

## EDGAR ALLAN POE'S *THE TELL-TALE HEART* ON PAGE AND ON SCREEN

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**Abstract:** In a time when interdisciplinary and intertextual engagements among diverse fields and disciplines begin to gain potency and efficacy, it is no surprise that film adaptations of literary classics lure readers' attention, sometimes even more than the classical works themselves. Examining a literary work along with its film may produce many benefits. For instance, unlike fidelity criticism which solely focuses on the adaptation's degree of faithfulness to the original text, studying literature and film together may encourage interdisciplinary and comparative studies in the field of arts, may raise one's awareness considering the intertextual relationship between film and literature and may help question the hierarchical relations among the arts. Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* and its short movie adaptation with the same title directed by Jules Dassin in 1941 are impeccable materials to achieve these goals. As perhaps one of the best examples of psychological horror genre, *The Tell-Tale Heart* relates a murder committed by the narrator himself. The tale is open to numerous interpretations as it leaves many critical wh-questions unanswered. As such, it creates gaps to be filled by readers. This article will thus examine how the aforesaid movie adaptation of Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* tries to fill those gaps via extraneous additions to the original story, making the adaptation a unique interpretation of the source text.

**Keywords:** Adaptation Theory, Literary Movie Adaptations, Edgar Allan Poe, *The Tell-Tale Heart*.

### KISA ÖYKÜ VE FİLM OLARAK EDGAR ALLAN POE'NUN *GAMMAZ YÜREK ÖYKÜSÜ*

**Öz:** Disiplinlerarası ve metinlerarası çalışmaların güçlendiği ve etkinleştiği bu zamanlarda, klasikleşmiş edebiyat yapıtlarından uyarlama filmlerin kimi zaman eserlerin kendilerinden bile çok ilgi görmesi şaşırtıcı değildir. Bir edebiyat metninin film uyarlaması ile birlikte incelenmesinin

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birçok faydası vardır. Örneğin, uyarlamanın metne sadakatini sorgulayan geleneksel okumalardan farklı olarak, edebiyat metni ve uyarlamalarını birlikte incelemek insani bilimler ve sanat alanındaki disiplinlerarası ve karşılaştırmalı çalışmalara yeni açılımlar getirebilir. Edebiyat ve film ilişkisini, birini diğerine üstün tutmaksızın, metinlerarası bir ilişki olarak değerlendirmek sanat dalları arasındaki hiyerarşik yapıya dair yeni yorumların önünü açabilir. Edgar Allan Poe'nun *Gammaz Yürek* başlıklı öyküsü ve bu öyküden uyarlanan, yönetmenliğini Jules Dassin'in üstlendiği aynı başlıklı film (1941) bu bağlamlarda incelenmek için çok uygun örneklerdir. Psikolojik gerilim türünün belki de en iyi örneklerinden biri sayılabilecek olan *Gammaz Yürek*, anlatıcı tarafından işlenen ve sadece anlatıcının sesi ve perspektifinden okura sunulan bir cinayeti anlatır. *Gammaz Yürek* 'nerede, neden, ne zaman, nasıl, kim' gibi önemli soruların yanıtı bırakıldığı, değişik yorumlara açık bir öyküdür ve bu şekliyle içinde okurlar tarafından farklı şekillerde doldurulabilecek boşluklar barındırır. Bu bağlamda, bu makale bahsi geçen film uyarlamasının orjinal öyküye yaptığı eklemeler ve değişiklikler ile metindeki boşlukları tamamlamaya çalışmasına odaklanacak ve filmin metne ne ölçüde sadık kaldığı meselesini bir kenara bırakarak uyarlamayı bu şekliyle özgün bir yorum olarak değerlendirecektir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Adaptasyon Teorisi, Edebiyat Uyarlamaları, Edgar Allan Poe, *Gammaz Yürek*.

## Introduction

Diverse and numerous forms of relations among the arts have become incredibly vibrant with the disappearance of rigid boundaries among different academic disciplines. Collaborative engagements among the once distanced academic fields have given rise to two separate yet equally important concepts: interdisciplinarity and intertextuality. Each being a distinct branch in the field of the arts and humanities, literature and film are prone to be closely engaged with one another. No one will deny that nearly every classical literary work appears at least once, if not twice or more, on the movie screen, which would prompt us to ask why literary adaptations matter to avid readers and also to students majoring in literature. The answer could be that literature and film together constitute a perfect example to interdisciplinary and intertextual integration of two different mediums of art. As the interaction between these two art branches gained momentum, their engagement earned an interdisciplinary title that reads 'adaptation studies,' a fitting example to a much-discussed postmodern term 'intertextuality'. This article will hence focus on the intertextual relationship between film and literature stressing that discussing textual and visual narratives together may provide various benefits. Among these are the following: (1) it strengthens interdisciplinary and comparative studies among different mediums of art (2) it raises one's awareness considering the intertextual relationship between film and literature (3) it directs attention to various factors considering adaptability of different literary genres (4) it lays emphasis on the view that fidelity criticism is not the

