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Faithful to a Fault?

Was it really necessary to remake “Let The Right One In” in English?

Kevin Taylor Anderson and Salman Hameed

With the recent release of *Let Me In* – an English-language remake of the Swedish film, *Let the Right One In* – we essentially have a carbon-copy of the Scandinavian film. On the one hand we were relieved – surprised even – that the American incarnation remained true to both the style and content of the original film. On the other hand, as the lights came up, we were compelled to ask, “So why’d they redo it”?

If the remake was done simply to make more money, then one could have imagined the American filmmakers possibly selling out and sacrificing the bleak, contemplative tone of the Swedish version for either the teen romance of the *Twilight* films or the gorefest of remade foreign horror films. But admirably, the filmmakers resisted the temptation.

There are indeed some minor structural and other changes between the original and the remake. The bleak, snowy landscape and the featureless and unimaginative architecture of “somewheresville” Sweden is relocated to the equally nondescript outskirts of Los Alamos, New Mexico, circa the cold war era of the early 1980s. However, the rhythm and pacing of both the editing and dialogue match the original so exactly that you half expect the actors to deliver their lines in Swedish while ankle deep in snowdrifts. Yes, there is more explicit mention of religion (and evil) in the American remake, but ultimately, these changes are quite minor for the plot of the film. What we end up with is a vampire romance for an American audience (without the *Twilight* simplicity), but one with a European sensibility for time, place, character development and dramatic conflict.

Perhaps, the goal of the remake was to introduce this particular vampire story to an American audience that is often resistant to reading subtitles. But the gross for the opening weekend for *Let Me In* was about \$5.6 million – a luke-warm opening for a movie that was made with a budget of \$20 million. Worse – despite some glowing critical reviews – the audience gave it only a C+, according to *CinemaScore*. Sure enough, the American film has already grossed more than twice as much as the total gross for the Swedish original. Nevertheless, the target audience remains quite limited.

So if it’s just a matter of making a buck by hijacking a mildly successful foreign film, why not simply dub the original into English, re-release in the US, and save millions in production costs.

Don’t get us wrong. The director of *Let Me In*, Matt Reeves of *Cloverfield* fame, has all the right intentions. But ultimately, the remake is so faithful to the original, that language appears to be the only significant difference between the two films.

Of course, the dubbing of films is inherently annoying, but there is another way of bringing a foreign film to a relatively broader audience: Like Scorsese did with *Gomorrah* or Tarantino did with *Hero*, just re-release the original, give it wide distribution and slap a big-name filmmaker on it.

However, this method wouldn't apply to all potential remakes of foreign films, and another Swedish remake looms on the horizon. With an international bestselling book behind it, *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* essentially has a built-in audience, and will likely have a different fate than *Let Me In*. Although the pressure will be on from the devoted fans of both Stieg Larsson's book and Niels Arden Oplev's film, the David Fincher remake – even though it remains set in Sweden – is expected to be a hit irrespective of its relation to the original film.

For enthusiastic filmmakers on the verge of remaking a foreign film, be aware: if it's not based on a film adaptation of an international best seller, then show some restraint and perhaps exercise some financial wisdom by giving the original a glitzy re-release.

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