

## THE INTERTEXTUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF DEAR EVAN HANSEN NOVEL ADAPTATION ON THE ORIGINAL BROADWAY MUSICAL

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**Abstract.** In the process of adaptation, there are major changes in the process and the final project. Changes in creative adaptation is natural. The novel adaptation of *Dear Evan Hansen* was published in 2017 based on the acclaimed 2015 musical with the same title. Novels often adapted into films and musicals, but an adaptation from a Broadway musical into a novel is extremely rare. Author Val Emmich worked with the creators of the musical to ensure a successful passing of essence from play to novel, ensuring the foundation of the creation of the musical which is the matter of anxiety disorders among teenagers to remain visible throughout the novel. Many scholars consider creative adaptation as less than the source material meaning that a creative adaptation translates into inferior product. This research scrutinized the process of creative adjustment in the novel through three distinct but interrelated perspectives based on the theory of adaptation by Linda Hutcheon: adaptation as a *formal entity* or product, adaptation as a *process of creation*, and adaptation as a *process of reception*. This research concludes that the novel adaptation transforms, deepens, and compliments the musical and its existence is justified as it contains intertextual significance.

**Keywords:** adaptation, Broadway, *Dear Evan Hansen*, Anxiety, intertextuality

### INTRODUCTION

Since the creation of moving pictures in the brink of the 19th century and throughout the rapid growth of film industry in the 20th century that frankly continues to this day, people have been endlessly adapting existing literary works to the giant screen. In the glorious age of celluloid films, when most films were shot in *black and white* film reels, film studios released influential *colored* film adaptations such as *Gone with the Wind* adapted from Margaret Mitchell's acclaimed novel, *Ben-Hur* adapted from Lew Wallace's acclaimed novel based on the teachings of Christianity, and Walt Disney's *Bambi* adapted from Felix Salten's novel, to name

a few. Even as the world moved toward digital projection cameras and screens, many films are still created based on (or to the very least *inspired by*) literary works. In 1996, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox released Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* to a critical success (Lodge, 2016), signifying that even centuries old literature can still enthrall modern moviegoers (Cramer in the introduction to *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, 2014:V). *Beowulf* (2007) by Robert Zemeckis also represents an even older literature known to men and was filmed with the most advanced motion-capture technology (Tella, 2007), at the time, and managed to enthrall audience despite the age of its source

material which dates back to the late 10<sup>th</sup> century (*The British Library*, updated under Creative Commons Attribution Licence) . Within these examples of film adaptations, each filmmaker or each production added new aspects to the original narratives. The popular 2013 Disney film *Frozen*, for example, is loosely based on Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale *The Snow Queen*, and the film actually does not resemble the source material at a glance despite the studio continuously claims its root to be Andersen's tale (Chan, 2019). The same situation is true to all film adaptations, many are faithful to the source materials and many are wildly different. Another example for a film adaptation that is overly different from its source but manages to gain success is DreamWorks' *How to Train Your Dragon*—the film adaptation changed not only the characters and their characterizations, but also the overall narrative. The success of the film despite it being wildly different from its source material, however, suggests that there is an undeniably transformative force in the process of adapting a work of art into a different form of art. To back this claim up, there were even several controversial cases between 1997 and 2006 in which two clashing animation studios at the time, Disney (led by Michael Eisner) and DreamWorks Animation (led by Jeffrey Katzenberg) often release nearly identical films *back-to-back* (Hartl, 2006). Despite promising similar premise and concept, the final products of the two studios are strikingly different. A rumor that leaks the information that both DreamWorks' *Madagascar* and Disney's *The Wild* were

created based on the same literature (brought into popularity by Mike Sage from *Peterborough This Week* in his comment on *The Wild* versus *Madagascar* in *Rotten Tomatoes*) further demonstrates how a similar work can be adapted into different films, demonstrating how a creative adaptation works.

