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# **THE SHINING: A SEPARATION**

A Fundamental Flaw in Adaptation Studies

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# Abstract

**Title:** *The Shining: A Separation - A Fundamental Flaw in Adaptation Studies*

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**Abstract:**

In recent years, the academic field of adaptation studies has started questioning the fidelity-led approach to adaptation that was long its guiding principle. This essay builds upon this novel approach by focusing on the conflictual relationship between Stephen King's novel *The Shining* (1977) and the film version (1980) directed by Stanley Kubrick. This comparative study shows the ways in which Kubrick's film transcends its source material to establish itself as a unique piece of art, not beholden to standards of fidelity in order to succeed. The focus of the argument is on the central themes of the novel and the film, aspects of metafiction and postmodernism, and Kubrick's deployment of Freud's ideas about the uncanny.

**Keywords:** *The Shining*, Stanley Kubrick, Stephen King, adaptation studies, metafiction, postmodernism, The Uncanny, film theory, film adaptation

# Table of Contents

1. Introduction .....	1
2. Theory .....	3
3. Previous Research.....	5
4. Adaptation, Approach and Style .....	6
4.1 Adaptation and Approach.....	6
4.2 Style .....	11
5. Themes and Postmodernism .....	14
5.1 Themes .....	14
5.2 Postmodernism.....	16
6. Conclusion .....	21
References .....	22

# 1. Introduction

*The Shining*, the novel authored by Stephen King and the feature film directed by Stanley Kubrick, is one of the prime examples of the conflictual and complicated relationship between two art forms: the literary and the cinematic. As such, it has been a frequently examined work in the field of adaptation studies, which has long explored the relationship between literary source material and its adaptation. Regrettably, the field's examination of the inter-medial relationship between the drastically different art forms that are cinema and literature has a chequered history, with its strongest offence being the subordination of cinema as a medium due to the way in which "adaptations are studied under the sign of literature, which provides an evaluative touchstone for films in general" (Leitch 3).

Although the author is the main figure in the creation of a literary work, one that exists with neither budgetary restrictions nor limits to what can be represented on the page, once the text crosses over into the cinematic realm it becomes a part of a collaborative process in which, under the unified vision of a director, the story is processed through the idiom of a different medium, and the means and the scope of the given production. In my writing of this thesis, in no way do I wish to strip the authorship of the original work away from the author, nor do I intend to diminish it, but I certainly would argue that as the source material continues to exist in its original form and is in no way altered by the making of an adaptation, it is unreasonable to subject its transposition to another medium to a process of evaluation and assessment based on criteria intended for a literary medium.

In the decades since *The Shining* was adapted, King's literary oeuvre has become a treasure trove for film adaptations. While the author has become synonymous with the best the horror genre can offer both in written and adapted form, the 1980 film adaptation of *The Shining* is best known for the director behind the adaptation, Stanley Kubrick. King's disdain for Kubrick's adaptation has been vocal and constant throughout the years, and it is clearly aimed at the treatment reserved to this specific novel, rather than a general stance on adaptation. In the 1990s, King penned a faithful TV adaptation, specifically titled *Stephen King's The Shining*, with mixed results, although he claimed it was a superior transposition. King seems to have unwittingly proven that a faithful adaptation does not necessarily translate into good cinema and that writing great literature is not the same as writing great screenplays.

This very conflict will be the focus of this thesis, in which I will make the case for a stronger separation of the mediums of cinema and literature, as an adaptation can serve as a unrelated statement that operates more as an unbound piece of art rather than as a subservient product upon which to apply mandatory demands of faithfulness to the source material. The theoretical framework for this study will therefore compare and contrast aspects of the novel and the film and the respective auteurs' approaches to storytelling, in order to highlight the manner in which Kubrick's meta-fictional and avant-garde handling of the source material transcends it to create a work that stands on its own, with its own independent themes and ambitions. The wildly differing characterisation of Jack Torrance, the story's main character, and the family unit as a whole will be one of the vehicles through which to address Kubrick's manipulation of the source material. Beyond the specifics of the story and the way characters are used in the novel and in the film, a broader discussion of metafiction and postmodernism will be included, as the central figure of Jack Torrance as a writer assumes different connotations in the context of the written word and in that of the moving image.

## 2. Theory

In the modern landscape of social media and the resulting increased participation in the discourse on film from audience members, a sentiment has grown to be pervasive amongst readers and moviegoers alike: the book is always better than the film. Behind such an obtuse sentiment lies a fundamental misunderstanding of cinema as a medium, one that has also been backed, and influenced perhaps, by literary scholars for over sixty years, since the publication of George Bluestone's *Novels Into Films*, the text that is arguably the founder of the field of adaptation studies. The reasons are various, ranging from "an uncritical adoption of the author's intention as a criterion for the success of both the novel and any possible film adaptation" (Leitch 3) to the notion that the "separate disciplines appear to have been significantly influenced by interdisciplinary rivalries" (Elliott 13). Despite the clear distinction that some academics would like to maintain, perhaps justified by "an assumption that art cannot be aimed at the masses and that art cannot be mass produced" (as cinema is perceived to be despite the wildly differing budgets and ambitions to be found between Hollywood, indie, and art-house fare), the intrinsic connection between the two art-forms through the decades has led to a great deal of cross-pollination, as "literature adapts film techniques and cinematic genres creating new types of fiction" (Cartmell 5), resulting in a shift in approach within the field that opens up various possibilities in the future assessment of cinema.

