

ATINER's Conference Paper Proceedings Series

ART2016-0016

Athens, 12 June 2017

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ART2016-0016

Athens, 12 June 2017

ISSN: 2529-167X

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to read *Sleuth* (2007) as Harold Pinter's endgame from which we can begin a new game again in search for an ending of both Pinter's series of screen-plays and plays. This reading reveals Pinter's cinematic politics based on his concomitant passions for film and politics. The 2007 film of *Sleuth* directed by Kenneth Branagh with Pinter's screenplay is an adaptation of Anthony Shaffer's play with the same title (1970). And it is also a remake film of the 1972 film directed by Joseph Mankiewicz with the original playwright's screenplay. Thus, arguing that Pinter purposely plays his endgame not as a master playwright but as a hired screenplay writer, i.e., a minor writer for his cinematic politics, this paper examines his uses of intermediality in a series of his (un)faithful adaptations from *The Servant* (1963) to *Sleuth* (2007). The original play of *Sleuth* which dramatizes the detective world can be classified as a comedy of menace constructed by subverting the paradigm of traditional comedy of manners. Mankiewicz's *Sleuth* (1972) also tries to use intermediality, for instance, by opening and closing the film with theatrical settings of detective fictions. But the 1972 *Sleuth* is not so successful in using intermediality as a negotiation "between" the original theatre and the adapted film. This paper argues that the 2007 *Sleuth* can connect politics of adaptation and intermediality to the nature of cinematic mechanism, thanks to Pinter's cinematic politics. Thus it concludes that Pinter's last screenplay is a successful and (un)faithful adaptation of Shaffer's original play and a remake film of Mankiewicz and Shaffer's 1972 film across time and culture.

Keywords: adaptation, intermediality, film, screenplay, cinematic politics

Three Versions of *Sleuth*: Whose Game?

The original play of *Sleuth*(1970)is a British play written by Anthony Shaffer. The Broadway production received the Tony Award for Best Play, and Anthony Quayle (Andrew Wyke) and Keith Baxter(Milo Tindle) received the Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Performance. The play was adapted for feature films in 1972, 2007 and 2014. The 1972 and the 2007 film were adapted respectively by Joseph Mankiewicz and Anthony Shaffer, Kenneth Branagh and Harold Pinter. The play also provided the basis for the film *Tamanna* (2014) which can be regarded as an adaptation film across cultures. ¹

Shaffer's original stage play was “a shocking wonder” in 1970, as it put the socio-cultural struggle for supremacy fought by the representatives of aristocratic and new-emerging classes on the stage and revealed the negotiation of masculine power in the social system of the 1970s. Mankiewicz's film adaptation in 1972 was “a sensation”, as the film exposed how Laurence Olivier (Andrew Wyke) humiliated Michael Caine (Milo Tindle) by tearing him to pieces. In the 2007 screen version, Caine came back as the rich and bitter crime writer, Andrew Wyke originally played by Olivier and Jude Law played the role of the handsome young punk, Milo whom Caine intended to squash. In fact, Andrew Wyke in all the three versions wants to perform “a game of humiliation” (Pietrzak-Franger 169) in his stage, i.e., in his territory as a director by casting Milo as his player, his victim.

In the all versions the basic assumption is that the rules of the game should be made by Andrew and the game is Andrew's rather than Milo's. As Mankiewicz acknowledged in an interview, the death of Milo in the ending of *Sleuth* represents “an important aspect of our society” that it is always the Milos who die, because it is necessary that he die “in order to convince” the privileged aristocratic class (Ciment 141). Although Andrew seems ridiculous and is mocked by his creations in the end, the versions imply that the game is Andrew's own game, Thus, as director Mankiewicz had become to identify himself with Andrew in the process of adaptation. And he also played his own game. But the director Branagh of the 2007 film didn't play his own game. Branagh took the directing job of *Sleuth* with Pinter, the Nobel Prize-winning playwright as “a gamble impossible to pass up” and made his update “admirably urban and utterly loyal to Pinter” (Christopher). Thus in the 2007 film Pinter played his game with “verbal fencing, the menacing pauses, the male aggression, the unexpected whimsy” (Christopher).