only way to approach literary film adaptations (5) it questions hierarchical relations among the arts and subverts the superiority of textual narratives over visual narratives (6) it encourages appreciation of different adaptation versions of literary classics merely as intertextual interpretations.

Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* and its short movie adaptation directed by Jules Dassin (1941) are exemplary materials to achieve these goals. Before examining *The Tell-Tale Heart* on page and on screen in these regards, it would be helpful to sketch out basic concerns of literary adaptations. This would enable one to see various enriching ways of exploring the transition from the text to the screen. To this end, interdisciplinary and intertextual nature of literary adaptations, adaptability of literary texts from different genres and parameters of evaluating literary adaptations now need to be explicated.

### **1. Basic Concerns of Literary Adaptations**

Film adaptations of literary classics always remain a focus of keen interest for avid readers and students majoring in literature. Film renditions of classical works especially lure students' attention even more than the classics themselves because, most of the time, watching adaptations are considered a shorter and easier way to achieve familiarity with the original text: "There is not an English teacher alive who, in the middle of making an absolutely insightful point about a great novel or play, hasn't been asked 'When are we going to watch the movie anyway?'" (Golden, 2007, p. 24). An irritating scene it may seem for a lecturer teaching literature, yet students' tendency to avoid reading the primary text and discussing it in class could be turned into a win-win situation by including the cinematic adaptations of literary texts into the course syllabuses as additional materials because as Divya John states "movies can be excellent precursors of speaking tasks" (2016, p. 250). In other words, movie adaptations of literary texts can stimulate students' interests in literature and function as icebreakers in the classroom environment. As a matter of fact, film versions of literary texts provide powerful visual input for anyone who has a genuine interest in literature because "there is power in looking closely at film versions of literary works. The similarities and differences between the mediums allow for discussion and critical analysis of the literary aspects of film and literature" (Golden, 2007, p. 24). The close engagement between a literary text and a film based on this text should be studied as a form of intertextual relationship (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 8).

As of approximately the second half of the twentieth century, various forms of relations among different mediums of art have gained strength, credibility and legitimacy. The term 'intertextuality,' coined by Julia Kristeva in 1960s, became an embracing concept through which various kinds of relations among the texts and the arts are explained: "[Kristeva's] own reading of Bakhtinian 'dialogism' as an open ended play between the text of the subject and the text of the addressee . . . gives rise to the Kristevan concept of 'intertextuality'" (Moi, 1986, p. 34). Intertextuality is based on the idea that art works are in constant

relationship with each other and that no work can stand isolated from the works which precede it:

Works of literature, after all, are built from systems, codes, and traditions established by previous works of literature. The systems, codes and traditions of other art forms and of culture in general are also crucial to the meaning of a work of literature. Texts, whether they be literary or non-literary, are viewed by modern theorists as lacking in any kind of independent meaning. They are what theorists now call intertextual (Allen, 2011, p. 1).

The term intertextuality became an inseparable part of postmodernist tendencies in literature and also in other mediums of art: "Intertextuality, as a term, has not been restricted to discussions of the literary arts. It is found in discussions of cinema, painting, music, architecture, photography and in virtually all cultural and artistic productions" (Allen, 2011, p. 224). As a movement which resists precise definitions and categorizations, postmodernism challenges conventional and traditional ways of looking at numerous different forms of art. It questions the possibilities of unity and order in a world which witnessed two devastating world wars in the first half of the twentieth century, undervalues the importance attached to originality and uniqueness of an art work, undermines former notions considering the universality and stability of truth and eliminates the boundaries among the arts. After all, postmodernism celebrates experimentation, playfulness, chaos, intertextuality, variety of interpretations and different perspectives:

Postmodern art, many argue, rejects notions of originality, and Modernism's desire to 'Make it new' and cultivates a wilfully derivative, mixed and thoroughly intertextual approach which attempts to capture a new age in which old certainties about historical knowledge, social progress and even the ability to represent the external world collapsed (Allen, 2011, p. 224).