In recent years, adaptation studies has relented on fidelity as the touchstone through which adaptations are evaluated, which has opened up the field to "fresh approaches to interpretation, rewriting, and refunctioning" (Cartmell & Whelehan: 2014). Yet, fidelity remains an intensely debated issue by academicians in the field and by audiences alike, one which I intend to challenge in this essay. According to Kubrick, "film operates on a level much closer to music and painting than to the printed word, and, of course, movies present an opportunity to convey complex concepts and abstractions without the traditional reliance on words" ("An Interview" Web). It is through this perspective that I intend to establish a framework through which to examine cinema in the context of adaptation studies, as I make a case for adaptations as independent artistic entities from their source material, unbound from demands of faithfulness. As such, the theoretical framework for the study will follow

perspectives such as those presented by Leitch and Cartmell, critical of the traditionalist views of adaptation studies, in order to position the study in a space that examines the two different pieces of art on a level plain, rather than assessing the merits of the film uniquely in relation to the intention of the novel's author. The study follows a funnel structure that will identify different levels through which to approach the scope of the differences, and the few but relevant similarities, between film and novel.

Although this thesis does question fidelity as a qualitative touchstone in relation to *The Shining*, it should be noted that it is not an absolute maxim by which to go in the assessment of all adaptations, as is argued by Wright in regards to it not being “an appeal to anteriority” (174) (in terms of the practice being a solely antiquated critical practice within both adaptation studies and film theory). Consequently, said variance in the approach to fidelity is particularly relevant once the film theory concept of “auteur theory” is taken into consideration. Auteur theory, as originated in the *Cahiers du Cinema* and then embraced and developed by film theory, positions the director as the “author” of the film, and as such, the issue of fidelity is dependent upon the director's ambitions and intentions towards the adaptation of a given source material. Despite the limitations of auteur theory, in the case of Kubrick it certainly applies, as each of his undertakings involved years of research and thorough involvement in each facet of the filmmaking process, creating a unified vision that is markedly his.

### 3. Previous Research

The topic of Kubrick's *The Shining* and his process of adaptation has long been the focus of essays and literature, as the lasting image of Kubrick as an auteur is one of particular interest, once it is taken into account that out of thirteen films he directed, twelve were adaptations. In "Introduction: Kubrick and Adaptation," I.Q. Hunter raises the idea of Kubrick as an "auteur of adaptation," for whom "adaptation, or rather collaborative adaptation, was crucial to realising his personal vision" (Web). Both "The Uncanny, The Gothic and The Loner: Intertextuality in the Adaptation Process of *The Shining*" by Catriona McAvoy and "The Unempty Wasps' Nest: Kubrick's *The Shining*, Adaptation, Chance, Interpretation" by Graham Allen seek to "explore the adaptation process in the space between book and film" (McAvoy 345) by looking at pre-production material and the way in which Kubrick adapts King's novel while incorporating a myriad of elements stemming from other sources, such as Sigmund Freud's *The Uncanny*, and how that changes the nature of the source material to fit the medium of film to the best effect. Furthermore, "Shades of Horror: Fidelity and Genre in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*" by Jarrell D. Wright ponders on questions similar to those brought forth in this thesis, will be consulted and built upon with the purpose to further the critical assessment of the film, in partial agreement with its proposed notion that "a film participates in—and should therefore be conceptualized as part of—a sequence of adaptations of which the "original" text, in turn, constitutes a segment" (Wright 175).

A number of secondary sources will be referenced in highly specific contexts within the discussion to provide additional background information on the history of the relationship between King and Kubrick and their works, or to strengthen the analysis of stylistic and thematic choices made by either the author or the director. Additionally, extracts from interviews made at the time of the film's release with King, Kubrick and Diane Johnson, the author and novelist who assisted the director in the writing of the screenplay, will be immensely helpful in approaching their artistic intentions and cementing their positions in relation to each other's work.



# 4. Adaptation, Approach and Style

In this section, I will address the differences in approach and style that are immediately apparent in the oeuvre of Stephen King and Stanley Kubrick and in the specific case of *The Shining* that reveal the fundamental incompatibility of the two from a creative standpoint.

