

# Analysis of Stanley Kubrick's 1980 Film Adaptation of the Shining

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UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA  
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BA THESIS

*Analysis of Stanley Kubrick's 1980  
Film Adaptation of "The Shining"*

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## Abstract

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The aim of this study is to analyze and compare *The Shining*, the 1977 novel written by Stephen King and the 1980 film adaptation produced and directed by Stanley Kubrick. The main issue considered is the subjective perception observable in the work of each of these artists. While Kubrick deliberately changed a myriad of elements to fit his own narrative, King was concomitantly quite upset with Kubrick's interpretation of the novel and the artistic liberty he took with writing the screenplay.

An investigation into the theory of adaptation studies and the underlying issues concerning the adaptation process will be conducted and applied to the analysis of the novel and film. The viewpoints and criticism, from both the novelist and filmmaker will be taken into consideration to further explore the general issue of film adaptations. This study should point out the fundamental issues such as "faithfulness" to the novel, the filmmaker's conveyance of the story, and the artistic differences in both works of art.

Key words: adaptation, novel, Stanley Kubrick, Stephen King, film

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# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1. Background

Artists may create in various modes. Paintings, songs, novels, and films are created using the artist's unique visions and ideas. These artworks are the artist's intellectual property, which are, according to the Oxford Dictionary, works "that somebody has created and that the law prevents other people from copying"<sup>1</sup>. In most cases, in fact, that legal standpoint is void, since the artists who decide to adapt someone else's work, usually use their own perception and unique vision to steer their creation process. This is especially noticeable when the author of the original work is not a supervisor or consultant on the filmmaker's project.

That said, criticism is inevitable. Once it has come to light that a specific work of art is an adaptation, it creates discussions among the public and the critics within. Regardless if the end result is good or bad, the adaptation may provoke a myriad of feedback and in some cases even controversy. The quality of both works are examined and the audience will at some point or another start to nitpick over every detail that was missed or added to the original material.

Novels have always been one of the most popular source materials, and understandably so. Every cinematic adaptation is accompanied by an already established fan base, and if done correctly, the adaptation will not only be profitable to the filmmaker but also to the writer, as it will probably result in more sold copies of the book. However, there are many cases where the adaptation was not as well-received as the filmmaker and artist hoped. Filmmakers are often foiled by their ability to understand the ideology behind the source material, which results in an adaptation that is abundant in the filmmaker's ideas that were not present in the

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<sup>1</sup> Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, "intellectual property"

source material. For instance, when Patricia Rozema adapted Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* in 1999, she made an intrepid exegesis about slavery, which was merely referenced in the novel. This shows how film adaptation can be modified to project messages deemed important by the filmmakers, but not by the writer.<sup>2</sup>

Thereby, when analyzing a film adaptation, it is crucial to examine the concepts as well as the ideological framework for the original literary work. It is also important to take into account the contemporaneous context of both the original work as well as the film.

Some adaptations have been unfaithful to the source material, but few have been as purposely unfaithful as one of the most popular and discernible horror films of all time, *The Shining*.

The film has been adapted from Stephen King's third published novel and his third hardback bestseller of the same title. Infamously, the novel, which to this day is beloved by many, is in some opinion, eclipsed by its 1980 adaptation by director and producer Stanley Kubrick.

Although the film's first cinematic debut left masses bewildered and even disappointed, *The Shining* had started gaining popularity in the following years. The film's redeemed reputation reached its peak after the US National Film Registry listed the film as "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant." The National Film Preservation Board states that "these films are not selected as the 'best' American films of all time, but rather as works of enduring importance to American culture"<sup>3</sup>. Since then, the film has been considered a modern day classic.

In order to successfully transfer the meaning of a certain work of art into another medium, certain changes need to be made. If we take novel-to-film adaptation as an example, a handful

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<sup>2</sup> Kathi Groenendyki, "Modernizing Mansfield Park: Patricia Rozema's Spin on Jane Austen." *Persuasions Online*, Jane Austen Society of North America, 2004, V.25, NO.1

<sup>3</sup> Library of Congress, 2018, National Film Registry

of questions about the adaptation process comes to mind. How will the novel be condensed into a limited number of pages for the screenplay, but still keep the narrative intact? How will the setting and the characters' appearances be successfully visualized? How to use certain technology aids to bring scenes to life and make them convey the same atmosphere as it was presented in the novel? There are many elements that go into the process of adapting a novel into a film, and with the help of technology aids, such as camerawork, music or sound, some would argue that the filmmaker is at an advantage. The filmmaker already has the story, which can only spring to life even more after transferring it onto the big screen. The difficult part for the filmmaker, in my opinion, is the subjective perception of the novel. For instance, if ten people read the same book, by the end each and every one of them will have created their own world in their minds. Each character would have a different face and the setting would look how they imagined it. Considering this, each filmmaker will approach the adaptation in a unique way, which is where adaptation becomes a subjective artform. Subsequently, the viewers will no longer be able to visualize certain elements as they were able to while reading the book, but instead the visual media of film will guide the viewer to form a different kind of perception and interpretation.