Recycling of well-liked stories in different mediums of art fits this scene very well as "art is derived from other art; stories are born of other stories" (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 2). Creation of art based on already existing art works is inevitable in a postmodern world and the relationship between literature and film is only one among many ways of producing art from art. Various works of literature from different literary genres are also transposed into different mediums of art.

Literary genres have always been inclined to evolve, diversify and hybridize throughout the history of literature, but prose, poetry and drama secure their primary positions as umbrella genres. Today, it is not extraordinary to see transposition of renowned texts produced in each genre to different mediums of art. Poetry interacts more with music due to some shared stylistic elements like rhyme, melody, rhythm and figures of speeches that are peculiar to both poems and songs while plays and prose narratives (mostly epics, novels, short stories) are more eligible to put to screen. Multifarious interactions among literary texts and diverse fields of arts exist; yet, screen adaptations are the widest and most available ones. Due to both stylistic and content-wise factors, "some sorts of

literature are more susceptible to screen adaptation than others" (McFarlane, 2007, p. 15). Let us then look, very briefly, at each genre's relationship with other mediums of art. This will enable us to have a better assessment of adaptations of short stories in general and Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* in particular.

To consider poetry first: there are innumerable examples revealing the vivid interaction between poetry and music because poems are more prone to be transformed into songs. The following are some notable examples: (1) Medieval folk ballads such as "Sir Patrick Spens," "Get Up and Bar the Door," and "Barbara Allen" are only a few of myriad folk ballads which are still sung as popular folk songs today. (2) Another memorable piece could be a touchstone work in Romantic poetry, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," (1798) which was adapted into a heavy metal song with the same title (1984) by the English heavy metal band Iron Maiden (3) "Lady of Shallott," a Victorian poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson published in 1832 has been made into songs by various artists starting from the early twentieth century. Loreena McKennitt's song with the same title, which was released in 1991, is probably the most widely known version.

The transition from the stage to the screen is another widespread form of literary adaptations. No one will object to the fact that the pieces that are favoured on stage are also tested on screen. Receptions of the plays on stage and on screen may of course vary depending on technical and dramatic details, an examination of which would exceed the scope of this article. Anyhow, popularity of reputed plays in adaptation industry never diminishes. Many plays from the Ancient Greek theatre, the Elizabethan era as well as several other plays by preeminent contemporary playwrights frequently appear and reappear both on stage and on screen.

Still, play adaptations cannot compete with novel adaptations because "it is the novel above all which has absorbed filmmakers' attention among possible literary sources" (McFarlane, 2007, p. 19). This is perhaps because both novel and film contain sequential stories which require a certain degree of fictionality, multi-dimensional characterizations as well as complex and intriguing plots. It could hence be said that it is the portrayal of lengthy stories that brings novel and film together on the screen: "the attraction common to novel and film is that both 'create' worlds and 'lives' in more amplitude and with potentially more regard for representational realism in their detail than the other literary forms" (McFarlane, 2007, p. 20). Novel and film can be thought of as sister arts because almost every popular novel, both old-time classics and contemporary ones, are good candidates for film industry. Also noteworthy, each field cultivate the other in diverse ways. For instance, in his *Bestsellers Popular Fiction Since 1900*, Clive Bloom states that one of the reasons why some authors remain all-time bestsellers is that "their popularity [is] boosted by films, television serializations" (2002, p. 7). Moreover, the vice versa is true, too. An ardent novel reader, at least out of mere curiosity, pays keen attention to literary

movie adaptations. A typical reaction of a fanatic reader always focuses on the changes made in the adaptation because regarding “the adaptation of novels the essential process is excision of one kind or other: either a paring down or the surgery that removes whole sections, subplots and sets of characters” (McFarlane, 2007, p. 24). In short story adaptations however, the reverse can be observed.

Adaptations of short stories are as popular as novel adaptations. A brief online search will reveal myriad of both professional and amateur ventures regarding short story adaptations. Generic features of short stories differ from longer fictional narratives in the way that stories generally present a single event with limited characters and perspectives. Adapting a short story may thus prove more difficult considering the length of the narrative and the economy of details, which is why the adapters “have had to expand their source material considerably” (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 19). A need arises here to touch briefly on Ernest Hemingway’s famous ‘iceberg principle,’ which can explain extraneous additions of the filmmaker when putting a short tale to the screen. Hemingway explains the iceberg principle in the following way:

If a writer of prose knows enough of what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water (as cited in Scofield, 2006, p. 140).