## 4.1 Adaptation and Approach

At the time of its release, King's views on *The Shining* adaptation, based on his perspective on horror and his attitude towards character work and story development, were that "the movie was very cold. Horror works best when it's hot; when it's an emotional trip, like a rollercoaster ride. Horror is also a medium where there has to be a feeling of love and warmth. You have to care when people die" ("Big Macs" Web). Furthermore, King describes his two main gripes with the film. The first is the characterisation of Jack Torrance as played by Jack Nicholson, whose thoroughly mad performance, in King's view, robs the character of the depth and arc he had in the novel and therefore deprives the film of the heart of the story. The second is the fact that Kubrick, according to King, was a pragmatic, rational and cold man who had trouble conceiving of a supernatural world ("Playboy Interview" Web). This failing of Kubrick's, in King's opinion, is the reason why the director "looked, instead, for evil in the characters and made the film into a domestic tragedy with only vaguely supernatural overtones. That was the basic flaw: Because he couldn't believe, he couldn't make the film believable to others" (ibid Web). Furthermore, King adds that "what's basically wrong with Kubrick's version of *The Shining* is that it's a film by a man who thinks too much and feels too little; and that's why, for all its virtuoso effects, it never gets you by the throat and hangs on the way real horror should." (ibid Web).

These comments show King's emotion-driven approach to the horror genre. His brand of writing finds its purest and most effective form in the development of characters for whom the reader should truly care, which in turn adds weight to the horror elements by which they are threatened. This central aspect of the author's writing style is compounded by the morals at the very core of his stories, where greater and supernatural evils are squashed by the time the last page is read and the battle between the more traditionally binary versions of good and

evil is won. This is also explored at length in the part-autobiography, part-essay *Danse Macabre*, where King adds:

The horror story, beneath its fangs and fright wig, is really ... conservative ... its main purpose is to reaffirm the virtues of the norm by showing us what awful things happen to people who venture into taboo lands. ... Modern horror stories are not much different from the morality plays of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries ... We have the comforting knowledge when the lights go down in the theater or when we open the book that the evildoers will almost certainly be punished, and measure will be returned for measure. (395)

His issues with the director's handling of the story and the characters, in conjunction with the perceived clash in terms of personality and artistic ambition between himself and Kubrick, form the foundation for his long-standing antagonistic stance. King's views of cinema in general do not seem to be particularly positive either, having said that "the movies have never been a big deal to me. If they're good, that's terrific. If they're not, they're not. But I see them as a lesser medium than fiction, than literature ... They're not high art the way I think books are high art" (*Feast of Fear* 16). With the exception of *The Shining*, King is not particularly critical of the other adaptations of his works, which makes his position against Kubrick's film stand out.

Kubrick did not set out to make a typical horror film, and he enlisted the help of author and professor Diane Johnson to help him find an academic approach to horror that would unearth its psychological roots and the Freudian notions at its core. In addressing the very basic aspects of the process to adaptation, Kubrick noted:

There are a number of scenes that work in the novel -- such as the topiary, in which the hedge animals move and pursue a victim -- that I deleted from the screenplay because I didn't think they would work in the film. There are no creaking doors, no skeletons tumbling out of closets -- none of the paraphernalia of the standard horror film. In a story of this kind, establishing believability is the most important matter, which is why I tried to establish a matter-of-fact visual style. ("Review by Hofsess" Web)

Kubrick's creative ambition, compounded by his career-wide success in redefining and revolutionising every genre he approached, was to bring to life the scariest film he could while not relying on many of the genre's long established machinations. In retrospect, his undertaking was a risky one, but one that ultimately paid off. This attitude is further corroborated by Diane Johnson, whose involvement in the project was intended to help the director in rooting the film in an academic foundation of philosophy and psychology:

When it came to the horror film, he did not want to make a movie that depended unduly on ghosts and gimmicks for horrific effect. Though he did not rule out the supernatural, he wanted to create a film in which the horror generated from human psychology. He wanted to know what the King novel was about, in the deepest psychological sense; he wanted to talk about that and to read theoretical works that might shed light on it, particularly works of psychology and especially those of Freud. (Johnson Web)

Kubrick's distinctive directorial and tonal approach operates as antithetical to King's, favouring a theatrical and abstract approach that allows for extreme interpretative openness. Kubrick and Johnson drew from a multitude of novels and academic sources in the writing of the screenplay of the film, but none is more important than Sigmund Freud's "The Uncanny", from which Kubrick drew the maxims that would inform his approach to the horror seen in the film (McAvoy 346). Chief amongst them is the approach to the "uncanny" - translated from the German word *unheimlich*, "unhomely", which is the opposite of heimlich, the "familiar," the "belonging to the home" (Freud 2). As such, what is most uncanny, or most unhomely, is the homely itself, a twisted representation of something to us very familiar. It is in regards to these guiding principles that I would argue that Kubrick's *The Shining* is as much an adaptation of King's novel as it is an adaptation of Freud's *The Uncanny*.

