

## The “Double Natured” Media Landscape in the Classroom: Postulating the Technicalities of Representation in the Film *The Remains of the Day*

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### **Abstract**

Media, in its variegated avatars is omnipresent in our times and more so in the domain of knowledge. Even in the domain of classroom pedagogy, improvisations using media have played a vital role. In the literature classroom, the cinematic adaptations of notable texts have paved the way for easy comprehension of the nuances of the themes and plots for the students. Kazuo Ishiguro’s magnum opus, *The Remains of the Day* (1989) is one such novel which was adapted into a film under the banner of Merchant Ivory Productions in 1993. This cinematic adaptation took glaring liberties with certain scenes and instances which highlight the differences between the text and the film. Borrowing the idea of “Double Nature” from Linda Hutcheon, this paper focuses on the inherent differences which creep in during the process of cinematic adaptation. The primary effort of this paper would be to depict the changes shown in the film in the intricacies of memory of the characters in the plot.

**Keywords:** Cinematic adaptation, classroom pedagogy, double nature, memory, original text

Literary adaptations have always been fascinating when it comes to analysing their importance in a classroom setting. A particular adaptation of a text into a film not only brings in multiple perspectives but also makes the students realize how diverse and different inherent ideas of the same plot can be. However, what becomes a matter of serious concern is the change which is seen in relation to the presentation of

the plot in the process of adaptation of a literary text into a film. More often than not, the conversion of a text into a film creates avenues for criticism as the film never really seems to exhibit all fidelity towards the original text. The perspectives which emerge after the cinematic adaptation of a particular text also lead to further engagement of the students in the classroom with the new text that emerges through a new representation. The primary reason behind this is that at the heart of every visual representation there is the involvement of the cognitive faculty of the students which gets stimulated when encountering visual representations. In her book, *A Theory of Adaptation*, the noted Canadian critic, Linda Hutcheon (2006) contends that, "an adaptation's double nature does not mean...that proximity or fidelity to the adapted text should be the criterion of judgement or the focus of analysis" (p. 6).

The present article uses this idea of "double nature" put forward by Hutcheon while making an attempt to engage with the cinematic adaptation of *The Remains of the Day*. Ishiguro's 1987 novel was directed by James Ivory and produced under the banner of Merchant Ivory Films in 1993. An important inference which can be drawn from the cinematic adaptation is that it can be viewed as an original work of visual representation. Moreover, students tend to be more attentive and involved while watching a film as opposed to listening to a critical lecture by their teacher. Adaptation, in this sense, is nothing but "the representation of representation" (Smith, 2006, p. 425). In the case of the film, *The Remains of the Day* there is a conspicuously altered representation in the film with regard to the plot of the novel. The primary story revolves around the central protagonist, Stevens, who is the old butler at Darlington Hall in both the text and the film. But, what makes the plot of the film slightly different is the addition of new scenes which might interest the students in a classroom but would surely irk scholars and critics alike. In this context, one may refer to the noted theorist, Peter Barry (2002) who makes a proper distinction between what can be called a story and a plot. According to him, "the 'story' is the actual sequence of events as they happened, whereas the 'plot' is those events as they are edited, ordered, packaged, and presented..." (p. 223).

Memory and its off-shoots become the cornerstones in the plots of both the text and the film which act as guiding lights in the lives of the different characters. Stevens' life within the grand structure of Darlington Hall epitomizes luxurious living but as the readers can very well sense,

Stevens seems to hanker after a missing piece of some puzzle in his life. There is a sense of discontentment in Stevens which the readers of the text can relate to, and it is the engulfing grip of his traumatized memory which holds him firm. The text revolves around a six-day journey undertaken by Mr. Stevens to the west of the English country side, beginning from Salisbury and taking him to other places such as Dorset, Somerset, Devon, Cornwall before concluding at Weymouth. This journey can be viewed as both literal and metaphorical, and forms an indispensable part of the narration of the plot as it deals with the 'rediscovery' of Stevens which was facilitated by the new American owner of Darlington Hall, Mr. Farraday.

