



Sidney Lumet's Movie Adaption *Long Day's Journey into Night*(1962)

Hajer Khalid AlShishani

Istanbul Aydin University, Turkey.

ABSTRACT

This study compares and contrasts a stage-to-film adaptation which is Sidney Lumet's movie adaption of Eugene O'Neill's Play Long Day's Journey into Night, while focusing on Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory discussed in her book Theory of Adaptation. This study also addresses the manner in which an adaptor changed or did not change the original work for a different medium. It further focuses on the way Sidney Lumet made a reference to Eugene O'Neill's play, while still allowing and urging himself to come up with something of his own and maintaining the unique characteristics of the original text.

KEYWORDS: Adaptation, Paly, Theory, Movie

INTRODUCTION

Story telling provides a way of sharing and exchanging cultural values and beliefs incorporating various Medias, such as drama, film, theater, short story, novel and folk tale. Which provides different ways for sharing similar themes and ideas to diverse groups of people who have different cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, despite the fact that many of these stories have been told repeatedly, they nonetheless find a place within different cultures, thanks to the adaptation of one medium into another, and hence provide a new versions of the literary work itself.

Moreover, from the beginning of film industry, adapting one media into another have had a major influence in attracting the general people, as a way to display different ideas and topics. (Vergara, 2015) Adapting the dramatic work into film became common, therefore, several theatrical adaptations had a significant role and feature in the record of cinema, drawing the way for future adaptations, by presenting and enduring social and aesthetic effect. Some of the most well-known adaptations that are astonishingly successful (McGibbon, 2014) and have left an everlasting cultural impact to the field of adaptation include: *A Streetcar Named Desire* directed by Kazan, *Long Day's Journey into Night* directed by Sidney Lumet, *Death of a Salesman* directed by Volker Schlöndorff (1985), *12 Angry Men* directed by Lumet. These adapted works have significantly contributed to the development of feature films, which paved the way for future adaptations. Some of the recent adaptation include: *Fences* Directed by Denzel Washington (2016), *Doubt* directed by Shanley (2008), *Frost/Nixon* directed by Ron Howard (2008),

Adapting one media into the other is nota simple procedure because an adaptation must be efficient in the existing conditions. As a matter of fact, some parts from the original work are unable to be presented over to the adaptation, which results in an incomplete adaptation. Numerous literary critics (McGibbon, 2014) have taken this into consideration. This paper analyzes Sindy Lumet's *Long Day's Journey into Night* movie adaption using Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation which she explains in her book *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), while highlighting the differences between both works of Eugene's text and Lumet's movie.

Certain works are hard to adapt due to their mode, writing style, or viewpoint. The director would have to determine how to depict a scenario which was intended to be read and experienced personally on theater. The decisions taken in adapting literary works to film sometimes result in entirely distinct work of the original plotline. Moreover, the adaptation can be produced multiple times in a variety of genres, some of which might be made solely for enjoyment or to convey meaningful themes to the viewers. Therefore, some critics studied adaptation process, each contributing to the field of adaptations differently.

Richard Krevolin describes in his book *Rahasia sukses skenario film-film box-office: 5 langkah Jitu Mengadaptasi Apa Pun Menjadi Skenario Jempolan* (2003) that Literary adaptation is the practice of capturing the essence of a literary work in order for it to be presented in another medium. It's likely that some components of the narrative will be presented while others are taken out, but the story's essence must remain unchanged. Therefore, adaptation is a self-contained process



of creating a story that must be approved by the new media. He further explains that the structure of a literary work is frequently changed in adaptation, such as the variations in characters, the rising and shrinking of the plotline of the narrative, and the variations in perspective (Krevolin, 2003).