This shows that the process of adaptation can be challenging, and the source material will either be improved or damaged to some degree, which will mostly depend on the viewers who had certain expectations from the adaptation since they were already familiar with the source material.

To further understand why adaptations are made, we must consider different motives that drive the artist. In most cases, we may argue that the biggest motivator is financial gain. If a novel is quite successful, it is only logical to think that if it were to be transferred to a different medium that could reach a wider audience, that adaptation would also be successful

and hence profitable. Artists may also decide to adapt a literary work to perhaps try and improve it, or add commentary and critique to the source material, which will be further discussed in *Adaptation Studies*.

While art in itself is agreeably subjective, one cannot stress enough the importance of understanding that "art comes from art". Inspiration can stem from any source, be it nature, someone's own life experiences or art that came before. Considering that, artists should be careful and respectful with handling the sources they choose to use. When using such sources, directly copying is out of the question. However, as it will later be discussed in *Methodology*, even though Kubrick decided to adapt King's novel according to his own perception, King and many fans of his novel were not satisfied with the resulting film.

## **1.2. Research Questions and Purpose**

There are many reasons that lead to a failed adaptation. Whether it is bad casting, a poorly written manuscript, changing a plot or deleting key characters to fit the film's budget for instance, adaptations almost never seem to perfectly transfer the objective of a book.

However, we have to wonder, do artists have the right to criticize adaptations if they do not fulfill their expectations? Do we need to view adaptations as an art form closely linked to the source or as a detached and completely new artwork? This thesis will try to exhibit facts that will provide positive confirmation of the aforementioned arguments. Through film and novel analysis, this thesis will aim to pinpoint the main differences in the film and why these differences were necessary to create the film. Kubrick's motives and decisions to change certain parts will be discussed. The goal of this analysis is to contribute to the understanding of the issues of adaptation studies and the general perception and interpretation of art.



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## 2. Theoretical Framework

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### 2.1. Adaptation Studies

A film adaptation is the transfer of a work or story, in whole or in part, to a feature film.

Although often considered a type of derivative work, film adaptation has been conceptualized recently by academic scholars such as Robert Stam as a dialogic process.<sup>4</sup>

Dialogic processes refer to meaning that has been implied through the interpretation of spoken words. The term is applied to constructs in literary theory and analysis, as well as in philosophy. Another definition of "adaptation" from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary states that an adaptation "is a composition rewritten into a new form"<sup>5</sup> which suggests that there cannot be a direct transfer to a new medium without changing the material first so that it would conform to it.

By adapting, one changes the form of the artwork and inevitably creates new concepts in the process. In the book *Understanding the Film: An Introduction to Film Appreciation* by Hill McGraw it is said that "the major difference between words and images is that visual images stimulate our perceptions directly, while written and spoken words stimulate our perceptions indirectly"<sup>6</sup>. When we read certain words, objects for instance, we picture those objects in our minds. It doesn't matter how much information and detail the author presented, our minds are powerful enough to fill in the missing pieces and form a complete mental picture.

It is important to understand how different these mediums are, which American author, Linda Seger explained in *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film*:

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<sup>4</sup> Google Arts & Culture, "Adaptation"

<sup>5</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "Adaptation"

<sup>6</sup> *Understanding the Film: An Introduction to Film Appreciation*, 1997, p. 204

*The experience of reading a novel is quite different from watching a film. And it's exactly this difference that fights translation into film. When we read a novel, time is on our side. It is not just a chronological experience, where someone else determines our pacing, but a reflective experience.*<sup>7</sup>

She also points out that while a certain scene in a film will uncover a character, advance the story and explore a specific topic, in a novel, a whole chapter may be dedicated to explore just one of these areas.

Film adaptations generally use novels as the basis, although autobiographies, plays, historical sources, non-fiction, comic books and even video games, plays, and other films are commonly used source materials. This practice has been omnipresent in filmmaking since the initial times of cinema, during the nineteenth century. Typically film adaptations have been criticized for the film's infidelity to the source material, with discussions about 'what has been omitted' and 'what has been changed in the story'. It is important to note that this criticism is ignorant of the complicated process and effort that goes into adaptation, because in order to fit a four-hundred-page novel into a two to three hour film, compromises are inevitable.

When adapting an artwork, we must understand the connection we are forming with the source material. This connection is mostly either straightforward or merely implied. Regina Schober, an American Studies professor at the Heinrich-Heine-University Düsseldorf, explains that

*Adaptations can be understood as processes in which connections are established between two different modes of representation. These connections (...) can be formed*

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<sup>7</sup> Linda Seger, "The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film". New York, 1992, Owl Books. pp. 13-14.

