



The Unreliable Narrator Caught on Film

**A Comparison between the Novel *The Remains of the Day* and the Film
Based on it**

Johan Karlsson

ENGK01

Degree Essay

Spring 2012

English Studies

Centre for Languages and Literature

Lund University

Supervisor: Ellen Turner

Contents

Introduction..... 1

Film Adaptation 2

The Unreliable Mr. Stevens in the Novel..... 3

Narration in the Film 9

Dealing with the Unreliable Narrator in the Film..... 11

Conclusion 14

Works Cited 16

Introduction

Most people would likely agree to that a film of roughly 90 minutes can never quite capture the entirety of a longer novel, but that it should be able to catch the most important and more profound parts of it in order to successfully retell the story. In *A Theory of Adaptation* Linda Hutcheon states that “a novel, in order to be dramatized, has to be distilled, reduced in size, and thus, inevitably, complexity” (36), but that condensing the plot can also lead to it becoming more powerful. This would suggest that in adapting a novel into a film there will be things that are lost, but possibly also gained.

In Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel *The Remains of the Day* (1989) the story is told from a first person perspective by the butler Mr. Stevens, who can be argued to be an unreliable narrator. According to the *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, an unreliable narrator is “a narrator whose account of events appear to be faulty, misleadingly biased, or in other ways distorted” (268). The film adaptation likewise titled *The Remains of the Day* (1993) is told from a more objective third person view. It is therefore prudent to ask the question of whether it is still possible to keep Ishiguro’s story intact with this switch in point of view. One might also raise the question of whether it is possible to successfully transpose the gap which exists in the novel between the narratee and the reader to film, or if it is even necessary. This essay will not argue that either the novel or the movie is “better”, it will simply consider if any elemental changes have taken part in the story as a result of the transition from novel to film.

The first chapter of this essay deals with adaptation theory and provides a short summary of what constitutes an adaptation as well as some of the reasons that exist for adapting novels. The main part of the essay, starting with chapter two, deals with the main character and narrator in the novel, Mr. Stevens. A short analysis of him will be presented and it will explain in what ways Mr. Stevens can be said to be an unreliable narrator and what his reason for keeping the truth (or slightly altering it) from the narratee is. The third chapter provides an analysis of how the film *The Remains of the Day* is narrated, but this part also brings up the question of whether it is possible that some important scenes from the novel have become impossible due to the change of point of view. In the last chapter I will discuss how the movie version deals with the loss of the unreliable narrator and if our view of Mr. Stevens is changed when he is not the one telling the story. Portraying something in an objective way becomes problematic when the narrator is unsure of how things happened.

I believe that the unreliable narrator is of great importance to the novel, as it is the account by Mr. Stevens' that allows the reader to gradually find out what kind of person he is. I also believe that the film might be able to utilize some other device than an unreliable narrator to be able to show some of the more profound parts of the novel, and so the aim of this essay is to show that something fundamentally important to the story that is present in the novel is not necessarily lost in the movie. Even though the film circumvents Mr. Stevens' unreliable narration, thus changing the point of view, we can still see all the factors responsible for turning Mr. Stevens into an unreliable narrator in the novel in the film.

Film Adaptation

Adaptations of great novels and even comic books are quite usual as any casual filmgoer knows. Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day* is one of many novels that have been adapted for the film screen. According to Hutcheon, adaptation is not something that is new to modern days; in fact she calls it a "part of Western culture" (2). She goes on to suggest that adaptations have "overt and defining relationships to prior texts" (3). Thus, adaptations are not new texts or stories, but a way to relate a story to an audience in a new way. Using this view, it is then possible to say that James Ivory's film *The Remains of the Day* is a retelling of the story created by Kazuo Ishiguro in his novel carrying the same name. However, Brian McFarlane states that "the precursor literary work is only an aspect of the film's intertextuality" (167), suggesting that the tradition of filmmaking also can be seen as a strong influence on films that are based or influenced by books. Further, when Hutcheon states that "adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication" (7) she is inviting us to consider the thought that an adaptation is not intended to be simply another original. Something can be true to the essence of the source without being a copy of it.

Sometimes an adaptation will surpass the source text, and the adapter will achieve more renown than the author of the work on which the film might be based. Thomas Leitch comments on this interesting fact in his article *Twelve Fallacies in Adaption Theory*: "Stanley Kubrick's films, all of them similarly adaptations of literary source texts, are universally recognized as distinctively his" (163). He continues to provide the examples of Orson Welles and Walt Disney, whose works are in some cases more known than the textual sources they were based on. This means that it is thoroughly possible that an adaptation will become more known and celebrated than the original source material, suggesting that adaptations are often times more than able to function as standalone works, not having to be

supported by original sources. They can become works in their own right so to speak, not constantly compared to some original.

