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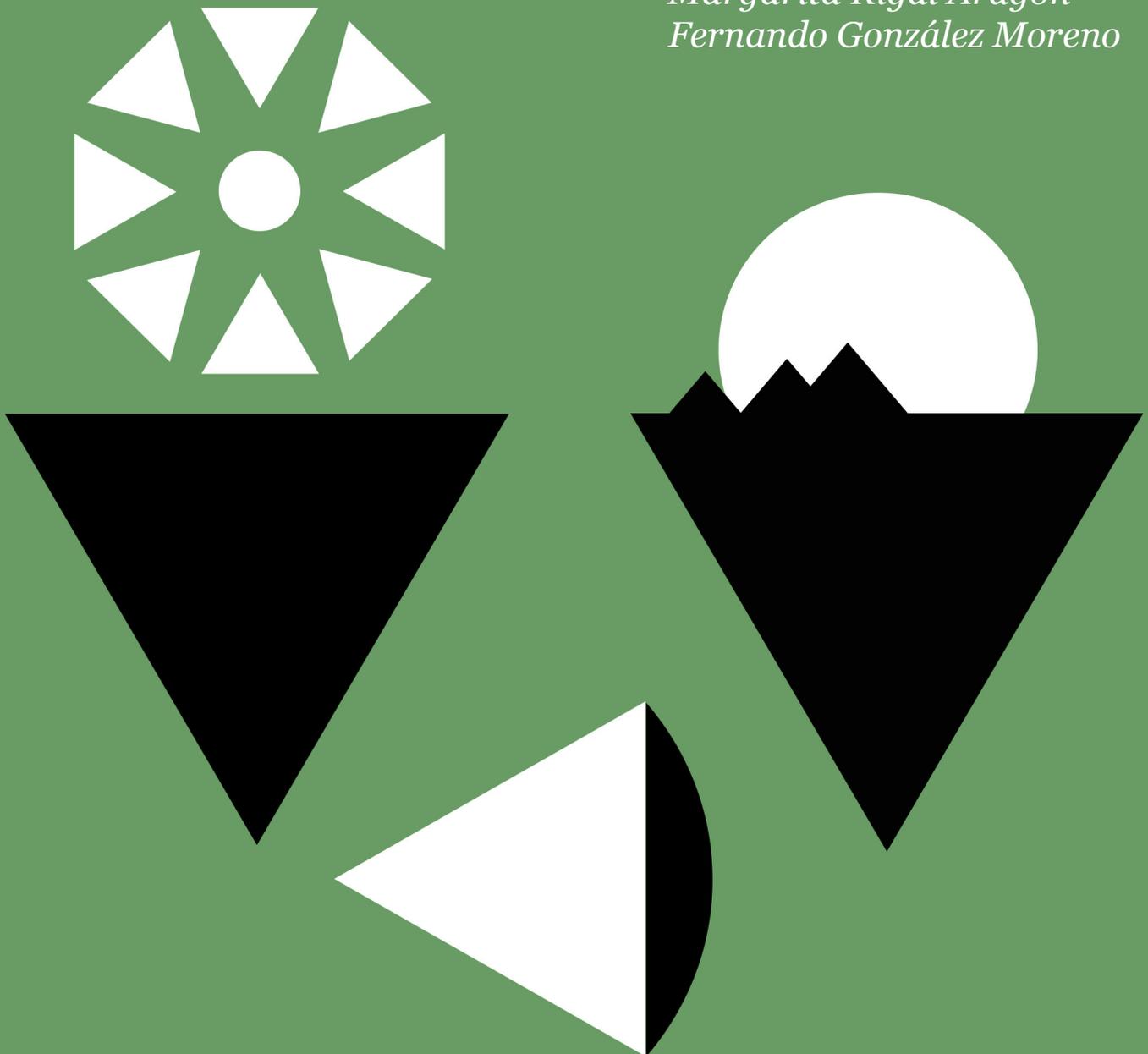
Estudios de Literatura Comparada 3

LITERATURA Y ECOLOGÍA,
LITERATURA Y VISUALIDAD,
VOCES DE ÁFRICA

EDITORES GENERALES

Margarita Rigal Aragón

Fernando González Moreno



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The Remains of the Day - *Novels into Film*

Lo que queda del día - *de novela a película*

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Abstract

With the development of society and the progress of technology, film and television, as mass media, have become an important part of the spiritual and cultural life of the contemporary world. Compared with novels, movies, as a multimedia product that combines audio-visual information, suddenly became popular due to its richness and diversity. Therefore, more and more novels are facing the adaptation of film and television, and many novelists tend to make their works more film and television potential in the early stage of creation. The writers' creative concepts and content have undergone profound changes.