Christine Geraghty, an adaptation critic, in her book *Now a Major Motion Picture: Film Adaptations of Literature and Drama* discusses that though the process of adapting one media to another is a complex procedure, yet the result of the adaptation is what her work mainly focuses on, she explains that through the adapted work one relies on his/her ability to recall. Though the movie is a representation of another literary text yet it invites its viewer to make connections with the original work and vice versa. She further explains that the process of adapting isn't just about the fidelity of the adaptation to the original text, it is also about capturing the viewers' attention on the genre, the acting style, the production, lighting and more. Christine Geraghty, Richard Krevolin, Brain Mcfarlane, Sapardi Djoko Damono, who are well-known adaptation critics, all believe like Linda Hutcheon that adaptation is a complicated art form that can change our perceptions of a range of cultural productions (Kinney, 2013).

Eugene O'Neill a well-known American playwright, wrote his tragic play *Long Day's Journey into Night* in 1939 and finished by 1941, he wrote this play as a reflection of his own family making it an autobiographical play. It portrays the O'Neill family, who are referred to as Tyrone in the play, and the setting is based on the O'Neill's' vacation home in New England, Monte Cristo Cottage. The plot follows the lives of the Tyrone's, which O'Neill writes from his memory recollections from living with his family which consists of his brother Jamie, his mother Ella, in the play known as Mary his father James O'Neill, and himself who in the play names after his dead young brother Edmund.

The film rights to O'Neill's play were obtained by director Sidney Lumet in 1962, a film director who is known for primarily making films based on literary works. His works contributed to the field of adaptations through his relationships with those literary works. In his work he displays a personal passion in a variety of ways, he shows a regard for intellect and the written text in the pieces adapted from literature, which is unique in the field of film adaptations (Cunningham, 2001) Lumet makes an effort stay true and respectful to the literary source when transforming it into the big screen. This enables him to convey its essence as a stand-alone work of cinema according to many critics like Cunningham.(2001). Some of his famous adaptations include: *Sea Gull* (1968) *The Group* (1966), and *Lovin' Molly* (1974) *Bye, Bye Braverman* (1968) and *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1962)

METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative, comparative, critical study which aims at applying Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory which she discussed in her book *A Theory of Adaptation* on Sidney Lumet's adaptation movie on Eugene O'Neill's play *Long Day's Journey into Night* while comparing and contrasting the adaptation to the original work. Furthermore, this study contributes to the adaptation field due to the lack of studies done on adapting one medium into another in literature, especially from theatre to screen.

SIDNEY LUMET'S MOVIE ADAPTATION LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT

Eugene O'Neill's play is about the Tyrone's family which consists of the parents, James Tyrone and Mary Tyrone, and their two sons Jamie and Edmund Tyrone. The play opens on a beautiful summer's day set in August 1912. It takes place only around this day from eight thirty in the morning until the midnight of the same day. Each member has his/her own struggle, Mary the mother is addicted to morphine. Edmund has a potentially deadly disease. The father James and the other son Jamie are alcoholics. Each character in his/her own way continually hide, accuse, despise, lament, insult, and deny in a never-ending loop of tension punctuated by desperate attempt at empathy and solace. This leads the characters to blaming each other for the misfortunes of their lives starting with Edmund sickness, Mary's addiction and ending with Jamie's and James' addiction to alcohol (Killian, 2013, pp. 5-6).

Long Day's Journey into Night by O'Neill begins in the family room and closes at the same spot. Whilst the movie adaptation begins in the front yard under the sun and later the film moves within the house and stays there; the men work outside, but Mary is strictly limited inside the house (Petrie 11) In the film adaption, Mary is played by Katharine Hepburn, who was also in the play version, James is played by Ralph Richardson, Jamie is played by Jason Robards Jr, and Edmund is played by Dean Stockwell (Entin, 1963)

