STEPHEN KING ADAPTATIONS – CULTURAL ZEITGEIST AND CHARACTERIZATION OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS

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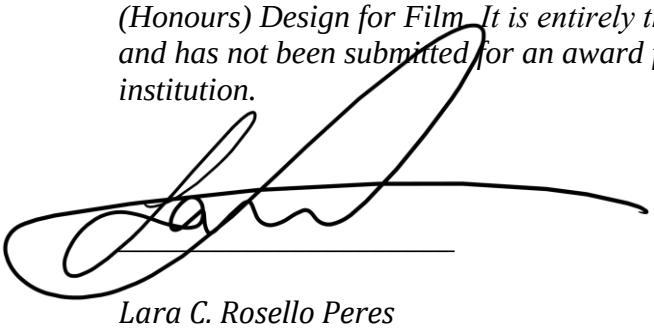
Declaration of Originality

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) Design for Film. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.



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Abstract

Stories have an unparalleled ability to shape our understanding of the world. When a beloved book becomes a film, it carries the weight of audience expectations, forcing creators to navigate the line between faithfulness to the source material, the demands of cinematic storytelling and a personal creative take.

My thesis explores this intricate process through the lens of Stephen King's works and their adaptations, a body of work that spans nearly five decades and reflects the changing landscapes of both literature and cinema. Focusing on *Carrie* (1976 and 2013) *The Shining* (1980 and 1997) and *The Green Mile* (1999), this thesis examines how themes of isolation, exclusion, and societal pressures transform when reimagined for the screen. It delves into the nuanced differences in character portrayals, narrative pacing, and cultural significance across adaptations, questioning why some succeed as timeless cinematic gems while others fade.

By analysing these adaptations within their historical and social contexts, I aim to uncover how filmmakers interpret and translate King's richly textured worlds. This work also critiques the broader implications of adaptation, including issues of representation, creative liberties, and the tension between artistic expression and commercial imperatives.

Ultimately, this thesis isn't just about King's works; it's about the art and responsibility of adaptation. Through exploring the successes and failures of these films, I reflect on my own journey as a filmmaker and storyteller, driven by a dream to honour the integrity of stories that shape our lives.

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Introduction

Have you ever watched a movie that stayed in your thoughts long after the credits rolled? The kind of film where the characters felt so real, their struggles so profound, and the world so vivid that you wished you could inhabit it, even for a moment? Some stories are like that—sticking with you, tugging at your heartstrings, making you crave more. Then comes the discovery: the movie was based on a book. It is like finding a secret doorway, leading you to a treasured trove of untold details and new layers of the story you love. That book often becomes a prized possession, a shiny spot on your bookshelf, holding dearly newfound significance.

Figure 01: Frame from The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe (Peacock et al., 2005)

For me, several movies have sparked this journey from page to screen. *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* was one of the first. I was amazed to learn that the series began not with Lucy hiding in a wardrobe, but with Polly and Diggory's magical adventure in *The Magician's Nephew.* That revelation opened the doors for me, igniting a passion for books adapted into films. Each discovery felt like doubling the joy—watching a story unfold visually, then diving deeper into its literary origins. Christmas lists filled with novels made it easy for Santa, as I eagerly asked the source material for the films that captured my imagination.

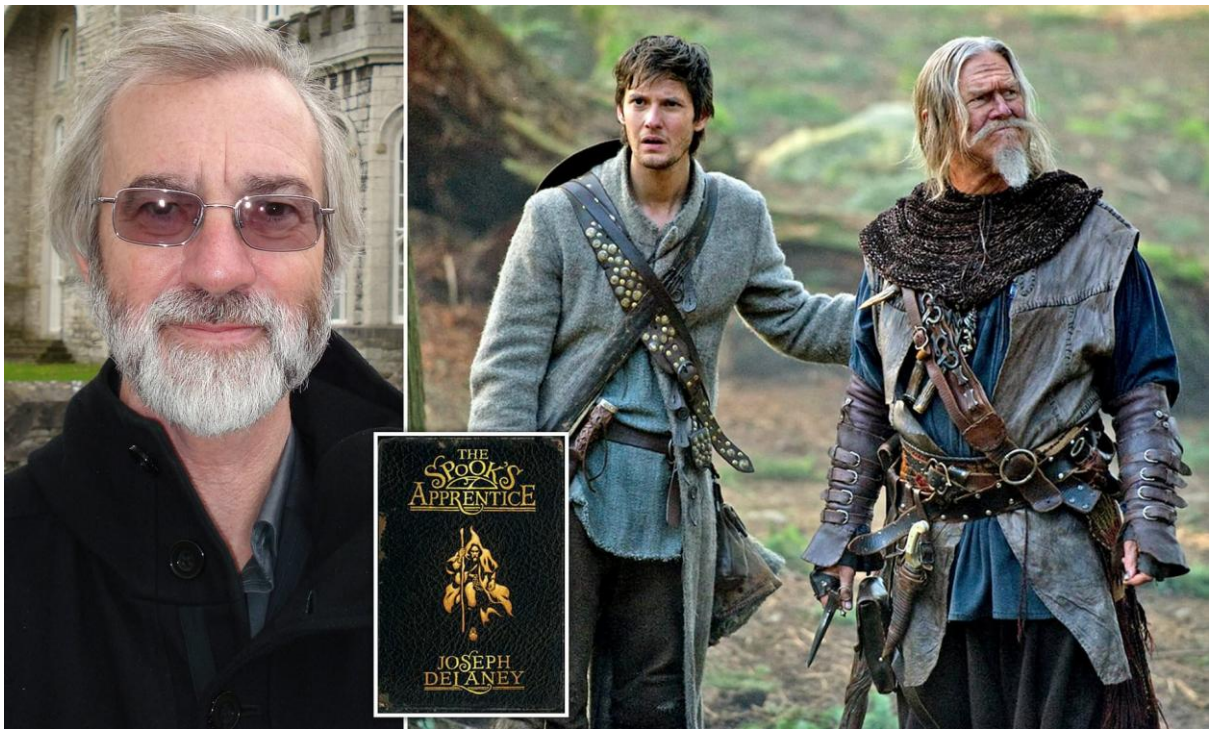

Figure 02: Joseph Delaney and Book cover of The Spooks and its adaptation Seventh Son. (Dye, 2022)

But not every adaptation has been a success. My first major disappointment came with *The Divergent* series. I loved the books, but the films, particularly *Allegiant,* left me cold. The vibrant characters and intricate subplots I cherished were stripped away, leaving a hollow shell of the story I knew. Then came the ultimate heartbreak: *The Seventh Son,* an adaptation of Joseph Delaney's *Spooks* series. As a lifelong fan of Tom Ward's adventures, I could barely reconcile the vivid, thrilling world of the books with the lackluster, clichéd mess presented on screen. These disappointments led me to question why some adaptations rise while others fall flat. What makes the difference? Is it faithfulness to the source material, the director's vision, the time it was made, or perhaps the constraints of translating a book's internal depth into a visual medium?

Despite my frustrations, these questions fueled my curiosity and kindled a new dream: to one day create my own adaptation of *Spooks,* doing justice to its rich lore and characters. This mix of disappointment and aspiration sparked a deeper interest in the art of adaptation itself. Why do filmmakers turn to books so often? What makes some adaptations resonate with audiences while others miss the mark entirely? What is the relation with time and its remakes? These questions form the foundation of my thesis. In this project, I aim to explore the multifaceted process of adaptation—not merely as a transcription of one medium to another, but as a cultural and artistic practice shaped by social context and creative interpretation. My focus is Stephen King, whose body of work offers a rich tapestry for analysis. With over 50 years of storytelling, from his first

novel, *Carrie* (1974), to his recent works like *Holly* (2023) and *You Like It Darker* (2024), King stands as a towering figure in literature and cinema alike. His stories have been adapted into countless films and television series, from Oscar-winning classics like *The Shawshank Redemption (1994)* to cult favourites like *It* (2017). These adaptations provide a unique lens through which to examine not only the mechanics of adaptation but also the ways in which stories evolve as they move between mediums and society.

