

The formal analysis and critical evaluation of a selected adaptation.

In this essay I will be discussing Stephen King's novel, *The Shining* (1977) and Stanley Kubrick's adaptation, *The Shining* (1980).

"Content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not its self. (Naremore 2000, p.3).

When people talk about a film being adapted into a film they always compare it to the book, that the book was better or the film was better. These two things can't really be judged like that as they are two totally different forms of storytelling. The book is the book and the film is the film and when it comes to *The Shinning*, these two are very different indeed.

There was not long between the release of the book and the film. Kubrick was sent the script and liked it straight away, in an Interview with Ciment, Kubrick (1982) said, 'seemed to strike an extraordinary balance between the psychological and the supernatural in such a way as to lead you to think that the supernatural would eventually be explained by the psychological.' Although there are many differences between King and Kubrick's works this is evident in the both the story and the film that you aren't sure if the events are really happening in the physical world in if in the characters minds. In the visions that Danny sees, we aren't sure whether these events are actually happening or if it is a psychic vision which is called *Shining* in the book, or if they are a real apparition in front of him. He said that the novel constantly makes you feel as if all will become clear, but nothing ever is fully explained.

Warner brothers bought the rights to *The Shining* soon after release, and also the rights to a screen play written by King, though Kubrick wanted to have a new screenplay written without King. In an interview

Kubrick with Ciment (1980), 'If you read a story that someone else has written you have the irreplaceable experience of reading it for the first time which is obviously something you can't have if you have written the story.'

Novelist Diane Johnson who was lecturing on gothic horror at the time, worked on the screen play with Kubrick. At the time King was an inexperienced writer and had not written a great deal, he disliked Kubrick's adaptation and went years later to buy the rights back and made his own miniseries. There are many differences between the novel and the film. When thinking of the book, the main moments that stand out in the story are; the hotel, the boiler, the wasp nests and the hedge animals. These were changed in the film. Of course, there is still the hotel, but unlike the novel these are all taken out. The points in the film are based in different layers through the hotel, starting with the wasps in the attic, the ghosts in the hotel, the hedge animals in the garden and finally the boiler in the basement. The film sets the story out on a more level playing field where the mazes that were set out in all levels of the novel hotel are now the mazes of corridors in the hotel and the actual hedge maze in the garden.

The story has to be narrowed down from the original as the length imposes restrictions. King's work is incredibly detailed with often several paragraphs or pages to talk about a scene or past event, therefore instead of words, Kubrick uses visuals and condenses parts of the story down succinctly. There are parts he can't say in words such as how Danny and Halloran shine, he does these through sound and reaction shots.

There would be various reasons why he would have changed parts such as parts he didn't like, things that didn't need to be included or things that weren't possible to do well, such as the hedge animals, which was made very evident in *The Shinning* (1997), a three-part miniseries that these would be very hard to achieve and do well.

The main part that was changed was the relationship between the characters. Wendy looked after Jack and Danny and Jack were very close. Instead the film talking about Jack being a recovering alcoholic who lost his job at a school due to losing his temper at a student and needing the work, the film focuses on Jack being a writer who is struggling with writer's block. There are parts that do point to family difficulties; at the beginning of the film a doctor comes for Danny after what seems like a fit or sorts but is Danny having a vision from Tony the inner voice of the shining, Wendy tells the doctor that it was an accident but Jack broke Danny's arm. During the film we sense that there is something that he is struggling with and eventually the hotel presents Jack with the appearance of the bar being fully stocked and Jack becomes drunk. The book was more a story of the family trying to stay together despite everything. The film has Jack seem strange from when we first meet his character, that something isn't right about him.

Jack comes to the hotel psychologically prepared to do its murderous bidding. He doesn't have very much further to go for his anger and frustration to become completely uncontrollable. He is bitter about his failure as a writer. He is married to a woman for whom he has only contempt. He hates his son. In the hotel, at the mercy of its powerful evil, he is quickly ready to fulfill his dark role.