Linda Hutcheon in her book *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006) identifies adaptations as "repetition without replication" (Hutcheon, 2013, p 18). This indicates that some adaptations might repeat the very same plot, characters and themes of the story without necessarily trying to replicate the original work, resulting in the creation of a new literary work that can stand on its own and be viewed as a standalone piece of work. She also points out in her book the importance of the technical process the director follows in adapting, for instance she argues that the director creates a link between sound and image while utilizing the space and time from inside film, as well as utilizing technology in a way that allows a transformation of one media into another. (2013, p 64) Hence, Lumet elaborates on the importance of cinematographic production in delivering the film. The

camera, which was positioned among Mary, James, Jamie, and Edmund, was described by Lumet as the film's fifth actor; he states in an interview "In *Long Day's Journey* there are four characters. I added a fifth, the camera." (Georgakas, Quart and Lumet, 2006 p 13) As a result, each character had his/her own photographic lens to illustrate, in every scene with Jamie and James, a wider lens has been used and placed at a lower and wider angle, until the camera was placed at a very low angle it was on the ground at the end of the movie.

Linda Hutcheon explains and adds, that the modifications done during the adaptation must be informative and creative, while preserving what makes the original text distinctive. Therefore, the goal isn't just to repeat the work, the goal is to create a unique individual work (2013, p 14). This leads the director of the film to bargain with the main plotline of the adapted literary work, while concentrating on the execution. Lumet follows the same plot and events on the play in his movie adaptation, making unnoticeable changes while focusing on directing the movie, in which he made a conscious effort to keep the film as true to the play as possible. Lumet and his producer didn't even hire a screenwriter and instead he only depended on Eugene O'Neill's original script. The play has four acts whereas the film was 170 minutes long, cutting almost 17 to 19 pages from the play, the play has almost 2855 lines of speech, and Sidney eliminated nearly 752 of them. Furthermore, Lumet excluded almost sixty percent of the play's poetic verses, to illustrate; in act four, fifty six out of ninety lines of poetic verses were eliminated from the film. Yet, Lumet was capable of removing lines without compromising the core theme, and he did so in such a way that it went unnoticed (Costello, 1994, p. 79).

Furthermore, adapting for Hutcheon is alluring, since it allows one to make reference to a story while still allowing and giving opportunity for one to make something of their own. According to that Hutcheon says in her book: "whatever the motive, from the adapter's perspective, adaptation is an act of appropriating or salvaging, and this is always a double process of interpreting and then creating something new." (Hutcheon 2013, p.20) The themes and messages that made O'Neill's play so successful didn't change when it was adapted to the big screen. As for the themes O'Neill explores the difficult topics of alcoholism, addiction, guilt, remorse and deception which was the first time these themes were that heavily portrayed in Broadway. Audiences were compelled to confront unpleasant problems as a result of the performance. It exposed the major characters' underlying psychological traits, Lumet kept these themes within his film version and made sure to portray these themes through production, the movie was famous for its manipulation of the camera by focusing on the angles. Subsequently, in an interview Lumet noted that the cinematic production behind the adaptation required a high level of ability, complex approaches, and strategies (Luciano & Lumet, 1971, p. 20) putting a great amount of work into the movie's development and

filming process, for instance focusing on lighting, sound, and camera's angle which correlates with Hutcheon's assertion that adaptation is not only in the outcome but also in the process, which is an immensely significant component of the process of adapting from one media to another (Hutcheon, 2013, p. 16).

Furthermore, Hutcheon in her book tackles who adapts one media into another; the reason behind adapting and most importantly how the audience react to the adaptation. She states that; "The reasons behind adaptation should be considered seriously by adaptation theory, even if this means rethinking the role of intentionality in our critical thinking about art in general" (Hutcheon, 2013, p. 95) which clarifies that there are many motives for why adaptations are made some of which include: principles of finance, promoting the culture, or even amusement and more. Thus, understanding the reason of adapting is as crucial as the product itself. She finally completes her work by posing two main questions which are: "What is Not an Adaptation?" and "What is the Appeal of Adaptation?" She states that many of the reforming such as reduction and interpretations are considered adaptations, however, using add-on texts or using a portion of an already existing music are not considered adaptations (2013). Mary Brewer in her article *Sidney Lumet's family epic: re-imagining Long Day's Journey into Night* (2013) articulates the purpose of Lumet's adaptation of O'Neill's play, she explains the goal behind Lumet's adaptation of O'Neill's play, then, was to convert it to film as accurately as possible. Lumet's film is a critique of O'Neill's work. In other words, while the film stays true to O'Neill's drama, Lumet makes creative liberties with language cutting, setting, and character; all of which effect the work's tragic topic and how audiences may react to it. (Brewer, 2013)