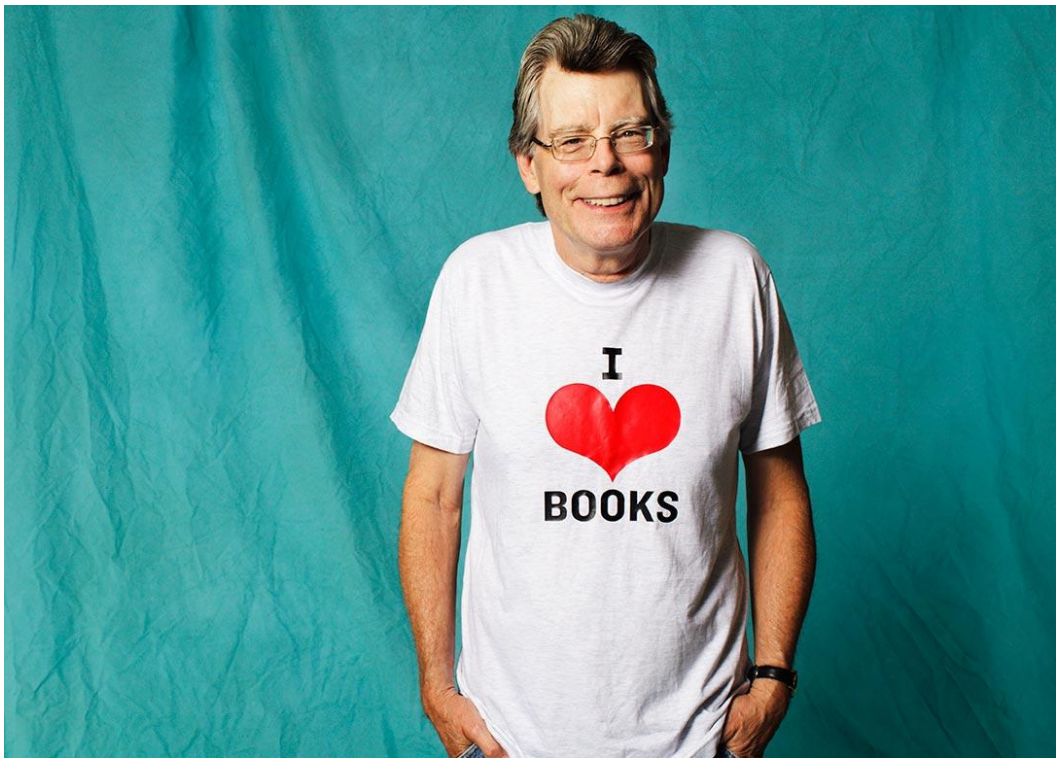

Figure 03: Stephen King (Studio, 2015)

Through this exploration, I aim to unpack the enduring appeal of King's work, the challenges, and opportunities inherent in adaptation, and the broader cultural implications of translating stories from page to screen. Whether a film honors its literary roots or ventures boldly into unfamiliar territory, it reveals something profound about storytelling itself, about us as an audience – and overall, as a society. Through four chapters, this thesis examines King's adaptations and their broader implications.

The first chapter delves into the theory of adaptation, exploring why filmmakers repeatedly turn to books for inspiration and how these adaptations reflect societal trends. The second chapter focuses on *Carrie*, analysing its depictions of girlhood and the evolving perceptions of its titular character across its 1976 and 2013 adaptations.

The third chapter unpacks *The Shining*, investigating the creative liberties that filmmakers take with adapted works and the portrayal of parenthood through both male and female perspectives. Finally, the fourth chapter examines *The Green Mile* as an example of a faithful adaptation, with an emphasis on the importance of the representation in media.

To conduct this analysis, I combined textual and visual research. This involved reading the original novels, watching their film adaptations, and analysing interviews with directors, writers, actors to understand the creative process behind the screen. Additionally, I explored scholarly works on horror, representation, and stereotypes to guide my interpretation of genre and character.

By exploring the enduring appeal of King's stories and the intricacies of their adaptations, this thesis seeks to illuminate the power of storytelling. Whether a film remains faithful to its literary roots or takes bold creative departures, each adaptation reflects something profound about the audiences it serves and the culture it inhabits. Ultimately, this project is more than just an analysis of Stephen King—it's a love letter to the stories that shape us and the endless possibilities of bringing them to life.

Chapter One: The art of Adaptation

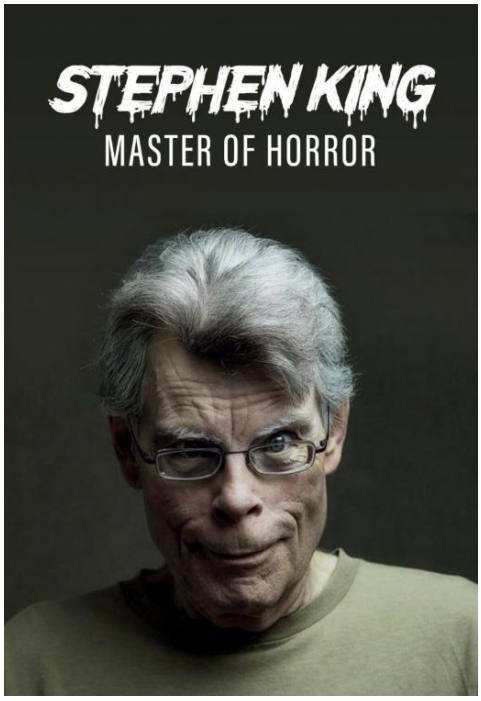

Figure 04: Stephen King Master of Horror (IMDB, 2018)

Stephen King has said "Books and movies are like apples and oranges. They both are fruit but taste completely different." (Goodreads, n.d.) The funny thing, this is the main issue when book-to-film adaptations are mentioned, which one was the best, the films, or the book? Both are forms of entrainment that have shaped society for years and years, which have dictated what is right and wrong, how we see ourselves and others, how we see the past, the present and the future.

Literature has been many things, forms of rules and rebellion, social status, a global need to develop, an art, a hobby. Film can look recent compared to the words in books, but films are a sequence of figures, and visual art has been with us from prehistoric ages. So, when one form of art reads to us words from one's mind, the other illustrates. So how does the translation of one to the other happen? The first stage is rewriting. A novel normally has around four hundred pages, full of detailed scenes and deep insightful characters. The book does not care for time and saving pages, the story will be told, even if it takes a couple of hundreds of pages or a couple of books. The book is broken into chapters, and the reader sets its rhythm, by devouring a book in a couple of hours or dosages, a book, unlike a movie, does not have a running time.

In comparison, a movie needs a script with around 120 pages, and most movies last 1 hour and half to 3 hours. The stories need to be told, but will not mind cutting corners to reach their end, leaving on the side some character development for the sake of getting the credits to roll. The film will have its structure set on beats, and a pace that hopes to engage the audience.

After producing the script, the film process only begins. A whole team will combine their minds and talents to create the visuals, based on their own understanding of them, and together they will create a new piece, like a love letter to the book. While a book is a more personal experience, being an experience between your imagination and the author's words. So, there is a difference between the levels of intimacy: books are a voice in our heads, but in films we are an outside watcher. Linda Seger talks about this in *Turning Fact and Fiction into Film*, saying, "When we watch a film, we are an objective observer of the actions. What we see is what we get. (Seger, 1992).

Books dive into a whole interactive imagination, which connects the reader's mind with the author's creative intention. Stephen King argues that reading a book is the closest to telepathy, meaning, if now I describe to you, that in the middle of an empty room there is a yellow chair. You will picture it in your mind; you see the yellow chair. And for you maybe the chair is crooked on the edges, but the message is there, you understand the overall meaning of the idea I am sending to you, but you flourish with your personal creativity, but at the end the idea gets across. (King, 2000)

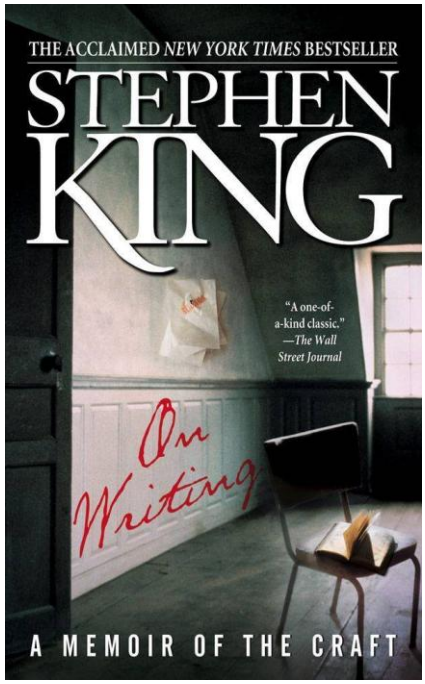

Figure 05: *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* by Stephen King book cover (Goodreads.com, 2019)

A book narration paints the whole story, even when it does not give you all the colours, we fill in the gaps. The characters are not only acting with us, but sharing their thoughts, giving more understanding to their persona. While a film is visually concise, as the saying goes, a picture counts as one thousand words. “A good scene in a film advances the action, reveals character, explores the theme and builds a Figure” (Seger, 1992).

This clear divergent mode of storytelling affects the results of the film when compared to the book. As mentioned before, there is a ticking bomb leading towards the film’s end, so that creates the need to adapt. Mostly those are the changes that make the book fandom rage, when the film cuts certain things, normally subplots and side characters, or add subplots or characters that were not in the original source. For example, *Misery* (1990) fits both well, as the film added the Sheriff Buster subplot, an outsider looking for the missing man, Paul Sheldon, which creates a rising tension with a race against time and evil. Buster helps to expand where the story is set and gives us emotional care towards the character, which catches us and the book readers by surprise when Annie, the antagonist, shoots him dead. That is because in the book, Buster never existed, he is an original character from the movie. They developed the impactful but gory death of a police officer who only appeared for a couple of pages in the book to the death of a main character in the movie.

Figure 06: Still of Annie from Misery (1990) (Shotdeck.com, 2024)

Movies must hit differently, sometimes a lawnmower becomes a shotgun, or a bat becomes an axe. All these changes are in the eyes of the director, producer, and society. Many hands and minds are shaping the final product. In the case of the director, the ones analyzed in this thesis are of big renown, Brian de Palma, Stanley Kubrick, and Frank Darabont, all with power enough to change and tell the story as they want. They

will translate not only their take on the book, but their personal views of the world and the themes they want to promote with their film, giving the project their own creative stamp.

