

The madman in the tell-tale heart - a review

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A Madman

In this day and age we live in a world that is consumed and manipulated by images and the media. The printed word has become less valuable as we see many more cross-media adaptations. Novels are being transformed into movies and shows, comic books into video games, and artists even take inspiration from a poem and turn it into a song. We like to be able to see everything and step into a different dimension which is something that a movie or videogame can allow us to do compared to a book that is based on the reader's imagination. An example of a well-known piece of literary work is 19th century writer Edgar Allan Poe's story "The Tell-Tale Heart" written in 1843, which has been turned into a short film, an animation, comic strip, and song. Although, these mediums follow the original literary work, as Dr. Garcia-Martinez stated "... keep in mind that each medium—be it film, animation, song, videogame, or comic book, etc. —maintains its own characteristic features and possibilities." Therefore, the cross-media adaptations can transform the story and are not always identical to the original text.

The 1941 MGM film adaptation directed by Jules Dassin and starring Joseph Schildkraut is endowed with several significant detail changes. The personality of the old man is very cruel and demanding which varies from the original text because he is very kind to his servant and in return he is obedient to the man but has fury towards his vulture-like eye. In Poe's original story they get along well but in the short film the man looks down on his attendant because he knows he will not go seeking another job so he

holds a substantial amount of power over him. Therefore, the tone is much more angry in this medium because both characters express resentment towards one another. Consequently, that changes the storyline because now the servant has a different motive to kill the old man it is no longer just the now, it is also his brutal attitude towards him. Although, some characteristics were changed the film did enhance the story in certain parts. Such as, when the man is becoming more and more anxious after he has just killed his respected elder. The doomful music, ticking of the clock, and dripping of water into the bucket outside the window, which all represent the man's heart, are properties that a short story would not be able to provide the reader, and thus it truly lets the viewer testify to the man's nervousness and doom as it unravels. In short, small modifications to a literary work when transforming it into a cross-media adaptation can help enhance it, as Dudley Andrew stated " It actually allows that viewing audience to experience the novel's written text through the media of film.

Certain modifications can greatly impact the tone of the original text, such as adding a narrator. Which was done so in the 20th century short animated film adaptation directed by Ted Parmelee. James Mason's mysterious and shaky voice employs a more eerie tone throughout the whole film which is not present in the written text because a reader is only provided with their voice or someone else's. Therefore, the tone is very prominent with the help of the narrator's voice as oppose to a reader reciting it with a regular tone. Also, the sinister music and opening credits at the beginning of the film are characteristics that are not present in the short story and therefore, enhance the reader's experience by providing them with knowledge about what they

are about to view. Of course, being able to see what Poe wrote is very entertaining there is something about the detail that he utilized in his original story that no visual text could do justice. As Poe wrote in "The Tell-Tale Heart", "I say there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew that sound. It was the beating of the old man's heart. It increased my fury as beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage." He compares the man's heartbeat to something so delicate that we could all imagine, the hands of a small clicking but muffled by a barrier of cotton. As the reader reviews that line they can hear just the faintest little click and ideate the servant's anxiety. In contrast, such as small sounds infuriates him just how a booming drum drives a soldier. These comparisons alter the servant's personality because Poe's descriptive text truly allows the reader to think and feel as if they were him. As oppose to seeing an actor's reactions on a screen which can be less compelling since they do not always express what they are thinking. Also, in a film they would not describe the sound they would merely play it. The overall aspects were still kept the same as Poe's original "The Tell-Tale Heart" such as the setting which takes place in the old man's home, they have a nice relationship and the old man is not rude to his attendant, and the motive for killing the old man which was his evil vulture eye.

Sometimes artists may just draw inspiration from an original work and use it to create something completely different. In the British rock band Alan Parson's Project 1976 music video the story's plot and characters seem to be much different. To begin, we do not know much about the character's relationship which is very opposing to Poe's original story where it tells the

reader that the old man had never done him wrong so it displays a clear motive for the killing. Also, It makes the servant seem very impulsive and wicked because the lyrics describe the old man's death with no remorse. The settings and characters are not accurately retained because in the original the servant is portrayed as a madman whose hatred for the eye builds up until he can no longer take it and plans an eight day long scheme to kill the man. In the song the man is not even portrayed as a servant. The servant does not seem like a madman but more of a vicious person who hated this old man and would do anything to get rid of him. Meanwhile, the music did provide many tone shifts because at the beginning of the video t was very powerful and loud along with the artist almost screaming to present his frustration. Following that after the man was killed the volume slowly started to become more quiet and peaceful and a white picture with two hands was shown on the screen. It seemed as if it was representing peace for the servant because now that the old man was dead he would no longer have to suffer from the " Eye of the Devil himself!" This adaptation is very strange because many of the lines are quoted directed from Poe's original " The Tell-Tale Heart" but the message of the story was conveyed much differently despite having the same words. As Andrew writes, the " the skeleton of the original can... become the skeleton of a film" (Braudy and Cohen, 455). Meaning, that the actual lines were the same and probably the most accurate amongst all the adaptations but the most different, they took Poe's words and really morphed them into another work. The music is what portrayed that of a madman that was losing his insanity but the lyrics did not truly expose the servant losing his sanity over the eye and the pounding of

the dead man's heart. It only told the story from the man's death and so on but not the events leading up to it.

Despite the 1965 comic book adaptation by Archie Goodwin and illustrated by Reed Crandall having the same lines from Poe's original story they did incorporate new settings and details that gave the tale a different tone. The comic starts off in an infirmary of a state asylum where the servant who has a name in this version, Robert, is in a strait-jacket. They are treating him in the infirmary because they believe he is crazy for killing the old man for his heart and claiming he could hear his dead heartbeat. In the original story he is never taken to an asylum so it changes the plot somewhat because it is almost a spinoff of the original. Also, the servant does not have a name in any of the other adaptations but now he does and he is never treated as a patient only as a crime once he is taken by the police. The timeframe of the story is also different than the films because Robert is revealing it as a flashback instead of in the present. The themes represent that the comic is a close adaptation of the original because in both works it demonstrates the effects of guilt on a person's conscience. The comic strip just proves the effect even greater by putting Robert in an asylum rather than being taken by a police. Furthermore, they made him seem much more gruesome in the comic strip by adding a part where he chops up the man into pieces and hides him under the floor planks when in the original he does not cut the old man. The text is enhanced because a comic strip can provide pictures and colors which is something that the reader would have to rely on their imagination for otherwise. For the most part it is the same story line except for the ending, when Robert can no longer take the beating sound and pulls

the heart from underneath the floor. Then it flashes back to the infirmary where they are removing his bandages and they show him his face in the mirror. He then leaps through the five story window because he experienced a slight discoloration in his eye from glass particles which reminded him of the evil vulture eye that he worked so hard to get rid of. The essential meaning of the story remained the same which was a man's insanity driving him to do something absurd then his guilt overpowers his conscience and forces him to tell the truth.

Our modern day society loves to take what has already be created and modify it into something different such as Marshall McLuhan says in *The Medium is the Massage* " Our official culture is striving to force the new media to do the work of the old" (94). Cross-media adaptations occur every day all around us such as the movies we go watch most likely came from an already established books and poems turn into songs. As Dudley Andrew wrote " borrowing is the most frequent mode of adaptation..." Accordingly, as the world and society changes so does our media because aside from being creatures of habit we also need to also adapt and fit in. If a reader can turn into a viewer but understand how two texts regarding the something have similarities and differences it will increase their visual literacy because it is important to be able to adapt to the changing world.