

REAR WINDOW: MOVIE ANALYSIS

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Rear Window: Movie Analysis

People were always interested in interpreting written stories for the big screen. Books of all genres: comedies, detective stories, romance novels, and thrillers often appear before the public as movies. The film *Rear Window*, produced by Alfred Hitchcock in 1954, is not an exception. The original short story *It Had to Be Murder* by Cornell Woolrich is one of many original works that have been chosen by other directors to be turned into a film. However, Hitchcock's movie is considered to be a classic and an excellent example of a mystery thriller film. While having some similarities, the short story and the film possess many differences. Hitchcock adds details, scenes, and even characters to the story, possibly changing its original intentions. This paper examines how Hitchcock's *Rear Window* and Woolrich's *It Had to Be Murder* are similar and different and discusses the effect these changes have on the movie's tone.

Similarities

The film follows the plot of the story almost entirely, saving the course of actions from the original. The protagonist of the story, simply called Jeff, is also the same. Most of the neighbors are in the movie as well. They play significant roles in the plot because the main character considers them his hobby – he is intrigued by their lives that he observes through his binoculars. The movie preserves Jeff's obsession with looking in the windows of others in full. Hitchcock creates a mystery at the same speed as the original, although the ending scenes vary widely. The beginning of the story is slow, and Hitchcock portrays it that way, shifting from person to person and showcasing their everyday life, allowing the audience to see the neighborhood through Jeff's eyes. The similarities do not stop here, as both Hitchcock and Woolrich are quite famous for their

ability to create tension and instill fear into the audience. However, while both authors succeed to do it, they achieve their goals differently.

Differences

While using the same idea as Woolrich, Hitchcock adds many details to the plot. On the one hand, the original story allows the narrator to be hidden and mysterious to the audience. The readers do not know the reasons behind his situation, as it is not discussed in the text. His occupation, profession, or social status are also hard to pinpoint. Jeff is rather isolated throughout the story with only a small number of people visiting his apartment. The first part of the short story is devoid of dialogue as the readers are exposed to the protagonist's thoughts and deductions. On the other hand, in the movie, the main hero is deprived of this mystery. At the very beginning, the audience is presented with his backstory, which explains Jeff's actions and motivations. Jeff is a photographer. Therefore, he has professional cameras and equipment to peer into people's lives. Moreover, Jeff has the professional curiosity to do that. The audience also sees that he is in a wheelchair. The reasons for that are clear as well. Jeff takes pictures in dangerous areas. Thus, his leg is broken because of an accident.

Moreover, while the story's Jeff is alone most of the time, Jeff from the movie is surrounded by people. He has many respectful friends and a girlfriend, Lisa Fremont, who visits him often. Her addition can be considered one of the biggest alterations of the cast, as Lisa becomes his main conversant throughout the movie. Instead of giving Jeff time to reflect on his thoughts and try to convince himself of his deductions, Hitchcock puts Lisa in the scene as a person who agrees with the protagonist. Furthermore, her character can be considered a trope of a young and beautiful but

passive woman. According to Modleski (2015), the contrast between actions and interests of Jeff and Lisa is supposed to make the audience relate to the male character and agree with his conclusions. The addition of friends that visit Jeff, while he is in a wheelchair, show him from a different side as well. The end of the adaptation is completely different from the original. While the short story has an open ending, *Rear Window's* characters solve the mystery and catch the culprit.

The Effect of Changes

Some of the changes made by Hitchcock can be justified by the fact that movies have to have a visual representation of its characters. If Jeff's broken leg, photographs, or cameras are not shown, the audience would have to look at a dark screen for most of the movie. However, some alterations affect the narrative in a way that could be avoided if Hitchcock wanted to stay close to the original. In the short story, Jeff's solitude allows the audience to step back from his perspective and rationalize the situation. The readers are expected to question him and his reliability as a narrator. In the movie, however, the abundance of dialogue leaves the audience no choice but to agree with the story created by Jeff.

The addition of Lisa plays a significant role in making people believe in Jeff's words. She accelerates the speed at which Jeff starts doubting his neighbor, Thorwald. Lisa is also the one to help Jeff search Thorwald's apartment. Moreover, her fixation on female intuition is counterposed with Jeff's logical thinking, which shows that Hitchcock wants people to trust Jeff. According to Palmer, Pettey, and Sanders (2017), Hitchcock's characters often follow a pattern of female characters being an accessory to the male protagonist rather than having a complex and developed personality. The

movie follows this narrative because Lisa is presented as a beautiful woman transfixed with fashion and clothes.

Director's choice to make the main hero a reliable narrator makes a thriller story less tense, as the audience is not exposed to the feelings of uncertainty and paranoia. The film's structure resembles a detective story where heroes are set out to catch the criminal. In the original, on the other hand, the protagonist fruitlessly tries to convince other characters as well as readers that Thorwald is guilty. Therefore, the endings of both stories are also different for a reason. The original short story keeps the secrets of the neighbor hidden from the public eye, and both the protagonist and the audience are left without a proper conclusion. An open ending brings even more tension and discontentment to everyone, which aligns with the story's narrative. In contrast, the film ends with the main characters confronting the supposed murderer and making him confess his crimes to the police. Thus, the audience of the movie gets a satisfactory ending fit for a detective story.

Conclusion

Hitchcock's film *Rear Window* takes the idea of the original short story and adds more plot details, characters, and concepts. Such changes show the story in a different light and portray it as a thrilling detective story rather than a mystery filled with indecisiveness and doubt. The movie's audience is not given the same amount of freedom when it comes to trusting the narrator. Woolrich leaves the readers in the same place as the protagonist – wondering if there was a murder. Hitchcock, on the other hand, simply tells the audience that there was one.

Reference list

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