Producers on the other hand want to stay safe, spending and at least getting their money back. Film budgets are not cheap, the insanely high budgets nowadays average around $100 million (Mueller, 2020) and they do not guarantee quality, as some of them manage to multiply their gains and others do not even get close to breaking even. This means that films need to engage the audience, they need to resonate and feed the audience with something warm and familiar. That is a reason adapted films are so recurrent. Books arrive with a built-in audience, especially for a well-known author, and a best seller normally sells 10,000 copies (Smailes, 2024). This is not high enough to be a good audience for the movie industry, but a suitable number to start since people that read the book are likely to buy tickets to its adaptation.

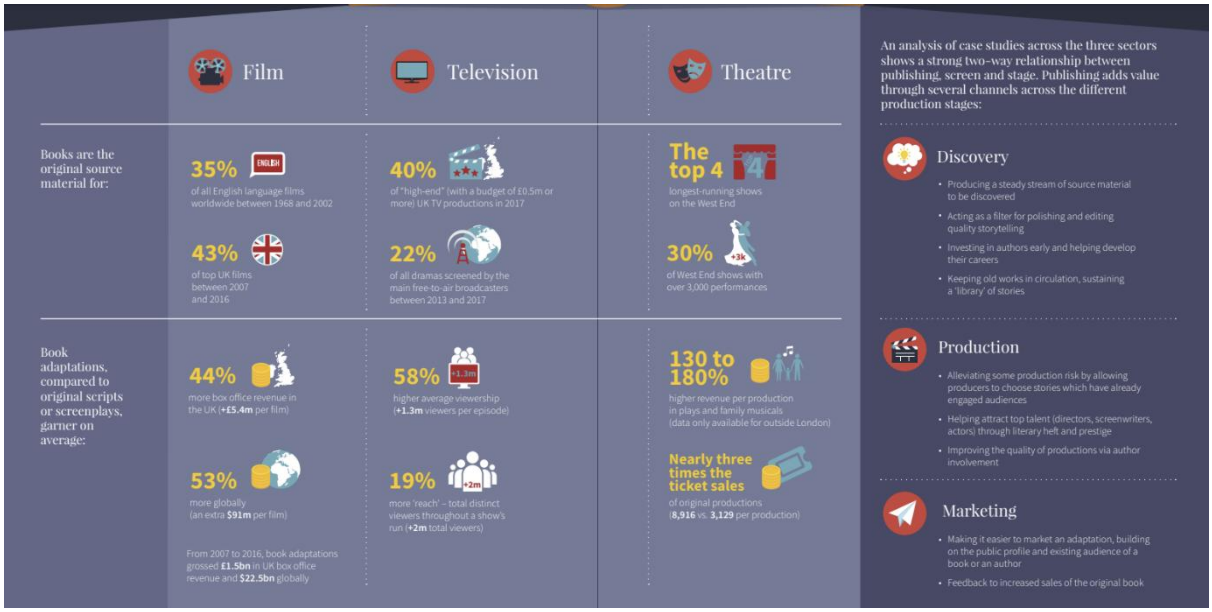

Figure 07: infographic report (Publishers Association 2018)

Adaptations have proven successful. A 2018 report by the Publishers Association showed those films based on books gross 44% more at the UK box office and 53% more worldwide compared to original screenplays, making that the safe bet when investing money on the next film (Publishers Association, 2018). This works in other ways, as adapted films have taken the podium as well: out of 96 Oscar winners for best picture, 49 have been based on books. For a 50/50 category this number is high. (ThriftBooks, 2023)

How does this considerable success translate to the other side of the coin? Do the authors of those book see benefits? In one hand, if the film is successful, you promote the author's name. People who enjoyed the film may feel inspired to pick up the book. However, the original work will always be intertwined with the interpretation, which can be beneficial or not. Most authors do not write the screenplay version, leaving the story to be written by someone with the knowledge of visual storytelling, and sometimes there is a collaboration with the original authors, and their knowledge of the work (Diffey and Diffey, 2024).

Figure 08: Stephen king cameo in *IT: Chapter Two (2019)* (Shotdeck.com, 2024b)

Stephen King is one example of an author who has seen both sides of this equation. From early in his career, he landed deals from his books to be adapted onto films or television shows, debuting with *Carrie* (1976) and hitting deal after deal with *Salem's Lot* (1979) and *The Shining* (1980), which not only brought success to the films, but also cemented King as a go-to author for film adaptations. And we can see from the numbers, Stephen King is the living author with the highest amount of work adapted, reaching over 50 visual media, not counting upcoming media in the next few years with more productions in development. (stephenking.com, n.d.)

Repeated adaptation of his work doesn't necessarily mean amazing adaptations: adaptation is a chancers game, while some please the audience other adaptations don't, and some please King while others get clear analogies: "Firestarter is one of the worst of the bunch, even though in terms of story it's very close to the original. But it's flavourless; it's like cafeteria mashed potatoes." (Kennedy, 2020)

There is also a current trend for re-adaptations, as this new wave of doesn't just apply to refreshing King's work —*Dune*, *Harry Potter*, *The Chronicles of Narnia* are all being remade for new audiences. This topic brings mixed reactions. Fans of the "original" feel attached to the first version and wary of changes, while others might be excited to re-experience the universe. And is a second chance when the first adaptation did not convince the audience, movies like *Dune* that now get to expand on the universe portrayed in the book, a critique of the original movie. (Toomey and Barker, 2020)

Is recycling works already known and loved by a substantial number of people lazy? I don't think so, but three aspects play into it: speed, transformation and nostalgia.

Speed: in today's entertainment landscape, there is a huge need for content, people are engaged within multiple platforms to watch a 30 second video, or a 30 min video or 3-hour film, or a 3 year long television show, but most probably a combination of all these options. When access has become worldwide and faster than a blink of an eye, it is understandable why adapted work triumphs, as the text is there with a layout of story, explored characters and a buffet of themes to deepen.

Figure 09: Meme of Arnold Schwarzenegger in the 1991 film *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (Skynet, 2017)

Not only that but consumerism plays its part. Pop culture has gone from niche to popular knowledge, although you may have never watched it, but you know something about a famous film, whether it is a quote, a character, a frame (see Figure 09). Movies are more than just movies—they became events. Regardless of whether you are a dedicated fan or an occasional watcher, you have been included in the mentality, and you own some type of merch, or participated on a social media trend or answer correctly that Friday pub quiz. Film and television pop culture is a powerful force that

feeds a creative economy. This fast-paced media consumption takes advantage of names and characters that are recognizable to any eye, the adaptations of well-known media provide a shortcut for producers who need to meet the demand for new content, and for the market which craves products to consume. Adaptations can give the audience something familiar but fresh in a quick and efficient manner since you don't risk inventing a whole new story that the public may or may not like. (Delaney, 2007)

Figure 10: Still from *Gone With The Wind* (1939) (The Guardian, 2015)

The second point is *transformation*, and by that I don't mean the transformation of the book to the film, but societal changes that happened since such pieces of work were conceived, in other words, the Cultural Zeitgeist (Krause, 2019). This concept is often referred to as the "spirit of the times," it describes the prevailing trends, moods, attitudes, and cultural climate of a particular era or moment. It captures the essence of a specific period, reflecting the collective mindset and values of society during that time. This idea is relevant in the film industry, as film influences and is influenced by societal changes. Cinema mirrors society's norms and expectations while simultaneously shapes them. A cycle of influence—society sets certain rules, and cinema transforms, reflecting both current and emerging mindsets (Serenapuang, 2023).

This dynamic can be observed in many ways, such as the evolving depiction of archetypes, or the way certain themes move from taboos to main media, or by the

incorporation of technology. Cinema creates stereotypes and then subverts or evolves them based on societal shifts.

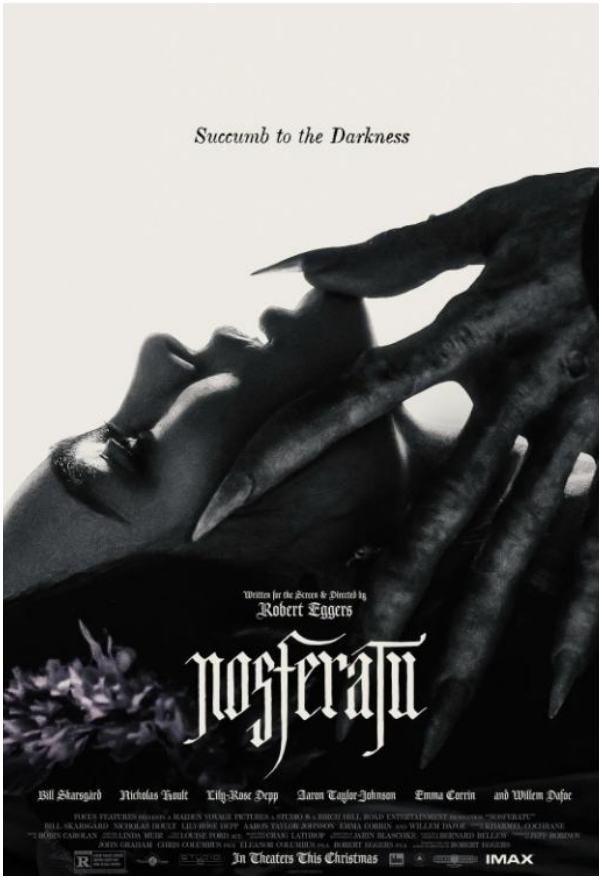

Figure 11: Poster from *Nosferatu (2024)* (Eggers, Henrik Galeen and Stoker, 2025)