The transformative force appears also in the adaptations of novels into plays and plays into films such as the 1984 controversial takes on the life of composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in the film *Amadeus* based on the 1979 play by Peter Shaffer. In the process of creative adaptation, it is impossible to argue that there will be *no* major changes in the process and in the final project—*change* is undeniable even though it is not mandatory. Changes in creative adaptation is, simply put, *natural*. It is not mandatory for Peter Jackson to omit many plot points in J.R.R Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*, but the length of film art is limited to approximately 2-3 hours of screen time (Rossen, 2020), with 2 hours as the ideal standard (Dahlgreen, 2015)—a range of duration that has become the unspoken and perhaps even unwritten norm in the case of film length. In order to show *The Fellowship of the Ring* without audience feeling nauseous, director Peter Jackson had no choice but to creatively pick only key or important parts of the novel to be translated into a moving picture. There are exceptions, of course, especially for films prior to 1970 such as *Gone with the Wind* and *Ben-Hur*, but such films were screened with an *intermission* and yet still unable to translate every single page of the novels

into moving pictures. *Since* the addition of intermission began to dwindle after the 1960's and *after* the introduction of massively produced home entertainment formats in the 1980s that continues to the ubiquity of DVD and now streaming, filmmakers have the option to release different versions of their films. For example, Peter Jackson released the theatrical version of *The Fellowship of the Ring* in 2001, but he also released the extended version of the film on DVD in 2002 because audience have more controls over their movie viewing experience at home rather than at theaters—home entertainment allows audience to have total freedom in determining intermission or modulation within the experience. A different medium, television series, give filmmakers more opportunities to explore the novel such as HBO's *Game of Thrones* which had nearly a decade to convey stories from George R.R. Martin's novels, but even such series contains a great number of changes and cannot be a hundred percent similar or identical to the novels.

It is established, then, that creative adaptation is as a natural occurrence as *sand*, to loosely quote Anakin Skywalker from *Attack of the Clones*, "it's everywhere". It is also established that adaptations from novels and plays to films are so common that people do not need to ask which of the artwork came out first: the answer is most certainly the novel and/or the play. The idea of adapting films into novels have also become quite popular as Disney often release the book versions of its cinema catalogue. However, Disney's

books often do not offer new angles or crucial additions to the overall narrative of the films. The idea of adapting a musical into novel, though, is itself novel (Mandell, 2018). A novelization of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is somewhat understandable and it can still capture all the emotions from the play script (not the actual performance), but a novelization of a musical should face tons more challenges and limitations because the essence of the musical is not only embedded in its script, but also its musical arrangements and songs which in themselves carry tones and musical styles that effectively affect the narrative of the musical and practically impossible to be translated into a novel. And yet, author Val Emmich and the creators of *Dear Evan Hansen* the musical decided to translate the musical into a novel.

The musical *Dear Evan Hansen* tells the story of Mark Evan Hansen, a 17-year-old boy who is struggling to *fit in*. Evan considers himself an outcast and is extremely anxious to connect with people—he feels so anxious that his discomfort with society could potentially damage his life. His mother realizes the damaging potentials of his son's anxiety and works harder to finance Evan's therapy. The therapist, Dr. Sherman, firmly suggests Evan to write letters for himself as part of the therapy. Evan's life starts to change completely when a boy from his school named Connor Murphy committed suicide and his parents find Evan Hansen's therapeutic letter in Connor's possession and mistook it for a sign that Evan is Connor's best friend. Connor's family starts

to consider Evan as part of their family and Connor's parents treat Evan the way parents treat a son—they could not show their affections to Connor and therefore, they show the affections to Evan. The musical was originally released or performed in 2015 and gradually gained momentum into fame. *Dear Evan Hansen* received massive critical acclaim and financial success. Paul Taylor from *Independent* (19 November 2019) touts the musical as "A superb, unmissable musical", while *West End* praises *Dear Evan Hansen*, "it is very hard to not watch this jaw-dropping performance without feeling a unique closeness to these characters" (West End TheatreLand, (n.d.)). Michael Billington from *The Guardian*, gave the musical a positive review and claims that the musical "captures agonies of youth" (2019). The reason *Dear Evan Hansen* received such praise is not only thanks to its narrative portraying anxiety disorders among youths, but also thanks to its powerful music and lyrics (Billington, 2019)—simply put, the musical would not be so powerful without its award-winning soundtracks.

The novel adaptation of *Dear Evan Hansen* was initially published in 2017. Author Val Emmich teamed up with the creators of the musical Benj Pasek, Steven Levenson, and Justin Paul to ensure a successful passing of *essence* from play to novel, ensuring the foundation of the creation of the musical which is to "reach out to those who might be suffering" (Emmich et al., 2018:361) to remain visible throughout the novel adaptation. It has been previously established that an

adaptation means *change* and the *change* can be either advantageous or disadvantageous to the original source material. As previously discussed, *Dear Evan Hansen* became popular and powerful thanks to its award-winning soundtracks, and a novel adaptation would mean the elimination of those powerful soundtracks. This research means to disclose whether the novel adaptation of *Dear Evan Hansen* is disadvantageous to the musical, meaning it is degrading or dragging the musical's achievement to negative criticism, or is advantageous, meaning the adaptation actually boosts the popularity of the musical and deepens the discussion of anxiety disorders in which the musical fails to portray due to its limitations. In order to be able to compare the novel from the original musical, this research sought help from the theory of adaptation by Linda Hutcheon.

