Adaptations have found a growing place in modern cinema with directors motivated by numerous factors to remake previously told stories. This paper studied the underlying motivations of American director Darren Aronofsky’s 2014 film Noah. The film is an adaptation of the biblical story of Noah and the Ark. Fundamental to the methodology of this paper is Linda Hutcheon’s A Theory of Adaptation. The study discovers the personal, economic, political and cultural motivations behind the adaptation were. The research results in an innovative understanding of the director and of the motivations behind his cinematic adaptation of Noah.

Keywords: Comparative literature, adaptation theory, Noah (2014), biblical story of Noah, Linda Hutcheon

INTRODUCTION

Cinema has become a massive media and grown immensely since its emergence in the late 19th century. Directors, producers and screenwriters of all walks of life have joined the movement of motion pictures; some have found their trademark style while others disappeared after a movie or two. American director Darren Aronofsky made his debut in 1997 with his first feature film Pi. Over the next several years he directed and produced numerous titles including Noah in 2014, the biblical adaptation of Noah and the ark. The film tells the same tale as the text, however Oscar-nominated director Darren Aronofsky adds a great deal of artistic and personal interpretations to the film. The prophet who had to save the few remaining virtuous in a world overtaken by sin is shown in the film as a man with colossal internal conflict; a man of god who with over 500 years of age is torn between the order of the creator and his own understanding of creation. Noah was released in North American theatres on March 28, 2014 and faced immense controversy from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim leaders alike due to the perhaps overly artistic additions of Aronofsky. Controversy ran so high that producing company, Paramount Pictures, added a disclaimer telling moviegoers that the film is not exactly the same story portrayed in the Bible. Darren Aronofsky never retracted anything regarding the film, rather he maintained his rights as an artist and in an interview with The Atlantic Aronofsky draws on the mythological story of Ithacus for comparison; “When you talk about Icarus, you don’t talk about the feathers and wax. You talk about how he flew too high and was filled with hubris and it destroyed him. That’s the message and that’s the power.” (Falsani, 2015 Darren Aronofsky’s Noah, 2014) is an adaptation of the biblical story of Noah and can be studied in the field of comparative literature where the changes that a literary work faces and why, how and to what extend it has been altered as crossed into another realm of art are studied.

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Linda Hutcheon notes adaptations such as Noah are “a creative and interpretive transposition of a recognizable other work or works, adaptation is a kind of extended palimpsest and, at the same time, often a transcoding into a different set of conventions.” (Hutcheon, 2013)

The changing times, the growth of comparative literature and most importantly the widespread popularity of cinema have made film production a prosperous business. The process of making a film is also a personal discovery, “Filmmakers themselves, just as everyday readers do, fall in love with a story they’ve read and want to see it brought to life in the medium that they excel in creating within, while at the same time they have the opportunity to bring the story to life for a large audience” (Snyder ). A director such as Darren Aronofsky fell in love with a piece canonical literature when he was 13 and finally gave it life when he was 45.

Under the theoretical framework of adaptation and appropriation theories proposed by scholars such as Linda Hutcheon, Robert Stam and Julia Sanders, the comparison of Aronofsky’s Noah and the Biblical tale is studied. The aforementioned research created the foundation of a study into Darren Aronofsky’s motivations for directing Noah. A Theory of Adaptation serves as the fundamental methodology for the study; in Hutcheon’s book the external impacts on an artist are stated. “We engage in time and space, within a particular society and a general culture. The contexts of creation and reception are material, public and economic as much as they are cultural, personal and aesthetic.” (Hutcheon, 2013 ).

Adaptations differ greatly from appropriations . Julie Sanders defines adaptations as “specific process involving the transition from one genre to another: novels into film; drama into musical; dramatization of prose narratives and prose fiction or the inverse movement of making drama into prose narrative”.(Sanders, 2006). Whereas an appropriation is the replacement of an image or story and changing its context.

By taking the adaptive and appropriated nature of the film into consideration this study examines the motivations of Darren Aronofsky. These motivations fall into 4 main categories of personal, economic, cultural and political motivations. The amalgamation of these motivations under the umbrella of adaptation , create a film which juxtaposes historical and modern, prophet and actor and childhood interpretation and biblical revelation.