The iceberg principle is used as a metaphor to describe the visible and latent contents of fictional works. In no other literary prose genre has the iceberg principle become so influential as it has been, and still is, in short stories. It fits especially the genre of the short story because its generic features entail conciseness. Hence, short story writers do not necessarily give every tiny detail regarding narrative elements such as characterization, plot formation, setting etc. Instead, the attentive reader is expected to play a major role in filling up what is left untold by the author. Beyond doubt, such stories are prone to be interpreted in numerous different ways. If movie adaptations of literary texts are taken as interpretations, then what is beneath the tip of the iceberg could be re-interpreted by the filmmaker in diverse different ways because, as Hutcheon states “adapters are first interpreters and then creators” (2006, p. 18). This is exactly what happens in the short movie adaptation of Poe’s *The Tell-Tale Heart*, directed by Jules Dassin in 1941, to which we will return in detail later on. Yet, at this critical point emerges one of the hotly debated concerns of adaptation studies: possibility of remaining true to the original text. How exactly this concern causes a furore among passionate readers (and most of the time among students of literature, too) incites us to discuss in a nutshell fidelity criticism and its implications:

Recall any conversation with someone who has seen the movie version of a book you’ve read. You’ll talk (usually angrily) about the scenes that were cut, the changes made, and the ridiculous casting. The discussion focusses on how the

film and the print text are different, and this is where students begin and end their analysis (Golden, 2007, p. 24).

It is true that only rarely does an adaptation of a literary classic fulfill the expectations of ardent readers. Yet, as many scholars writing on film and literature reiterate, fidelity criticism is today considered unsatisfying, facile and outdated in adaptation studies (Hutcheon, 2006; McFarlane, 2007; Golden, 2007). It is not incumbent upon the filmic rendition to strictly stick to the literary original, given the fact that the adaptation version is a brand new work in itself, not a replica of the adapted work. Also, remaining perfectly true to the original work is the next thing to impossibility because, as Hutcheon reminds, "adaptations are often compared to translations. Just as there is no such thing as a literal translation, there can be no literal adaptation" (2006, p. 16). Even though the illustrious 'based on' notices that appear before the opening scene of adaptations serve to pay tribute to the adapted work, the notice itself is prone to ambivalent interpretations: "The seeming simplicity of the familiar label, 'based on a true story,' is a ruse: in reality, such historical adaptations are as complex as historiography itself" (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 18). As a matter of fact, the based on notice could itself be fictitious as in the case of *Fargo* —an American comedy/crime movie by the Coen Brothers (1996) and its recently adapted TV series (2014). Hence, a movie presented with a 'based on' notice is not necessarily based on what it claims to base itself on. When seen through a postmodern lens, such ambivalences encourage one to question the so-called uniqueness and universality of 'truth.'

Instead of the fidelity approach, Hutcheon suggests that adaptations should be evaluated based on the filmmakers' ability and creativity to constitute an autonomous work (2006, p. 20). Golden, too, suggests that fidelity criticism should not be the only criterion to appraise literary adaptations. Instead, he writes, "[i]n every English class, I teach students about the literary, cinematic, and theatrical elements of film" (2007, p. 25). Golden further details cinematic elements as "the shot type, angle, camera movement, editing, and so on" and theatrical elements as "costumes, props, sets, lightning and acting choice" (2007, p. 25). These might prove useful to teach basics of film terminology; yet, for literature classes, what matter most are the representations of literary elements such as "characterization, theme, tone, setting, symbol and so on" (2007, p. 25). As mentioned earlier, the most common inclination in literature classes and among bookworms is to discuss the similarities and differences between the textual narrative (the source text) and the screen narrative (the adaptation). There is nothing wrong with this as long as it is done in such a way that the artistic value of neither film nor text would surpass one another. Also, elaborating on why and how the changes occurred in each medium of art may prove more useful. The rest of this article will hence examine in detail Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* both on page and on screen. To this end, the following brief section will first introduce the story as a textual narrative, which will be helpful for the evaluation of its movie adaptation as a screen narrative.

## 2. *The Tell-Tale Heart* on Page

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) mostly produced poetry and short stories but its his stories that gained him a mythical position among the writers of gothic and horror fiction. Poe also holds a special status as “the first American writer to gain a reputation outside the United States. His short stories and poems, famously mysterious or frightening, were popular both at home and in Europe” (Kür, 2004, p. 11). Poe gained a canonical status mainly through his short tales, which have always remained a focus of interest for fans of thrillers from all around the world. Also, as the writer of extensively anthologized short stories, Poe has frequently been read and taught in higher educational institutions.