It is also observed that although Stevens is presented as the head butler of Darlington Hall in the novel, he never seems to be content in his position. At the back of his mind, there exists an inherent sadness. He is always burdened by his earnest desire to accomplish his 'duty' and this, to some extent, prevents him from having a trouble-free space in his mind. Referring to the idea of "double nature", Hutcheon (2006) argues that a film always tends to make various kinds of changes both in the plot and the presentation of the characters when compared to the text and that, "writing a screenplay is a labour to simplify the heavy plot of a novel" (p. 1). Also, whenever a film is being made or a literary text is being adapted into cinema there is a simultaneous production of numerous stories which combine culture and history as well. As film critic Christian Metz states, "adaptation tells us continuous stories; it 'says' things that could be conveyed also in the language of words, yet it says them differently. There is a reason for the possibility as well as for the necessity of adaptation" (as cited in Hutcheon, p. 3). Hutcheon, while citing Metz, argues that adaptation plays a vital role in the development of previously unseen tales which can open up numerous possibilities of discussions both in the context of a classroom and in the society at large. A particular adaptation does not come with a mundane recreation of the book; it always entails numerous events and scenes which are either not a part of the book or are altered and twisted so that they suit the purpose and the context of the film. This, resultantly, leads to the development of stories which lead to meaningful discussions in a classroom.

However, the journey, which is so important both in the context of the plot of the text and in the context of the life of Stevens, gets considerably reduced in the film, leading to a setback in the literary delight of the plot.

The text also lays out the serene English landscape with its Arcadian feel, as observed during the course of the journey undertaken by Stevens. With the film shortening the journey, the beauty of the landscape also fades to a certain extent, and thus, there are vivid differences in the representation of the scenes in the film. Ishiguro makes the following remark in relation to showcasing the serenity of the mesmerizing greenery:

I wished to set this book in a mythical landscape, which to a certain extent resembled that mythical version of England that is peddled in the nostalgia industry at the moment. This idea of England, this green, pleasant place of leafy lanes and grand country houses and butlers and tea on the lawn, cricket—this vision of England that actually does play a large role in the political imaginations of a lot of people, not just British people but people around the world...I felt it was a perfectly reasonable mission on my part to set out to slightly redefine that mythical, cosy England, to say that there is a shadowy side to it. In a way I wanted to re-write P.G. Wodehouse with a serious political dimension (as cited in Kelman, 1991, p. 71).

The significance of the difference in the representation of the landscape in the novel and the film is that it helps identify the difference in aesthetics of the two modes. It has to be stated that the novel primarily focuses on the signs of language for erecting the story, whereas the film deals basically with different icons. The students can relate to the inherent pleasure involved in the visual depiction of the scenes in a film which also bolster their critical thinking. The different icons of a film bring in a direct relationship with the audience but a book does not necessarily create that sense of engagement with the readers. Some films also carry an angle of didacticism; in that, there is the presence of a value and moral content, leaving its impression upon the viewer. Characterization in a film creates identification, leading to a direct experience of life. It can be argued that films lead to the development of active retelling of events in the minds of the students as they can connect and develop links to their personal lives and experiences. They also help in the process of re-framing of personal experiences through different angles.

These altered presentations provide discussion points in classroom teaching because there is a development of the critical faculty of the students which gets engendered, inspired and nurtured by the varied presentations of scenes and events. A particular film becomes a medium

of transformation for the students both at the social and the personal level, leading to the development of their own selves, or what can be referred to as the process of “individuation”. “Individuation means becoming a single, homogeneous being, and in so far as individuality embraces or innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one’s own self. One could therefore, translate ‘individuation’ as coming to selfhood or self-realization” (Kellis, 2007, p. 324).

Memory plays a significant role in both the text and the cinematic adaptation. But the portrayal of the character of Stevens’ father in the film becomes another point of departure. In the novel, Stevens’ father is no longer capable of carrying out his duties as the butler properly as he has become old and forgetful. In order to reduce the senior Mr. Stevens’ workload, Lord Darlington asks Stevens to inform his father that he was no longer required to collect the trays of food and wait at tables. Needless to say, the senior Mr. Stevens is not too pleased at these orders. When asked not to wait at the tables anymore, Stevens’ father is annoyed and replies, “I have waited at the table every day for the last fifty-four years” (Ishiguro, 1989, p. 68). In the cinematic adaptation Stevens is only ordered to reduce the duties of his father without paying any great attention to the detailed portrayal of scenes such as these in the novel. Both the father and son privilege their responsibility above everything else.