Wendy's character is also different from the book, where she is blonde and is a much stronger character and does much more to help Jack, in the film, she seems to be more controlled by Jack, she is much more subdued in the film. Kubrick said about Wendy, "The novel pictures her as a much more self-reliant and attractive woman, but these qualities make you wonder why she has put up with Jack for so long." (Ciment, 1980) The Wendy in the film is much more fitting without the whole back story to explain it in full. In the story Wendy wants to leave the hotel but would rather stay than return to civilization as it would mean living with her Mother, the Wendy in the film perhaps doesn't seem as though she would be strong enough to leave Jack at all, let alone leave it for her Mother's house.

The ongoing theme of abuse is in the book, with Jack and Wendy's relationships with their parents and with Danny's relationship with his father. The film doesn't address the back story between the parents, but what it does is shows it in a more relevant light to the time in which the film was made. The family values movement was all about a family must stick together and uphold tradition family values or it will be the downfall of people and this film is throughout a critique on America. Throughout the film the themes of race, class and family are common. Through the film there are hints of Indian art and iconography through, such as an animal head in the hall where Jack writes, patterns in the carpets and in one scene Wendy is wearing a shirt with embroidered Indian iconography such as cactus and tipis. The scene that is most obviously racist is where Jack is in the bathroom with Grady the caretaker. The bathroom is a wonderfully shocking red, and is all together unsettling when it starts, let alone Grady the caretaker being there and saying to Jack,

No sir, YOU are the caretaker. You've always been the caretaker.
I ought to know: I've always been here.

Looking closer at the mise-en-scene, Jack is wearing blue jeans and the scene has red, blue and white, the colours of the American flag. In this scene Grady also calls Holloran a Nigger, is a very pronounced way to insinuate even more disgust than just the racist term. Looking at the above line closer, and the complete part of text they are saying that they are in control and nobody will get in the way of their white male power.

Looking at the end of the story where the main changes take place. As I have previously said about not being able to create hedge monsters, Kubrick didn't like the ending to the book, he wanted an ending that the audience couldn't anticipate, in the film it seems as though Holloran will save Wendy and Danny and when he dies it seems there is no way for them to escape. In the book the Holloran does come to the hotel to save them and is attacked by Jack but goes on to save them and take them away

from the Overlook. Everything in the rest of Kubrick's adaptation had not led up to the book ending that way. Interestingly in the original cut that only made it to a few cinemas before being taken out by order of Kubrick, where Danny and Wendy were recovering in hospital. It was intended to show that they were alright and survive, but with cutting it out it is more fitting with the whole theme of the film and the novel that there is so much unexplained of exactly what is going on, who is imagining things, are these things really happening or are they happening in the mind of the characters. As it is the end is incredibly tense and is a long chase between the characters left not sure how it will end and keeps you guessing right up to the final shot of Jack in the photo from the group party on the wall.

Iconic shots in the film were; The elevator doors with a wave of blood, the lady dead in bathtub and long shots that not only make visual interest but lets the actors work in longer and complete takes, and maintain a continuous level of emotion. He made it his own, for example, in the film the Grady sisters are a horrifying sight, one of the scenes that sticks with viewers, these scenes were not in the book and them looking like twins was not in the book. The girls were a reference to the photo *Identical Twins, Roselle, New Jersey, 1967. (Arbus, 1967)*

Casting of the actors for the roles was spot on as if the roles were made for them. Jack Nicholson embodies the character of Jack, and in other films he plays a very similar character such as Daryl in *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987), who is a manic and has a feeling of danger on the surface as lovely and charming he may appear on the surface. Interestingly also the same name of their character was Danny Lloyd who played Danny. Shelley Duval was cast as Wendy, her unusual look fit the character and unusual-ness of the film, her performance of being a caring mother and being frightened of Jack in the end is exactly what the character that Kubrick wrote was.

In conclusion Kubrick made the story his own and both stories told in the different mediums are incredibly different but both great detailed stories. Both can be looked at in so many different lights,

ways and with many ideological terms. All in all, it is a great adaptation on many levels and it's a shame that Stephen King disliked it.

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