Another key theme present in the film, which also finds its roots in Freud's writing and is closely tied to the uncanny, is that of the Doppelgänger. Much of the iconic imagery originating in film, such as the Grady twins, Danny and his internalised representation of Tony, and the woman in room 237, at first beautiful but then revealed as a decaying but animate corpse, are direct results of Kubrick's inclusion of the theme. Duality becomes a core thematic aspect of the film, enhanced by the ubiquitous presence of mirrors in the Overlook Hotel and by its predominant placing during key scenes. Despite the eventual success of Kubrick's implementation of Freud's principles, King derided the insertion of Freudian elements in the story:

No body has a Freudian view of the relationship of man to his society. Not you, not me, not Kubrick, nobody. The whole concept is abysmally silly. And as a movie-goer, I don't give a tin whistle what a director thinks; I want to know what he sees. Most directors have good visual and dramatic instincts (most good directors, anyway), but in intellectual terms, they are pinheads, by and large. Nothing wrong in that; who wants a film director who's a utility infielder? Let them do their job, enjoy their work, but for Christ's sake, let's not see Freudianisms in the work of any film director. ("King on Carrie" Web)

Although his demeaning views of directors are hypocritical at best coming from a writer who has long raged against literary critics and the labelling of his primary genre as a “lesser” artistic endeavour, what is most curious is that there are indeed shades of Freudian views present in the novel, which the author himself may have not intended, but were noticed by Kubrick.

Duality is present in the novel as a means of foreshadowing, with two relationships in particular of importance: Jack and his father, Mark Anthony Torrance, and Danny and Tony. King explores cycles of abuse in many of the chapters that delve into Jack’s psyche to expose his troubled past. After a neighbour had discovered Jack playing with matches and spanked him, Jack’s abusive and alcoholic father Marc Anthony “had reddened Jack's behind ... and then blacked his eye. And when his father had gone into the house ... Jack had come upon a stray dog and kicked it into the gutter” (King 118). While “in those days it did not seem strange to Jack that the father would win all the arguments with his children by the use of his fists ... it had not seemed strange that his own love should go hand-in-hand with his fear” (244-245), at the end Jack’s “love began to curdle at nine when his father put his mother into the hospital with his cane” (245). Jack’s violence towards a defenceless dog extends the violence received from the powerful adults, the father and the neighbour, down the line, which in turn extends again from Jack to Danny. Marc Anthony’s voice returns to Jack later in the novel, speaking through the radio:

You have to kill him Jacky, and her, too. Because a real artist must suffer. Because each man kills the thing he loves. Because they’ll always be conspiring against you, trying to hold you back and drag you down. Right now that boy of yours is where he shouldn’t be. Trespassing. ... Cane him for it Jacky, cane him within an inch of his life. (King 250)

Even though Jack replies “You're dead, you're in your grave, you're not in me at all!” (King 250), his eventual possession by the Hotel turns Jack into a reincarnation of his father, who even speaks in his words. Similarly, Marc Anthony’s cane, mentioned multiple times, is no different than the roque mallet that Jack bares to hurt him, as the the dark figure who wields it in Danny’s many nightmares and visions (King 35). In the case of Danny and Tony, we see a clever use of foreshadowing that is ultimately no different than what we see with Jack and his father, but played in reverse. Upon reaching the final chapters, once Tony finally appears in front of him, Danny discovers that “looking at Tony was like looking into a magic mirror and

seeing himself in ten years ... as if the Daniel Anthony Torrance that would someday be — was a halfling caught between father and son, a ghost of both, a fusion” (King 446). This means that all of the visions and hints that Danny receives through his ability to shine are actually memories for Tony, in a use of foreshadowing that creates an added parallel between the use of memories for Jack, who keeps looking destructively at the past, and Danny, who looks hopefully at the future.

Ultimately, the clash between director and author finds its roots in the radically different philosophical beliefs that inform the themes upon which both film and novel are built. Of chief importance is their approach to evil, which, according to King, “is always an act of free and conscious will – a conscious decision” (“King on Carrie” Web), while Kubrick believed that “there’s something inherently wrong with the human personality ... There’s an evil side to it.” (“Kubrick’s Horror Show” Web). These thematic constructs are key to the identity of both versions, and Kubrick’s particular perspective leads me to a fundamental disagreement with McAvoy in her assessment that “Kubrick’s approach to the adaptation of *The Shining* as a fairy tale [...] can perhaps be read as a positive and optimistic film” (357), especially in relation to her using the following quote from Kubrick himself as a reason to think the film “can give us hope” (ibid: 357): “If you can be frightened by a ghost story, then you must accept the possibility that supernatural beings exist. If they do, then there is more than just oblivion waiting beyond the grave” (“Kubrick on The Shining” Web). This quote seems to oversimplify Kubrick’s ultimate intentions, as the philosophical attitudes previously presented contradict this, while the historical context in which fairy tales operate was a facet of the fantasy story that he intended to and ultimately did twist. In the very same interview, while professing his curiousness and fascination towards ESP and the supernatural, he hinted at what would become a defining element of the film by saying that one of the aspects he had appreciated of the novel was that it:

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: "Jack must be imagining these things because he's crazy". This allowed you to suspend your doubt of the supernatural until you were so thoroughly into the story that you could accept it almost without noticing. (“Kubrick on The Shining.”: Web)

The director's approach towards balancing the supernatural and the psychological is of paramount importance, an aspect to which I will return in successive sections of the thesis, especially in relation to Kubrick's meta-fictional and postmodernist attitudes towards the material and the ultimate goals he had for the film.