First published in 1843, *The Tell-Tale Heart*, preserves its status as one of the paragons of psychological horror tales, at which Poe is adept. Written in the first person, the story is very brief yet also condenses. As a gripping tale, it involves only two major characters but no background details have been given about them. So, in this article, they will be referred interchangeably as the young man, narrator or murderer and the old man, master or victim. To summarize concisely, *The Tell-Tale Heart* relates a murder committed by the narrator himself, who struggles throughout the tale to convince readers of his sanity and sagacity. He fails to prove right, nonetheless, which is where the irony lies because as he tries to persuade the readers of his sanity, we gradually become more convinced of his unstable psychological condition. The opening paragraph of the story will give an idea:

True!-nervous-very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses-not destroyed- not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then am I mad? Hearken! And observe how healthily – how calmly I can tell you the whole story (p. 13).

The story is indeed very short, only presenting the perspective of the narrator/murderer, who describes what would seem to us an example of a senseless violence because the murder is committed for no obvious reason other than the victim's eye. For some reason unknown to the readers, the young man is obsessed with the old man's eye. What is wrong with the eye is one of the details that remain unclear in the story. The narrator's obsession with the old man's eye may hint a psychological disorder (perhaps schizophrenia) but the way he refutes this idea is indeed really smart: “have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but over-acuteness of the senses?” (p. 16). This may mean that the narrator has a unique sensitivity to things which may go unnoticed by others. Still, there is, apparently, something evil with the eye that troubles the narrator: “It was open – wide, wide open – and I grew furious as I gazed upon it. I saw it with perfect distinctness – all a dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones” (p. 15-6). Just because of how he feels about the eye, the narrator plans what looks to him a flawless murder. The eye, then, functions as the only motive or stimulus for the murder,

of course if the murderer is assumed to be a reliable narrator for someone with an instable mind.

At the beginning of the story, the narrator elaborates on how he was prying the old man throughout the week before he finally committed the crime. He later explains how he dismembered and concealed the body of the old man as a proof of his intelligence: "If you still think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body" (p. 16). Just as the narrator finishes the cleaning up in the early hours of the day, he hears knocks on the door. Confident of himself, he walks to the door only to find three policemen, who say they come upon a call from a suspicious neighbor. The police officers find nothing indicative of foul play so they accept a drink from the narrator, who tries hard to look restrained and calm. The police officers take their time and enjoy their drinks while at the same time talking over trivial matters. At that critical moment of the story, the narrator is seated on a chair that is placed "upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim" (p. 17) and he starts hearing some sounds. As a matter of fact, his senses misguide him and he mistakes what he hears with the heartbeats of the old man, whom he dismembered and hid under the planks of the floor. So it is impossible for him to hear the victim's heartbeat, but it is possible that he hears his own heartbeats because of his excitement, paranoia and maybe guilty conscience or he basically suffers from schizophrenia. The narrator grows extremely skeptical as the police officers keep laughing, because he thinks they hear the same sound and "they were making a mockery of [his] horror" (p. 18). All of a sudden, finally, he cracks and turns himself in, a moment that gives the story its title.

The Tell-Tale Heart, is one of those tales, in which the iceberg principle plays a great role in creating multiple interpretations. The tip of the iceberg only presents a one-week time period from the voice and perspective of the murderer. Poe denies readers' crucial background information regarding many things, which would shed light on possible wh- questions such as "where & when does the story take place?" "Who are the characters involved?" "What is their relationship to each other?" "Why does the young man kill the old man?" "What happened to the narrator after he turned himself in?" and "When, where and under what conditions does the narrator tell the details of the murder?" That is to say, the story does not supply readers with enough hints regarding many critical details, such as backgrounds of characters, their relationship to each other and time and place of the events presented. Bereft of enough textual evidence, "The Tell-Tale Heart" leaves many issues unclear, making the latent content beneath the tip of the iceberg liable to be interpreted in various divergent ways. This makes the tale open to polysemous interpretations and a screen adaptation could be one way of interpreting such a tale that resists singularity of meaning.

Such a text could also be challenging for readers or, more particularly, for students of literature, who tend to seek cause and affect relationship among the

events. Put simply, ambiguous texts could be compelling and breaking the ice to start a discussion could be more difficult than anticipated. In such cases, studying the text together with its movie adaptation could be really helpful. Considering Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*, watching especially the 1941 dated short movie version without initially having read the text would be misleading about the content of the original text because the filmmaker made extraneous additions to the movie. Still, this alone could pave the way for productive discussions regarding the differences between the source text and its film rendition because, as Nigel Ross states in his "Literature and Film", "when a film version is available, the contrast between the two versions can be very thought-provoking" (1991, p. 154). The following section will thus thoroughly examine the said adaptation of *The Tell-Tale Heart*, focusing on this contrast.

