too much and a relationship will never, ever work" (Derks, 2018). In the screenplay, their departure was more poetic with Hugo accompanying Mardaleen to the bus stop and telling her he loves her. A weighty declaration considering the context of the preceding scenes, where Mardaleen and Hugo are in a heated argument about her sudden choice to leave for Cape Town and another during which any doubts that she might have about leaving are gently persuaded away by Vivienne.

Prinsloo's screenplay further exploited the harshness and apparent desolation of the Namibian landscape to exploit Mardaleen's inner fears around her dreams for a cosmopolitan existence. In his novelisation, Bloemhof (2020) expands on Mardaleen's relationship with another man in Cape Town, and this man ultimately cheats on her. Rather than creating external factors by introducing more characters, Prinsloo kept the romantic tension centred between Mardaleen and Hugo.

3.3 Fidelity in adapting *Vergeet My Nie*

Despite suggesting a model of traditional comparative analyses the aim is not to compare and contrast the different (re-)creations of *Vergeet My Nie* (Prinsloo, 2019), *Vergeet My Nie* (Bloemhof, 2020) and *Vergeet My Nie* (Velts, 2020) with one another or with *Op 'n Fiets deur die Sneeu* (Derks, 2018) as one would with fidelity criticism. As Hutcheon (2006:114) explains, adapting one medium to another inevitably involves questions of fidelity since the process requires both a "mixture of repetition and difference, of familiarity and novelty". However, positioning *Vergeet My Nie* as an inherently collaborative project in terms of the fidelity of the adapted material in conjunction with the source material provides useful insight not only towards the writing process(es) but also in terms of the production and filmmaking processes. Indeed, in his infamous list of twelve fallacies in contemporary adaptation theory, Leitch (2003:161) includes this fidelity-related fallacy stating: "Fidelity is the most appropriate criterion to use in analyzing adaptations". An exclusive focus on fidelity, and using fidelity as a measure of quality, is a narrow and limiting approach to a complex, layered process. Derks (2018) starts her short story with "Dit is die jaar 1996 – toe Bon Jovi en Aerosmith en Nirvana uit elke studentewoonstel op die PUK gebulder het..." [It is the year 1996 - when Bon Jovi and Aerosmith and Nirvana roared from every student flat on the PUK...]. Derks (2018) not only evokes the specific period but also the type of music associated with that time. Whereas Bloemhof (2020:9) further elaborates on Mardaleen's music references by adding the lyrics of *Livin' on a Prayer* (Bon Jovi, 1986), the screenwriter and director consider audio-visually creating the specific mise-en-scène suggested by Derks (2018), while taking music licensing fees and budget implications into consideration.

Any temptation to sectionalise various processes involved in (re-)interpretation and varieties of (re-)creation, should therefore be avoided since adaptation is fundamentally located in a context of collaboration, especially when more than one new version of the story is (re-)created across various media. To explore the complicated relationship between text and film, the idea of fidelity, according to Desmond and Hawkes (2006:43), should best be used as a descriptive rather than as a value term when discussing the merit of the adapted text. Accordingly, Prinsloo initially refrained from classifying the novel and screenplay as a specific type of adaptation i.e. loose, close or intermediate (Desmond & Hawkes, 2006:44), or what Cahir (2006:17) defines as “literal, traditional and radical” adaptations, as such a classification could (consciously or unconsciously) cloud and limit the screenwriter’s sense of story potential.

Bloemhof (2020:3) acknowledges the freedom of conflation, compromise, selection and excision that accompanied his process of writing the novel, stating that he would at times veer away from both the screenplay as well as events recounted by Derks (2018), whilst remaining true to the tone and most of the details provided by the screenplay. Prinsloo’s screenplay differs considerably from Derk’s (2018) short story, and could retrospectively be regarded as a loose adaptation since most of the story elements from *Op ’n Fiets deur die Sneeu* (Derks, 2018) are omitted or substituted along with new additions in the screenplay.⁹ Prinsloo used Derks’ short story, along with additional information communicated through interviews and questions, as departure points when (re-)creating events and characters for the screenplay.

