

Adaptations of the Short story the Monkey's Paw: Reviewing the Last Hundred Years

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Abstract

Adaptation has a significant place in the world of literature. This conversion of a genre into another has widely been witnessed and relished. The popular forms are film, stage play, radio broadcasting, cartoon show, a video game, etc. It works on all necessary dimensions artistically and appeals the common audience. The important thing is the fan following of the original genre. It helps to have a desired reach and output. This paper is an attempt to study the theatrical and non-theatrical adaptations of a famous short story The Monkey's Paw. Written by W. W. Jacob and first published in his collection of stories, The Lady of Barge (Sept. 1902), this supernatural story is treated as a classic horror and is still a hot-cake for the readers. The story gives a message that when wishes are made with honest intentions; they are likely to come true. Such wishes are good for us and influence us with positive impact. However, those unnatural, greedy or unusual wishes are sure to give unwanted and unexpected results. The Monkey's Paw, since its first appearance, is being told, read and circulated endlessly. One hundred plus years and it is still being prescribed for literary studies, being used for reviews and research and still seen in various adaptations. What is the reason for its wide appreciation? The probable answer is 'its charm'. Its success is in creating the exact atmosphere needed for the plot structure, giving the flow of events in a systematic manner that gives the intended result, the horrifying one. The story reiterates a moral 'everything comes at a price'. In the story, three wishes are granted to the owner of the monkey's paw, but the wishes come with an enormous price for interfering with fate. The Monkey's Paw invariably claims a definite position in the world of literature. It has been adapted for a number of novels, films, radio shows, stories, movies, plays and comics and other sorts of adaptations.

KEYWORDS: horror, supernatural, adaptations, the monkey, greed, mummified

INTRODUCTION:

This paper is an attempt to study the literary and other adaptations of a famous short story The Monkey's Paw. Adaptation proved an important thing in last few centuries in the world of literature. It is a conversion of a literary genre into another, adapting the same literary work in the same genre or into another medium. The last century has widely witnessed such literary adaptations of novels, short stories, plays or poems in the form of a film, stage play, radio broadcasting, cartoon show or a video game. Adaptations appealed the common audience because it received a story to function well, almost on all dimensions. It is bit easy because the concept, character, story, dialogue, and action are ready to use and can be represented with required changes. The more important thing is its genuine fan following and the overall amount of success.

The Monkey's Paw is such a wide-spread, widely recognized story that it has tempted hundreds of time to get adapted in different forms. This bloodcurdling story was written by W. W. Jacobs in the first decade of the twentieth century. This 117 years

old story is still having the power to shake its reader upside down. This supernatural story, first published in his collection of stories named *The Lady of Barge* in September 1902, is still treated as a classic horror. It is still a hot-cake today and ready to give you a hair-raising experience in any form of presentation. A famous review of this Jacobean story reads as:

The *Monkey's Paw* is, and always has been, one of all-time favourite short stories. Spanning only a few quick pages, the story reminds readers that every action has a consequence. It's the age-old 'be careful what you wish for' as the blurb states, and it always serves as a reminder....

... a short story is supposed to be of a perfect length and this one's no different. After all, we never learn the third wish, do we? Nonetheless, there's just enough time for Jacobs to instil a sense of camaraderie between the families in the reader.... I will never not suggest this story to someone looking for a quick horror read.

(www.theghostlygrimoire.com)

There is no doubt that when wishes are made with honest intentions, they are likely to come true. Such wishes are good for us and influence us with positive impact. However, those unnatural, greedy or unusual wishes are sure to give us unwanted, unexpected consequences. *The Monkey's Paw* deals with an episode in the life of a family, the family of Whites. Mr. and Mrs. White and their adult son, Herbert are the central characters and Sergeant-Major Morris, an old family acquaintance. These are the only four characters in the story. The story is based on a theme of a mummified monkey's paw given to Sergeant Morris by an old Indian fakir and would grant three wishes. The number 'three' here itself is suggestive of a supernatural element. The wishes would grant anything under the sky but would end in or lead towards some hellish consequences. Rather, the consequences will appear natural but would result in a kind of punishment for tampering with fate. Having a dreadful experience of the paw, Sergeant Morris disowns it, but, when asked by Mr White, hands it to him but by giving some precautionary words.