Nostalgia defined in the dictionary as the feeling of pleasure and sadness that is caused by remembering something from the past and wishing that you could experience it again. (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023) This feeling is human and very recurrent for us. This feeling is associated with loneliness and/or sadness and was once even considered a curable disease. Svetlana Boym, a Russian American cultural theorist, explores nostalgia being a "symptom of our age, a historical emotion" and just like films tell about society and its mindset, nostalgia elaborates the desires of going back in time, fictional in our minds but times we felt we understood what was happening. The trip down memory lane always feels more glamoured than facing reality, sometimes those feelings create flames for change, as from indignation; towards a new corrupted political system leading towards a revolution or remaking that film that brought you comfort when a kid. (Boym, 2011) It can also create a feeling or rejection of the present, attached to the feeling that things will never be the same as they were once. Boym describes it as restorative and reflective nostalgia, while restorative nostalgia makes us feel positive about our past and motivates us to seek out new possibilities and experiences, reflective nostalgia often leaves us upset and wistful, thinking that our best days are behind us. (Crosby, 2021) And

sometimes the reflective nostalgia happens even before you watch the movie, the idea of having something different of what we remember already generates a derogatory felling towards the new takes.

As mentioned before everything is fast paced, things are momentary, what causes us to find a way to teleport to times where things were different, and many times this is done by watching that favourite childhood film. This feeling of comfort helps us. (Brodsky, 2023)

Now this can be taken in two ways, an industry that, aware of this, makes more and more content knowing the audience is hooked on a nostalgic feeling towards the original adapted work. Or the makers of remakes feel attached to those pieces of work just as much as the audiences and wish to work with that feeling of nostalgia by adding their own perspective to their project. This can create love letters to the previous work with a touch of their own essence, with current nuances implemented, that aims to entertain older audiences and introduce to younger audiences, keeping the stories alive in pop culture and in our hearts.

Chapter Two: *Carrie and its different interpretations.*

Figure 12: Still of Carrieta White in *Carrie* (1976) (Shotdeck.com, 2024c)

> POW! Two unrelated ideas, adolescent cruelty and telekinesis, came together, and I had an idea … Before I had completed two pages, ghosts of my own began to intrude; the ghosts of two girls, both dead, who eventually combined to become Carrie White. (King, 2018)

Stephen King's first big hit, *Carrie*, was published in 1974. Carrie was inspired by two real girls who faced immense difficulties during their formative years and did not survive the trauma created by social isolation and bullying (King, 1974, p. ix-xiv). King wanted to create a narrative where the victim gains the power to fight back against a harsh world. This novel follows the story of Carrieta White, raised by her religiously fanatic mother, Margaret. Carrie, who is neither accepted nor liked in school, is the target of ridicule and exclusion. In King's universe, Carrie possesses 'the shining', an ability that allows one to perceive and do extraordinary things. In Carrie's case, this takes the form of telekinesis.

Figure 13: Carrie in the gym shower from *Carrie* (1976) (Shotdeck.com, 2024c)

The story kicks off when Carrie experiences her first period in the gym showers, sparking panic as she mistakenly believes she is dying from bleeding. Her lack of knowledge about this natural event fuels the cruelty of her classmates. This sets in motion the events that bring four key characters into the spotlight: Sue Snell, who regrets her part in the bullying and seeks redemption by asking her boyfriend Tommy to take Carrie to prom; Rita Desjardin, the gym teacher who strives to hold the girls accountable; Chris Hargensen, who becomes obsessed with exacting her own form of revenge on Carrie; and Carrie's mother Margaret White, whose discovery of Carrie's womanhood triggers fears of impurity and moral decay.

King's novel spins multiple points of view together, giving insights into each character and building a complex narrative in under 300 pages. King is known for his exploration of moral dilemmas and the intricacies of human behaviour. Philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau theorized that humans are inherently good, but are corrupted by society (Bertram, 2023). Carrie embodies this idea: she isn't born a villain; her actions are a

result of the emotional and social isolation she endures, both from her mother and her peers in high school.

Figure 14: Carrie after the event of the prom from *Carrie* (1976) (Shotdeck.com, 2024c)

This duality—viewing Carrie as both a victim and a monster—evokes conflicting feelings in the reader. It's hard to fully sympathize with Carrie, which seems intentional on King's part, as she exacts revenge not just on her tormentors, but on everyone around her. Yet, she is still a child, lonely and suffering. This moral ambiguity is what makes her story compelling. Was Carrie truly a villain, or was she a product of her circumstances? Was Margaret evil or simply mentally ill? Was Sue genuinely trying to help, or was she just lightening her own guilt? Was Chris inherently mean or just a neglected child acting out?

These layered characters offer a rich source for adaptations, providing directors with different paths to explore as the story unfolds and which aspects of human nature to emphasize. With a character driven narrative and strong visuals, it's no surprise that just three years after *Carrie* was published, Brian De Palma brought it to the big screen.

The book's intricate morality and visuals inspired De Palma to pursue the adaptation after his first read. (SnakeStormTV, 2011a)

Carrie has been adapted three times: in 1976 as a film, as a television movie in 2002, and a 2013 remake. My analysis will primarily focus on the 1976 film with some comparisons to the 2013 version. Both adaptations closely follow the book, with minor adjustments.

Figure 15: Desjardin moments beofre her death in *Carrie* (1976)

Figure 16: Desjardin being pushed away before Carrie starts her rage in *Carrie* (2013)

De Palma's 1976 version omits some subplots and changes certain characters' fates. For example, on the straightforward front, Carrie's destruction doesn't escalate to the outside of the high school for budget reasons (Ghosts of Vermont, 2022). And on the artistic side, De Palma chooses Desjardin to die with the rest of the prom attendees, symbolizing that everyone present shares some guilt. In the 2013 film, however, the killing focuses more on Carrie's direct antagonists, sparing Desjardin's life. Both interpretations capture the spirit of King's work, of the personal take and the moral complications, which *Carrie* is full of.

Figure 17: Still from Carrie in the prom after being nominated prom queen. Carrie (1976) (SHOTDECK, 2024a)

The prom scene, for instance, in the book is told through multiple viewpoints: survivors, newspaper reports, and Carrie's own perspective. This builds an atmosphere of hysteria and confusion, enhancing the impact of Carrie's shift from fear to power. Carrie's mind swings between full awareness and trauma-driven delusion. The realization that she is no longer the victim, but the one causing pain makes her laugh for the first time. The book describes this with lines like, "She began to giggle, and it was an insane sound—triumphant, lost, victorious, terrified." The complexity of this scene allows directors to choose how to depict Carrie's emotions: rage, dissociation, a

mix of euphoria and guilt (King, 1974, p.187). With the canvas and the brushes set and ready to go is just a matter of making the film happen.

Figure 18: Carrie losing her mind after the events in the prom in *Carrie* (1976) (SHOTDECK, 2024a)

Casting plays a pivotal role in how Carrie's emotions were conveyed. For two main reasons, the audience reception, and the actor intake. In King's novel, Carrie is described as a "chunky girl" with acne and colourless hair, who transforms not through beauty, but through newfound self-confidence. Yet, both adaptations cast thinner actresses (see Figures 18 and 19). Representation has become a crucial topic in audiovisual media, emphasizing the importance of characters who reflect real-world diversity in appearance, voice, and experiences. Seeing someone who looks or feels like you on screen can foster a powerful sense of connection.

Figure 19: Still of Chloe Grace Moretz as Carrie in *Carrie* (2013) (Shotdeck.com, 2024d)

These portrayals walk a fine line between reinforcing and dismantling stigmas. Cinema often reflects society's current mindset while hinting at possible cultural shifts. The challenge is finding a way to break negative stereotypes without reinforcing them. This leads to an important question: would portraying Carrie as a plus-sized girl enhance or harm perceptions of plus-size women? On the positive side, casting a plus-sized actress as Carrie could bring a more down-to-earth authenticity, reinforcing the harsh reality, of a society that way too often judges individuals by their appearance. (Winterfilmawards, 2023)

This portrayal could underscore that being an outcast stem from failing to fit society's extreme standards. However, not all representations are beneficial. Carrie, after all, is a character who ends up killing everyone in a fit of rage, blurring the lines between victim and villain. If audiences are conditioned to view the plus-size girl as "evil" and "disturbed," this portrayal could reinforce negative stereotypes (Making media Matter, n.d.).

Would removing Carrie's weight as a focal point make a difference? Could her size be depicted without being a defining characteristic? Where a protagonist is not disliked because of her size but because of her flawed personality. Yet even then, the persistent cultural demand to "be skinnier" looms over women, regardless of how they are depicted. Female audiences are alienated to be displeased with their bodies.