Though Lumet adapted Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* because it is one of the top and most famous American plays yet he mentions in an interview that his movie *Long Day's Journey into Night* is his most successful adaptations he has ever done. (Costello, 1994, p. 78) Thus, it influenced future adaptation, he turned the play into a film, but he did so in a way that was loyal to Eugene's original work, he changed it in a way for the play to stay the same, which is the paradoxical essence of a successful adaptation. Lumet succeeds in building a world in which Eugene O'Neill's brilliant use of words and speech within the play is used in a proper technique, without affecting the play's smooth flow of speech. He does that by relying on the art of movie photography while keeping respect of the emotional scenes within the play (Luciano & Lumet, 1971).

In summary, this paper included an analysis of Sidney Lumet's movie adaptation of *Long Day's Journey into Night*, while focusing on Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory, in which she discusses that some adaptations may reproduce the story's storyline, characters, and ideas without attempting to replicate the original work, resulting in the

production of a new literary work that can stand alone and be considered as a standalone piece of art. Sidney Lumet managed to make Eugene O'Neill's Play *Long Day's Journey into Night* his own while maintaining a connection to it. This is actively demonstrated in the way when one hears the name of Eugene's play *Long Day's Journey into Night*, one cannot but think of Sidney Lumet's film. Yet both Lumet shows his ability to effectively adapt the same narrative for diverse mediums by providing a new way to tell the same tale rather than merely repeating it in a new medium. Furthermore, it cannot be denied that Lumet's Movie is a successful adaptation, which had a major contribution to the adaptation field.

REFERENCES

1. Brewer, Mary F. "Long Day's Journey into Night." *Modern American Drama on Screen* (2013): 167.
2. Costello, D. P. (1994). *Sidney Lumet's "Long Day's Journey Into Night"*. Salisbury University.
3. Cunningham, F. R. (2001). *Sidney Lumet: Film and literary vision*. University Press of Kentucky.
4. Georgakas, Dan, Leonard Quart and Sidney Lumet. "Still "Making Movies" An Interview with Sidney Lumet." *Cineaste Publishers, Inc.*, 2006. 13.
5. Entin, J. W. (1963). *Long Day's Journey into Night*. Taylor & Francis, Ltd.
6. Hutcheon, L. (2013). *A theory of adaptation*. Routledge.
7. Killian, J. (2013). *A paradox of American tragedy : Long day's journey into night and the problem of negative emotion in theatrical performance*. University of Louisville: Electronic Theses and Dissertations.
8. Kinney, M. E. (2013). *Linda Hutcheon's A Theory of Adaptation*, by Linda Hutcheon. *Critical Voices: The University of Guelph Review Project*, 7-15.
9. Luciano, D., & Lumet, S. (1971). *Long Day's Journey into Night: An Interview with Sidney Lumet*. *Film Quarterly*, autumn, Vol. 25, No. 1. University of California Press.
10. McGibbon, G. R. (2014). *Seeing double: The process of script adaptation between theatre and film*.
11. Sewall, R. B. (1979). *LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT*. vol. 29, no. 4. *CrossCurrents*.
12. Vergara, A. T. (2015). *Literary Film Adaptation for Screen Production: the Analysis of Style Adaptation in the Film Naked Lunch from a Quantitative and Descriptive Perspective*. *Logos: Revista de Lingüística, Filosofía y Literatura*, 25(2), 154-164.

Citation: Hajer Khalid AlShishani, "Sidney Lumet's Movie Adaption *Long Day's Journey into Night(1962)*", *American Research Journal of English and Literature*, Vol 7, no. 1, 2021, pp. 1-4.

Copyright © 2021 Hajer Khalid AlShishani, This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.