In the very next frame, the scene shifts to early morning which is nowhere in the text. In another instance, the film shows a conference with other European guests at Darlington Hall, which is not a part of the novel. The cinematic presentation brings to the fore the otherwise hidden dimensions of societal and cultural truths. The film, then, becomes the medium for conveying different kinds of truths and viewpoints of the society at large. As Hutcheon (2006) observes, “Each medium, according to the ways in which it exploits, combines and multiplies the ‘familiar’ materials of expression—rhythm, movement, gesture, music, speech, image, writing each medium...possesses its own communicational energetic (p. 34). As for Stevens’ trip, the readers of the book realize that at its core lies his latent desire to meet Miss Kenton towards whom he has had feelings of love. However, it is amusing to read into Stevens’ roundabout reasons for visiting her:

I found myself reconsidering Mr. Farraday’s kind suggestion of some days ago. For it had occurred to me that the proposed trip in the car

could be put to good professional use; that is to say, I could drive to the West Country and call on Miss Kenton in passing, thus exploring at first hand the substance of her wish to return to employment here at Darlington Hall (Ishiguro, 1989, p. 10)

Kyle Dawson Edwards (1940), in his famous essay entitled, "Brand-Name Literature: Film Adaptation and Selznick International Pictures' *Rebecca*", states that, "In some film adaptations, the original story lines are drastically altered, characters eliminated, condensed or combined, and narrative emphases shifted: other adaptations attempt scene-for-scene transcriptions of the source material" (p. 32). The presentation of the characters in the film is a significant aspect as Mr. Farraday, who is of paramount importance in the text does not feature at all in the film. "Cutting and combining characters helps condense an unwieldy novel into a workable form" (Seger, 1992, p. 3). The film fleshes out another character, Mr. Lewis, who was present at the conference at Darlington Hall, and who was keen to purchase the Hall. In the novel, the new American owner, Mr. Farraday hosts an American couple and shows them around the estate. Mrs. Wakefield, wants to know the truth about the estate:

Mrs. Wakefield: 'But tell me, Stevens, what was this Lord Darlington like? Presumably you must have worked for him.' 'I didn't, madam, no.' 'Oh, I thought you did. I wonder why I thought that' (Ishiguro, 1989, p. 129).

When confronted by Mr. Farraday as to why he had lied to Mrs. Wakefield, Stevens had no answer. In yet another instance, Stevens lies blatantly to the chauffeur when his car breaks down on the road. When asked by the chauffeur if he had ever worked for Lord Darlington, Stevens simply replied, "Oh no, I am employed by Mr. John Farraday, the American gentleman who bought the house from the Darlington family" (Ishiguro, 1989, p. 126). The scene with Mrs. Wakefield does not find any kind of mention in the film, and regarding the second instance, the director creates a completely new scene. The viewer finds that Stevens is out on the roads and when asked about Lord Darlington by a shopkeeper, he replies that he didn't know him. H. Harting (2011), in his article, "Sentiment and History in the *Remains of the Day*" contends that, "*The Remains of the Day* works to produce a surfeit of feeling or affect on the part of the reader, and it does so at the same time that it

thematizes emotional distance, repression of desire, and stultifying anti-sentimentalism" (p. 3).