Discussion: Motivations of Adaptation

Adaptations are nothing new; countless films, stage dramas, miniseries and television films are produced each year all of which have been adapted or appropriated from previous literature. Linda Hutcheon believes the motive lines within the “appearance of new media and new channels of mass diffusion” Hutcheon, 2013) Andre Bazin considers the influence of intertextuality and proposes the reason of some many adaptations as the amalgamation of other works, noting “a film adaptation, for instance, may interact with not just a single source novel, but other novels, earlier adaptations, and a variety of works in other media.” (qtd. in Hutcheon,2013 ). John Ellis expresses his understanding of reasons of adaptation, noting a main reason for adaptation is that they are “tried and tested” (qtd. in Hutcheon, 2013 ). Sarah Cardwell comments of the basis of adaptation more focused on a biologically viewpoint and claims “Cultural adaptation … is seen as aiding the survival of only the original organism itself” (Cardwell, 2002).

Kamilla Elliott looks at the financial lures of adaptation when she scrutinizes studies about the adaptations of Shakespeare into “today’s multi-million dollar productions shown in megaplexes” ( Elliott,2003 ). Elliott also studies the development which lies within adaptation; she writes: “As writings growing out of readings, as writings that are interpretive readings, they complicate and deconstruct distinctions made by philosophers and theorists among authors, readers, and texts and between the production and consumption of texts.” ( Elliott, 2003). On the whole, the reasons behind adaptation are very absolute; however using the ideas provided by academics in the field, four main motives behind Aronofsky’s adaptation Noah have been highlighted and scrutinized.

Economic Lures

The reasons one may choose to adapt are numerous, nevertheless finances are never without impact. Borrowing from the previously successful seems like a sure fire way to create flourishing adaptations in any medium. There exists no certainty in adaptation capital, as companies such as Sony Corporations have witnessed success and failure in different adaptations of the same original. However, the possibility of economic victory more often than not pushes producers and filmmakers alike to adapt.

Braudy makes note of a minute feature found in a screenwriters’ handbook which writes “an adaptation is an original screenplay and, as such, is the sole property of the screenwriter” (Braudy,1998 ). Considering originality in this sense opens the door for great financial gain. Considering the medium, in this case cinema, adaptation makes even more sense. Hutcheon writes that “Expensive collaborative art forms like operas, musicals, and films are going to look for safe bets with a ready audience.” (Hutcheon, 2013). This ‘ready audience’ can be classified as a certain age group, ethnicity or religious group. Darren Aronofsky chose a very vast religious group when he decided to create a cinematic adaptation of a tale that exists in all the holy books of all Abrahamic religions. TIME magazine published a major news report on the efforts undertaken by Aronofsky and Paramount Pictures to sell Noah to the Christian community. Jeffrey
McCall, a professor of media studies at DePauw University was quoted in a USA Today article on the matter and said: “Hollywood has the same corporate and relativist values it has had for many years . . . . The producers have, however, identified a market that is underserved and won’t come to the movie theater to watch crazy violence and sex-drenched plots.” (Bowles, 2014) Thus creating an open space for family films and films based on religious tales, such as the biblical tale of Noah and the flood.

Albert Mohler Jr., president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, zooms in on this decision of Aronofsky and writes “Hollywood knows that Christian families are a vast market...We are given all that we need to know about Noah in the Bible – and we need every word of the Bible. We cannot expect Hollywood to tell that story for us, or even to tell the story well.” (Mohler, 2014). Mohler’s view are more focused on the accuracy of the retelling but nevertheless he has pointed out what may be the reason non-religious Darren Aronofsky decided to adapt this story.

In 1957, George Bluestone noted the importance of money behind adaptations. He wrote: “With film adaptations, the studio system has meant that there have been close allegiances between investment banking and corporate production from the start” (Bluestone, 1957). Financial emphasis can also be placed on the actors; undoubtedly some actors sell better.

**Personal Motivations**

Besides the financial and cultural motivations, adaptors are often personally interested or attached to a certain story which causes them to choose a certain piece for their new adapted yet original creation. Darren Aronofsky is no different and Noah is the manifestation of a long time interest in the tale of a flood cleansing the earth. Mark Kermode of The Guardian calls Noah “Aronofsky's long-nurtured pet project”; this is a reference to a poem Aronofsky wrote in 1982.