In fact, the relationship between film and literature has received widespread attention since 1895, when the history of film began. No art is an independent and closed entity, and the connection between movies and novels is even more closely related. In particular, modern novels are not only interacting with neighboring genres such as poetry and drama, but they are also echoing distant disciplines such as music, painting, and even science and technology.

KEYWORDS: Kazuo Ishiguro, The Remains of the Day, Film Adaptation, Novel

Resumen

Con el desarrollo de la sociedad y el progreso de la tecnología, el cine y la televisión, como mega medios de comunicación, se han convertido en una parte importante de la vida espiritual y cultural del mundo contemporáneo. En comparación con las novelas, el cine, como producto multimedia que combina información audiovisual, se ha vuelto repentinamente popular debido a su riqueza y diversidad. Por ello, cada vez más novelas se enfrentan a la adaptación del cine y la televisión, y muchos novelistas tienden a dotar a sus obras de un mayor potencial cinematográfico y televisivo en la fase inicial de creación. Los conceptos y contenidos creativos de los escritores han sufrido profundos cambios.

De hecho, la relación entre el cine y la literatura ha recibido una amplia atención desde 1895, cuando comenzó la historia del cine. Ningún arte es una entidad independiente y cerrada, y la conexión entre el cine y las novelas está aún más estrechamente relacionada. En particular, las novelas modernas no sólo interactúan con géneros vecinos como la poesía y el drama, sino que también se hacen eco de disciplinas lejanas como la música, la pintura e incluso la ciencia y la tecnología.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Kazuo Ishiguro, Lo que queda del día, adaptación de novela, película

Introduction

Ishiguro's works have achieved literary and innovative foresight and have enough artistic value for filming. However, there is still a lack of studies about the comparison between his fictions and adapted movies. *The Remains of the Day* is a very good example that showcases why and how Kazuo Ishiguro's fictions are being adapted into films. Up to now, Ishiguro has published a total of seven novels. Among them, *The Remains of the Day* and *Never Let Me Go* have been put on the big screen. *The Remains of the Day* was released in 1993 as a British-American

drama film. Directed by James Ivory, adapted by Ruth Praver Jhabvala, and co-produced by Ismail Merchant, Mike Nichols, and John Calley. The film was nominated for eight Academy Awards, five Golden Globe Awards, and it was ranked by the British Film Institute in 1999 as the 64th greatest British film of the 20th century. Anthony Hopkins, who played the role of Mr. Stevens, won the Best Actor of British Academy Film Awards. Through the understanding of the historical development process of novels and films, and through the differences between the contexts of the two, the success and failure in the film adaptation of *The Remains of the Day* will be discussed.

Historical Review in Literature and Film

The video communication activities of literary works have existed since the birth of movies. Before movies, fictions found their way to painting and printing, thus establishing a tradition of communication. In different historical stages of social development, the interaction between film and literature represents different characteristics. Due to the popularity and commercial nature of movies, many people subconsciously believe that film and television works derived from literature are inherently inferior. The elite consciousness of literature is unconsciously consistent with the identity of researchers. Yet since the 20th century, the emerging film art and the ancient novel art have gradually formed a two-way interactive relationship during the development process: on the one hand, novels provide films with multi-level cultural resources ranging from thinking concepts to artistic forms and provide a basement of artistic characteristics of film. On the other hand, the rapid advancement of movies has given novels a profound influence by prompting continuous system adjustments, thus the film industry has triggered internal changes in the style of novels and has gradually taken the «visualization» narrative tendency into a new landscape of modern and contemporary novel creation. It is not because the cinema is language that it can tell such fine stories, but rather it has become language because it has told such fine stories (Metz 1971, 59). For modern novels that mainly rely on narrative techniques, the transition from «what to tell» to «how to tell» has become more and more prominent, and their reference to movies is, obviously, an important part. It can be considered as an essential innovation of the aesthetics of the novel.