Pinter declared purposely for his politics that he would not write any more plays right before he received a nobel prize in 2005. But his work had been revived all the more for his assertion of stoping writing plays, for example, in 2006 *The Hothouse*, *The Dumb Waiter* and *Betrayal* were

¹ Whilst some of the interactions between the two men are similar, *Tamanna* has roles for not just Wyke's wife, but also his second, younger wife who is the Tindle character's object of desire. The milieu is Pakistan's film industry, Lollywood in its dying days, and is used an allegory of wider issues. The dialogue, not in English but in Urdu, and the scenario are adapted in numerous ways for both Pakistani and Islamic culture.

presented in London, *The Homecoming* was performed on Broadway in 2007 (Lyall). Andrew in the 2007 film does not write novels any more not for his political conviction but for his dedication to “his own celebration”, elevating him to the status of a celebrity (Branagh, *Sleuth*). But his works which had been translated into many languages and adapted into other media made him a millionaire and celebrity. Like Andrew known as “the master of menace” praised by *The Sunday Times*, Pinter had also obtained his reputation and wealth as the master of comedy of menace. Thus, maybe Pinter seems to make self-parody through Andrew by identifying himself with Andrew. But he also tries to identify himself with the young impudent Milo, the son of an immigrant from the working-class streets of London across time. From this double perspective on the struggle between Andrew and Milo, Pinter came to disobey Andrew’s demand: “Obey the rules” and make a unfaithful adaptation by playing his own game. This game is his endgame played by himself not as a master playwright but as a hired screenplay writer. Pinter himself appears on the screen as a character in a television movie of one of Andrew’s books as a movie within a movie. The character is identified as “the interrogator” which Pinter always played as an actor in repertory theatre. Here we want to play the sinister and nasty role again in his endgame in order to interrogate the trial of adaptation in terms of intermediality between theatre and cinema.

The Original Play: Anthony Shaffer’s *Sleuth* (1970)

Shaffer’s play of *Sleuth* can be said that it dramatizes the detective novel. In other words, it is a play adaptation of the detective novel, defined as “the normal recreation of noble minds” by Andrew(14). But as Milo retorts on Andrew’s definition, “the noble minds were the normal recreation of detective story writers” (14). In fact, Shaffer attempts to criticize manners of “noble minds” by focusing on the struggle for dominance between Andrew and Milo as the “rivalry between old England and new United Kingdom”(Palmer 167). In the aristocratic world of noble minds recreated by detective novelist like Andrew in *Sleuth* and Agatha Christie in the 1930s manners and good breeding means Pierre Bourdieu’s distinction which inferiors cannot acquire. Thus the detective novel can be regarded as a novel genre which reflects the dominant aesthetics of the ruling class like Andrew’s. Thus, Shaffer’s *Sleuth* is classified as a comedy of manners which is a style of comedy that reflects the manners of upper class society in a way that is essentially true to its traditions and philosophy. And it also can be regarded as a comedy of menace which threatens the system of traditional society in a way that subverts the paradigm of British traditional comedy of manners through violent games between the classes, like Pinter’s plays.

The play of *Sleuth* is set in an immensely successful mystery writer and aristocrat Andrew’s Wiltshire manor house which reflects his obsession with the inventions and deceptions of fiction and his fascination with games and game-playing. Into his house he lures his wife’s lover, Milo for a performance

of his drama of robbery crime of jewelry frequently dealt in detective stories as a game. Andrew demands Milo should obey his rules in playing the game, i.e., his own game. In other words, Andrew tries to control Milo, like one of his automata. But through the process of playing the game, Andrew comes to acknowledge that Milo is also qualified as “a game-playing person” who is “the complete-a man of reason and imagination; of potent passions and bright fancies” (76). Milo rejects Andrew’s proposal to participate in his games staged in his country house world, because it “a dead world”, “a world of coldness and class hatred and two dimensional characters who are not expected to communicate; it’s a world where only the amateurs win, and where foreigners are automatically figures of fun”(90). Through his rejection, Milo subverts the definition of the detective story generated by noble minds into “the normal recreation of snobbish, out-dated, life hating, ignoble minds” (90).

In the stage of *Sleuth* there are “intermedial gazes” of automata as in puppet theatre which is “an intermedial art form” (Wagner 125). Shaffer’s stage in which portraits, photographs, two human actors and staged automata present “a visualization of intermediality in performance” (125). Shaffer uses intermediality of live performance of human actors and medial representation of other bodies with the use of media technology in order to impact the perception of the audience. Thus the audience can perceive how Andrew makes his house into a traditional puppet theatre as a puppeteer who has a privileged power to control staged figures like automata and how finally he became threatened by “intermedial gazes” of automata out of his control.