### 3. *The Tell-Tale Heart* on Screen

The most challenging aspect of *The Tell-Tale Heart* is the first person narration and perspective because adaptability becomes a critical question for such narratives. Transposing an 'I' narration to screen mode without changing the perspective is very difficult. One way to achieve this is to use voice-over, which narrates the story as the movie plays. A recent film adaptation of *The Tell-Tale Heart* directed by Ryan Shovey in 2011 is an example to this. This version remained perfectly true to the original text as the first person voice relates the story word by word and no alterations (whether additions or deletions) can be seen. An earlier movie adaptation directed by Jules Dassin in 1941 will loom large in this article as this version is an unusual interpretation of the original text.

The movie opens with a quote from the Bible: "The law is written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness."<sup>2</sup> This is significant in that this epigraphic quote hints the kernel of the story. Even though the young man was hearing what appeared to him as the heartbeats of his victim, it may be that he was either suffering from schizophrenia or a pang of conscience. After all, it was this that made him confess his crime at the very end of both the original text and the film version. The movie opens after this Biblical quote, yet the opening scene is completely different from the text. As a matter of fact, it is an extension to the original text because it lays bare the untold background story of what might have happened between the two major characters before the murder took place. In Poe's tale, this is only one of the things that have been left beneath the tip of the iceberg. Thus, the opening scene of the movie adaptation can be considered as an attempt to disclose some of the hidden parts of the iceberg or, in other words, an attempt to fill a gap in the story.

In the first scene of the film, we see a man twilling as the camera zooms in. The camera then closes up first on the young man's face, then on his ear as the footsteps of the old man are heard from the outside. The old man, who has a

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<sup>2</sup> Romans, 2: 15.

deformed eye ("vulture eye" as it is called in the story), appears at the door. As the camera zooms in to his evil looking face, he authoritatively commands the worker: "Come here!". The young man does as he is bid. When they face each other, the old man slaps him in the face for no apparent reason. Then the scene changes and we see them in conversation for the first time. Their dialogue reveals critical details about the nature of their relationship:

The old man: Next time you will not complain to others about the way I treat you. You will be glad it was only a slap, you deserve a beat.

The young man: I'm not going to stand this any longer. I am going to quit you.

The old man: Why don't you? Why don't you quit me you weakling? You've been dependent on me ever since you were a boy of 14. You are almost 30 now. You've never worked for anyone but me. You haven't even the courage to go ask for a job. You're a coward. You're afraid. Your voice tremble . . . You would starve to death without me to watch after you. Quit me? You will be dependent on me as long as I live (Dassin, dir., *The Tell-Tale Heart*).

As the old man finishes his words, the camera again zooms in the young man's face, the music intensifies and it seems that he experiences a moment of epiphany. Apparently, at that moment the young man realizes that if the old man dies, he will not be dependent on him anymore. Also, he would not have to endure the old man's insolent and belittling attitude towards himself. When the scene changes, we see the young man oiling the hinges of the door as a preparation for his murder plot.

In the original story, we do not ever see the old man in a conversation with the young man. Yet, in the movie, as the young man enters the old man's room at night to kill him, the old man understands his plot to murder him and provokingly says: "you are not strong enough . . . you will never rest". His last sentence serves as a foreshadowing because the young man cannot bear the burden of murder and starts feeling uneasy. Dismembering of the victim is not shown in the movie possibly to avoid monstrous and sick representation of the young man, because unlike the text, he committed this murder for a plausible reason in the movie. The master-slave relationship between the two major characters earns causality to the story and fills another gap, because no clue is given in the original story regarding the relationship between the the old man and the young man. It also helps to justify the murder. While in the textual narrative the neutral representation of the old man makes the murder a senseless crime, in this screen version the young man has enough reasons to kill the old man because he is represented sinister, domineering and patronizing.

In the movie, the young man is seen weary and feeble after he finishes the cleanup, yet he starts hearing heartbeats before the policemen arrive. He gazes the clock to check whether what he hears is the ticking of the clock. He also checks the dripping water to make sure that his mind does not misguide him. The imaginary pulsation that he hears does not stop and he falls asleep. The police officers come next. They check up on him and the house, question the old man's whereabouts and his possible return date. Again different from the text,

in the movie version, the policemen do not accept the young man's drink offer. The tone of the conversation turns very serious and suspicious, which makes the young man restive. The following climactic moment is added to the original story and it increases the tension as the movie slowly draws to its close:

The police officer: Where is the old man?