Figure 20: Desjardin says that Carrie is a pretty girl in *Carrie* (1976) (Shotdeck.com, 2024c)

In a modern remake of *Carrie*, incorporating the physical pressure in girlhood and casting a plus-sized actress could add new layers to the narrative and challenge existing preconceptions. The actress's performance would be pivotal in shifting the story's impact. This approach could deconstruct stereotypes and offer a fresh perspective on Carrie's trauma and resilience, given that representation—both in casting and narrative focus—can change how stories resonate with audiences, something that not even the 2013 adaptation decided to take on.

Figure 21: Carrie prays in *Carrie* (1976) (Shotdeck.com, 2024c)

Returning to the original 1976 film, Sissy Spacek's portrayal of Carrie brought an unmatched fragility and haunting quality to the character. Spacek's commitment to the role, including studying religious imagery, brought depth that made her Carrie memorable. She balanced Carrie's meekness with moments of unnerving intensity, cementing the character's place in horror history. (SnakeStormTV, 2011b). In opposition, Chloë Grace Moretz's portrayal in the 2013 version, while dedicated, lacked the vulnerability needed to draw audiences in fully. Her performance, possibly due to her age – only 15 at the time - or directorial choices, lacked authenticity, echoing criticisms at underdeveloped performances in teen dramas (Mandatory, 2013).

Figure 22: Julianne Moore as Margaret White in *Carrie* (2013) (IMDb, 2024)

Figure 23: Piper Laurie's in *Carrie* (1976) as Margaret (Shotdeck.com, 2024c)

Julianne Moore's portrayal of Margaret White in the 2013 adaptation brought visible mental instability, incorporating moments of self-harm and scenes that showcased her emotional disconnect from Carrie (see Figure 15) (Video Detective, 2013). This update aligned with a modern understanding of trauma and mental health. Yet, the film's reliance on CGI and less impactful direction left her performance feeling unanchored. Piper Laurie's 1976 Margaret, on the other hand, exuded an almost supernatural menace. Her character was shaped by intense, witch-like qualities, bolstered by the dramatic use of capes and low camera angles to emphasize her dominance (see Figure 20). Laurie's take on the character brought an interesting turn on Margaret.

Figure 24: Margaret's death in *Carrie* (1976) (Shotdeck.com, 2024c)

Figure 25: Margaret's death in *Carrie* (2013) (IMDb, 2024)

In the behind-the-scenes documentary, she recounts how she decided to persist with certain details that added depth to the character. One striking example is her referring to the red dress, even though it was clearly pink. Laurie explains that this choice demonstrated Margaret's mindset—a vision so entrenched and unwavering that she could dismiss reality to conform to her own rigid beliefs. This detail exemplifies how Margaret's distorted perception extended beyond her daughter to encompass her entire worldview, making her an even more compelling antagonist. (SnakeStormTV, 2011c)

Laurie's interpretation of Margaret's death scene also offers an intriguing look into her character. Laurie shares that her choice to portray Margaret's last moments with an almost ecstatic pleasure was intentional. She reasoned that, for a woman who had denied herself earthly joys and devoted her existence to religious fanaticism, death

would signify her ultimate reunion with God. The moans of pleasure in her final breaths reflected this culmination—a release from a life of repression into what she perceived as divine fulfilment. This nuanced take on Margaret adds layers to her character, suggesting that even in death, she remains devoted, finding transcendence in her suffering. (*Carrie (1976) - 'Acting Carrie' Documentary 3*)

However, Julianne Moore's Margaret lacks this extra layer of depth, Carrie from 2013 feels like an unflavoured copy from the 1976 film forgetting their own uniqueness. Even though framed similarly (see figures 23 and 24) the impact is not the same since, the 1976 version paints this religion fanatism throughout the film that leads to her reunion with her God with her death, a satisfying ending for how the character was exposed during the film, while the 2013 with the mental health aspects being more evident in Margaret depiction, fails to end with that being the strongest trait, missing the payoff.

Figure 26: Still from *Carrie* (1976) of Carrie's classmates (SHOTDECK, 2024a)

Art department in a film. Film is collaboration, where everyone's intake is used to achieve the best result. In the costume department De Palma's film further highlighted Carrie's social isolation. Her clothes were loose and old-fashioned, sharply contrasting with her peers' more modern styles (see Figure 23), who wear jeans and sport trendy hairstyles reinforcing her outsider status. (BostonGlobe.com. (2016). This visual choice underscored her alienation, portraying her as someone out of place and time. The 2013 adaptation, however, failed to capture this visual contrast effectively, rendering Carrie's look less distinct and her outsider status less pronounced (see Figure 23).

Figure 27: Still from *Carrie* (1976) where Carrie sews her dress (Tom + Lorenzo, 2020)

Figure 28: Still from *Carrie* (2013) when Carrie dresses up (Muther, 2016)

A crucial detail in the 1976 film is the scene where Carrie sews her own prom dress (see Figure 27). This moment symbolizes her small act of independence and hope, one

of the rare times she does something for herself. In the 2013 film, this emotional touch is absent; the dress seems to appear without significance, losing the sense of Carrie's tentative reach for normalcy and agency.

The time gap between both films are almost 40 years, so technology and ways to make movies have developed. In Carrie 1976, there is a meticulous usage of practical effects, from people being cut in half, to being stabbed to a whole miniature house being burnt to the ground. (See figure 22) (Ghosts of Vermont URBEX / Sky's the Limit Videos, 2022b) Those elements added a unique feel to the work. The 2013 adaptation uses CGI for Margarets death and tries to incorporate up-to-date elements such as technology in the narrative. In the locker room scene, Carrie is filmed during her traumatic experience, and the footage is later shown at prom. (See figure 24)

Figure 29: Miniature house in *Carrie* (1976) being burnt (Mello, 2020)

Figure 30: Sissy Spacek BTS photo of *Carrie* (1976) (IMDb, 2022)

Figure 31: Prom scene in *Carrie* (2013) (legolukey, 2014)

While this addition attempts to comment on cyberbullying and the lasting impact of public humiliation, it doesn't effectively integrate into the narrative. The original intimacy and escalation of Carrie's emotional breakdown are diluted when the prom scene is interrupted by a projection of the shower footage, making it feel like a forced and unnecessary flashback. Although the use of technology could have brought a contemporary relevance to the theme, its execution lacks depth and meaning. It feels

included simply to reflect modern behaviour—filming and sharing everything—without exploring its impact on the story or adding new insight.

Those points illustrate how important is the collaborative work, many inputs build the film, from directing, to acting, to dressing, to filming, to editing… all of them create what it can be a classic or a forgetful remake. Both have the same beats and the same overall structure and theme as the book, but it's the different approaches that elevates the cinematographic work in the same level as the book.

Figure 32: Pig's blood spilling over Carrie in *Carrie* (1976) (SHOTDECK, 2024a)

Carrie remains a timeless story because of its layered exploration of themes such as religious fanaticism, toxic mother-daughter dynamics, social rejection, and the boundaries of self-defence. Each adaptation reflects different interpretations, offering insights into changing societal attitudes, questions like what turns a victim into a "monster." But most importantly the exposition of girlhood, her lack of knowledge of her own body for, the societal pressure to be like other girls – pretty, the conflictual relationship between mother and daughter within feelings of envy and regret of sacrifices made for one to the other be able to exist, the need to contain your frustrations to not be seen as hysterical or *emotional*. Those elements have been

secretly present in most girl's life, and reading or watching *Carrie*, deep down torments us, since getting rid of societal chains upon girlhood and being your ultimate self leads to destruction, Carrie finds peace but all around see her as the monster. (see Figure 23) It would not be surprising if more adaptations would be made of this work, since the creative freedom from its themes and characters offers a diverse range of possibilities to illustrate. (Berlatsky, 2018)

Chapter Three: The Shining and author dissatisfaction.

Figure 33: “here’s Johnny” scene from The Shining (1980) (IMDb, 2024b)

The Shining is one of King’s most iconic works, not only for its supernatural narrative with a raw take on a family dynamic, but for its iconic 1980 film adaptation directed by Stanley Kubrick. The movie is renowned for its memorable performances, breathtaking set design, impressive cinematography, and gripping tension. Iconic moments like "Here's Johnny!" (see Figure 24) become part of pop culture, making *The Shining* a cinematic classic.

However, not everything about the adaptation was well-received, particularly by King himself. In various interviews, King has expressed his displeasure with Kubrick's interpretation, famously comparing the film to "a big, beautiful Cadillac with no engine inside it." (Jagernauth, 2016) King’s core dissatisfaction stems from Kubrick's portrayal of the characters, notably Jack and Wendy Torrance. When asked about his character development process, King emphasizes that viewing characters without judgment is essential, recognising that no one is purely good or evil (Portal, 2019). As we see in

Carrie, the moral complexity, and the human nature of being flawed appeal significantly to King. This complexity is lost in Kubrick's adaptation. While Kubrick's style prizes a visual story, King prefers the moral and character driven narrative, where different themes are exhibited in the book and every character brings something to the story.