When a story is transferred from one medium to another, there are bound to be differences between the source and the “new” work. Something that is written in a novel might take a much longer time for an actor to say than for someone to read for instance. As stated in the introduction of this essay, some parts of the story will have to be removed, altered or indeed, “distilled” (36), as Hutcheon puts it, in order for a literary text to fit into its new cinematic frame. However this reduction is not necessarily a negative thing as the story may gain something in the process as well. It is of course possible to suggest that novels and films have such different modes of narration that retelling a story accurately becomes very hard, if not impossible. However, Leitch states in his article that films are not merely visual, but “audio-visual... depending as they do on soundtracks as well as image tracks for their effects” (153). This suggests that cinema has many other devices to employ when adapting a literary work for the screen. The soundtrack and the visual theme might play just as an important role when determining whether an adaptation is successful as the actual screenplay.

There are many reasons why novels are adapted. Naturally, financial gain is one of them. As Hutcheon states: “expensive collaborative art forms like... films are going to look for safe bets” (87). In more than one case this means going with something well known and appreciated, like the adaptation of a popular novel. As Hutcheon suggests, a “name alone” can sell a film (88). Usually a film adaptation of a novel will also benefit the novel, as according to Hutcheon, sales of the novel increases and publishers often print new editions (90). Another reason for adaptation could be to increase one’s cultural capital. A film adaptation of one of Shakespeare’s plays or a classic novel could be seen as an upward move in “the perceived hierarchy of the arts” (90). Other reasons for making an adaptation could be to pay tribute to one’s favorite work, or maybe even to be able to make a slight critical comment. It is therefore possible to suggest that how an adaptation is rendered on screen can be dependent on the motives for adapting it.

The Unreliable Mr. Stevens in the Novel

Ishiguro’s novel *The Remains of the Day* is narrated by Mr. Stevens, the butler of Darlington Hall. As Mr. Stevens goes on a motoring trip in order to see and possibly re-employ Miss Kenton, the former housekeeper of Darlington Hall, he relates the current and past events of his life to the narratee. The narratee remains unnamed and is only referred to occasionally as

“you”. The story is clearly focalized through Mr. Stevens’ eyes. The narratee never questions Mr. Stevens or asks him to clarify anything. It is most likely that the narratee is also a butler, as Mr. Stevens sometimes uses phrases like “we have” and “each of us” when discussing the essence of being a butler (45).

Lilian Furst states in her article “Memory’s Fragile Power in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Remains of the Day* and W.G. Sebald’s “Max Ferber” that Mr. Stevens often seems to be sure of what he remembers, stating that this can be seen in the language he uses, talking about how Mr. Stevens “recalls” and “remembers”. However, Furst also brings up the fact that Mr. Stevens sometimes appears unsure of his memory and suggests that this is “casting a shadow over what he claims to recall well” (535-536). Considering how Mr. Stevens sometimes talks about events that happened more than 20 years ago being critical of the narrator’s memory is probably prudent. When Mr. Stevens reflects upon some particular comments about his father’s failing abilities as a butler, he is unsure of whether it was his colleague Miss Kenton or his employer Lord Darlington who actually provided them, using words like “I have a feeling...” (62-63). There is clearly a contrast in the novel between what Mr. Stevens seems to remember clearly and what he is not certain of.

Mr. Stevens ponders over a letter he has received from Miss Kenton which he is sure expresses her “desire to return” to Darlington Hall (10). As Mr. Stevens re-reads the letter later in the novel there is evidence to suggest that maybe Stevens is just doing some wishful thinking. He admits that nowhere in this letter does Miss Kenton “state explicitly” that she actually wants to return to Darlington Hall but the butler is still convinced that that is the general meaning of her letter (50). When re-reading the letter Mr. Stevens also reminds himself that her name is now actually Mrs. Benn, as she has been married for several years. Considering how he has referred to her only as Miss Kenton earlier, this gives the impression that Stevens does not like the fact that she is married, or that he does not really take her marriage very seriously. He is in fact convinced her marriage is soon coming to an end, and so he assumes that she would be very happy to return to the comfort of Darlington Hall (50). It seems almost as if Mr. Stevens is transferring his own hopes onto Miss Kenton. As Mr. Stevens goes through the letter several times throughout the novel his impression of it changes however. For instance, even later in the novel Steven looks at the letter again, and states that “there is nothing stated... to indicate unambiguously her desire to return” (149). As the contents of Miss Kenton’s letter are never fully revealed but only summarized by Mr. Stevens, we cannot know what is actually there. The reader has only the narrator’s own voice to go on. Mr. Stevens, in going from being absolutely convinced that Miss Kenton wants to

return to Darlington Hall to doubting that that is really what she wants creates, in a way, distrust in Mr. Stevens from the reader's side. As Susanne Keen suggests in *Narrative Form*, Ishiguro uses the gap between the narratee and the implied reader to good effect (34). Considering how Stevens' impression of what Miss Kenton actually says in her letter changes each time he goes through it, the reader (whether actual or implied), cannot be sure that the other things and episodes he retells are accurate, and not colored by his current emotions or feelings towards the subject.

Mr. Stevens' questionable memory coupled with the sometimes unaware input of personal feelings has a clear effect on how Mr. Stevens narrates both current and past events in the novel. Mr. Stevens is not always aware of being an unreliable narrator, as seems to be the case with Miss Kenton's letter, but it is quite clear that Mr. Stevens' narration agrees well with the description from the *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* presented in the introduction of this essay, being both faulty and distorted at times.