This research specifically sought help from the book *A Theory of Adaptation* because the case it meant to investigate is very uncommon. Most studies investigate the process of adaptation from literature to film or from play to film, but it is a scarcity to stumble upon an in-depth study on a novel adaptation of a critically acclaimed musical. The majority of adaptations are from literature to films with popular examples such as *The Godfather* based on Mario Puzo's novel, *Jurassic Park* based on Michael Crichton's novel, *Harry Potter* series based on J.K. Rowling's best-selling books, and *The Twilight Saga* based on Stephenie Meyer's sensational series. Since most adaptations are from novels to films, many scholars consider the circumstances

as the norm of adaptation—one can easily browse on the Google search engine and find that most popular websites concerning the process of creative adaptation understand the notion of creative adaptation to be that of adaptations from books into films. Some may also acknowledge or recognize adaptations from play to films since there are many plays that have been translated into films and vice versa. *Amadeus*, *Into the Woods*, *The King and I* and *The Sound of Music* are examples of plays adapted into major Hollywood films. A play narrating the lives of individuals combating prejudices that come along with HIV/AIDS and homosexuality in the 80s entitled *Angels in America* even got its own television adaptation with famous actors including Al Pacino, Emma Thompson, and Meryl Streep. A play or musical adaptation of a film is also quite popular as Disney's *The Lion King*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *The Little Mermaid* gained momentum and huge critical and financial success. When it comes to the novel adaptation of a film or a musical, though, the result is mostly disappointing. Disney released the books of its *High School Musical* trilogy and nobody seems to care. When Disney transformed the musical film into a real musical concert, however, the response was fantastic and Disney had the opportunity to release the concert on DVD.

In the case of *Dear Evan Hansen*, apart from the fact that a novel adaptation of a musical is somewhat alien to many, many scholars actually consider creative adaptation as *less* than the source material (Hutcheon and O'Flynn, 2013:3) meaning

that a creative adaptation translates into inferior product. Part of the reason why many scholars share similar skepticism toward creative adaptation is because in general, creative adaptation means adapting literature into films and literature is seen as the more superior form of art (Hutcheon and O'Flynn, 2013:4). The problem concerning *Dear Evan Hansen's* creative adaptation becomes even more complex when the record is set straight that instead of adapting a novel into a pop musical, the creators of the musical adapted the musical into a novel. Indeed, literature is considered by many as the best medium to spread ideas and understanding (Graham, 2005:127) thus deemed to be superior from other forms of art because it deals directly with human language. However, since many creative adaptations are seen as inferior to their source materials, the case of *Dear Evan Hansen* could potentially dismantle the notion of literature's superiority since the novel is *merely* a creative adaptation of a far more superior form of art. This research aimed to investigate whether or not a creative adaptation is *automatically* inferior compared to its source material and whether or not the creative adaptation of *Dear Evan Hansen* from musical to novel brings justifiably positive additions to the preceding musical. Since adaptation means adjusting, altering, and ensuring suitability, the idea of *fidelity* in a transformative creative process should be used to frame research on creative adaptation today (Hutcheon and O'Flynn, 2013:7). This research would scrutinize the process of creative adjustment in *Dear Evan Hansen*

through “...three distinct but interrelated perspectives”: adaptation as a *formal entity or product*, as a *process of creation*, and its *process of reception* (Hutcheon and O’Flynn, 2013:7).

When an adaptation is seen as a formal entity or product, the adaptation is considered to be “transcoding” which means the adaptation is considered as an “extensive transposition of a particular work or works” (Hutcheon and O’Flynn, 2013:7). The process of transcoding can be seen as a shift of medium which means the creative process is the process of “telling the same story from a different point of view, for instance, can create a manifestly different interpretation” or shifting the ontology (the nature (of being)) of the works of art “from the real to the fictional, from a historical account or biography to a fictionalized narrative or drama” (Hutcheon and O’Flynn, 2013:7-8). The perfect example of transcoding is Disney’s *The Lion King* (1994) which is based on Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (Vincenty, 2019) and once it gained critical and financial success, Disney brought the film to Broadway (*Buena Vista Home Entertainment*, 2010). The shift in ontology is visible in the stories of *Pocahontas* and *Robin Hood* (Holeinone and Cattaneo, 2008:5) which are based on historical figures, but their true biographies are less popular than their *exaggerated* fictional narratives.