Since its first stage appearance (1903), this interesting story is being told, read and circulated endlessly and is famous throughout the world of literature for more than hundred years. It is still being prescribed for literary studies, being used for reviews and research and has been used for various adaptations. What may be the reason for its wide appreciation and readership? The probable answer is its charm. Its success lies in creating an atmosphere and giving the flow of events in a systematic way giving the desired effect. The story gives an eternal moral that everything comes at a price. There are three wishes granted to the owner of the monkey's paw, but the wishes are sure to be followed with an enormous price for interfering with 'the fate'.

Many creative writers found *The Monkey's Paw* interesting and reusable material. The concept of 'three wishes' turned out magical. Though pre-warned, one needs to be careful regarding the given wishes because every demand is sure to turn out into 'seemingly natural consequences'. Young Herbert persuades his father to demand two hundred pounds as the first wish and as ill luck would have it, and as a 'seemingly natural consequence', the same amount is offered by Herbert's company as an amount of compensation. The same principle gets applied when Mrs. White begs Mr. White to go for the second wish, to bring him back to life. Mr. White knew it to be a bad idea, knew it would be consequences, but demands the 'second wish'.

The sudden horrifying knock over the door suggests the arrival of Herbert but in a ghastly appearance (remains unseen in the story, making the story more serious, horrible). Finally, Mr. White uses the paw for his third and final wish. He wishes his son's death and wish to rest him in peace, forever.

The story is full of irony. Its small, interesting episodes and a twist, in the end, makes it worth reading, again and again. The message 'nothing for free' comes out in the flow of events. It marks an indelible impression over the mind of its reader. Moreover, the past hundred years standing of the story is still having its impact in the world of creativity, the creative writing. The use of 'metaphors', use of 'magical' or 'supernatural figures', the 'tension' element through its suspense episodes as well as the thrill and horror makes the story undying.

The success mantra of the story is its creation of an atmosphere of excitement by adding suspense and mystery, its outcome mysterious and unpredictable. One can hardly put the text aside before end, and one can hardly predict the end at any point of reading. This element makes the story adaptable. It has been adapted for numerous times in print and electronic media, including plays, movies, TV shows, operas, stories, cartoons, video games, comics and others from its beginning (1902) till this date (as late as 2017).

The first literary adaptation of The Monkey's Paw as a one-act-play appeared immediately after its publication, to be precise, as on 6th October 1903. The one-act was performed in London's 'Haymarket Theatre' and the star cast was Cyril Maude (Mr White) and Lena Ashwell (Mrs. White) followed by another stage adaptation in 1910.

FILMS:

Films are the most successful, most demanded form for adaptation. The first adapted film version of The Monkey's Paw story appeared in 1915. Those were the early days of bioscope creations, especially from the late 1890s to 1920s, it was directed by Sidney Northcote, the then director of 14 silent films. He made these films between 1912 and 1914. Another film version of the title appeared in 1923 directed by Manning Haynes followed by a 1933 version directed by Wesley Ruggles. Its updated version appeared in the same year on The Alfred Hitchcock Hour (1933) with some improvements. Hal Erickson briefed the improvised version of the story in following words:

While on vacation in the Bahamas, Paul and Anne White (Leif Erickson, Jane Wyatt) were attending a party where the guests are cruelly mocking a wizened gypsy woman (Zolya Talma). Defiantly, the old crone brandishes a tiny, severed monkey's paw, which Paul immediately identifies as a good-luck charm. Indeed, when the gypsy gives the monkey's paw to Mr. White, she informs him that the shrivelled artefact will grant him three wishes, but the third wish will be for death. A young Lee Major appears as the Whites' son, Howard, whose grisly demise looms large over the story's heart-pounding climax.

This version was improvised in respect to its characters and time, place, action. Here Mr and Ms White become Paul and Anne, Sergeant becomes Lee Major and Herbert becomes Howard. But, the original plot and the original moral remain same. The film

was so unique that it was well appreciated in those days. The film was considered to be lost until the online pieces of evidence were made available for the common public in 2016. The other adaptations of the story came out in 1948, 1961, 1989, 2008, 2013 and 2017.