At present, the film characteristics of novels are mainly reflected in the popularization of the topic and the linguistical simplification. Some writers tend to add more dialogue between the characters, which makes the novels more alike to scripts. In the case of Ishiguro, some researchers believe that his writing seems to be closer to popular than elite literature (The Paper 2017). Also, as Ishiguro has once said in an interview, «I wanted the language to flow and to feel natural, and yet it couldn't become too colloquial – too 'English'» (The Guardian 2016), the vocabulary in his novels is usually less complicate so that it can be easily translated into different language thus can obtain international readers. And like Ishiguro has admitted himself, his experience of working as a television screenwriter has influenced his writing style as well. While writing *A Pale View of Hills* (The Guardian 2016), he has struggled for a while to make sure that his novels can be sufficiently different from a screenplay. However, the historical background of *The Remains of the Day* seems to be minority interest, and even Ishiguro himself considers difficult to turn *The Remains of the Day* into a movie (TIFF Originals 2017) because the interior narrative occupies a significant part of the book, which is hard to be represented on the screen. Nevertheless, Harold Pinter approached Ishiguro before the book was ever published and he wrote the screenplay of the novel and made the deal with Columbia. His choice has further proved that *The Remains of the Day* is an extraordinary book and is worthy to be adapted. Then, with the interpretation of Ivory and Jhabvala, it was turned successfully into a great movie. For instance, as Debra Rogers has said to Ishiguro «your book is about self-denial, and the movie is about emotional repression» (TIFF Originals 2017), they have cut less

relevant plots and characters and thus high-lightened the main theme like the hidden love line from Mr. Stevens to Miss. Kenton, which makes the story more accessible to the public.

Due to the difference between text and audiovisual symbols, films cannot visually re-store all of the novel. It has been noted that «inasmuch as ... pictures are more easily recognized transnationally than ... languages, pictorial and multimodal metaphors allow for greater cross-cultural access than verbal ones» (Forceville 2009, 49). Feeling of superiority complex of literature is deeply ingrained in some researchers, thus it is difficult to maintain fair value judgement in academic research. The emergence of this dilemma is closely related to the shift of the starting point of the adaptation research. The research thinking of film adaptation starting from existing phenomena denies the problem of inter-literature. Therefore, if directors and screenwriters do not reproduce the original text as same as how it was written, it will be highly possible for them to be criticized by readers. In fact, in adaptations, «differences» and «similarities» are equally important. And it is obvious that Pinter, Ivory, and Jhabvala, of course, all of them have taken seriously this innate difference between the two types of arts and avoid putting the large part of view expressing and argumentation in the novel on the screen. Instead, they have decided to perform several major plots to directly and clearly show the storyline and build Mr. Stevens' characteristic.

Narrative Perspective

The first adaptation of the novel in the cinematic version appears at the beginning of the film. The unreliable first-person narrator in the original text is hidden. Unreliable narrative is a major narrative feature of Kazuo Ishiguro's writing. In *The Remains of the Day*, the protagonist, Mr. Stevens, is a typical unreliable narrator. In sharp contrast to the novel, this is not reflected in the movie. Although the film uses voice-over and flashback narrative methods, the whole film is told through an objective perspective. In fact, due to the inherent differences in the way of expression of text and image, it is fundamentally impossible for movies to provide the same narrative effect as novels. Brian McFarlane has pointed out that «in a sense, all films are omniscient: even when they employ a voice-over technique as a means of simulating the first-person novelistic approach, the viewer is aware, as indicated earlier, of a level of objectivity in what is shown, which may include what the protagonist sees but cannot help including a great deal else as well» (McFarlane 1996, 33).

Because of the differences in narrative methods, the narrative objects also undergo qualitative changes. It is well-known that viewpoint plays a decisive role in the narrative of novels, because it involves the flow and development of the story, the conflict and climax of the plot, the time sequence of events, the characters, and the central idea. All narrative elements and narrative methods in the text are related to the viewpoint. The use of different viewpoints appears not as a decorative modification but as a fundamental change to the original content of the novel, so that it can provide a new aspect to the novel. Rather than being added as an appendage that will transmit the plot to an audience, narrative point of view creates the interest, the conflicts, the suspense, and the plot itself in most modern narratives (Wallace 1991, 130-131). The «narrative perspective» refers to the angle and position of the author when constructing the text, and its establishment is a dual construction of narrative behavior and meaning. The author's specific standpoints for grasping the perspective of the characters will form a different story, and also make the text's emotional value turn different. We can see this change of narrative perspective in the very beginning of the film adaptation of *The Remains of the Day*. The source text begins with the first-person account of Mr. Stevens and remains with his perspective; however, the film begins with the narrative voice of Miss Kenton. This change avoids the possibility of letting Mr. Stevens talking monologue, thus the audience will not feel tiring about the flat narrative tone.