Linda Hutcheon focuses on the importance of personal passion for the adaptor, she writes “adapters’ deeply personal as well as culturally and historically conditioned reasons for selecting a certain work to adapt and the particular way to do so should be considered seriously by adaptation theory” (Hutcheon, 2013). This serious consideration is critical for understanding why Noah was made the way it was. Darren Aronofsky’s interest with the biblical tale was triggered when he only 13 years old and a 7th grade student in English teacher Vera Fried’s class. The assignment was to write a poem about peace. Aronofsky wrote his assignment under the direct influence of the biblical tale of Noah and the ark. Similar to the movie, the poem starts with the declaration of evil overtaking the world and ends with peace filling the world. Julie Sanders quotes John Ellis, in her book Adaptation and Appropriation and states “Adaptation into another medium becomes a means of prolonging the pleasure of the original presentation, and repeating the production of a memory” (Sanders, 2006). Thirteen year old Darren Aronofsky’s poem can be considered as the first appropriation or inspired artistic creation he had of the biblical text and Noah is the more mature extravagant attempt with the same desire. The poem Darren Aronofsky wrote in 7th grade is as follows and it is available to the public on The Guardian’s website. (Child, 2014).

The Dove
Evil was in the world
The laughing crowd
Left the foolish man at his ark
Filled with animals
When the rain began to fall
It was hopeless
The man could not take the evil crowd with him
But he was allowed to bring his good family.
The rain continued through the night
And the cries of screaming men filled the air
The ark was afloat
Until the dove returned with the leaf
Evil still existed.

When the rainbows reached throughout the sky
The humble man and his family knew what it meant
The animals ran and flew freely with their newborn
The fog rose and the sun shone Peace was in the air
And it soon appeared in all of man's heart.
He knew evil would not be kept away
For evil and war could not be destroyed
But neither was it possible to destroy peace
Evil is hard to end and peace is hard to begin
But the rainbow and the dove will always live
Within every man’s heart.

Personal perception is a fundamental part of adaptation and appropriation. As the poem shows, Aronofsky had already started to imagine the text he had read in the bible in 1982. He comments on this lifelong fascination in an interview with Cathleen Falsani of The Atlantic. When asked about how he felt about the story of Noah at age 13 Aronofsky replies:

When I was a kid, growing up Catholic in CCD [Confraternity of Christian Doctrine], I was shown the picture books with the rainbow and the animals and the ark. But I couldn’t get my head around, first of all, why God would do that? It was terrifying. (Falsani, 2014)

This is the answer to the critics who asked why the film made God as well as his prophet seem torturous. The film is made as it is because that’s how the director understood the written original story. Thomas Leitch makes clear mention of the important role of originality and perception in adapted works. In his article Twelve
Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory he affirms that "the moral implicit in the shifting fortunes of writers and directors as creative artists seems to be the enduring appeal of someone's originality as an artistic values" (Leitch, 2003).

In the interview with The Atlantic when asked about the portrayal of justice and righteousness Aronofsky makes a personal reference as a parent and says: "If you are too just with a child you destroy them with strictness. If you're too merciful you can spoil them. Finding that balance is what makes you a good parent." (Falsani, 2014). This is part of the personal reasons that impacted the way the film was perceived from its original written, telling mode.

The mentioned motives have consciously or unconsciously influenced Darren Aronofsky and led to controversy. Brian McFarlane writes that "no one is suggesting that viewer-readers will not have opinions about whether they prefer film or the novel. Opinions, though, are private reactions that don’t necessarily forward the discourse about film and literature.” (McFarlane, 1996). Thus opinions are opinions, but that does not make the discourse of the movie and the perception of the director incorrect.

### Cultural Capital

Adaptations add to the cultural canon of each country; the adaptation can move the original in the hierarchy of art and share its message to a new audience. Linda Hutcheon notes this motive behind adaptation and writes that “one way to gain responsibility or increase cultural capital is for an adaptation to be upwardly mobile” (Hutcheon, 2013). According to Hutcheon this rise will often be pedagogical and/or cultural; meaning an original will be adapted to revive it in new media. This has been done for the works of great writers such as William Shakespeare, Samuel Beckett and Jane Austen among others. The same concept can easily be applied on religious texts as well. Reproducing a story of a holy text will bring the scripture to light again and bring attention to the original message.