The young man: I don't know. Why are you looking at me? I just told you I don't know.

The police officer: Where is the old man? Where is the old man?

(The young man continues to hear heartbeats. The police officers look confused because of his suspicious and eerie behaviours.)

The young man: Are you deaf? Are you deaf? Don't you hear it?

The police officer: Hear what?

The young man: The pounding you fool, the pounding. Can't you hear it? You do hear it. Stop it. Please stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. . . . Tear up the planks! (Dassin, dir., *The Tell-Tale Heart*).

After the young man confesses his crime by disclosing where he has hidden the dead body of the old man, his final words before he is taken away by the police are important. He peacefully says "it's quiet now." So the movie gives the impression that it was because of his guilty conscience that the young man has heard the pulsation. After he confesses what he has done to the old man, silence prevails and he seems to have gained his inner peace.

After this outlining of the movie adaptation of *The Tell-Tale Heart*, it is now time to focus on how we should approach the original text and the film adaptation based on this text. When someone (be it an ordinary reader or a student) attracts attention to the similarities and differences between this story and its movie version, directing the attention to the methods and reasons of change would create dynamic discussions. For instance, Golden writes that the types of changes that can be observed in an adaptation are threefold: alterations, deletions, additions. A discussion based on these changes and the effects they produce could be a good one (2007, p. 27). Considering *The Tell-Tale Heart*, we can observe additions rather than the other two. Adding supplementary details to the original text can be regarded as an attempt to fill what was left unclear in the original story. Even though this made the short movie considerably different from the text, these additions gained the movie cinematic verisimilitude and made it more believable as the murder is no longer a motiveless malignity. This is done through three separate, yet equally important, ways: (1) changing the perspective through which the events are narrated (2) including causality to the story and (3) detailing the affective experiences between the two major characters and thus adding some emotional, in addition to psychological, dimension to the story.

Narration and perspective are important in that the interpretation and understanding of a fictional narrative can change based on who narrates and whose perspective is used. Point of view and the narrator's treatment of

different characters can be influential in shaping readers' thoughts, feelings and reactions for characters involved in a story. Through perspective, some characters may look sympathetic to readers while others are pictured unsympathetically. In other words, who relates and sees the events exclusively shape the construction and reception of what is happening in a fictional narrative. Regarding screen adaptations, "[s]hifts in the focalization or point of view of the adapted story may lead to major differences" (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 11). For instance, in Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the I-narrator narrates the events from his perspective only. There are significant clues regarding the narrator's psychological vulnerability. This is what makes the tale ironic in that as the narrator tries to prove his sanity; his psychological instability slowly comes to light. The first person narrator in the story does not give readers any information regarding his status and function in the old man's house and the real nature of their relationship. In Jules Dassin's movie adaptation, however, third person perspective is used and the audience sees the events neither from the old man's nor the young man's perspective. The atmosphere of the tale changes due to both the third person point of view and extraneous additions mentioned earlier.

These additions gained the story principle of causality, making it plausible to understand the motive behind the murder. A possible explanation of the murder in the tale could be the narrator's schizophrenia, which is nowhere mentioned in the original text. This is evidently because at the time of the story's publication back in mid-nineteenth century, no such illness existed in medical terminology<sup>3</sup>. However, the narrator/murderer's psychological instability is hinted at in the text. The way he is disturbed by the "vulture eye" of the old man and delusional sounds he hears are indicative of a psychological disorder, which could either be explained by his schizophrenic mind or pressure of his conscience. In the movie, the young man is an abused worker (or servant) and the old man is his master. The antagonism between the two is evident. The representation of the master/slave relationship between the young man and the old man alters the way the audience sees the events because it is suggested that the worker killed his master as a result of his rude and offensive conduct. The reverse is depicted in the text, nonetheless:

I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture – a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees-very gradually- I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever (p. 13).

Even though this looks like a confession, a critical question about the narrator's reliability should be raised at this point, particularly when his psychological

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<sup>3</sup> In *Angst: Origins of Anxiety and Depression*, Jeffrey P. Kahn writes: "In 1887, Emil Kraepelin (German Psychiatrist, 1857-1926) introduced the term *dementia praecox* . . . to encompass his pioneering syndromal descriptions of Schizophrenia" (2013, p. 141).

imbalance is considered. So, even though he himself explains that no enmity exists between the two, this again is open to various interpretations because of the enigmatic nature of the tale. As has been mentioned earlier, *The Tell-Tale Heart* leaves many issues ambiguous, thus diversified interpretations are not surprising. If adaptations are considered as intertextual re-interpretations, Dassin's movie based on Poe's tale adds emotional dimension to the story by creating antagonism between the two major characters. Hence, in the movie, the young man murders the old man either because he seeks revenge on him or because he wants to get rid of his authority forever.