This reluctance of Stevens to acknowledge his former master is not due to any reasons of discontent or disaffection from the lord or with his work as his butler. The reminiscences in the entire narrative (textual as well as cinematic) bear testimony to Stevens' sense of pride in his work. He is meticulous, resourceful and runs Darlington Hall perfectly in its glory days. He is a gentleman's gentleman, and that is the hallmark of his trade. Stevens is relentlessly diligent in all his associations and dealings, as is his father (the under-butler) to the very end of his life. Senior Mr. Stevens' general decline is almost a metaphor for Lord Darlington's obtuseness vis-a-vis the Germans, as well as for the anticipated collapse of the Darlington peerage. Lord Darlington is retrospectively perceived as an early Nazi sympathizer who has entertained some rather questionable German emissaries under his roof. He is not an evil man, but as his nephew points out to Stevens, he is too naïve to understand the full import of his association with the Germans and their friends. Lord Darlington's fall from grace is a pretty hard one: in fact he doesn't survive it. The Darlington peerage ends with him, because no one stakes a claim to it. Even his nephew does not wish to be associated with him at this point. Stevens' reticence has to be seen in the same context. Stevens feels embarrassed about Lord Darlington, and perhaps even sorry for him. In any case, he does not wish to answer any questions about him; he wishes to "avoid unpleasantness". Part of this reluctance could also have to do with Stevens' own guilt of having been an impassive bystander, refusing to ever honestly caution/ warn/ confront the lord, simply because as a butler, it wasn't his place. In the final analysis, that is not enough to absolve him. The whole idea of duty, so pervasively troped across the narrative, acquires an entirely different complexity here. If Stevens' job was indeed to serve Lord Darlington, then turning a blind eye to his naivete would perhaps amount to a most immoral dereliction of duty. The pathologies of Stevens' equation with Lord Darlington manifest in other ways in his equation with Miss Kenton turned Mrs. Benn too. He cannot bring himself to say what he really means to because he is afraid of committing any impropriety. He is entirely, exasperatingly correct, as a butler and as a man; and yet he is almost completely wrong as both.

The ending of the film, however, privileges Stevens' seeking to look forward rather than into the past. In the end, the viewer finds Mr.

Stevens and Mrs. Benn making their way to the pier where they watch the lights in the pier glow. Later, Mrs. Benn is shown boarding a bus to leave the place, and Stevens is found coaxing a confused pigeon to come out of the banquet room. He is back to take his place again at Darlington Hall. These scenes are not found in the text and can be stated to be innovations for the purpose of cinematic adaptation. In the words of Linda Seger (1992), "in making the transition to film, many books or plays that are downers have had the endings changed in order to appeal to the wider demographics of film and television" (p. 6). The last part of the novel contains a monologue which is somewhat melancholic in tone and nature. As Stevens reflects, "Indeed—why should I not admit it?—at that moment, my heart was breaking" (Ishiguro, 1989, p. 252). Whereas in the film, the act of rescuing the pigeon and allowing it to fly is a symbolic indication of the new lease of life which Stevens seems to experience towards the close. If the ending of the text is gloomy, the ending of the film is full of vitality and hope, and both these endings are poles apart when compared to each other.

The film, *The Remains of the Day*, then, can be considered as a cinematic adaptation which reiterates positivity, hope and serenity. Contrarily, the ending of the novel depicts how Stevens is still caught between his desire to be the perfect butler and his own personal desires and wishes. It can safely be stated that Stevens, at the end of the film, is a completely different individual with his mind freed of preconceived notions related to the accomplishment of his duty. It is worth noting that even in the case of drama, the different dialogues and scenes which are otherwise printed on a piece of paper get translated into specific performances which are enacted on the stage by various actors. Hutcheon (2006) argues specifically in relation to the conversion of different kinds of dialogues into performances by different actors by stating,

In a very real sense, every live staging of a printed play could theoretically be considered an adaptation in its performance. The text of a play does not necessarily tell an actor about such matters as the gestures, expressions, and tones of voice to use in converting words on a stage into a convincing performance; it is up to the director and actors to actualize the text and to interpret and then recreate it, thereby in a sense adapting it for the stage (p. 39).

Regarding the presentation of different characters in various kinds of cinematic representations, Thomas Leitch (2003) observes that, "Novels



create more complex characters than movies because they offer more immediate and complete access to character's psychological states. The ability to enter the minds of fictional characters directly is of course one of the glories... of prose fiction" (p. 158). What stands out in the presentation of the film and in the narration of the text is that both are unique in their depiction and are masterpieces in their own ways, speaking in languages unique to their respective mediums. In a world dominated by OTT platforms, the use of films as a multimedia device to teach in a classroom is an important means to engage with students. The stories seen in the text and the film need to be viewed as two independent entities and the pedagogy needs to address it accordingly. It would be justified to conclude with this observation by Hutcheon (2006), "Art is derived from other art; stories are born of other stories" (p. 2).

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