*by different agents – the author or creator of a specific medial expression, the recipient or the medium itself – by implicitly or partially drawing on and adapting elements of another medium.*<sup>8</sup>

She argues that the adaptation becomes unconstrained and detached from the source artwork as soon as it is finished. As life imitates art – and the other way around, so does artistic expression find its birthing place in the human mind through viewing the world around oneself, and therefore drawing inspiration from all sorts of places, beings and things. This is a natural inclination of every artist. Whether artists have the need to comment on someone else's art through their own rendering of it, or want to improve it in some ways, adaptation is, in that sense, a process closely linked to the source artwork. But when does it become completely detached? I would argue that the adaptation can never become entirely emancipated from the source, but rather become significantly far removed from it, up to the point where those who do not know the origin or do not inquire about it, will view that artwork as an original piece. Upon realizing that a certain artwork is an adaptation, a person may change perspective and thereafter acknowledge and accept the artwork as an adaptation.

To understand the issues of adaptation we must also consider the different models of adapting and critiquing. According to Karen E. Kline there are four paradigms that form cinematic adaptations and that should be considered by critics when reviewing adaptations.

“Translation” concerns the ‘fidelity’ of the film to the source text. She explains that “the film exists to ‘serve’ its literary precursor.” The second, the “Pluralist” paradigm, serves to “present analogies between the novel and the film” and differences are not only allowed, but

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<sup>8</sup> Jorgen Bruhn, "Adaptation as connection - Transmediality reconsidered" in *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*, ed. Anne Gjelsvik and Eirik Frisvold Hanssen, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2013, p. 89

expected. The third paradigm is “transformation”, where the adaptation is considered a separate and individual art form, but are still viewed as adaptation, despite the alterations between the novel and the film. Kline notes that while the source material was mostly transformed, “traces” of the original text are still expected to some extent. The fourth and final paradigm, “materialist”, argues that the film is a “product of cultural-historical processes”, meaning that the contemporary context is more important than the literary source.<sup>9</sup>

## **2.2. The Issue of Cinematic Adaptations**

Adaptations are undoubtedly a specific type of artistic expression, especially in terms of cultural studies and psychology. The palimpsest-like construct of presence and absence provokes a feedback from a cultural perspective and analysis of the perception and interpretation that has changed through the new media the work has been adapted to.

According to Jean Mitry, the issue of adaptation in general lies in the difference of expression.

. In his journal, *Remarks on the Problem of Cinematic Adaptation*, he notes that “we talk as if adaptation were a matter of translation, like passing from one language to another, when in fact it's a matter of passing from one form to another, a matter of transposition, of reconstruction<sup>10</sup>”. Another issue with cinematic adaptation is the assessment of the compatibility of meaning that is ingrained in the literary forms and the meaning that will be created when that work is transformed into a different form. Mitry further explains that complications arise because of the general belief that using various media will transfer the meaning in different ways, which will lead to a stimulation of different perspectives because the adaptation expresses different meanings than the source material.

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<sup>9</sup> Karen E. Kline, “The Accidental Tourist on Page and on Screen: Interrogating Normative Theories about Film Adaptation.” *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1996, pp. 70–83.

<sup>10</sup> Jean Mitry, “Remarks on the Problem of Cinematic Adaptation” in *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 1971, pp. 1–9

When discussing issues with film adaptation, many cinephiles will point out Austrian-American director Erich von Stroheim's attempt to create an accurate adaptation of Frank Norris's novel *McTeague* in the film *Greed*. Von Stroheim's approach resulted in a 9½ hour long cinematic piece. The studio he worked with at the time insisted that the film be cut to at least four hours, but it was in fact finally cut to two hours, which resulted in a fairly incoherent film. According to Herman G. Weinberg, "Stroheim later called *Greed* his most fully realized work and was hurt both professionally and personally by the studio's re-editing of it"<sup>11</sup>. Since then, few filmmakers and directors have attempted the same approach to avoid such a result.

There are some examples of novels being conceptualized and written in order to be used as a source for a film. Arthur C. Clarke, for instance, worked on the film idea for *2001: A Space Odyssey* by writing down his vision in the form of a novel. Graham Greene wrote *The Third Man* exclusively to aid the screenplay and not with the intention of publishing the novel. John Sayles and Ingmar Bergman also tend to write their concepts for a film as a novel before writing the final screenplay, but they never publish their literary works, only the completed film.