Another movement added in the cinematic version appears at 13'45" of the film, while Mr. Stevens is cleaning the crafts in the dining room and suddenly hears Miss Kenton called his father «William». Hopkins moves from a medium-long distance to the front; the frame is given from a medium-long shot to a close-up. Then the lens shot keeps moving so that we can see from Stevens' subjective perspective showing Miss Kenton's back walking down the lawn in a high-angle full shot frame. This plot is described in the source text like «Yes, Miss Kenton, just a small matter. I happened to be walking past the kitchen yesterday when I heard you calling to someone named William» and «I did hear you call several times for 'William'. May I ask who it was you were addressing by that name?» (Ishiguro 1989, 35). We can see that there is no mention of how Mr. Stevens heard this happened in the novel. However, if this «how» and «when» do not appear in the film, the audience will feel lost when Mr. Stevens asks about the condition. Here the shooting mode is noteworthy for analyzing. As everyone knows, high angle shot expresses that the subjective perspective is looking down on the person or object in the image. In terms of Mr. Stevens, obviously, he feels uncomfortable with Miss Kenton's action of directly calling his father's name because he does not see her as the housekeeper of Darlington Hall and his father as under-butler. Instead, he very much respects his father as a great butler and an elder, however, Miss Kenton is just a young woman. Miss Kenton's professional identity is being despised. This attitude is represented clearly through the shooting angle. Besides, Mr. Stevens sees Miss Kenton's back from a French window. The image of the French window can be seen as a metaphor of prison, which can be related to the ending frame of the film.

In fact, the source book ends with Mr. Stevens reflecting on his life at the seaside pier in Weymouth, Western England, but in the movie, he finally returns to Darlington Hall after his travel. This seems to imply that Stevens's symbolic journey of reflection and exploration has returned to its original point. In the cinematic version, the elimination of the «confession» scene also coincides with the above conclusion. Mr. Stevens in the film seems to have no regret about his past life, returns to his original place, and accepts his destiny calmly.

Description into Action

As far as novels and films are concerned, there are obvious differences in the discourse systems of the two. In terms of characterization, novels appeal to readers' imagination through text, nevertheless, the image of characters should be turned into a concrete figure in screen writings. In films, actions and scenes are usually interrelated, which means the shots should keep moving all the time to keep the audience being enjoyed. Yet the depiction in novels can be a series of specific psychological descriptions and it is flexible for the authors to add metaphors and strong emotional words that can hardly be found in screenplays. The way of narrative in novels is more concise and would leave more space for imagination for the readers because fiction is a kind of language art and film is basically a visual art. Novel is a form of theory and reasoning, and film relies on performance, where the audience can see and hear through. Actions and dialogue usually form the main body of screenplays. Typically, dialogue will feature prominently and will be interspersed with action (Forster 1927). E.M. Foster has considered in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) that «the specialty of the novel is that the writer can talk about his characters as well as through them or can arrange for us to listen when they talk to themselves. He has access to self-communing, and from that level he can descend even deeper and peer into the subconscious» (Forster 1927, 59).

As have been mentioned before, the narrative of films is all about movement. Scenes must keep moving in order to put the story forward. It has been considered that flat characters are easily recognized whenever they come in and easily remembered by the reader afterwards, which can be understood as flat characters always have a more fixed character trait. On the contrary, round characters are capable of surprise, contradiction, and change, they are representations of human beings in all their complexity (Forster 1927). Most of the figures in

Ishiguro's works are round figures. Their characteristics do not remain the same in front of the readers in a straightforward manner and their qualities and emotions are constantly changing in the development of the plot of the novel. However, Mr. Stevens seems to be exceptional. His attitudes towards his profession keep from the beginning to the end of the story, the yearning of dignity and the respect of loyalty run through his life. This makes his image very compact and easily adaptable for films. The audience can see his characteristics at a glance, but at the same time it is easy to make the character seem restrained. Such distinctive features make Mr. Stevens a unique hero who is incredibly challenging for actors. But Hopkins does well in his play, as said Merchant (Hopkins and Thompson 1993), «Hopkins is a performer who can twitch an eye and an audience will see and feel what is happening so far as his emotions are concerned» (Raw 2012, 12). What Hopkins has done coincides with Ivory's way of treating a character. He sees them like «a set of choices and behaviors- a process rather than a discrete entity» (Blair 2007, 183).

For example, in the source text of *The Remains of the Day*, when Lord Darlington talks about the two Jewish maids, Mr. Stevens thinks that

Indeed, the maids had been perfectly satisfactory employees and - I may as well say this since the Jewish issue has become so sensitive of late - my every instinct opposed the idea of their dismissal. Nevertheless, my duty in this instance was quite clear, and as I saw it, there was nothing to be gained at all in irresponsibly displaying such personal doubts. It was a difficult task, but as such, one that demanded to be carried out with dignity (Ishiguro 1989, 99).