A further source of friction can be attributed to the fact that Kubrick did not have particularly kind words for King or the novel at the time the film was being made, saying about the novel that it "is by no means a serious literary work, but the plot is for the most part extremely well worked out, and for a film that is often all that really matters" ("Kubrick on *The Shining*." Web), he added that "King's great ability is in plot construction. He doesn't seem to take great care in writing ... He seems mostly concerned with invention, which I think he's very clear about" ("Interview by Foix" 675). This stance aligns with the answer to a question fundamental to Kubrick when approaching an adaptation:

Is the novel translatable into a film? Because most novels, really, if they are good, aren't; it's something inherent about a good novel, either the scale of the story or the fact that the best novels tend to concern themselves with the inner life of the characters rather than with the external action. So there's always the risk of oversimplifying them when you try to crystallize the elements of the themes or the characters. ("Interview by Foix" 673)

This stance, shaped by his decades of experience, seems to contradict earlier comments made at the time of *Lolita*'s release, about the perfect novel to adapt being:

Not the novel of action but, on the contrary, the novel which is mainly concerned with the inner life of its characters [as] it will give the adaptor an absolute compass bearing, as it were, on what a character is thinking or feeling at any given moment of the story ... and from this he can invent action which will be an objective correlative of the book's psychological content, will accurately dramatise this in an implicit, off-the-nose way without resorting to having the actors deliver literal statements of meaning ("Words and Music" Web)

Both perspectives ring true to Kubrick's process at different stages of his career, informing the analysis which follows in the coming sections.

## 4.2 Style

In terms of style, King's prose and style keeps close to the canons of the Gothic novel, with its explicit references to Edgar Allan Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death* and the undeniable

influence of Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, with flourishes of style in the form of capitalising words for effect, such as REDRUM, or the use of sentences enclosed in parenthesis for the voices that the characters hear, which disrupt the flow of the writing as they do the characters' thoughts (King 35). On the other hand, it is hard to overstate how massively influential the film has been, as it has shaped many of the conventions now closely associated to the highest caliber of filmmaking in the genre. The use of 18mm wide-angle lenses creates frames that are large in scope, serving the dual purpose of amplifying the labyrinthine qualities of the Overlook Hotel while also surrounding the characters in negative space that enhances the sense of isolation present in the film. In stark contrast to most horror films, *The Shining* is a brightly lit film, using a naturalistic approach to stage lighting that simulates natural light and justified light, resulting in a thorough avoidance of any expressionistic lighting that cannot be justified by the placing of the real light sources in the environment in which a scene takes place.

In a departure from the stylistic conventions of the horror genre, Kubrick holds the camera on the actors' faces as they react to whichever frightful element or entity with which they are confronted, before showing them to us. Typically, the reveal of the scare occurs simultaneously for the audience as it does for the characters experiencing the scare, but by forcing us to experience the fear in the characters' eyes first, Kubrick creates a level of intimacy and immersion in a purely cinematic way. Similarly, another specific editing choice stands as the umpteenth example of a disagreement between King and Kubrick, as the author took particular issue with the way in which the reveal of the manuscript is handled in the film, saying that:

[Wendy] can't help it, she looks at it. And we're frightened when she does that, because we ... know the conventions of the genre demand that she be caught. Then it gets worse, because when she starts to thumb through the pages she sees that he's writing the same thing over and over again: "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." And she's thumbing through it faster and faster and faster, and we're cutting back and forth to her face, from the book to her face, from the face to the book, back and forth, and it's great, because you know he's going to come. Then for some reason that I still don't understand ... Kubrick cuts away and shows Nicholson first, so there's no payoff. That's the end of it; that's the dissipation of the climax. ("King of the road" Web)

King argues that this editing choice nullifies the build-up and dissipates its intended climax. Instead of sacrificing the suspense built up throughout the scene with a cheap scare, Kubrick

instead builds on the momentum by showing us the impending doom, as Jack approaching Wendy at such a pivotal point in the film can only lead to a further descent into darkness. Similar reversals can be seen in the handling of many of the moments of great suspense and their frightening payoff, which Kubrick consciously undercuts in order to make the audience feel uneasy and regularly unsafe throughout the entire duration of the film.

Aiding the editing are Kubrick's characteristically unorthodox musical choices, which have become staples of the horror soundscape, such as various avant-garde pieces by György Ligeti and Krzysztof Penderecki, and a contemporary electronic score by Wendy Carlos and Rachel Elkind, which includes the iconic rendition of the Hector Berlioz's "Dies Irae" which has become so closely tied to the film that most people do not know it originates as a piece of classical music. The duality of the music present in the film heightens many of the previously mentioned aspects which relate to the uncanny, as Kubrick juxtaposes drastically different composition styles to establish a firm post-modernist perspective that challenges the conventions of horror music and sound design.



# 5. Themes and Postmodernism

In this section, I will delve deeper into the execution to unearth how the deployment of thematic devices and a postmodern perspective sets the two apart.