Book-to-film adaptations are projects that require a lot of delicate work. Although it is rather difficult to create a film that entirely encapsulates the novel's story, there are cinematic adaptations which have achieved that. Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), Robert Mulligan's *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1962), Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972) are just a few films that objectively did the writers justice. Whether an adaptation is

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<sup>11</sup> Herman G. Weinberg, "The Complete Greed of Erich Von Stroheim: A Reconstruction of the Film in 348 Still Photos Following the Original Screenplay Plus 52 Production Stills", New York: ARNO Press, 1972. pp. 17-18

perceived as good or bad depends mostly on the public's reaction. For the descriptions of a setting or a character in a written narrative transferred to the medium of film to be successful, it must in some part meet the viewer's expectations. In an interview for News Northeastern, Kathleen Kelly, who teaches book-to-film adaptations, explains:

*It's not necessarily the plot or the stars; it's more that the viewer thinks, "That's exactly how I pictured it!" Often, the more a reader's expectations line up with the film, the more successful the film is thought to be.<sup>12</sup>*

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<sup>12</sup> Matt Collette, "3Qs: What Makes a Good Book-to-Movie Adaptation?" 27 Mar. 2012

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## 3. Methodology

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### 3.1. King's Objective

To understand Stephen King's strong personal connection to his work, we must know his motives that inspired him to create his work. It is important to note that King pursued writing *The Shining* after staying at the Stanley Hotel in Estes Park, Colorado in September 1974 which would become the very crucial setting of the novel. At that time, King and his wife were the only two people staying in the hotel the night they checked in. In an interview with the *Literary Guild*, King explained: "We heard about this terrific old mountain resort hotel and decided to give it a try. But when we arrived, they were just getting ready to close for the season, and we found ourselves the only guests in the place—with all those long, empty corridors."<sup>13</sup>.

While traversing the vast and long hallways of the hotel, it came to King's mind that his surroundings would be the perfect setting for a chilling horror novel. The same night, King had a dream about his three-year-old son sprinting through the hotel's corridors, screaming and being chased by a fire-hose. Immediately after waking up, King went on to form the outline of the novel that would become *The Shining*. The novel integrated King's overall overwhelming feeling that encapsulated his stay at the hotel, along with the risks of alcoholism and destruction of a family, which were both some of King's biggest fears.

Autobiographical undertones forge the central themes of the novel – King himself struggled with alcoholism early in his career, which subsequently harmed his family life. The realization of the weight of these autobiographical elements in his novel came to King some

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<sup>13</sup> Tony Rutherford, "IMAGES - The Real Stand-In for 'Shining's' Overlook Hotel." *Huntington News*, 1m Nov. 2019

time after the publication: "I was after all, the guy who had written *The Shining* without even realizing (...) that I was writing about myself."<sup>14</sup>. To him the novel was a means of "self-psychoanalysis" and a sort of catharsis to free himself of these fears.

Stephen King has written over 60 novels to this point, but due to a dark chapter in his life, there are purportedly no literary works of his that have no autobiographical elements which point to that dark period. It is well-known to the public that King had fallen victim to drug and alcohol abuse and has battled tirelessly to free himself of these demons, which is reflected in many of his works. He created numerous characters that mirror his struggle and his biggest fears: Jack Torrance (*The Shining*), Danny Torrance (*Doctor Sleep*) and Gard (*Tommyknockers*) to name a few. His addiction problem reached its peak in the 1980s, during which time King wrote some novels that he doesn't even recall writing, such as the aforementioned *Tommyknockers*, published in 1987 and *Cujo*, published in 1981. With the help of his wife, Tabitha, King regained control over his addiction and has been sober for a couple of decades now.

Most of King's literary works have been adapted to the big screen, and most have been successful. However, King's approval or disapproval for the adaptation of his literary works has always been made known publicly. In an interview with *The Guardian*, he notes that he "enjoyed Brian De Palma's 1976 adaptation of *Carrie*, starring Sissy Spacek, but hated what Stanley Kubrick did to *The Shining* in 1980", claiming that his novel was transformed into "a domestic tragedy with only vaguely supernatural overtones". Moreover, he was of the opinion that the casting was quite the opposite of what he had expected: Jack Nicholson was apparently too superficial to the original character, while Shelley Duvall as Wendy was "insulting to women" and not as strong of a character as she was originally depicted in the

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<sup>14</sup> Grady Hendrix, "Writing Your Fear: Stephen King's *The Shining*", *tor.com*, 2 Oct. 2017



novel.<sup>15</sup>

Interestingly enough, in an article for online journal *Senses of Cinema* Filippo Ulivieri writes that after attending a private screening of the film two days before the premiere, King confided to a friend that he actually "loved" the film and had a genuinely "positive reaction". The source can be found in George Nelson's *Memo to Julian Senior 'Re. Stephen King'*<sup>16</sup>. Then years later, in 2012, King spoke at the closing ceremony of the Savannah Book Festival where he commented on the underlying problems and differences between his novel and Kubrick's adaptation. He commented on Jack Nicholson on portraying Jack Torrance by criticizing the character arc: "Where's the arc in that? You're crazy in scene one, you're crazy at the end, and in between you type a little."<sup>17</sup>. After having reviewed many interviews King has given over the years, it would seem that King's dislike of the film changed with time.