In the adaptation of the biblical story of Noah and the ark cultural capital must be defined as a binary capital consisting of culture and religion. Albert Mohler comments on this new kind of capital and writes that

> There is a periodic swing between giddy excitement that Hollywood has decided to make a movie about the Bible or a Christian theme and, on the other hand, barely restrained outrage that Hollywood has brought forth some new atrocity. (Mohler, 2014)

The new capital which aims at making religion mainstream is simultaneously making profit, creating the question of motive. Are movie makers really interested in the cultural aspects of making religion mainstream or is it just an industry? Mohler believes that in making Noah “they [Aronofsky and Handel] distort it to the uttermost, perhaps without even intending to do so”. (Mohler, 2014) This distortion is part of the cultural capital because it raised interest and controversy causing many to go see the movie; thus indirectly increasing public knowledge about the biblical tale of Noah. Noah has also been hailed as an environmentalist movie, therefore culturally speaking it is establishing the need for concern and action against the destruction of the earth’s natural resources. In the bible it is written that “God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (The Bible,1936). This is the only line that makes any notice of the damages mankind had caused on the world and more importantly nature. This single line has been significantly highlighted in the movie with the stating of lines such as “At our hand, all he created is dying” and “If we change, if we work to save it, perhaps he will too” by the prophet Noah. Also part of the cultural message embedded in the movie are scenes which show Noah reprimanding his son for picking a flower (Aronofsky, 2014) and reminding his son of the purpose of flowers "girls being sold by their father for meat(Aronofsky,2014) and Noah helping a tiny bird that is injured (Aronofsky, 2014). All these scenes are educating audiences about the dangers humans have on nature. Although the movie is supposed to show a time long before ours, the cultural message of environmentalism has been modernized and added to the theme.

Aronofsky has openly confessed to the environmental theme in the film, in an interview with Slashfilm.com he said “It’s about environmental apocalypse which is the biggest theme, for me, right now for what’s going on on this planet. So I think it’s got these big, big themes that connect with us. Noah was the first environmentalist.” When asked about his movie being labeled as an environmental film in an interview with CNN’s Christiane Amanpour Darren Aronofsky responded that It’s in Genesis. Noah is saving the animals; he’s not out there saving innocent babies, he’s saving the animals, he’s saving creation. It was very clear to us that there was an environmental message. To pull that message out of it, we think, would have been more of an editing job than just sort of representing what's there. (Respers, 2014)

In another interview with The Atlantic Aronofsky noted the concept of wickedness and care which is emphasized in the movie and said “such a clear, ecological message in Genesis. The first thing Adam is told is to tend and to keep the garden, in Genesis 2:15.” (Falsani, 2014) Miriam Krule writes about how Aronofsky projects Noah as an environmentalist and writes that “Aronofsky’s message to us moderns is clear: We, too, have corrupted our world, just as the antediluvian humans (save Noah)
did theirs” (Krule, 2014). However, Krule believes the movie is too anti-humanistic and claims that “Noah collaborates in the fantasy of certain parts of the environmental movement, which believe that Earth would be healed if there were fewer of us, living further apart from each other.” (Krule. 2014).

The cultural impact of the movie is undeniable, whether the movie is looked at as a film fuelled with religion motives or a film with environmental concerns there exist a motive higher than pure pleasure for the adaptation.

**Political Motives**

In his article Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory literary scholar Thomas Leitch mentions the variety of problems adaptations face. He writes that “an adaptation is assumed to be a window into a text on which it depends for its authority, and the business of viewers and analysts is to look through the window for signs of the original text.” (Leitch, 2003). This simile is exact because it points out the authority which lies behind each and every adaptation. This authority is often political, as in the modern world few things are uninfluenced by politics. Noah does not seem to possess any political charge. The film starts with a cinematic depiction of the Garden of Eden, mankind’s fall from paradise and Cain and Abel. The plot of the film is evidently about the massive task the creator wants of the prophet Noah. However, if the film is viewed not as a religion remake but as a creation of the United States and in particularly Hollywood, Noah finds new meanings.