## 5.1 Themes

Although the fidelity-led approach to adaptation would point to the smaller changes that concern character traits and character arcs and their translation to a different medium as the defining differences between the two versions of the story, the different attitudes towards the development of the themes make the strongest case for a more drastic separation of the two entities. For the purposes of the analysis, the elaboration of the themes can be approached both through a meta-fictional perspective, which mirrors the philosophical and creative predispositions of the two artists, and the exploration of the dichotomy of King's conservatism and Kubrick's postmodernism. With these defining qualities in mind, two important distinctions are of importance in regards to King being a naturalist and Kubrick oppressive and controlled. The paradox at the very core of King's writing is the very naturalism for which he is known, as the author explores concepts and stories that are inherently supernatural through highly realist techniques. Kubrick, on the other hand, often deals in scenarios that are anchored in the real world and in their resulting realistic consequences, but does so with a technical approach to storytelling that strips away any naturalistic element and subscribes to expressionist and postmodernist stylisation instead, rendering the coldness and controlled elaboration of any scenario an eerie experience.

Their drastically diverging philosophical perspectives form the foundation upon which the two different versions of *The Shining* were constructed. Although King's vitriol for the film adaptation is rooted in a multitude of disagreements with Kubrick, the most important is in the handling of Jack Torrance and his thematic relevance. The character is in many ways a proxy for King's own personal experiences and fears related to alcoholism and fatherhood. The mirroring of the author in the main character lends the novel a profoundly impactful meta-fictional key of reading, which King has spoken about on several occasions:

By making Jack Torrance a drinker who was trying to quit and by making him a part of the insidious child-beating syndrome that is passed from father to son to grandson, I found myself able to look around a dark corner and to see myself as I could have been, under the right set of circumstances. (“The Shining and Other Perpetrations” 13)

Similarly, King has relayed stories of experiences as a father which found their way in Jack Torrance as a character:

I came home one day and Joe, my oldest boy who was then three or four, had done all these cartoon and crayon drawings on this manuscript that I had been working on ... and I was thinking to myself, ‘Little son of a bitch I could kill him. I could kill him, look at this stuff!’ (“Omnibus” Web)

In King’s novel, much of what is established of Jack’s dysfunctional youth, his struggles with alcoholism, his proneness to bouts of violence and his frustrations with his family life and professional career, presents us with a sympathetic individual who is predisposed to be corrupted and possessed by the supernatural evil of the Overlook Hotel, though he is not doomed to succumb. The penchant for evil that results in his ultimate demise is a conscious choice, not a predetermined or foregone conclusion. Upon being introduced to the character in his meeting with Mr Ullman, Jack declares: “I no longer drink. I did once, and it got to be serious. But I haven’t had so much as a glass of beer in the last fourteen months. I don’t intend to bring any alcohol up here, and I don’t think there will be any opportunity to get any before the snow flies” (King 10). He intends his stay at the Overlook to be a change for the better. His descent and his corruption are gradual, as King slowly has the character rationalise “the Bad Thing,” as Danny calls it (ibid 30), saying that “he had always regarded himself as Jack Torrance, a really nice guy who was going to have to learn how to cope with his temper someday before it got him in trouble. The same way he was going to have to learn how to cope with his drinking” (ibid 118). Torrance argues that “it had nothing to do with willpower, or the morality of drinking, or the weakness or strength of his own character. There was a broken switch inside, or a circuit breaker that didn’t work” (ibid 117). The Jack Torrance we see in Kubrick’s film has no choice because the evil already resides within him. The Jack we meet at the beginning of the film is not someone trying to turn a new leaf, but rather someone already at the brink of madness, whose contempt for himself and those around him can only lead down one path, aptly amplified by Jack Nicholson’s enigmatic and maddening performance.

Torrance, and *The Shining* as a whole, exist in a highly personal metafictional space for King, the writing of which was a cathartic and expurgatory process for the author. Which makes Kubrick and Johnson's writing of an adaptation that refuted much of what made the novel such a personal affair for King an unsurprising source of contempt. Regardless, the meta-fictional aspects of Jack Torrance do not stop at King's auto-biographical reflections, as the choice of focusing the story on a writer has profoundly different effects on a narrative depending on whether it unfolds on the page or on the screen. In a novel, there are varying approaches to this. King allows us to inhabit Jack Torrance's mind and witness his inner turmoil and eventual descent to darkness, while never allowing us to read what he has been working on, as doing so would add a meta-textual dimension of text-within-the-novel that clashes with the author's style. In Kubrick's adaptation, on the other hand, the conservative qualities of King's writing are mutated and transferred to thoroughly postmodern territory that alters the meta-fictional aspects as presented in their original form.