Figure 34: Jack Torrance working on his novel in The Shining (1980). (Shotdeck.com, 2024e)

In the book, Jack Torrance embodies the pressures of traditional manhood—a man failing as a husband, father, provider, and individual. After losing his job as a teacher due to beating a teen that punctured his car's tire, Jack finds himself struggling to financially support his family, a blow to his ego and role as the breadwinner (Schojbert, 2018). Jack uses alcohol as an escape from his reality, a concerning aspect of society encapsulated in the life of men. In the U.S., for example, alcohol abuse is prevalent among men, with data suggesting that men are twice as likely than women to binge drink (Pindar, 2022). The addiction leads to events that degrade his situation even more, with the physical abuse of his son Danny resulting in marital conflicts. Jack's journey to sobriety eventually starts leading him to accept the job as a caretaker in the Overlook Hotel.

King's work depicts a man battling mental health issues in a society that stigmatises emotional vulnerability in men. Jack's anger issues and alcohol addiction spiral into

suicidal intentions. There is a scene where Jack contemplates using a gun to take his own life after hurting Danny, believing his absence would benefit Wendy and Danny, an underexplored theme in the film. This is particularly relevant when studies show that men die by suicide at significantly higher rates than women, with the World Health Organization reporting that men account for approximately 75% of global suicides. (HeadsUpGuys, 2024)

Figure 35: Jack Torrance after having a nightmare about murder in The Shining (1980). (Shotdeck.com, 2024e)

This aspect of Jack's character highlights a broader societal issue: the cultural expectation for men to suppress emotions. When men are taught to "tough it out," their bottled-up emotions often find release through aggression, substance abuse, or self-destructive behaviours, and all of those are demonstrated in the film. Moreover, Jack's internal conflict is layered with the weight of intergenerational trauma; he is haunted by the fear of becoming like his father. This deep-seated fear adds another dimension to his deteriorating mental state. Same thing happens with Danny in the sequel *Doctor Sleep* - Danny follows in Jack's footsteps, believing that this is how he is supposed to be, a broken man is passed from generation to generation. However, in the 2019 adaptation of *Doctor Sleep*, this conflict finds a different turn when Danny seeks help, we see him going to the A.A. meetings and getting better. In the book of *The Shining* Jack goes to the meetings, but in the film, they are never mentioned, which paints the struggle not as a

problem, but as a personality trait, that he is a man that enjoys drinking but can't. The 1978 film portrayal aligns with the characterization of man and the societal pressures to appear strong and stoic. (Palmer, 2021)

The nuances and the character depth of Jack is primarily overlooked for a portrayal as an ignorant and negligent husband and father. In the film, Jack, portrayed by Jack Nicholson, is depicted as a man already on the brink of madness—a cold, detached figure who only needs a slight push from malevolent forces to become fully violent. Jack's violent nature in the film not only conceals the moral duality of a conflicted man, but also the hope of redemption. Men will be men and die like so; as mentioned before, films reflect the societal views and desires of their time. The film does not intend to show Jack as an emotional and complex character. He is easily seduced by the Hotel and eager to end his obligations - his wife and child. Jack at the end of the film smiles at us after joining the hotel for his afterlife (see Figure 36), a quite different ending than in the book, where to save the family, he stays behind to make sure the hotel would be burned to the ground.

Figure 36: Jack Torrance smiling on the last scene of The Shining (1980) (Shotdeck.com, 2024e)

Jack Torrance's story gives us a take on men and his inability to articulate his struggles, combined with societal and personal pressures, which leads to destructive outcomes. By framing Jack's descent through a lens of mental health rather than solely labelling

him an abuser, the narrative invites a nuanced discussion on how cultural norms around masculinity can exacerbate mental health crises.

Adapting works may always encounter divergence on creative takes, and this one diverges a lot, especially when such rich characters are resumed to a horror-focused role, only there to kill or survive. King has made it clear that the story was remarkably close to him, that Jack's character falls too close to King himself, a writer with an addiction and a family to take care of. Hence, King brings a narrative that communicates more, the spoken and unspoken bits of being a man. In contrast, Kubrick sees and illustrates men as creatures of pleasure ready to get free of moral obligations to join a continuous party where they can be their true selves. This is an aspect that we can see in Kubrick's filmography, which is full of what men can do once their moral restrains are lifted, for example *Full Metal Jacket* where characters such as Animal Mother embraces the inherent chaos of a battlefield to indulge in mindless killing, literally accepting his animalistic urge to kill (see Figure 37) (says, 2022).

Figure 37: Animal Mother from *Full Metal Jacket* (IMDb, 2024)

On the other side, Winifred Torrance also undergoes a significant transformation. In King's novel, Wendy is a strong, opinionated woman who becomes the heroine. Is a conflicted battle where fear the fear is not only for her life but also for Danny, if she loses her son loses. But more than that, Wendy is conscious that this is not her husband, she knows the power of the Overlook is upon him. She believes that there is still a chance of redeeming Jack. "The hotel has gotten into your daddy... Do you understand me?" King, S. *The Shining* - chapter 46 (1977). This understanding adds so much complexity to her dilemma—she's not just trying to escape a crazed killer but also grappling with the hope that the man she loves can still be saved.

This protective maternal instinct fighting against with the possibility of losing her partner, gives Wendy a moral and emotional complexity largely absent from Kubrick's adaptation. In the film Wendy Torrance, played by Shelley Duvall, is reduced to a helpless, passive figure, often criticised as existing only to scream and appear "stupid" (see Figure 35) —a sentiment echoed by King himself. (Entertainment & Arts, 2013)

Figure 38: Wendy Torrance in despair in The Shining (1980). (Shotdeck.com, 2024e)

Kubrick's decision to portray Wendy as weak and submissive raises questions about gender representations in the film. In one side the film supports this view, brought in by Robin Hauck's analysis of the 1980s representations of motherhood in American cinema in the film, she is rendered weak. This reflects the role of women in the 1980s, a time when women were still struggling to assert themselves in a male-dominated society. Hauck argues that many films from that era reinforced conservative ideals of motherhood, positioning women primarily as caretakers and reducing their agency. This fits with Kubrick's reinforcing the figure of Wendy as weak and dependent. (Hauck, 2003)

Does Wendy need to be softened to fit into the role of Jack's wife, providing an explanation why Wendy would stay with a volatile, alcoholic husband? Kubrick's interpretation ignores the reality that it takes incredible strength to navigate and survive complex relationships, particularly when children are involved.

Figure 39: Wendy Torrance Taking care of Danny after him being attacked in The Shining (1980). (Shotdeck.com, 2024e)

Additionally, Wendy falls into Carol J. Clover's concept of the "Final Girl" — a term coined to describe the intense, desexualised heroine who survives slasher films. Characters like Laurie Strode from *Halloween* (1978) embody this archetype: a responsible, modestly dressed woman who avoids the sexual behaviour often associated with earlier female horror victims. Kubrick's Wendy, with her heavy, warm clothing and focus on Danny, mirrors this desexualised "Final Girl" trope. (Baughman, 2024) The layered clothes symbolise her maternal role, making her less of a partner to Jack and more of a mother figure to Danny. This deliberate visual styling may have been Kubrick's way of manipulating audience sympathies. By presenting Wendy as a desexualised, "neglectful" wife, Kubrick encourages viewers to sympathise with Jack's growing frustration. The notion of the "popcorn mom," where women begin to juggle careers and motherhood, leaving less time to cater to their husbands, was prevalent during the time, and Kubrick plays into this trope. In Kubrick's framing, Wendy's focus on her child, along with her "inattention" to Jack, makes Jack's descent into madness seem more inevitable and more understandable to the audience.

Figure 40: Wendy on the phone in The Shining (1980)... (Shotdeck.com, 2024e)

That's another essential reflection on the portrayal of the partnership and love. In the book, you can see that the couple loves each other despite the challenging moments

created by the hardship of raising a family, and both conflicted feelings towards their own parents and the idea of becoming them: Jack doesn't want to become his father and Wendy her mother, they together try to be better for Danny.

Wendy and Jack love each other; they encounter moments of partnership along the time they stay at the Overlook Hotel, which is not once demonstrated in the Kubrick adaptation. They don't share a kiss or word of affection, more like the opposite, hostility is displayed even before they get to the hotel, already showing how they don't act as a loving couple (see Figure 28). In 1980, the social view on marriage was shifting; in the study, *Marital Instability Over the Life Course*, aspects like the economic strain, the upcoming change in women's role in society, the view on marriage as a social institution and the wave of individualism exemplify the lack of companionship between the couple. (Booth et al., 1980)

Figure 41: The Torrance family in their way to the Overlook Hotel in The Shining (1980). (Shotdeck.com, 2024e)

Wendy and Jack Torrance are exhibited as the traditional model of family. They don't expose the reality that they are not together because they want to, but because that's how things are. Divorce is not mentioned in the film, while it is constantly a fear in the

book, from Danny to the parents. Kubrick takes the “till death do us part” to the line, where the only way for one to get rid of the other is by murder.

This plays differently in a less accessed media - upon Stephen King’s disapproval of the Kubrick adaptation, King got a 3 episode television series, that despite being even more faithful to the book did not bring audience approval. But it portrayed things differently, Wendy here is a strong and decisive character, a mother, and a partner, she is a full human being, there is no need to fit her in one box and strip her persona to fit a horror story. Allowing your characters to be flawed and desire to be better adds to a drama where you are not only fighting ghosts but yourself and those who you love.