The First Adaptation Film: Joseph L. Mankiewicz and Anthony Shaffer’s *Sleuth* (1972)

The first film adaptation of *Sleuth* (1970) made changes to the original play to underline its theme of the class conflict and its topic of game playing. And the 1970 film invites the audience to engage in a game as well as to watch the game between Andrew and Milo. But the director Mankiewicz complained in the interview with Michel Ciment that the audience and especially American critics are not ready to watch “an American film of this type” (128). Mankiewicz wants to play a game with his audience, by using such tricks as the misleading cast credits at the beginning of the film and the miniature cardboard theatrical sets which open and close the film, the clues concerning the identity of certain characters. But Mankiewicz condescendingly acknowledges that he failed in playing the game by blaming his audience- his game player as unqualified player who cannot notice what he declares with the tricks: “What you’ve just seen way my game. It was one of the works of Andrew Wyke” (128). He expects that the intermediality of theatre and film can be the most effective strategy to invite his audience to participate in the game. But he is not prepared to know that the game is not his own game but an intermedial interplay between him and his audience, because he identifies himself with Andrew as a privileged and intelligent player or director. In fact,

as director Mankiewicz is willing to accept Michel Ciment's celebration: "sleuth is a play by Anthony Shaffer, but the film strangely resembles an original screenplay by Mankiewicz." Although the author of the original play, Shaffer wrote the screenplay, Mankiewicz seems to regard his own.

Mankiewicz visualizes Andrew's privileged hegemony with his control over the medium of the detective novel, for instance, his country house's staged decor, exotic objects, theatrical sets, and games (Pietrzak-Franger 184). Especially Mankiewicz's own idea, the hedge maze represents Andrew's power and "the complexity of the order" that Andrew creates and lives in and so only he is familiar with. In the beginning of the film when Milo comes to a deadend in the maze, he is allowed to enter into the center of the labyrinth by Andrew who opens a hidden door in the hedge wall. But the labyrinth makes Andrew "twentieth-century Minotaur and Minos in one" (184) who built the labyrinth and at the same time was trapped within it. Thus the maze symbolizes both Andrew's authority and his final downfall.

In Shaffer's original play and Mankiewicz's film, Marguerite is not just an object of male desire and a symbol of male status. Her position is more complex. Especially Mankiewicz often emphasized his fascination with female characters and lamented their absence in Shaffer's play. Thus he replaced absent Marguerite as her surrogates, such as her portrait, her red coat, and the female automaton pianist. As Mankiewicz himself mentioned, it is the "severe, dominating woman at the piano who really controlled Andrew Wyke"(Ciment 131). In this way, Shaffer put "intermedial gazes" as surrogates of absent Marguerite on the stage and Mankiewicz makes Marguerite dominate the *mise en scène* of the film. As R. B. Palmer points out "the gently misogynistic" attitude of Shaffer and Mankiewicz, in the two versions Marguerite is treated as "a burden difficult for any man to bear, causing the two [Andrew and Milo] to find apparently common ground" (169). And so Andrew advises Milo who rejects his offer, "Don't go. Don't waste it all on Marguerite. She doesn't appreciate you like I do. You and I are evenly matched. We know what it is to play a game and that's so rare. Two people coming together who have the courage to spend the little time of light between the eternal darkness-joking" (89). Thus we can see that Marguerite is only significant and powerful only if she remains part of the erotic triangle and conforms to the status of an object of exchange.

The Second Adaptation Film: Kenneth Branagh and Harold Pinter's *Sleuth* (2007)

Shaffer's *Sleuth* was noted that the play seems to provide "the post-Agatha Christie teases and comforts" and "to stand in two worlds — Christie's and Pinter's" (Koehler). Thus the play can be viewed as an adaptation of Christie-like Andrew's English manor mystery novel into a play, a comedy of menace which is the term used to describe Harold Pinter's plays. Thus it is significant for Pinter to participate in remaking Shaffer's original into a film adaptation

across generations as his endgame. With more than thirty-year time lapse and socio-cultural and cinematic transformations, the 2007 film is palimpsestuous by reusing, erasing, or altering the original play and the previous film while retaining their traces, although Pinter insisted that he had never read the play and watched the 1972 film. It also has “residual intertextual references to Mankiewicz’s adaptation in the cast”: Michael Caine, the embodiment of the new ascending working-class hero in the 1972 film, features as Andrew next to Jude Law, who plays contemporary Milo. The Milo transformed into a young sexy actor and the Andrew transformed into an old celebrity respectively young and old Pinter himself. Thus this *Sleuth* opens more peep-holes into Pinter’s psyche than Shaffer’s (Christopher).