## 5.2 Postmodernism

For Kubrick, postmodernism represented an ideal context in which to bring the private and personal level of King's metafiction in order to elevate it to an examination of historical and philosophical issues. The fascination with cinema and cinematic techniques is strongly present in postmodernist literature, where films and television appear as an ontological level as "a world-within-the-world, often one in competition with the primary diegetic world of the text, or a plane interposed between the level of verbal representation and the level of the "real" (McHale 128). This is filtered through the lens of cinema itself, where in turn it is the literary dimension that becomes a separate ontological level, albeit in a limited fashion. Kubrick does this through the use of details both small and large: the chapter cards that mark ever-shorter intervals of time throughout the running time of the film, the opening credits scrolling in a way to mimic the first pages of a novel, and most importantly, through the use of Jack's writing. We are shown Jack writing frequently, as his manuscript becomes an object of importance, the content of which is hidden from the audience until its reveal finally unmask the madness that has been building up throughout the film.

Kubrick's use of metafiction and self-reflexivity, coupled with his Freudian views on the uncanny and his refusal to abide to the traditional rules of horror, creates a piece of art that is fully concerned with the medium itself and utilises unorthodox cinematic and literary methods to explore its central theme. McHale describes the distinction between literal reality and cinema as a metaphorical vehicle in postmodern literature which "becomes increasingly indeterminate, until we are left wondering whether the movie reality is only a trope after all, or belongs to the 'real' world of this fiction" (128). It is in this approach that we find the crux of Kubrick's thematic and stylistic handling of the material, which is the balance between the inherent human evil and the supernatural, or the lack thereof. In the context of postmodernism, the fantastical is a relevant notion to appraise Kubrick's perspective. The most influential epistemological version of the fantastical is the one defined by Tzvetan Todorov:

Less a genre than a transient state of texts which actually belong to one of two adjacent genres: either the genre of the uncanny, in which apparently supernatural events are ultimately explained in terms of the laws of nature (for instance, as deceptions or hallucinations); or that of the marvellous, in which supernatural events are ultimately accepted as such—where, in other words, the supernatural becomes the norm. (qtd. in McHale 74)

H.P. Lovecraft is one of the defining authors in the realm of the fantastical and, to a degree, of the marvellous. His influence and the adoption of concepts closely connected to his cosmic horror appear in entirely different facets of the novel and the film of *The Shining*. King's story takes a rather literal approach to the iconography of H.P. Lovecraft's cosmic horror, as the Overlook Hotel is presented as a powerful supernatural evil that seeps into the lives of the Torrance family, while also explaining at length the mechanics and origins behind its nefarious force. Kubrick strips the Overlook of almost all of the outright supernatural power it had in the novel, while also obfuscating nearly all of the explanations behind the apparitions and phenomena that occur throughout the story. This can be traced back to Kubrick's explicit acknowledgement of Lovecraft's influence, saying that he had read one of the author's essays:

You should never attempt to explain what happens, as long as what happens stimulates people's imagination, their sense of the uncanny, their sense of anxiety and fear. And as long as it doesn't, within itself, have any obvious inner contradictions, it is just a matter of, as it were, building on the imagination, working in this area of feeling. ("Interview by Foix" 677)

It is important to point out that the near-mythical figure that Kubrick has attained as a director who could exert absolute control on his sets, and through the final cut he was always afforded, should not mean that any and all aspects of the film, especially in relation to its interpretative qualities, should be taken as conscious artistic decisions. Nonetheless, Kubrick's film threads a fine balance between these two genres of the fantastical. The supernatural is presented as a manifestation of something deeply human, rather than a physical entity that interacts with the characters. This ultimately blurs the line between what can be explained by psychology and what can be attributed to supernatural causes. In its purest form, the hypnotic power of *The Shining* rests in the duality of its uncanny qualities, "since what it puts us through is as heimlich as it is unheimlich ... [as] this is all to do, of course, with our reliance on the evidence of our senses, and particularly our eyes" (Allen 367). Just as a novel allows us inhabit the characters' minds through the written word, Kubrick allows us to immerse ourselves in the events of the films, forced to question what is in front of our eyes in the same way as the characters are. I concur thoroughly with Allen in his assessment that "*The Shining* makes sight, eye-sight, its central metaphor, and it does so in order to stage a cinematic reflection upon the uncanniness of the filmic universe" (368). The ambiguity of much of the supernatural occurrences in the film rests in the potential for the characters to project their own subconscious fears and desires onto a visual plane, as the audience "[has] difficulty in determining which vision is actuality and which is fantasy" (Wright 184), basing its reactions on the very conventions of cinema that Kubrick toys with, culminating in "a film which not only explores the phenomenology of the cinema, but also conveys 'character' through the eyes of its actors" (Allen 368).

Kubrick weaponises the archetypes and the conventions of horror cinema to portray a story of evil that is markedly human rather than supernatural. As accurately pointed out by Wright, "Kubrick consistently miscues the audience, priming viewers to expect the kind of story that he never delivers" (185). This can be seen in "Danny's croaking, vaguely sinister vocalizations for his imaginary friend Tony imply a plot focused on demonic possession" (ibid 185) while "references to the Donner party, and to 'a little boy who lives in Danny's mouth' and hides in his stomach, presage a cannibalistic end for the Torrance family" (ibid 185). All of these aspects build up to create an ambiguous experience that allows for many different readings.