It is also important to note that, in an effort to show how he actually wanted his novel to be adapted, King released a mini-series seventeen years after Kubrick's adaptation. The lesser known adaptation is the three-episode miniseries which aired in 1997. It has also been called "Stephen King's *The Shining*", as it was written and produced by King himself after being utterly dissatisfied with Kubrick's adaptation. This almost five-hour long miniseries was directed by Mick Garris from King's teleplay and was shot at The Stanley Hotel, where King originally got the inspiration to write the novel. Even though this version of *The Shining* was much more faithful than Kubrick's adaptation, the film still overshadowed the miniseries and remained as the true classic.

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<sup>15</sup> Emma Brockes, "Stephen King: on Alcoholism and Returning to the Shining", *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 21 Sept. 2013

<sup>16</sup> Filippo Ulivieri, "King vs. Kubrick: The Origins of Evil", Edited by Miguel Marías and Alexander Nemerov, *Senses of Cinema*, 6 October 2020,

<sup>17</sup> Eric Johnson, "Stephen King Discusses Kubrick's *The Shining*", YouTube, 20 February 2012

### 3.2. Kubrick's approach

In an interview with Michael Ciment, Stanley Kubrick explained that prior to starting writing the screenplay he had been working on his visualization of what the film would be. He further notes that he encountered difficulties while trying to extract the essential plot and to reinvent the parts of the narrative he deemed "weak". It is interesting to note that Kubrick praised King's virtues in the plot and commented on how easy it was adapting it into the screenplay form, yet, when we consider the final product, not much of the plot in the film was consistent with King's narrative. Several drafts of the screenplay were written until Kubrick and Diane Johnson, who helped write the script, decided what to omit and what needed to be left in the film. Furthermore, Kubrick noted that "the characters needed to be developed a bit differently than they were in the novel"<sup>18</sup> which finally became one of King's main objections. In an interview for TCM's documentary, King states that he always thought that the images were "striking", praising the iconic 'Here's Johnny!' scene, however these images are only superficial to the film and are not "substance". He described the film as "something like a beautiful car that had no engine".

According to Laura Miller, author of *What Stanley Kubrick Got Wrong About The Shining*, there is no necessity to complain about Stanley Kubrick's adaptation of King's novel. She further notes "that two such different men as King and Kubrick were able to see themselves in this character indicates what a remarkable creation Jack Torrance is"<sup>19</sup>. While each of them had a different perspective on the character, in both the film and the novel, the character has been one of the most central parts of the story.

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<sup>18</sup> Michel Ciment, "Kubrick". New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983. Print p. 74

<sup>19</sup> Laura Miller, "What Stanley Kubrick Got Wrong about 'The Shining'", Salon, Salon.com, 2 October 2013

In an interview with Vicente Molina Foix from 1980, which was later reprinted in *The Stanley Kubrick Archives*, Kubrick stated that while reading *The Shining*, he found it "very compulsive", and thought "the plot, ideas, and structure were much more imaginative than anything (he's) ever read in the genre." He continued that "one could make a wonderful movie out of it"<sup>20</sup>.

### **3.3. Film and Novel Comparison**

There are many fundamental differences between the novel and the film. According to Kubrick, the changes he made to the story were "a necessity" to achieve the film's ambiance as he envisioned it. One of the main characters, for instance – Jack Torrance, who was portrayed by Jack Nicholson, was treated differently in the film. In King's novel, John Daniel Edward "Jack" Torrance was a reflection of himself – a writer, struggling with his alcoholism addiction and volatile temper. In the novel, he decides to quit alcohol as it nearly ruined his career and his marriage. As the supernatural entities that are seemingly trapped inside the hotel Overlook's walls start coercing Jack into hurting his wife and son, he starts drinking again and completely gives into the ghosts wants. The novel ends with Danny breaking the hotel's forces and manages to bring his father back to reality. Ultimately, Jack lets his son escape and reminds him that he loves him before the forces take over his mind again. The novel ends in a huge explosion of the hotel in which Jack dies as well. The ending of this character and the novel in general is quite satisfying in the sense that Jack sacrificed himself to save his family and possible new victims that would succumb to the hotel's sinister forces. While this character is very layered and complex, he is simply an everyman, a caring father and husband, who at first lost his battle with addiction and demons (literally and