Since Bloemhof’s (2020) adaptation is based primarily on the screenplay draft he had access to, his version of the narrative could be defined as a close adaptation with most of the narrative elements from the screenplay transferred to the novel (Desmond & Hawkes, 2006:44). Bloemhof’s (2020) version can otherwise also be framed as an intermediate adaptation, since some elements of the story are kept in the novel, while other elements are excluded, and still more elements are added, thereby neither conforming to nor departing entirely from the short story (Desmond & Hawkes, 2006:44). This delineation further confirms that with this case study, the nature of the source material continuously shifts based on the adaptation in question. In terms of measuring the success of the screenplay adaptation of the short story, Prinsloo proposes Cahir’s (2006:263) aesthetic rubric. Although this rubric initially positioned the filmmaker at the forefront, we argue that since the screenplay acts as a transitional process between source material and film, Cahir’s (2006:263) criteria could be applied to the screenwriting process in the case of *Vergeet My Nie*. Prinsloo sees the adaptation process as a translation process; as Venuti (2007:30) explains, the source text must be recontextualized in this new process and product. This authorial and creative position echoes Stam’s (2000:67) sentiment that “film adaptations can be seen as a kind of multilevel negotiation of intertexts”. Prinsloo concurs with Diane Lake’s (2012:408, 410) warning that absolute faithfulness to the source material would result in a dismal failure of a

film and that the screenwriter is required to invent (characters, places, events) as part of the adaptation process.

In Cahir's aesthetic rubric, the first criterion suggests that the adaptation must communicate definite ideas concerning the *integral* meaning and value of the source text whilst remaining "faithful in *their fashion*" (Cahir, 2006:97, 99) (emphases in original). This criterion suggests that the screenplay is not just a plot summary of the source material, but instead communicates definite ideas concerning its meaning and value, as interpreted by the screenwriter and filmmaker (Cahir, 2006:100). Instead of a faithful retelling of events as they occur in the plot of the source material, the screenwriter and director could make use of different events that evoke a similar meaning or value to the events featured in the source material. Prinsloo's (2019) screenplay for *Vergeet My Nie* suggests themes related to trust and maintains its central tension around whether Mardaleen would ever be able to establish a harmony between her romantic desires (which are already negatively informed by her father and boyfriend Braam's infidelity) and her cosmopolitan aspirations. In Prinsloo's screenplay, as in Derks' (2018) own account, the tension between 'love' and 'career' is, in the end, revealed as a false binary. Mardaleen's career ambitions are not simply a hindrance to a satisfying, contented life; as an aspirational character, she desires more from life than what she perceived society, and specifically, men in general, demanded from and also offered her.

With Cahir's (2006:263) second criterion proposing that "the film must exhibit a collaboration of filmmaking skills", the screenplay should also indicate an awareness of the filmic medium, by suggesting editing options and juxtaposing disparate worlds to symbolise certain perspectives, ideologies, and cultural constructs. The *Vergeet My Nie* novel, screenplay and film aimed at presenting Potchefstroom, London, Cape Town and Namibia through Mardaleen's eyes. All these narratives privileged this character's point of view. Potchefstroom was framed as a confining space she desperately wanted to escape from, whereas Mardaleen's first impression of London is of a romantic city, a place of freedom and a fitting stepping stone for her ambitions. Cape Town is portrayed as the city of lights, along with the hustle and bustle associated with climbing the corporate ladder. In stark contrast, despite the picturesque landscapes, the tranquillity and Hugo's efforts to make her feel at home, Mardaleen experiences Namibia as rural and removed from proper infrastructure. Prinsloo (2019) uses Potchefstroom and Namibia to exploit Mardaleen's fears and to remind her of her parents' mistakes. However, as Mardaleen's character develops and her priorities shift, so do her perceptions of these worlds. As Mardaleen Derks confirms outside of her written personal narrative (Grbich, 2020), the farm in Namibia is far less harsh than the rocky landscapes depicted in the film, continuing that "Velts purposefully did this to reveal the contrast between [Mardaleen] and Hugo's worlds, since the difficult choice to move to Namibia had to be intensified".