Thus, reconnecting with the previously mentioned Freudian notions of the Doppelgänger and the theme of duality, we can see a conscious effort on Kubrick's part to root in a purely human realm much of what was originally supernatural, as "every scene in which Jack witnesses a 'ghost' features a prominently placed mirror—in the case of Lloyd's manifestation, directly in front of Jack" (Wright 185). While the director "only establishes that Jack's visions have a genuine, physical existence when he absolutely must, after Jack promises that he will "correct" his wife and son and we hear the bolt slide open outside the pantry where Wendy has imprisoned him" (ibid 185). This leads to what Wright defines as a "a radical shift in the narrative's locus of efficacy, a shift away from the supernatural as a potent force" (ibid 185). While in the novel the Overlook has to manifest itself and seep its way into Jack in order to take control of him, Kubrick "identifies anger and frustration as affirmative causes of Jack's violence, not as character flaws that give the external influence of the Overlook a way to manipulate him" (ibid 185). Kubrick's ultimate purpose could be described as a secularisation of the source material, and by extension a genre, that is deeply conservative and leans heavily towards supernatural, and often religious, dimensions. In the film, supernatural forces become "less palpably real than in the novel, serving merely to decorate or metaphorically to amplify the primary horrors that Kubrick wants to depict, horrors with fundamentally human causes" (ibid 185). Which also produces the ontological tension and interpretative openness that is constitutive of postmodernist fiction, as "allegory projects a world and erases it in the same gesture, inducing a flicker between presence and absence of this world, between tropological reality and 'literal' reality" (McHale 145).

A ramification of this particular thematic and philosophical position is directly responsible for the vast differences in the endings of the novel and the film, as the two stories conclude in ways that are representative of the two artists' respective views. King's ending sees Jack, possessed by the Overlook, whose "mask of face and body had been ripped and shredded and made into a bad joke. It was not [Danny's] daddy, not this Saturday Night Shock Show horror with its rolling eyes and hunched and hulking shoulders and blood-drenched shirt" (King 473). Jack momentarily regains consciousness upon Danny telling him: "If there's a little bit of my daddy left inside you, he knows they lie here. Everything is a lie and a cheat ... You're it, not my daddy. You're the hotel ... Go on and hit me. But you'll never get what you want from me" (King 475). Danny recognises the evil and the deceit of "it," which is how

the Overlook-possessed Jack is referred in this chapter, and his act of truth and kindness breaks the generational cycle of violence and reunites the son for a final moment with his father, whose final words to Danny are "Run away. Quick. And remember how much I love you" (King 475). As the Overlook Hotel burns to the ground, with Jack in it, after the faulty boiler fatally malfunctions without its daily maintenance, Danny and Wendy are taken to safety by Dick Halloran. The novel's conclusion restores the family unit and order, as King's warm, emotional storytelling sees the Hotel, the ultimate source of evil in his story, go up in flames. Kubrick's ending sees the inherent human evil of the grotesquely hunchbacked and distorted Jack chasing Danny through the frozen hedge maze, where the child ultimately and cunningly tricks his father and manages to escape, leaving him to his death, without redemption. Kubrick's cold human evil sees Jack frozen, Hallorann dead, and chaos unleashed, while the Overlook Hotel still stands, and "as [it] is not the source of evil in the film, it need not be destroyed at the film's conclusion—and particularly not by fire, which has traditionally been associated with the purgation of supernatural evil" (Wright 185).

## 6. Conclusion

Through the analysis of *The Shining*, in this thesis I have explored the failings of the historically strict fidelity-led approach in the field of adaptation studies. The comparative study, in conjunction with the writings of McAvoy, Allen, and Wright and a number of interviews, has brought to light the vast differences between Stephen King's novel and Stanley Kubrick's film, highlighting the ways in which the director's intentions and ambitions, amongst which his incorporation of Freud's "The Uncanny" stands as the most important, have shaped a unique piece of art that should be assessed independently from the novel from which it is adapted. There is a consensus in the studies that I have reviewed that recognises the value of King's text in the shaping of the film, while ultimately affirming the independent nature of Kubrick's work due to the many sources of inspiration upon which it drew and the manner in which he eventually developed them into distinct thematic and stylistic facets. The sprawling nature of Kubrick's film, with its many ambiguous and enigmatic characteristics, made the writing of this thesis a highly selective process, as the aspects on which to focus had to be restricted drastically to the central themes, metafiction and postmodernism. An aspect which I eventually discarded, on which future studies could focus, is a study of its adapted screenplay in the context of the field of screenplay studies, which questions the under-appreciation of the adapted screenplay within an adaptation discourse that most often compares the finished film and its source material, ignoring the inter-medial text.

Kubrick famously said that "it's just the story of one man's family quietly going insane together" ("Review by Hofsess" Web), encapsulating his approach to the story as one of human evil, in a way that stands in contrast to the supernatural tones of King's. In conclusion, much of what made the film so reviled upon release, but so acclaimed in the decades since, is a thoroughly courageous approach to adaptation, to cinema and to storytelling, that disregarded any fidelity-based obligations to the source material while simultaneously embracing academic and literary concepts in ways that show the true power of the cinematic medium.



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