Within the perspective of creative adaptation as a *process of creation*, “the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation; this has been called both appropriation and salvaging, depending on your perspective”

(Hutcheon and O’Flynn, 2013:7-8). There are many examples of this perspective of creative adaptation such as Disney’s *Treasure Planet* which is a reimagined version of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*. The process of remaking films often goes through this perspective: in the original 1933 film *King Kong*, a group of filmmaker crews went on an expedition and stumbled upon a giant ape which fights its final battle on The Empire State Building. In the 1976 remake of *King Kong*, the creators decided to change the film crews into a group of explorers from the oil company *Petrox* and in this film, the giant ape fights its final battle not on the top of the Empire State Building, but on the top(s) of the World Trade Center which was first opened in 1973. The overall premise of the 1976 remake of *King Kong* is *adjusted* to the *then* current situation of the 1970s. *King Kong* was once again reimagined in 2005 in which this version switches the premise of *King Kong* back to its original 1933 premise. In the 2005 version, King Kong’s final fight happens on top of the Empire State Building—not only it is because the creative team of the film wanted to be more faithful to the original, but it also because the World Trade Center (WTC) was completely destroyed four years prior to the release of the film by a terrorist group and the attack created a massive trauma to the US as a whole since the WTC had become one of the famous landmarks of New York and of The United States of America.

The third and final perspective of creative adaptation is to view adaptation as a form of intertextuality. In *A Theory of*

*Adaptation*, this perspective resonates with “An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work” because “...we experience adaptations (as adaptations) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation” (Hutcheon and O’Flynn, 2013:8). Through examples from popular comic book adaptations such as *The Spider-Man Trilogy*, *The Avengers*, and *Superman Returns*, audience who are familiar with the source materials meaning those who are familiar with the comic books, should be able to relate the adaptations to the source materials. The same phenomena happen with film adaptations of popular video games such as *The Tomb Raider*, *Resident Evil*, and *Prince of Persia*. In the preface of the book *The Magical Worlds of The Lord of the Rings*, author David Colbert (2006:9) claims that many fans of *The Lord of the Rings* were worried that the film adaptation of *The Fellowship of the Ring* would be a degrading force to the novel because the film would delete many interesting characters and plot points in order to meet the required standard of film length. However, the film enthralled fans more than it enthralled regular audience because the film essentially deepens their understanding on the overall story of *The Lord of the Rings* (Colbert, 2006:9).

## METHOD

This research is conducted as a qualitative research which should describe phenomena in a narrative fashion and cover broad and thematic concerns (Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009:7). This research, by its nature as a qualitative

research, focuses on the social and cultural construction of meaning (Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009:166). Since this research means to compare two different forms of art under the similar title *Dear Evan Hansen*, this research is required to attain access to both its musical and its novel. This research does not require the entire musical production to be able to compare the musical with the novel. Since the songs in *Dear Evan Hansen* are the main concern of *change* in the novel adaptation because literature cannot act as a CD player and perform the songs, this research focuses on the songs as comparisons to the expressions in the novel adaptation. The use of the songs from the Broadway album or recording as primary data can be quite controversial because a Broadway musical should require a person to experience the show first hand, but the production team of *Dear Evan Hansen* released a CD album of *Dear Evan Hansen* the musical (*Warner Music Australia Store*) which means the songs can be scrutinized separately from the musical while maintaining its position as part of a whole musical show—the songs are detachable from the show, but remain representative of the Broadway musical. This research thus attained data from *Dear Evan Hansen* the Broadway musical CD album and the novel adaptation of *Dear Evan Hansen*. This research also scrutinized the *videomatic* of the Broadway musical released on *YouTube* which visualizes the entire musical through storyboard-style animation. Since the aim of this research is to find creative changes in the creative adaptation of *Dear Evan Hansen* and to disclose whether or not the novel deepens the scope of discussion of its musical regarding anxiety disorders, this research utilized arranged procedures as follows:

1. Scrutinizing the songs, *videomatic* and the novel *Dear Evan Hansen*.

The *Dear Evan Hansen Original Broadway Cast Recording* album consists of 14 songs arranged in chronological order in accordance to the actual Broadway performance (*Warner Music Australia* and Gans, 2018). Thus, the album actually tells the overall storyline of the musical since the songs are the most important parts of the entire Broadway production (it is obvious because *Dear Evan Hansen* is not a regular drama but a musical). This research then compared the official CD album to the *videomatic* released on *YouTube* to judge the fidelity of the *videomatic* to the actual Broadway performance. The term *videomatic* can be quite confusing because the term is rarely used in everyday life and mostly used in the world of filmmaking. This research adopts the definition of the term *videomatic* used in the Special Edition DVD of *Titanic* produced by Van Ling (2005) with an introduction by *Titanic* producer Jon Landau. In the DVD section of *videomatic*, the term refers to the preproduction stage of creative process of creating a raw footage using models and storyboard images as a guideline for the production and postproduction stages. Both the CD album and *videomatic* are then compared to *Dear Evan Hansen* the novel.

2. Comparing the overall narrative of the musical and its novel adaptation through the theory of adaptation. The book *A Theory of Adaptation* suggests three perspectives of the creative process of adaptation,

suggesting the research to view adaptation as a *formal entity or product*, as a *process of creation*, and through its *process of reception* (Hutcheon and O'Flynn, 2013:7) all of which individually discussed in the previous chapter. This research scrutinized the novel by applying the three perspectives of creative adaptation.

3. Pinpoint differences between the novel adaptation and its original musical. Through the three perspectives of creative adaptation, this research should pinpoint similarities and most importantly differences between the original Broadway production of *Dear Evan Hansen* and its novel adaptation.
4. Process the data to draw the conclusion in accordance to the aim of the research presented in the introduction section and as reflected on its research title.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### A. Anxiety Disorders in Dear Evan Hansen the Broadway Musical

The Broadway musical (based on the official CD album and *videomatic*) and the novel *Dear Evan Hansen* both tell the story of Evan Hansen. The song *So Big So Small* tells the narrative when Mark Hansen, Evan's father, left the family after he and Heidi, Evan's mother, were officially divorced. The separation happened when Evan was only seven years old. At the time, Evan did not realize the gravitas of the event that will eventually affect his mental health. Even though the novel is unable to perform the song *So Big So Small*, the novel tells the history of Evan's family as faithful to the musical as possible and therefore, the novel conveys similar storyline as the



Broadway musical. Instead of performing the song or presenting the lyrics within its pages, the novel tells the separation of Evan's parents in descriptive paragraphs. Added below are excerpts from the song *So Big So Small* which show that a U-Haul truck came to Evan's house but he did not think of it as the start of the chaos in his life. Evan was only seven years old and rather than being extremely sad about the arrival of the truck, Evan was extremely happy and wanted to play behind the wheel. His parent's attitude made it more difficult for Evan to realize the truth that they got separated and officially divorced. The line "We let you sit behind the wheel" indicates that both of Evan's parents were there for him and Evan only realized they took care of him for the very last time when he noticed his father's belongings were transferred inside the truck and he did not stay in the house afterwards.

It was a February day  
 When your dad came by,  
 before going away  
 A U-Haul truck in the driveway  
 The day it was suddenly real.

I told you not to come outside  
 But you saw that truck  
 And you smiled so wide  
 A real live truck in your  
 driveway  
 We let you sit behind the  
 wheel.

Goodbye, goodbye  
 Now it's just me and my little  
 guy  
 And the house felt so big, and I  
 felt so small.  
 The house felt so big, and I felt  
 so small.

That night, I tucked you into  
 bed  
 I will never forget how you sat  
 up and said  
 "Is there another truck coming  
 to our driveway?  
 A truck that will take mommy  
 away."

(Pasek and Paul, 2017)

The separation of his parents makes Evan feel anxious. In the last line of the excerpt, the seven-year-old Evan asks his mother, "Is there another truck coming to our driveway? A truck that will take mommy away" signifies the fact that Evan finally knows what happens when a U-Haul truck comes and he fears that his mom will leave him just like his father did. Both the musical and the novel show the fact that Evan's mother wants the best for her son and she never leaves Evan. She notices that Evan is extremely anxious about nearly everything in his life and she determines to provide Evan a proper treatment with the help of therapist Dr. Sherman. Since the divorce, however, Evan's father needs to take care of his new family and Evan's mother needs to work longer than usual especially since she needs to pay the bills for Evan's therapy and her extra classes to pursue a more secure position which would potentially help ensure Evan's well-being. While his mother thinks it is the best for her to work extra hours to save every single dime possible to pay Evan's needs and her extra classes, Evan thinks completely the opposite. According to Evan, even though he knows that his mother has good intentions, his mother fails to understand his need for companionship—a therapy

session, by all means and based on its nature, is not a session to make friends. The excerpt added afterwards shows Evan's thoughts about his life.