The 2007 version introduces a number of modifications to the characterization of both protagonists as well as to their power struggle. Thus an intertextual reading of the 2007 version of *Sleuth* which reflects socio-cultural transformations in multicultural British society with the other two previous versions may focus on “depicting the precariousness of male positions by mapping out the instability of male control over certain media” (Pietrzak-Franger 171) rather than on the theme of class conflict. In other words, the 2007 version gives more special attention to sexual politics rather than politics. Andrew in the 2007 film represent no aristocratic class but “a new phenomenon, the super-rich, drawn from a colorful array of occupations apart from business, the media, the arts and sport.” As a celebrity and wealthy crime novelist Andrew lives in a designer house with post-modern design, new high-technology and media decorated by his trophy wife Maggie. Like Madame Irma in Jean Genet’s *The Balcony*, it is Maggie who watches and controls the game between the two men as “the driving force”(183) and the digital technology in the house behind the scene. And Pinter transforms Marguerite into Maggie as one of “archetypal Pinter women” as “victimizers of their men, turning them into childish creatures who desire nothing more than to regress to the comfort of the womb”(Adler 377). Thus the post-millennium absent woman Maggie comes to exert more power over the men than either Shaffer’s or Mankiewicz’s Marguerite and to take over two men’s control power over media in the house.

In the opening scenes of the 2007 *Sleuth*, Andrew asks Milo, "Do you know what adaptation means?" It is a condescending question to make Milo uncomfortable and it also contains Pinter’s hidden rejoinder as an adapter “to those who might demur at the swingeing changes he has made to the celebrated and much-beloved original”(Fahy). Andrew’s liking for adaptations and translations of his books which the 1970 and 1972 Andrew would dislike reveals his self-celebration and his preoccupation with his fame and reputation. And like an early adapter Andrew seems to enjoy showing his privileged status using hi-technology and media such as television, film, and CCTV installed in his house. Andrew’s such absorptions in adaptations and media “position him as a connoisseur and consumer of contemporary visual culture and virtual reality”(Pietrzak-Franger 176). He thinks that he can manipulate and control Milo in his house under his control with the help of hi-technological media,

like a character in the book written by himself.

Andrew's country manor house in the 1972 *Sleuth* (the filming location was Athelhampton House built in the 15th century and restored in 1891) is filled with numerous old games, automata, books, and intertextual references such as Agatha Christie's photograph and Edgar Allen Poe Prize trophy. But Andrew in the 2007 film lives in the cold and minimalist house of "refrigerated splendour" (Christopher) with several concrete rooms as brutally modern as the White Cube gallery. Paradoxically the elegant atmosphere of this space seems to hide cruelty and menace lurking beneath its surface. And the game between the two men in this space becomes the battle more deadly and desperate to the point of its inhumane showdown than that in the two previous versions. Almost an hour shorter than the Mankiewicz version, the 2007 *Sleuth* is full of spare and cryptic language and menacing which are familiar qualities of Pinter's plays. Pinter attempts to play with the audience the more subtle game than Mankiewicz's game with his audience. And the game between the two men in the urban and elegant space is the more brutal and inhumane one than that in the space of Mankiewicz's manor house, because the game is played as a fight for control power over technological media installed in the house.

The space of the setting is spacious, but the film is "too claustrophobic" (Dargis). For instance, the elevator (Pinter's idea) which is as small as a coffin built for one is "a central feature" of the film. Tilting camera follows Andrew and Milo upstairs and down and back again and into the elevator and finally makes the audience feel as if they're "trapped inside the elevator with Milo and Andrew, going up and down and up and down, though nowhere in particular" (Dargis). This claustrophobic effect on the audience is exactly what Pinter wants to induce on the audience, although Branagh regards it as a risk in his interview with Martin A. Grove. But critics were not satisfied with the outcome that made them to evaluate too Pinterque *Sleuth* as "the worst prestige movie of the year" (Corliss).

Three Endings

The ending scenes of the three versions of *Sleuth* show considerable intertextual and intermedial changes through the process of adaptations. The ending scene of the original play:

ANDREW: You're a bad liar, Milo, and in the final analysis an uninventive games-player. Can you hear me? Then listen to this, NEVER play the same game three times running!