Figure 42: The Shining - TV Miniseries 1997 Wendy and Jack kiss. (IMDB, 1997)

Figure 43: Jack hugs Danny before destroying the Overlook hotel in The Shining - TV Miniseries 1997. (IMDB, 1997)

The Shining shows how social constructions are rooted in our minds and how it affects ourselves and those around us – ideas such as: women must endure pain, and men must suffer in silence. The propagation of this idea in film helps creating prejudicial environments in real life, for example the abuse Shelley Duval went through while filming *The Shining*. Kubrick's obsessive direction led to 127 takes of the scene where Duval had to swing a bat up to the stairs, a mentally and physically distressing scene had to be endured repeatedly to fill the will of one man. This affected her performance, described as exaggerated and over-the-top and earned her a Razzie nomination, although one that they regretted nominating. According to Maureen Murphy, the founder of the Razzie Awards, this nomination sparked some discussion, "Knowing the backstory and the way that Stanley Kubrick kind of pulverised her, I would take that back", but not the Stanley Kubrick nomination "Oh, I don't feel that badly about Stanley Kubrick …I think that guy's overrated". (Sharf, 2022)

Chapter Four: The Green Mile' along representation, stereotypes and tropes.

Figure 44: John Coffey resurrecting Mr. Jingles (Shotdeck.com, 2024g)

The Green Mile by Stephen King is a compelling story originally published in a serialized format. Over six months in 1996, King released the story in monthly instalments, building anticipation and engagement. This innovative approach paid off to King, not only financially, but also as a challenge, as King said "You've got the frosting in a bowl, and you've got the cake on a plate and you're saying to yourself: I hope that I have enough to frost the last side, and I hope I don't have so much left over that I have to make cupcakes and frost them." (Kenney, 1996). Frank Darabont's 1999 film adaptation further cemented its legacy, earning an Academy Award nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Picture and Best Supporting Role for Duncan and securing a spot in IMDb's Top 250 films, where it continues to hold high regard. (IMDb, 2019)

Figure 45: A frame of *Top Hat* 1935 in *The Green Mile* film (Darabont, 1999)

The story follows Paul Edgecombe, a death row prison guard, and John Coffey, a black man falsely accused of raping and murdering two young girls. Set against the backdrop of the 1930s, the narrative explores themes of justice, humanity, and redemption. While the film is one of the most faithful adaptations of King's work, still some changes happen for the sake of translating to a different format – film. These include a shift in the timeline from the 1930s to the 1940s, due to the directors' desire to make a dramatic payoff, the film introduces a trauma reaction when Paul watches the film *Top Hat*. This setup is made so that at the end of the film when Paul asks John Coffey what his last wish is, he says to watch a film since he never had experienced that. This payoff has a great emotional weight and visual appeal, creating a recognizable frame of Coffey with teared-up eyes being illuminated by the film projector (see Figure 30).

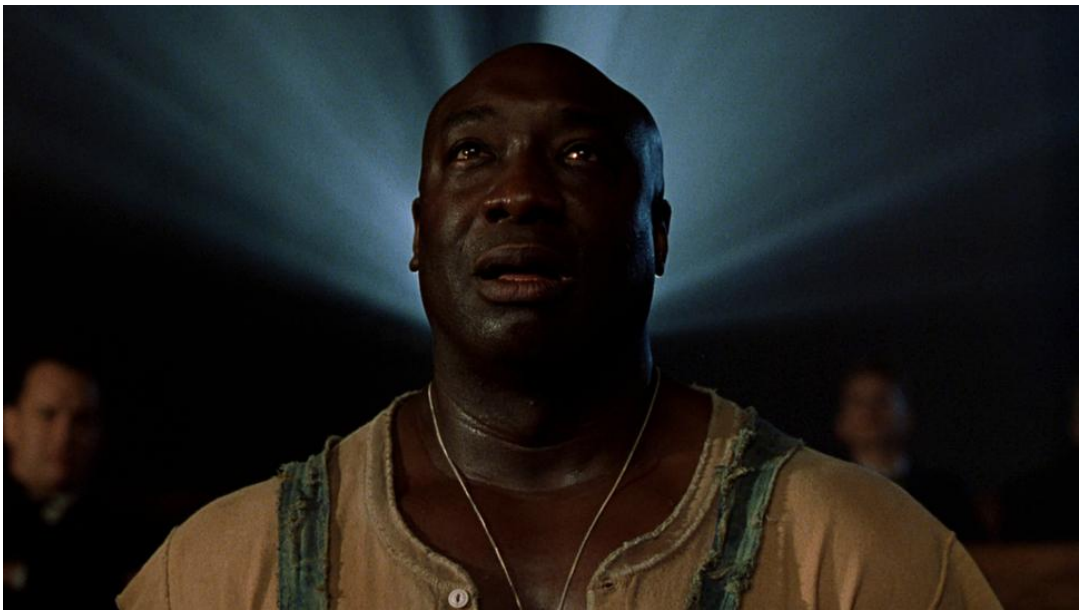

Figure 46: John Coffey watching “Top Hat” 1935 (Shotdeck.com, 2024g)

As well, another difference is the exclusion of Paul’s character paths and subplots, one being the nursing home subplot, that detracts the attention from the main story and is time consuming - *The Green Mile* film already being 3 hours long. With that exclusion Paul’s detective investigation narrative changes. In the book Paul finds out Coffey is innocent, demonstrating how a racist mentality and legal system contributed to his sentence. There was no real defence or even an attempt to find out what really happened, and Paul’s investigation shows that, since he alone, a prison guard worker, managed to find out John was innocent, while in the film John Coffey shows his innocence by magical visions. In the book there is an attempt to free or change John Coffey’s sentence, with Paul’s insistently sending letters to different states trying for salvation, while in the film there is a slight suggestion of trying to help John to escape, quickly refuted by John himself by admitting he’s tired of all the pain and suffering he feels.

Figure 47: Older Paul in the nursing home after watching "Top Hat" 1935 (Shotdeck.com, 2024g)

The last and most intriguing change is the omission of details surrounding prisoners Delacroix' and Chief's crimes. These changes streamline the story for cinematic pacing, but sacrifice some of the novel's depth, also expose the director's view on it. As Stephen King said:

> I would have to say that I was delighted with The Green Mile. The film is a little "soft" in some ways. I like to joke with Frank that his movie was really the first R-rated Hallmark Hall of Fame production. For a story that is set on death row, it has a really feel-good, praise-the-human condition sentiment to it. I certainly don't have a problem with that because I am a sentimentalist at heart. (Kennedy, 2020)

The film takes a more utopian view, to solve the moral dilemmas. While King loves the duality of man as we could notice with the complex characters mentioned in previous chapters, he makes the readers understand the causes and consequences of Delacroix. He is a man who has committed arson, has raped and killed, but also adopted a pet mouse and heartily believes the mice will go to mice circus once he is gone. In my case, when I read it, Delacroix wasn't either a villain or a victim, he was a prisoner, however in the film the sympathy we fell towards is much bigger, especially when we see the cruelty that Percy carries out towards him and his pet friend, bullied and sabotaged

until the day of his death (see Figure 32). His and Chief's death are an emotional escalation of what is coming for John. The film makes us hope for redemption, without knowing if they are guilty of their crimes or what are they guilty for, so when the audience knows for sure that John Coffey is not guilty there is a bigger impact on us.

Figure 48: Delacroix playing with Mr. Jingles (Shotdeck.com, 2024g)

Those changes are not only important for adapting to a different format, it helps with the pace and dramatic purpose but also reveals some social views onto the film.

Figure 49: John Coffey crying in the crime scene holding the body of the girls) (Shotdeck.com, 2024g)

In the book John Coffey is a large muscular black man, where even the largest dungarees fall short on him. He was found at the scene of the crime crying so much that he hypnotized those that found him, almost in a trance state, staring for an undetermined time. He carried with him a sandwich for lunch, and once in prison we learn he is afraid of the dark. John Coffey is isolated by a society that doesn't welcome him, that judges him by his colour, by how big he is, and by how he speaks and behaves, being described in the movies as a big dummy, monstrous and being questioned as to whether he is mentally challenged.

Coffey's isolation is even higher not only because of those external factors, but also by his internal gift - or curse. He possesses extraordinary abilities of healing, and an empathy that takes the pains of others onto himself. Coffey is almost an out of this world entity, no family, no friends, no story, he is there to walk the earth and fix the pain of those around him. There is a subtle, or maybe not that subtle context that Coffey has an underlined symbolism of Christianity within his character and his actions, if so, helping the others because he is the Messiah would make sense, and falling into the same path of Jesus Christ by being punished for other sins.

On the other hand, Coffey's explanation for trying to help those around him could be that helping others is ultimately helping himself since he absorbs other people's pain. But what if his character is like that because of a stereotype? John Coffey's type of character is not an isolated case but a trope.

Figure 50: Prisoners in the “The Green Mile” (Shotdeck.com, 2024g)

John Coffey’s character embodies the "Magical Negro" trope. This is an archetype that features a black character with supernatural abilities whose sole purpose is to aid the white protagonist (Weekes, 2021). Coffey’s miraculous powers—healing illnesses, resurrecting a mouse, and absorbing others’ pain—serves to highlight Paul’s moral awakening and humanity.