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<sup>20</sup> Vicente Molina Foix, "An Interview with Kubrick By Vicente Molina Foix" in *The Stanley Kubrick Archives*, 1980

metaphorically) but redeemed himself in the end. In *A Night at the Movies: The Horrors of Stephen King*, TCM's documentary, King explains: "In *The Shining*, Jack Torrance is a difficult character but he's fundamentally a sympathetic character. I always visualized him as a piece of metal that's bent first one way and then the other by these malignant spirits who basically want his son because (he) is a psychically powerful person."<sup>21</sup> He went on to characterize Jack and the other figures as very warm and 'normal' people who are taunted by ghosts and the supernatural, while Kubrick made them too cold. In his adaptation, Kubrick perceived the haunting in Jack Torrance himself, while King made it clear that the malevolence is surrounding the characters and affecting them but is not actually within their souls. It seems that the casting was perfect for Kubrick's film, and I have to agree that Jack Nicholson was perfect for the role. However, it is perfect for Kubrick's Jack Torrance and not King's Jack Torrance. As previously mentioned, King criticized the film for being "too cold" while his novel was far more "warmhearted". According to him and many critics, Kubrick didn't care for the redemption arc of the character, he simply wanted Jack Torrance to be insane and violent until the end; he wanted a scary ending and not a satisfying one. Some critics agree that Kubrick's Jack Torrance seemed borderline psychotic from the beginning of the film, whereas in King's novel, this transition happened much slower. In an 2016 interview King told *Deadline*,

*"I feel the same because the character of Jack Torrance has no arc in that movie. Absolutely no arc at all. When we first see Jack Nicholson, he's in the office of Mr. Ullman, the manager of the hotel, and you know, then, he's crazy (...). All he does is get crazier. In the book, he's a guy who's struggling with his sanity and finally loses it. To me, that's a tragedy. In the movie, there's no tragedy because there's no real*

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<sup>21</sup> Laurent Bouzereau, director, "A Night at the Movies: The Horrors of Stephen King", Turner Classic Movies, Inc. A WarnerMedia Company, 2011

change."<sup>22</sup>

Before Jack Nicholson was even cast, King suggested that Jon Voigt, Christopher Reeve or Michael Moriarty would be great options, since they seemed more of an 'everyman' to him. He also noted that Nicholson was famously identified with McMurphy from the 1976 drama *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, which would contribute to the audience expecting the character to 'go crazy' early on in the film. In Steve Deeble's *Evolution of a Screenplay: The Shining*, the author suggests that if an 'everyman' had been cast, as King has advised, the shock of the ensuing madness in the film would be far more disturbing<sup>23</sup>.

Jack's demise in the film happens under ambiguous circumstances, he dies a monster. The final scene shows him frozen to death in the hedge maze, which leaves the viewer wondering what caused his downfall – himself or the hotel? The fact that his death and the ending is in juxtaposition with the death King originally chose for the character, might be seen as a hint of provocation on Kubrick's end.

Wendy Torrance, Jack's wife, was not to King's liking either. In an interview with BBC News in 2013, King states that "Shelley Duvall as Wendy is really one of the most misogynistic characters ever put on film. She's basically just there to scream and be stupid, and that's not the woman that I wrote about". Writer Chelsea Quinn Yarbrow criticized King for Wendy's portrayal as well. In *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction* she attributes Wendy's "weakness" to King's "inability to draw convincing female characters"<sup>24</sup>. In the 1997 miniseries Wendy is a lot stronger, and in my opinion less annoying than in Kubrick's adaptation. She is far more firm than in the novel and at times

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<sup>22</sup> Mike Fleming Jr, "Stephen King On What Hollywood Owes Authors When Their Books Become Films: Q&A". Deadline, 3 February 2016,

<sup>23</sup> Stephen Deeble, "Evolution of a Screenplay: The Shining", 10 October 2016

<sup>24</sup> Dale Bailey, "American Nightmares The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction", University of Wisconsin Press, 2011, pp. 123–123.

authoritative towards Jack.

Danny Torrance is a bright 5-year-old in the novel. His vocabulary is very advanced for his age and he has the supernatural gift of the 'shining'. He has an imaginative friend, whom he calls 'Tony'. Tony is present in both the novel and in the film. In the novel, towards the end it is quite evident that Tony is in fact Danny from the future, manifesting through the 'shining' to warn Danny about the hotel and his father's fate. In the novel, Tony appears to Danny as a full-body apparition, while, in the film, he appears to be present only in Danny's mind and talks through him with a strange gesture of his index finger. There is also an ambiguity surrounding Tony in the film. On numerous occasions, Kubrick explained that same as with the circumstances of Jack Torrance's death, he decided to keep 'Tony' a mystery as well.