I am left with a loneliness so overpowering it threatens to seep from my eyes. I have no one. Unfortunately, that's not fantasy. That's all-natural, 100% organic, unprocessed reality. There's Dr. Sherman, but he charges by the hour. There's my father, but if he really gave a shit he wouldn't have moved to the other side of the country. There's my mom, but not tonight, or last night, or the night before. Seriously, when it actually counts, who is there? In front of me, on my computer screen, is just one name: Evan Hansen. Me. That's all I have. (Emmich, et al. 2018:31-32)

The excerpt taken from the novel is in line with the song *Waving Through a Window* from the Broadway musical which contains the lines.

"I try to speak, but nobody can hear. So I wait around for an answer to appear. While I'm watch, watch, watching people pass. I'm waving through a window, oh. Can anybody see, is anybody waving back at me?" (Pasek and Paul, 2017).

The excerpt tells how Evan feels lonely ever since his parents split and he has nobody to talk intimately to. It also exposes Evan's thoughts about his parents in which he considers his father as not "giving a shit" about him and his mother as always busy as if she is a team coach who always preach to the team to perform as a single unit but does not actually play in the game (Emmich

et al., 2018:30-31). Both the Broadway musical and its novel adaptation expose familial problems that trigger Evan Hansen's anxiety disorder. They also expose societal and technological problems that further worsen Evan's anxiety, deeming him to suffer from social anxiety disorder. The following excerpt shows how Evan is all alone not only in his own home, but also in the society. Since most of Evan's societal activities take place in his school, the excerpt talks about how disconnect Evan really is from his schoolmates.

I've never loved lunch. There's not enough structure. Everyone's free to go where they please, and where they please is nowhere near me. I tend to claim a spot at a forgotten corner table with the other randoms, force-feeding myself the SunButter and jelly sandwich I've packed in my bag every day for a decade. (What I eat is the only thing about lunch I can control.) But sitting in the corner now feels like hiding, and I promised myself I wouldn't hide. Not today. (Emmich et al., 2018:23)

The Broadway musical *Dear Evan Hansen* and its novel adaptation both tell the exact same story of Evan Hansen's anxiety disorder's causes and symptoms. Started from a broken family, Evan develops resistance to the society. However, he actually desires true companionship because he does not want to be alone. The problem worsens when he does not have a single friend and the only person in school that he ever acknowledges as a friend, Jared, does not want to be associated with Evan—Jared insists that he and Evan are merely "family

friends” because their mothers know each other but they are not real friends (Emmich et al., 2018:12). The novel adaptation shows how a normal situation such as lunch can be unbearable for Evan because his loneliness and inability to connect with others are contradictory to Dr. Sherman’s therapy and his mother’s advice which is to connect to people and “seize the day” (*Dear Evan Hansen Act One*, 2017:25). Since *Dear Evan Hansen* is set in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the story talks a lot about technological advancement in communication technology specifically social media (Kassie, 2019) and how constant access to social media can make

“The letter that Connor stole from me is my mashed potatoes. It’ll never die if it gets out. It will follow me wherever I go” (Emmich et al., 2018:40). Throughout the Broadway musical and novel *Dear Evan Hansen*, it is established that Evan suffers from social anxiety disorder triggered by several factors. This research found that both the musical and novel adaptation of *Dear Evan Hansen* show Evan’s life battling with social anxiety disorder through Evan’s perspective and the depictions allow this research to formulate an *anxiety timeline* for Evan Hansen which can be seen in Figure 01:

#### Anxiety in *Dear Evan Hansen* *Anxiety timeline*

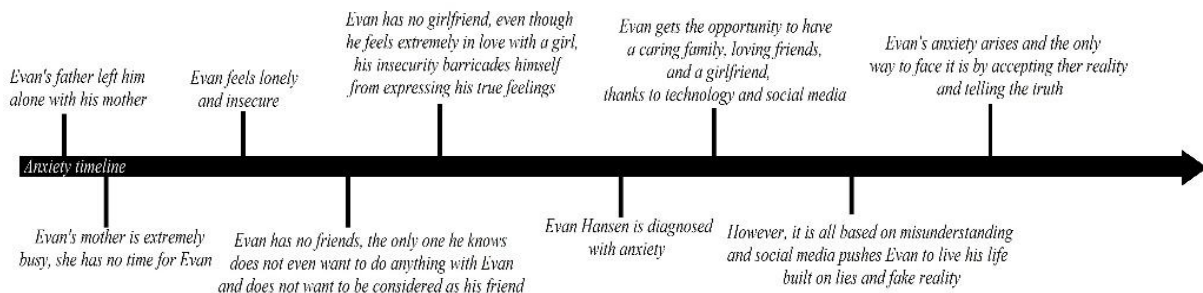


FIGURE 1 EVAN HANSEN'S ANXIETY TIMELINE BASED ON THE MUSICAL AND THE NOVEL.