However, as mentioned before, Coffey’s own story remains underexplored. His background, motivations, and inner life are secondary to his function as a narrative device. Coffey’s story is told to us by the guilt Paul feels after the events that happened in the prison, as Paul literally gets punished with a long life, he sees those around him dying and he does nothing about it.

Figure 51: Dick Hallorann talks with Danny in The Shining (Shotdeck.com, 2024e)

The trope has deep roots in Hollywood, where black characters are often relegated to supporting roles that serve white protagonists. Similar examples can be found in other adaptations of King's works, such as Dick Hallorann in *The Shining*. In Stanley Kubrick's 1980 film, Hallorann dies trying to save Danny Torrance, despite surviving in King's novel. This alteration strips the character of his agency and reduces him to a plot mechanism and a reinforcement of the trope. In the mass media format Dick's role is reduced to a server, while in the book he is a character, we know his background story, we know what happens to him after the events in the Overlook Hotel, and moreover Dick becomes a father figure to Danny, the bond between them grew, adding a lot more to the understanding of the powers both hold, a spiritual and emotional bond. (Paicely, 2020)

Figure 52: Red and Andy talking in The Shawshank Redemption (Shotdeck.com, 2024f)

Similarly, in *The Shawshank Redemption* novel Red is a red-haired Irish man but, in the adaptation, black actor Morgan Freeman was cast. Even undeniable amazing skills as a narrating actor, Red's character serves primarily to assist Andy Dufresne, despite having a richer backstory in King's novella. So, this trope continues, where black actors are there for a white character to tell their story or to tell a white character's story, while their own is untouched and uncared for.

The reliance on the "Magical Negro" trope can be interpreted as an attempt to relieve historical guilt, offering sterile portrayals of interracial dynamics without addressing systemic inequalities or giving them space to tell their own stories. John Coffey's narrative reinforces this dynamic: while he is empathetic, powerful, and selfless, his story ends in tragedy, he is not able or even wants to help himself. Even though his execution highlights the flaws in the justice system but also perpetuates the idea of black characters existing solely to uplift white narratives.

This representation mixes a superficial view on the black persona but still gives space to representation in a media dominated by white figures. Representation in cinema matters because, as mentioned before, cinema reads and shapes societal perceptions. In *The Green Mile*, a dialogue between Paul and John Coffey's lawyer Burt makes an analogy of dogs being like black people, "That dog attacked my boy for no reason. Just got it in his mind one day. Same with John Coffey." (www.imdb.com)

Figure 53: Dick Halloran in his room in The Shining (Shotdeck.com, 2024e)

For decades, Hollywood has told stories through a predominantly white lens, marginalizing, stereotyping or sexualizing whole communities and groups. The trope's persistence underscores the need for diverse narratives that grant black characters agency, depth, and central roles.

Still, Michael Clarke Duncan's portrayal of John Coffey adds layers of nuance to the character, challenging some of the trope's limitations. Known for playing imposing figures like security guards, Duncan's performance is marked by vulnerability and emotional depth. His portrayal earned widespread acclaim and showcased his range as an actor. While the character's narrative function remains tied to the trope, Duncan's performance highlights the potential for actors to transcend even when the roles are

reductive. Duncan said, “The role means a lifetime achievement for me. Armageddon put me on the map and let people see me, but now this role is a breakout role, my first break out role.” (Kinne, 2000)

Figure 54: John Coffey’s execution (Shotdeck.com, 2024g)

King’s adaptations often reflect the broader challenges of representation in Hollywood. The industry’s reliance on archetypes like the "Magical Negro" or the “Tragical Negro” – when the black character is the first to die or is there only to die, stems from a long history of storytelling shaped by white creators. While films like *The Green Mile* and *The Shawshank Redemption* have been praised for their narratives, they also reveal systemic limitations in how minority characters are portrayed. Progress in representation requires moving beyond such tropes to create stories that centre on diverse perspectives and experiences.

Things that we are now seeing increasingly, even though way later than it should, more creators of different backgrounds, shapes and colours are getting the chance to share their voices. John Coffey is a suffering character, which gets isolated from his own story,

by others and by himself when he decides to stop fighting. John Coffey is not a character that one would feel represented by, but a character that exposes obvious injustice to a white audience, he is a cause, more than a character. And this cause is not made to the black audience.

Figure 55: John Coffey asking for Mr. Jingles so he can save the rodent (Shotdeck.com, 2024g)

Still, *The Green Mile* remains a poignant and powerful work, both as a novel and a film. Stephen King admits his own lenses - in an interview King got questioned on a critique of not being able to develop a believable woman character between the ages of 17 and 60.

> King replies: Yes, unfortunately, I think it is probably the most justifiable of all those levelled at me. In fact, I'd extend her criticism to include my handling of black characters. Both Hallorann, the cook in The Shining, and Mother Abagail in The Stand are cardboard caricatures of super-black heroes, viewed through rose-tinted glasses of white-liberal guilt. And when I think I'm free of the charge that most male American writers depict women as either nebbishes or bitch-goddess destroyers, I create someone like Carrie—who starts out as a nebbish victim and then becomes a bitch goddess, destroying an entire town in an explosion of hormonal rage. I recognize the problems but can't yet rectify them. (admin, 2018)

Figure 56: Still of Tom Hanks as Paul in “The Green Mile” (Shotdeck.com, 2024g)

The Green Mile is an exploration of humanity within a white authorial lens, still a piece of interesting work in its own way given the death role story and the dramatic burden of being a magical empath, but issues like the reliance on the "Magical Negro" trope invites critical reflection. Representation in cinema is not merely about inclusion, but about crafting characters with agency, depth, and individuality. As Hollywood evolves, breaking free from these reductive portrayals is essential to fostering a more equitable and authentic storytelling landscape by giving chances to characters and storytellers with diverse backgrounds.

Conclusion

Carrie demonstrates the speed of adaptation—within just a few years, its story has been retold multiple times, not only through direct adaptations but also through its influence on pop culture. *The Shining*, on the other hand, represents nostalgia—not just in how audiences revisit the film but also in Stephen King's own response to Kubrick's adaptation. His rejection of the film and his later attempt to remake it himself exemplify the driving forces behind many remakes: the desire to improve upon an existing work or to see a beloved story reimagined in a way that aligns more closely with the creator's vision. Meanwhile, *The Green Mile* reflects transformation—not only in its characters but also in how adaptations can reflect evolving societal attitudes, particularly regarding representation and the stories that get told.

Through months of research, my perspective on adaptation has expanded significantly. The creative liberties taken in adaptations are not just artistic choices by directors, but reflections of broader societal changes, industry demands, and evolving audience expectations. I have come to appreciate the intricate collaboration between different creative departments that shape a final product—writers, directors, cinematographers, art department, casting and marketing teams all influence how a story is told. Adaptations can be deeply reflective, capturing the nostalgia of a generation, or restorative, seeking to address past omissions and bring new voices and views into the spotlight.

Recent successes like *Dune* and *Nosferatu* remakes prove that strong, visionary adaptations can reintroduce well-known narratives to new audiences, generating fresh

appreciation for their source material. However, the industry also faces the risk of over-commercialization. Some adaptations, such as *Mufasa: The Lion King* or *It Ends With Us*, seem driven more by financial motives than by a compelling artistic vision. The balance between meaningful reinterpretation and mass-market appeal is delicate, and when adaptations are created solely for profit, they often fail to resonate with audiences who cherish the original works.

Adaptation is not a new phenomenon. Shakespeare is the most adapted author in cinema history, proving that reinterpretation is integral to storytelling. The practice of adapting literature for film has existed since the earliest days of cinema and will continue to shape the industry as new technologies and platforms emerge. In a world where content can be created, shared, and consumed instantaneously, the demand for adaptations will only grow, feeding our collective desire to revisit and reimagine familiar narratives.

Whether faithful to the source material or taking bold creative liberties, adaptations continue to captivate audiences. The debate over whether a film should be a direct translation of a book, or a radical reimagining will persist, but what remains undeniable is that every adaptation contributes to the ongoing conversation between literature and cinema.

In many ways, writing this conclusion has been the most challenging part of this thesis. Adaptations exist in a realm of paradox—full of artistic merit yet sometimes driven by commercial interests, capable of both honouring and distorting their source material. But perhaps that is where their true beauty lies. I viewed adaptation primarily through the lens of fidelity—how closely a film follows its source material. However, I have come to appreciate that adaptation is far more than just a matter of accuracy. It is an

artistic and interpretative process influenced by time, cultural shifts, and the vision of its creators.

I also realized that adaptation is deeply personal. What makes a "good" or "bad" adaptation varies from person to person. Some love Kubrick's *The Shining* despite King's disapproval; others cherish Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* while dismissing *The Hobbit* films. It ultimately comes down to what resonates with the viewer.

The debate over whether an adaptation should be a direct translation, or a creative reinvention will never end. Each new version of a story adds another layer to its history, reflecting the era in which it was made and the perspectives of those who shaped it.

Ultimately, the beauty of adaptation lies in its ability to challenge our expectations. Some adaptations stay faithful, others take bold liberties, but all contribute to the evolution of storytelling. Just as Shakespeare's or King's stories have been reimagined countless times, the books and films we cherish today will continue to be adapted for future generations.

Stories are not static—they are living entities, meant to be retold, reshaped, and re-experienced. Adaptation ensures that they endure.

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