The changes regarding character traits, perspective and plot structure should not necessarily be discussed under fidelity debate because infidelity to the source text cannot debase the adaptation movie. All in all, instead of engendering hegemonic relationships among different fields of arts, art works should be evaluated as each other's' equal. Conventional approaches like fidelity criticism consider adaptations as secondary to the literary originals and they form a hierarchical relationship between film and literature, prioritizing the latter. This orthodox approach insists evaluating the movie adaptations in terms of its degree of faithfulness to the prior text. It also holds the view that adaptations cannot escape holding secondary status as by-products of the adapted texts and hence doomed to be considered as minor art forms.

Still, adaptations can be examined as independent, autonomous works that could stand on their own. Hutcheon supports this view and considers generating hierarchical relations among different forms of art as "a critical abuse:" "Whether it be in the form of a videogame or a musical, an adaptation is likely to be greeted as minor or subsidiary and certainly never as good as the 'original'" (2006, p. xii). She alternatively states that "to be second is not to be secondary or inferior; likewise, to be first is not to be originary or authoritative" (2006, p. xiii). Instead, Hutcheon stresses the intertextual nature of adaptations, directing attention to the cooperation of two art forms using the same story. As postmodern thought celebrates the circulation of stories through new works and new styles, adaptations begin to gain independence, which would give an end to its "vampiric" status—to borrow Hutcheon's terminology again: "An adaptation is not vampiric: it does not draw the life-blood from its source and leave it dying or dead, nor is it paler than the adapted work. It may, on the contrary, keep that prior work alive, giving it an afterlife it would never have had otherwise" (2006, p. 176). Instead of a subsidiary status, this view promises adaptations an independent status, which also makes them stand-alone works of art. Even though adaptations base their subject matter to prior source texts, this reading considers them as interpretations, which are unique in themselves. This could perhaps be why Hutcheon prefers to define a literary adaptation as "a creative and interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging, an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work" (2006, p. 8). In a similar vein, Ian Balfour takes adaptations as literature's "posthumous or postdated other" and acknowledges that the two fields should be treated equally without placing one

of them in a superior position: "I too see no virtue in categorically favoring words over images or images over words, even if it were possible and even if literary studies necessarily focusses far more on the words" (2010, pp. 969-970). In order to rule out traditional notions of hierarchical relationships among the arts, the studies on literature and film should be "concerned to explore how they deal with each other, rather than which came first and which is 'better' than the other" (McFarlane, 2007, p. 28). Such highlights are of utmost importance in that they can give greater scope to anyone, who tends to discuss a movie based on a text merely in terms of its fidelity to the source text.

### Conclusion

This article has examined the intertextual relationship between literature and film through the example of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* and Jules Dassin's movie based on this story with the purpose of highlighting the fact that examining a text with its movie can be stimulating and thought-provoking for anyone who is engaged in a personal or professional relationship with literature. This is because even though they are two separate yet equally substantial branches in the field of the arts, the engagement between literature and film is inevitable, especially in the times when interdisciplinary and intertextual studies begin to be acknowledged and gain validity. Yet, when the two come together through a screen adaptation, they cause vehement discussions. This may evoke a classic metaphor used to portray such engagements: 'the unhappy marriage' of literature and film. However, examining a literary text along with its filmic rendition would be enriching when studying a literary classic. Such integration of different art forms using the same subject matter not only facilitate studying literature in terms of its literary qualities but also broadens one's horizon regarding literature's relationship to other art forms. Thus, examining literature and film together could prove valuable for students majoring in literature because it encourages comparative approaches in the humanities, undermines texts' superiority over visual narratives, enhances the view that different adaptation versions (with inclusions, exclusions and alterations) could be read as unique interpretations. Such a comparative approach also encourages comprehension of postmodern engagements among different mediums of art. This will at the same time facilitate to have a better understanding of the term 'intertextuality,' because adaptations should be classified as intertextual hybrids made up of literary texts and films. These points are worth remembering when a conversation about a fictional book in classroom or elsewhere makes its way to a point about an adaptation movie based on that book.

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