people even more anxious. *Dear Evan Hansen*, in both its musical and novel, shows how Evan feels anxious as he stares at his social media account waiting for Connor Murphy’s post about Evan’s letter. Evan fears that if Connor ever posted Evan’s letter online, the letter will haunt him forever and not only in the cyber world, but also in the real world as he says,

#### B. Anxiety Disorders in the novel adaptation

The anxiety timeline vibrantly shows the augmentation of Evan Hansen’s social anxiety disorder in chronological order. Evan’s anxiety starts with the split of Evan’s parents that causes his father to leave and stay with his new family and

Evan’s mother to work extra hours leading to less and less time for her own son. The familial problems make Evan feel lonely and insecure. His insecurity further grows more severe as he has no real friends at school or anywhere in the world, not even *real* friends on social media. Evan’s

dead during most parts of the show and therefore, Connor only appears as Evan’s fragments of imagination. The Broadway musical makes it crystal clear that the story is mainly about Evan Hansen—Evan is the center of the attraction and everything is told through Evan’s perspective. It is

Anxiety in Dear Evan Hansen  
 Anxiety timeline

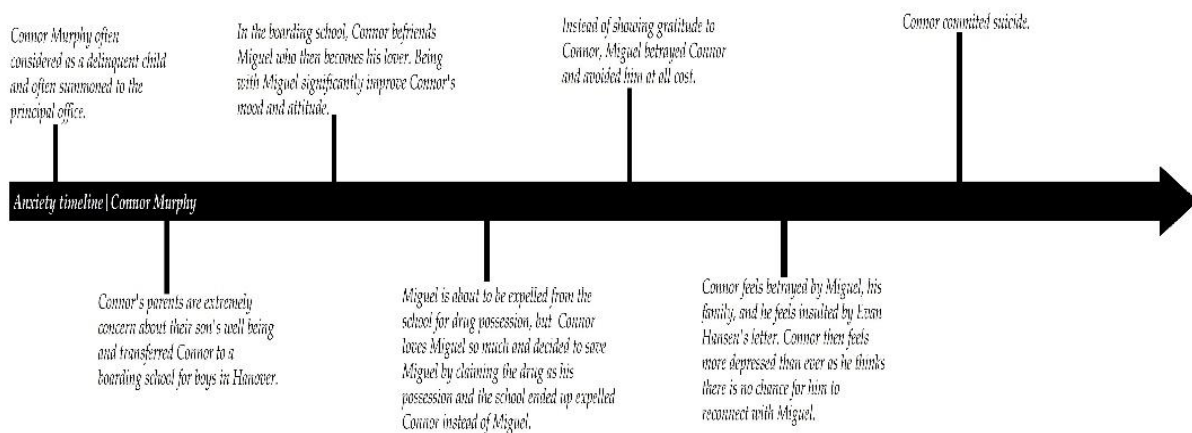


FIGURE 2: CONNOR MURPHY’S ANXIETY TIMELINE BASED SOLELY ON THE NOVEL.

loneliness and insecurity barricade Evan from interacting with people, a gleaming symptom of social anxiety disorder (Hemmings et al., 2018:53). In the Broadway musical *Dear Evan Hansen*, Connor Murphy committed suicide and his parents tell Evan about the suicide in Act One part Four (Levenson, 2017:49), rather early to the show considering the entire Act One consists of eleven parts. The death of Connor Murphy is extremely important in moving the story forward because his death brings Evan closer to Connor’s parents and to Connor’s sister, Zoe Murphy, whom Evan is truly and secretly in love with. Even though Connor’s death is the turning point in Act One, he is already

impossible to recreate Connor Murphy’s anxiety timeline based on the Broadway musical [alone]. Upon scrutinizing the novel, however, this research found that the novel makes it possible for this research to recreate Connor Murphy’s anxiety timeline not based on Evan Hansen’s imagination but based on Connor Murphy himself. This research recreated the timeline which can be seen in the following Figure 02.