The Overlook hotel, although *just* a setting, plays a crucial role in the story. In King's novel, the hotel is essentially as alive as the characters are. From hedge animals that guard the hotel coming to life to ghosts and fire hoses that attack and chase characters, the hotel is an active participant in the narrative. Throughout the story, the readers find out that the hotel wants to be set free, and the only way it can achieve that is to get Danny and consume his powers. This supernatural side of the building was 'overlooked' in the film. Yes, there are scenes where Jack Torrance sees ghosts of the hotel's past engulfing him more and more into the madness of the hotel, however, the hotel is still passive enough for the viewers to suspect that all of this madness is actually happening in Jack's head. The setting is one of the crucial elements in any horror film, and most critics will agree that Kubrick handled that aspect with great skill. From the hotel's decor, to the confusing layout of the corridors, to the hedge maze that Kubrick created – all of these small modifications led to stunning and eerie imagery in the film. The decision to change the hedge animals that come to life to a creepy hedge maze was fantastic. Not only was the CGI technology as advanced at that time nor were these animals necessary

and would not fit into the atmosphere of the film. Additionally, the maze was crucial to achieving one of the most iconic scenes in horror cinema – Jack chasing his son through the snowy maze with an axe. The maze, along with the confusing hallways of the hotel created disorientation, which was one of the focal elements for Kubrick to create suspension in a film. Every eerie occurrence in the film is presented in an ambiguous way, mostly through Danny's 'shining'. Many memorable scenes that have since become engraved in pop culture stem from Kubrick's individual additions to the screenplay. The blood elevator, the twins in the hallway, the "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" on the typewriter, the famous line "Here's Johnny!" are only some of the scenes that Kubrick decided to add. These scenes, along with the exceptional soundtrack made up for Kubrick's narrative in the film.

The mentioned endings of both the novel and the film leave each audience with a different feeling. The novel provided a complete and satisfying ending in which the Overlook hotel explodes and takes Jack Torrance with it. The film, however, ends as ambiguously as the rest of the film. Jack freezes to death in the maze, while the Overlook stays behind, seemingly waiting for its next victim. King's goal was to scare the readers with ghosts and the supernatural, while Kubrick aimed at disorienting and confusing the viewers to the point where they would not know what could happen next. Although much more indefinite and less satisfying than King's ending, Kubrick's film leaves the viewer with a much more sinister aftertaste.

Suspense is one of the critical elements in a good horror film, because it achieves viewer engagement. Most horror films create suspense by starting the film as if it were anything but a horror film. This is often achieved by introducing calm and serene scenes that put characters into non threatening situations, so that the audience would assume nothing bad could happen to those characters. What makes *The Shining* differ from conventional horror films is that it

indicates the dangers are to come early on. Although it is indicated that something terrible will happen, the suspense is still there, and the viewer is still caught by surprise. The tension is ever-present in *The Shining*. Even when there shouldn't be anything to fear, Kubrick makes sure that the film's atmosphere keeps the audience on their toes at all times. Kubrick also toys with creating suspense by making the characters notice something before it is revealed to the audience. Thanks to this ambiguity, the audience gets to experience the intense reactions of the characters before they see what the characters are reacting to. This differs quite a lot from the traditional horror films where the audience experiences the scares at the same time as the character. However, Kubrick's take on this ultimately creates more intense moments in already intense scenes.

Triggering our primal senses is what this film excels at. It is strange and unpredictable, and by repeatedly stimulating these senses the suspense is always left hanging mid-air.

In order to achieve suspense in the novel, King used a huge variety of suspense-building techniques: quick-paced narration, which occasionally slows down, short climactic episodes, dreams and visions as a means of foreshadowing and indicating the instability of a character's psyche. In her book *The Suspense of Horror and the Horror of Suspense*, Maria Anastasova notes that these dreams and visions are another autobiographical element, considering King had nightmares during his stay at the Stanley Hotel. She also states that

*"the function of dreams, especially in Gothic literature, is to foreshadow the future and thus move the plot forward. They maintain suspense on another level – by suggesting the idea that something awful is going to happen and they also signal the psychological instability and vulnerability of the characters."*<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Maria Anastasova, "The Suspense of Horror and the Horror of Suspense", Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018, p. 74



Because different patterns of suspense-building cooperate and work together, Stephen King's *The Shining* operates on multiple levels at all times. Episodes of gradually developed motifs that produce suspense are scattered throughout the chapters, resulting in one motif intertwining with another. The entire narrative is an accumulation of smaller episodes of suspense which are always partially resolved, yet never disappear entirely until the end of the novel.

King relied on the structure of his narrative and the reader's imagination in order to succeed in creating a suspenseful story. He has been praised by many for his talent of creating gripping narratives. Since it came out in 1997, *The Shining* remained a classic amongst bibliophiles. When we take into account *Doctor Sleep*, the sequel which was published in 2013, it is evident that the narrative has not been abated. The character's development, the social issues addressed and the autobiographical background are just a few elements that caught the reader's eye and achieved mass fondness. The discussion about the novel became even more dynamic after Kubrick's film was released. According to King, the film was seriously detached from the original message he wanted to convey and changed the whole perspective of his narrative. Historic, cultural and literal interpretations of both the film and the novel widened immensely, and issues of racism and the Holocaust as themes, as well as many conspiracy theories were added.