The 1961 film version was titled as *Espiritismo* (released as *Spiritism* in the US) and was directed by Benito Alazraki. Other films were *Pet Sematary* (1989) by Stephan King and *Kagbeni* (2008) by Bhusan Dahal. A Horror Film got released in 2013 starring Stephan Lang, C J Thompson, Corbin Bleu and Charles S Dutton. The other latest film adaptation entitled *Wish Upon* appeared in 2017. It replaced the theme of monkey's paw with a music box and the three wishes for seven wishes. Improvised music box comes in the possession of a high school student Claire. Claire uses the given wishes to satisfy her fortune, friends, love and revenge. The shocking fact Claire realises is that people close to her suddenly begin to die. Eventually, she finds the earlier owners of that music box have also died making it a notorious gazette. The other horror film version of *The Monkey Paw* was *Wishing Stairs*. It replaced the White's story with three students at an All Girls' School. The paw was replaced by the eponymous stairs giving a similar horror effect.

RADIO BROADCASTS:

There are some significant radio adaptations of the story too. The first radio version of the story appeared in 1928 over UK Radio followed by an episodic series 'Thirty Minute Theatre' (1958) starring Carleton Hobbs and Gladys Young. The other notable Radio versions of the play are *Appointment with Fear* on BBC Radio (1946), *The Nightfall* on CBC Radio (1980), *BBC Series Fear on Four* (1988) and the *BBC Radio Drama Series Christopher Lee's Fireside Tales* (2004). The latest BBC episode based on *The Monkey's Paw* story came in February 2018 as *Inside No.9*. All these aired programmes had the desired effect on the radio audience too.

NOVELS:

There are paw novels too. The important one is *The Monkey's Paw Trilogy* written by Ralph Lagana. *I Wish* by Johnny Mains, *Cursed* by Benedict Jacs, *Shine* by Candy Gourlay's and *Pet Sematary* by Stephan King (1983) are the other notable novels on this ghastly story.

MUSIC ALBUMS:

The adaptations in the form of musical albums and songs featuring *The Monkey's Paw* appeared with the same title lyrics "The Monkey's Paw". The earliest was the album *Witness* by a band of music composers *The Electric Hellfire Club*. It was followed by another song with the same title by a band *Small-town Poets*, Columbia Records and presented by artists *Scott & Raven's* (1987). The other albums were *Strange Angels* (1989), *Genius* (2001), *Band Horror Punk* and *The Devil's Rain* (2011), *The Vocaloid Song Series* is a clear adaptation of the legend monkey's paw in its song *Aimless Imitation Chair Stealing Game*.

TELEVISION SHOWS:

There is no doubt that *The Monkey's Paw* observed unending popularity in the film and radio adaptations and same was the case with the television. Television was a new media of entertainment, the early audio-visual media. The play appeared on

television as early as on 19 April 1965 with a title *The Monkey's Paw: A Retelling* (Season 3, episode 26). TV adaptations of the paw story appeared on the famous Indian Cable Network Show (ZEE Television) by the Ramsay Brothers entitled *Taveez* (a horror show). The other television adaptations are Few short films by Michael Scott and James Henchmen (2003), *Are You Afraid of Dark? The Tale of the Twisted Claw, Brandy and Mr. Whiskers, The Monkeys, and The Man in the Bottle*. The animated television series *Suruga Monkey* is also believed to be the paw adaptation with some improvisations.

OTHER ADAPTATIONS:

Apart from film, radio, television and other significant adaptations of *The Monkey's Paw*, the Opera version by the composer Jonathan Kupper came in 2009. It was performed in his Opera Vista's from 2009 to 2011. The other adaptation was a parody in the form of a Cartoon Series *Rick and Morty* where the paw theme is used to save the life of a devil who lost his will to live after he was outwitted by Rick. The other Cartoon Series was the *Adventure Time* where protagonist Finn and Jake meet a wish-granting being named Prismo. Prismo likes Jake and warns him that all his wishes will come true, like a monkey's paw thing. The other cartoon I am Weasel presents Weasel's power to make his wishes come true.

There was also a video game titled *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl* (2007) where, at the end of the game, the player may reach the *Wish Granter* (like *Monkey's Paw*) resting deep inside and is supposed to grant wishes to whoever manages to find it. However, the wishes inevitably turn out twisted and corrupted. The last, but not the least, is the adaptation in the form of a web-comic, *Saturday Morning Breakfast Cereal* (2010), the latest version of entertainment featuring the monkey's paw that grants wishes but with certain consequences.

CONCLUSION:

To conclude, *The Monkey's Paw* invariably claims a definite position in the world of literature. It has proved its metal in the period of last one hundred and seventeen years. The story has been adapted for a number of novels, films, radio shows, plays, video games and comics. The bare three scenes of the story had enough material for a century to get horrified and spread horror.

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