Connor Murphy’s anxiety timeline shows that Connor, too, possibly suffers from social anxiety disorder. However, the source of his disorder is different from Evan’s in which Connor feels betrayed by his friends and most importantly, his

boyfriend Miguel. Connor comes from a wealthy family and his parents are intact. Therefore, there is no apparent reason for Connor to feel neglected by his own family as the song *Does Anybody Have a Map* (Pasek and Paul, 2017) shows that Connor's family always have breakfast together. Connor does use drugs and is considered a freak at school (Emmich et al., 2018:24-25), indicating that instead of suffering from anxiety disorder caused by familial problems like Evan, Connor's problems started within himself and with his friends. When his lover leaves him, Connor feels even more insecure and withdrawn from the society. The timeline shows that Connor eventually takes his own life. Connor's backstory can only be found in the novel and is absent throughout the musical.

### C. *Intertextual significance of the novel adaptation*

While Evan Hansen's anxiety timeline can be attained from the Broadway musical and the novel *Dear Evan Hansen*, Connor Murphy's anxiety timeline can only be attained from the novel adaptation. The musical does not explore Connor's background and focus entirely on Evan Hansen. Throughout the musical, Connor only appears in the beginning of Act One and through the rest of the musical, Connor appears only as fragments of Evan's imagination. In the song *Sincerely Me*, it is told that Evan and Jared are making fake emails they claim to be written by Connor as Evan tells Jared, "This needs to be perfect, these e-mails have to prove

that we were actually friends" (Pasek and Paul, 2017). In the song *If I Could Tell Her*, Evan tells Zoe Murphy how his brother, Connor, loves her—but Evan uses the opportunity to tell Zoe what he feels about her as he claims that his feelings are Connor's feelings by saying "He said, there's nothing like your smile, sort of subtle and perfect and real" (Pasek and Paul, 2017). Connor, of course, never said that to Zoe let alone to Evan, but Evan tells Zoe his feelings as if he is disclosing Connor's feelings. The creative adaptation adds more dimension to Connor Murphy—the novel provides audience with Connor's background sufficient enough to understand why he ended up taking his own life.

Based on the backstory of Connor Murphy, it is possible for one to put the backstory side by side with Evan's anxiety timeline to reveal how anxiety disorders may be triggered by different causes in different cases (different individuals). Connor's backstory also reveals how anxiety disorders can have different degrees of severity as Connor's anxiety leads him to suicide while Evan's anxiety leads him to tell lies to people about his relationship with Connor. Based on the fact that the addition of Connor's backstory in the novel adaptation of the Broadway musical *Dear Evan Hansen* allows the musical audience and readers to further understand the course of anxiety disorders, the novelization is not *inferior to* nor *degrading to* the Broadway musical, but *compliments* the musical and deepens the discussions on anxiety disorders in the musical.

## CONCLUSION

The novel adaptation of *Dear Evan Hansen* can be seen through the three perspectives based on the theory of adaptation. *Dear Evan Hansen* the novel is *transcoding* which means it is an “extensive transposition of a particular work or works” (Hutcheon and O’Flynn, 2013:7). The creative adaptation of *Dear Evan Hansen* can also be considered as a process of creation, in which “the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation; this has been called both appropriation and salvaging, depending on your perspective” (Hutcheon and O’Flynn, 2013:7-8). In the Broadway musical, both Evan Hansen and Connor Murphy’s sexual orientations are specifically addressed as *straight* as Evan performs the song *Sincerely Me* and both Evan and Connor sing “Our friendship goes beyond your average kind of fun. But not because we’re gay. No, not because we’re gay. We’re close, but not that way...” (Pasek and Paul, 2017). However, the novel adaptation specifically addresses Connor as bisexual (Emmich et al., 2018:234) and *possibly* exclusively gay—the authors of the novel might intended Connor to be exclusively gay, but if they insisted Connor to be gay, they would contradict the Broadway and therefore, they made Connor bisexual instead. This change does affect the overall course of the story because Connor’s relationship with his boyfriend, Miguel, determines his state of mind which is the point of “(re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation” of the novel. *Dear Evan Hansen* the novel also appears as a form of *intertextuality* since the novel adaptation is “An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work” and since “...we experience adaptations (as adaptations) as palimpsests through our memory of other

works that resonate through repetition with variation” (Hutcheon and O’Flynn, 2013:8). Thus, based on the findings and discussion, this research concludes that the novel adaptation of *Dear Evan Hansen* transforms, deepens, and compliments the original Broadway musical and therefore, its existence is properly justified.

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