Finally, we must consider another element of Kubrick's film that objectively advanced the adaptation: music and sound effects. Kubrick himself selected most of the soundtracks for this film, while music editor Gordon Stainforth was largely accountable for incorporating the auditory pieces into the visual. In almost every scene there are eerie sounds within the background that intermittently intensify, even when unnecessary, just to keep the audience on

the edge. Some of the original music tracks were composed by using an analog synthesizer keyboard to create unnatural and disturbingly unsettling sounds. Works by Bartók, Penderecki and Ligeti were used to accompany the frantic and horrific scenes in the film. Surprisingly enough, these pieces of music were never intended to be related to horror, let alone be used as a soundtrack in a horror film. Shrieking strings and discordant bellows have remained a common sound choice in many horror films following *The Shining*. Almost all horror films rely on music in jump scare scenes to indicate threat or imminent danger. Still, Kubrick wanted the music to be more than just an entourage to the scenes. In most horror films the music can indicate threat and danger. Yet, in this film, it also created extreme suspense where the audience would expect it least. The film's atmosphere is unsettling and unpredictable with scenes that startle the viewer although there are no remarkable visual changes. Scenes that look 'peaceful' still make the audience quite uncomfortable, precisely because of the music. In my opinion, the music served as a good replacement for Kubrick's undermining narrative in the film.

### **3.4. Findings**

Since filmmakers greatly influence their films even when they are adapting someone's work, they are often considered to be the true authors. Auteurs such as Alfred Hitchcock, Stanley Kubrick and Walt Disney are frequently not considered adaptors because of their signature attributes to the source materials they use. It is evident that when a medium is transferred to another, a new and unique artwork is created, regardless of how detached or close it is to the source artwork. It is merely a (re)presentation of an artform, but through a different medium.<sup>26</sup>

Those who have read King's *The Shining* and seen Kubrick's film can clearly see that both

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<sup>26</sup> Adaptation, "Cinematic Terms - A FilmMaking Glossary", Filmsite LLC, 2021

artists created a masterpiece of their own. As one of many admirers of both artists, I believe that the film should not be treated as an attempt to 'copy' Stephen King's work, but as Kubrick's own creation. Kubrick has been criticized for disrespecting the main purpose, which was according to King, to tell a story. Nevertheless, Kubrick had a vision that was different and unique at that time. The underlying reasoning for that statement lies in the fact that both King and Kubrick created masterpieces that have the same outline, but a different execution in form and style.

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## 4. Conclusion

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My thesis that an adaptation may be detached from the source to honor the vision of the artist who is adapting the work is correct for the following reasons:

Firstly, Kubrick's film was his independent creation. As stated in the analysis of adaptation studies, an adaptation can be either closely connected to the source or only used as inspiration to form a new work of art. One must understand that adaptation is a *reworking* of an existing source. 'Rewriting', for instance, changes the source deliberately in order to fit the adapter's ideas<sup>27</sup>, while 'writing back' adds commentary and critique to the source text.<sup>28</sup> Parodies, on the other hand, imitate and add satire to the source text. All of these techniques are allowed to be utilized by the adapter. Arguably, Kubrick used 'rewriting' and 'writing back' in his adaptation, which was an artistic choice he made. In other words, Kubrick envisioned the film a certain way and created his own concepts to form an adaptation he thought would suit best. The detachment from the original source was necessary to fit Kubrick's set of skills and talent of filmmaking.

Secondly, both the novel and the film were a huge success and an individual masterpiece. Each artist is an expert in their respective field, and their works only further amplify that fact. The adaptation could have been done by any filmmaker, and could have turned out completely differently, but I believe Kubrick found the adequate manner of achieving an entertaining and groundbreaking horror film. He highlighted the aspects of the novel that he was drawn to, but lost focus on the in-depth narrative that King deemed crucial to the story. In

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<sup>27</sup> Corinne Lhermitte, "Adaptation as Rewriting: Evolution of a Concept." Open Edition Journals, Presses Universitaires De Rennes, 26 August 2009

<sup>28</sup> Ranga Mataire, "The Idea behind 'Writing Back'." The Sunday Mail, 13 April 2019

the film the audience became distant to the characters, but became inundated with the cinematography and the different approach Kubrick presented. On the other hand, King's novel made the audience connect with the characters and their backstories, eager to follow the characters' arcs through the novel which finally culminated in a satisfying and conclusive ending. Ultimately, my research has proved that adaptations should not be judged on their accuracy in portraying the source material and that aspect should not be the sole basis on which the work is criticized. A film can concomitantly be well-made and not directly copied from the source text. Finally, upon reviewing the findings of my research, I believe that both the novel and the film, although they are quite different in many aspects, should be respected as individual and unique masterpieces of artistic expression.

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