Such mental activity inside his head is barely representable in film unless by using a voice-over, however, Hopkins' action of rubbing his finger along the mantelpiece shows the ambivalence of Stevens. He looks down and appears awkward and apologetic, which conveys Stevens' helplessness. As a butler who dedicates his life assisting and trusting his lord, it is hardly possible for Stevens to directly argue Lord Darlington at that time no matter how he denies in his mind to execute the order. «The effectiveness of action does not depend on what people do, but on the meaning of what they do» (Lawson 2014, 168). Although there is no dialogue involved in this scene, the way that Hopkins performs precisely portrays the hesitation of Stevens.

Commercial Intention

For adaptation, directors and screenwriters do not read in a purely aesthetic way, instead, they read pragmatically and intensively. Previous research argues that «New Criticism at its best never suggested that a literary text should be read hermetically as an independent creation but rather that it simply required deliberate and intensive study» (Rudnicki 2009, 294). The way that directors and screenwriters read coincides with this theory. They read original literary works based on the standpoint of films, see the source content with a practical perspective, and try to absorb all the materials that could be reused to form a complete and independent storyline. To attract the interest and approval of potential audience, it requires a sensitive literary comprehension and a strong will of adaptors. The way that directors and screenwriters read coincides with this theory. They read original literary works based on the standpoint of films, see the source content with a practical perspective, and try to absorb all the materials that could be reused to form a complete and independent storyline. The combination of Mr. Farraday and Mr. Lewis in the film can be considered as one of the first interpretations behind this pragmatic change by the director. In the source content, Mr. Farraday is the new owner of Darlington Hall, who has never been present before he bought this place. Stevens says that «the house is now the residence of Mr. John Farraday, an American gentleman.» (Ishiguro 1989, 82). And Mr. Lewis is an American senator who arrived at Darlington Hall in 1923 for a conference (Ishiguro 1989, 59). The shared feature of these two characters is their American background. To concentrate the storyline and make the image of this new owner

more dramatic, these two are mixed as one character in the cinematic version. This adaptation emphasizes the historical background of this replacement of Darlington Hall's owner.

In the film, Mr. Lewis is interpreted as a typical prototype of a nouveau-riche American with a blue-blooded British property. They choose Christopher Reeves for this character, who has been well known as a Hollywood actor by playing Superman's role. Himself is a representative of the U.S. and the «American Dream» and very attractive to the audience. In both the novel and the film, Mr. Lewis has had a discussion with the European property, which shows the conflict between American and Europe at that time. Mr. Lewis says that «You gentlemen here, forgive me, but you are just a bunch of naive dreamers. And if you didn't insist on meddling in large affairs that affect the globe, you would actually be charming.» and «a classic English gentleman. Decent, honest, well-meaning. But his lordship here is an amateur» (Ishiguro 1989, 70). And this speech is copied in the cinematic version. The American Senator, representing an icon of a rising great country, criticizes the English virtues, or assesses the obsolete British culture cruelly. Thus, indicates the destination of his replacement of Lord Darlington, and expresses the fall of British gentleman. This change of mixing Mr. Farraday and Mr. Lewis in the cinematic version can be considered as a punchline of the adaptation, which reduces a less prominent role (Mr. Farraday) and offers Mr. Lewis a richer characteristic. Hence, the coming of the new owner of Darlington Hall becomes a more interesting and ironic plot for the audience.

Conclusions

The adaptation from novels to movies is, in fact, a transition from text to audiovisual symbols, and also a transition from traditional media (books) to mass media. The process of bringing the novel to the big screen is actually a re-creation of the original work by filmmakers. «Only when the text, the actors and the audience are within the scope of the common experience, the film and television symbols can fulfill their communication function, and the film can obtain the value of its existence» (Meng 2012). When *The Remains of the Day* has been adapted into film, it faces, on the one hand, a text full of British characteristics; and on the other hand, audiences from different countries around the world. Different creators also have their own unique social and cultural backgrounds, creative interests, aesthetic cultivation, and artistic concepts. As can be seen from the award nominations that *The Remains of the Day* has achieved, this film version is undoubtedly a work of great artistic value. Ishiguro's own experience as a screenwriter, as well as the tacit understanding between Ivory and Jhabvala who have collaborated many times, and the targeted deletion and adaptation of the original text, are all indispensable factors for the success of the movie version of *The Remains of the Day*.

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