(There is the sound of a car approaching and pulling a halt. A flashy blue police car light shines through the window. The door bell rings. Loud knocking on door. Painfully MILO lifts his head from the floor, he laughs)

MILO: Game, set and match!

(His laugh becomes a cough. Blood trickles from his mouth. He grimaces in surprise at the pain and dies. The knocking on the door is repeated more loudly. ANDREW staggers to his desk and accidentally presses the button on it. This sets off the sailor who laughs ironically. The knocking becomes more insistent. ANDREW leans weakly against pillar as the curtain falls) (92-93)

The ending of Shaffer's play still concludes that the game is Andrew's game and he wins over Milo because he knows the rules of the game. But as Milo ironically teases Andrew about his definition of his amateur sleuth, St. John Lord Merridew, in Act 1, Andrew just wins in the game staged in the world of the detective fiction. But now he cannot avoid being arrested by the police who "are always stupid in your[his] kind of story"(27). Finally he comes to lose his control over the medium of the detective novel and so to be threatened by "intermedial gazes" of automata out of his control.

The 1972 film ends with Milo's dying speech: "Andrew, don't forget, be sure and tell them it was just . . . a bloody game". And instead of Andrew dying Milo presses the button purposely to set off all the automata move and make noises simultaneously. Deprived the control button, the automata's ironic and mocking laughs and sounds and their gazes make Andrew more nervous. And this final scene is transformed into a freeze-frame of theatrical scene as the camera pulls back. The ending of Mankiewicz's film emphasizes his theme of the class conflict in terms of game playing. By usurping Andrew's power to control over his automata Milo aggravates Andrew's nervousness and makes him cry like a child. The aristocratic society in the 1970s is "a vanished past" and it only "survives in the artificial crystal", i.e., the spectacle of Andrew's manor house (Deleuze *Cinema2* 95). The spectacle is "the crystal in the process of decomposition"(94). But Shaffer's play and Mankiewicz's film end with no sign of line of flight, "the bursting forth of life" in the crystal.

The ending of the 2007 film adaptation across time is a lot more different from those of the previous versions in the 1970s. Of course, this contemporary Milo is also doomed to die. Andrew shoots Milo when he is heading off in Maggie's red coat. As Andrew lies on the bed with a vacant look and we see Milo's body fallen into the bottom of the elevator shot from a high angle shot. And we see a red car approaching and parking between Milo's and Andrew's cars. And the door buzzer is buzzing. According to Gilles Deleuze, in *The Servant* (1963) which is Pinter's first film adaptation, i.e., his first intermedial game, "women seem in advance of the milieu"(*Cinema 1* 138) which entraps Tony and Barrett, the master and the servant men from which they cannot come out. In *The Servant*, Deleuze finds a salvation in women. Maggie also can be regarded as the woman who can find a line of flight from the closed spectacle. And they seem in revolt against the claustrophobic space where Andrew and Milo is entrapped. Usually women are victims or users of the men's claustrophobic world. This is the case with Maggie whom Pinter discovers in *Sleuth*. It is Maggie who "traces a line of exit, and who wins a freedom which is creative, artistic, or simply practical" (138-9).

In fact, Maggie is a user rather than a victim of the crystal-like space. Unlike "gently misogynistic" Shaffer and Mankiewicz, Pinter transforms

Marguerite into the contemporary woman Maggie a user of the post-modern space which is equipped with high-technology and media. We can guess that security camera views of the two men in the house among various multi-mediated looks in the film may be the absent Maggie's views. Especially when Andrew warns Milo: "Don't let her dominate you", she intervenes into the game with a timely phone call. This implies that she is watching the two men through cameras of CCTV in the house decorated by herself. In fact, Milo can be regarded as "Maggie's messenger" who comes to visit her husband because she "insisted" on the meeting of the two men (Pietrzak-Franger 183). Thus it is Maggie who initiates the game between the two men. By ending the film with the arrival of Maggie rather than the police, the 2007 *Sleuth* implies that she can bring a salvation to the closed oedipal rivalry world. Although the film is criticized as "too claustrophobic" and too pessimistic, it has "the power of modern cinema" to restore "our belief in this world", because "in our universal schizophrenia we need reasons to believe in this world" (*Cinema 2* 172).

This reading the 2007 *Sleuth* as Pinter's endgame with his last screen-play in terms of adaptations and intermediality supports that he can find a line of flight in the process of playing a series of screen-plays from his first screen-play with Joseph Losey to his endgame with Branagh with his concomitant passions for film and not just politics but also sexual politics.

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