The film is banned in several countries such as Bahrain, Oman, Malaysia and half a dozen other Middle Eastern countries. The reason of this ban was said to be the film’s showing of a prophet’s face and family, a usual taboo in most Middle Eastern movie industries. Newrepublic.com looks at the denial of release in the named countries as part of political policies. In the article titled The Big New 'Noah' Movie Is Closer to the Bible Than its Christian Critics Will Admit writer Brook Wilensky-Lanford writes

There is no literal way to read the Bible. Everyone interprets, and anyone who tells you different has a church he wants you to join. So all the religious hubbub over Darren Aronofsky’s Noah—the National Religious Broadcasters getting the studio to add a disclaimer, the ban in several Gulf nations, the claim that the director “superimposed” an “anti-Christian” message—is just predictable political posturing. (Wilensky-Lanford, 2014)

This view on the film shows not only a hidden political motive that that director may have had but also the wave which follows motives of adaptations. Kamilla Eliott writes about why often adaptations are not what we expect because we do not understand all the different sides of the adaptation process. She believes that critics are inaccurate:

[Critics] Read only one way, from novel to film, and find that the film has made changes. But, if one reads in both directions from novel to film and from film back to novel—one often finds that many supposed infidelities appear clearly in the text. (qtd. in Hutcheon, 2013)

Although Eliott is directly referring to fidelity criticism and audiences’ keen eye to fine differences, her idea can also be looked at in a different light. The reciprocal journey of understanding should take place between the receiving audience and the adaptation. By realizing the political differences between where Noah was made and the countries which banned it we can come to recognize how the film does in fact have a political charge. Acknowledging the fact that religion and politics are not separate in many Middle Eastern countries, Noah gains a new dimension, a political motive that has influenced the biblical adaption.

**RESULTS**

This study was set out to explore the adaptation process which American director Darren Aronofsky followed in making his 2014 remake of the canonical biblical story of the prophet Noah and the ark. This adaptation was controversial from the start for several reasons: firstly the original is Holy Scripture. Many critics banned the release of the movie while others first watched and then wrote negative reviews. The interpretations and artistic effects only made the controversy more heated. Other questions which led the research were related to the biblical stories process of adaptation into a 138 minute blockbuster film; the adapter’s motivations for choosing to adapt this holy canonical text were studied. The influences upon the adapter and the changes in the story had to be scrutinized to provide insight into an adaptation which crossed time, place, culture, medium and mode.

The product of the adaptation process follows the same storyline as the scripture, however in the film there exist several changes in plot such as the existence of giant rock angels and the potential death of Noah’s grandchildren. Darren Aronofsky, the film’s director and writer, has had numerous interviews in which he has discussed the biblical story’s link to his film.

The research revealed four interesting motives which led to this particular creation of Noah. Firstly, Darren Aronofsky’s childhood encounter with the tale is a fact many viewers may be unaware of. A thirteen year old Darren wrote a poem for an English class in which he used the biblical tale for inspiration; Aronofsky has referred to his fascination with the story in an interview.
with The Atlantic as he says: “I remember the feeling of being afraid, of terror.” (Falsani, 2014) This personal motivation exposes a great deal about why the movie was made to project God as unkind and depict the prophet as a fearful and angry man.

The other motivations study disclosed included the financial lures which exist in creating religious adaptations. Millions of believers will flock to theatres in hopes of seeing their holy book projected to new times truthfully; non-believers will come and see Noah out of curiosity and with aims of finding fault. Either way the creation of this adapted movie had financial sparkle. Darren Aronofsky has announced through various media outlets his cultural, capital desire of creating the film in the way that he did. Aronofsky’s Noah is a crusade against the destruction of the earth’s natural resources. Knowing that Hollywood, adaptations and religious films had an audience led Aronofsky to incorporate an environmentalist message into the film. The final motive discovered in the current study was the political charge of making a film in America which puts a human face with human flaws on a prophet of God, a matter severely taboo in some Asian and Middle Eastern countries. The film, though not overtly political, does challenge some countries’ ideas hence raising curiosity.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that Darren Aronofsky’s Noah is an adaptation of the biblical story, not an appropriated story nor one only inspired by the bible. The reasons the adaptation of this particular biblical story was chosen and the alternations which it was given do not lower the statue of the product not the original. The motivations of Darren Aronofsky have fuelled the filmmaking process and shaped the film Noah. The film adaptation Noah is neither secondary nor overriding of its original; it is the artistic interpretation, and at many times not an incorrect one, of one man. The way the film has changed the plot is not one of bias or ignorance, on the contrary it should be considered an addition to the canon of films and religion because it shows how one individual’s interpretation, motivations, financial and cultural setting can create interpretation of a canonical text. Noah has brought one of the earliest historical stories of mankind to new light. The film has endured alternations and interpretations which are not matters of controversy but rather fundamental parts of transcultural and cross-medium adaptations.

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