The novel, screenplay and film further fulfil the third criterion of Cahir's aesthetic rubric since all three adaptations demonstrate "an audacity to create a work that stands as a world apart" and utilizes the source text in such a way that "a self-reliant, but related, aesthetic offspring is born" (Cahir, 2006:263). Although adapted from Derks' (2018) written personal account, each of these products displays the appropriate discourse associated with each respective medium. The characters are developed in terms of their motivations and desires, whereas the various settings and soundtrack choices provide a nostalgic experience associated with the 1990s. The fourth criterion, however, presents a balancing act, since the adaptation cannot be so self-reliant that it stands in complete contradiction to the source material (Cahir, 2006:263). The adaptation should demonstrate some fidelity towards the source text in the film's eventual narrative (re-)creation. Despite ostensibly being loose adaptations of the short story, the screenplay and film are not completely independent from the source material, and the source material is certainly not negated by the screenplay nor the film. Following Van Jaarsveld (2012:311), a commitment to the original text remains present since in the process of adaptation Prinsloo as the screenwriter acknowledged the cultural background of her target audience (popular media readers likely to be familiar with the expatriate either personally or vicariously), in addition to constantly discounting the audience's interaction with the source text.

4. Conclusion

This article approached *Vergeet My Nie* as a case study discussing the adaptation process from the published personal account *Op 'n Fiets deur die Sneeu* (Derks, 2018) to the screenplay, *Vergeet My Nie* (Prinsloo, 2019) to the feature length Afrikaans film, *Vergeet My Nie* (Velts 2020). Francois Bloemhof's novel, *Vergeet My Nie* (2020), based on a version of the screenplay as well as the published personal account, was additionally albeit briefly considered to demonstrate how creative challenges of (re-)creation, (re-)interpretation and issues of fidelity, with Cahir's (2006) aesthetic rubric serving as an effective guidepost, can be overcome to deliver a product that appeals to a popular mainstream viewership. The article had located this case study with *Vergeet My Nie* at its centre within an Afrikaans cultural sphere in which *Huisgenoot*, kykNET and The Film Factory operated as the various dominant entities that altogether facilitated the adaptation process and its cognate products (the feature film screenplay; the feature film itself; and the novel based on a version of the screenplay).

In the case of *Vergeet My Nie*, Prinsloo (2019) demonstrates the shift of the unfixed language to a fixed visual and auditory language by loosely adapting the source material and engaging creatively with characters, themes and places. Prinsloo created new characters, conflated existing characters, and merged and (re-)created key events from the source material as well as expanding on the original personal account provided by Derks (2018), thereby

demonstrating a clear understanding of the processes and creative calculus required to adapt the source material into a screenplay for a feature film aimed at popular mainstream viewing, where this viewership is anticipated to be engaged with the cultural industrial entities that shape the critical context in which such adaptations are written and produced.

Notes

- 1 These figures were valid at the time of writing.
- 2 While the primary focus of this section is on the screenplay *Vergeet My Nie* (Prinsloo, 2019) and Bloemhof's novel, we refer to *Vergeet My Nie* (Velts, 2020) where relevant.
- 3 Please note that the page numbers of the specific version of this article that was accessed do not align with the published article, and that the alternative version of the article is referenced due to access restrictions.
- 4 Originally a French term, *mise-en-scène* means "putting into the scene," and according to Bordwell, Thompson and Smith (2017:113) signifies the director's control over what appears in the film frame, including the set, lighting, costume and makeup, and staging and performance.
- 5 The screenplay later reveals the meaning behind the nickname: Hugo tells Mardaleen that foxes mate for life.
- 6 See Seongseop Kim, Sangkyun Kim and Brian King (2019) for a brief overview on film, nostalgia and tourism.
- 7 According to Deutelbaum (2016:29-44) "Sorkin's adaptation of Mezrich's text is considerably more nuanced than the simple term 're-creation' suggests" thereby proposing this altered phrasing of Hutcheon's two-stage process.
- 8 Mardaleen's final words in Bloemhof's (2020:161) novel.
- 9 "Retrospectively" because, as stated earlier, such classifications did not necessarily consciously inform Prinsloo during the adaptation process.

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