The parts of the novel where Mr. Stevens talks about Miss Kenton's letter all take place in the present, but there are also parts of the novel where Stevens recollects past events of his life and correlates them to more recent events which he experiences on his journey. For instance, when Mr. Stevens' car breaks down he receives assistance from a local man who asks Mr. Stevens where he is employed. Mr. Stevens tells the man that he is employed at Darlington Hall, but states that his current employer is Mr. Farraday, an American gentleman, and he denies ever having worked for Lord Darlington (126). It is possible that Mr. Stevens is feeling some shame about having been employed by Lord Darlington, who has had his reputation ruined because of his German sympathies before the Second World War. The local man who gives assistance to Mr. Stevens served in the war, and so Mr. Stevens might want to avoid embarrassment by stating that he never knew Lord Darlington. We know, however, that Mr. Stevens admires his former employer. For instance, he states on pages 63-64 that he thinks Lord Darlington was a good man and that he himself is "today proud" to have served him. It is odd then, that Stevens should lie about his relation to Lord Darlington. It is possible that he simply does not want to end up with a conflict on his hands. Stevens tries to explain his own behavior by suggesting that he was merely telling a white lie to save himself from "hearing any [...] nonsense concerning his lordship" (132), an excuse that suggests he is afraid of conflicts, at least concerning Lord Darlington. His excuse of not wanting to hear anything negative about his old master might be true, but then again, if he is secure in his own pride of having worked for Lord Darlington it is odd that he does not simply say so. It seems as if Mr. Stevens is afraid of being confronted with other people's

opinions of his old employer. He considers Lord Darlington a good person, but when the question comes up he appears to be afraid of speaking his actual mind. It is as if he would want to defend Lord Darlington, but not knowing how to.

Mr. Stevens seems to be an inhibited man, reluctant to let his personal feelings show, even if they sometimes do without him realizing it. He feels safe in his role as a butler and takes great pride in it; he states that great butlers are those that are capable of inhabiting their “professional role to the utmost” and that those butlers that are truly great should not be disturbed by “external events, however [...] alarming or vexing” (43-44). This approach to his job dominates his entire personality. He rarely allows his feelings and personal opinions to be exposed. This affects him both as a character and as a narrator.

During a conference on the aftermath of World War 1 at Darlington Hall Mr. Stevens’ father becomes very ill. He is in fact, dying. As Mr. Stevens is tending to the guests he cannot be with his father. It is obvious, at least to a critical reader that he feels very sad, but he is reluctant to express this. A guest notices that something is wrong, but Mr. Stevens answers multiple times to worried questions that he is “perfectly all right”. When Lord Darlington remarks that it looks as if he is crying, Stevens wipes his face with a handkerchief and simply replies: “I’m very sorry, sir. The strains of a hard day” (108-110). Clearly Mr. Stevens is trying to employ the capabilities of great butlers mentioned earlier, as he does not allow even the death of his father to prevent him from doing his job. He does not state his actual feelings at this time or let them show, other than what might be guessed at from Mr. Stevens’ dialogue with Lord Darlington. He does not tell the narratee how this memory makes him feel either.

Graham MacPhee states in his article that “what goes unmentioned or is quickly dismissed as of no consequence often provides the most penetrating insights” (195). What Mr. Stevens will not comment on is usually connected to strong emotions somehow. This is not only the case with the part where his father dies, but throughout the novel. Mr. Stevens’ inability to explain or discuss his own feelings creates uncertainty about his personality, and raises the question of why he decides to share some things with the narratee. It seems as if Mr. Stevens is trying to deceive himself, but by lying to himself he unintentionally lies to others. Regret caused by prioritizing the duty to his employer rather than the duty to his family, that is, his father, could be one of the causes for his self-deception. He does not want to admit that he might have made the wrong choice, spending his father’s last moments serving guests instead of being with him.

Lord Darlington’s godson, Mr. Cardinal, unexpectedly comes to visit just before a secret meeting in Darlington Hall organized by Lord Darlington. Mr. Cardinal is a journalist

and tells Mr. Stevens that he has received a tip that an important meeting is to be held at Darlington Hall between the British Prime Minister and the German ambassador Herr Ribbentrop. As he and Mr. Stevens talk about Lord Darlington and the meeting he expresses his worries to Mr. Stevens, suggesting that Lord Darlington is being manipulated by the Nazis in Germany. Mr. Cardinal states that this is something that has been going on for a few years, and that “his lordship has... been the single most useful pawn Herr Hitler has had in this country for his propaganda tricks” (235). Mr. Stevens does not acknowledge Mr. Cardinal’s worries, and simply states that he trusts “in his lordship’s good judgment” (236). He seems painfully unaware that his employer is going to be made a fool of. He does not seem to look back at this memory with any regret or shame, as he does not grasp the implication of the events taking place. Furst comments on this episode quite sharply: “...in public history, the negotiations between Ribbentrop and Lord Darlington in *The Remains of the Day* are an underhanded act almost of treachery, not a matter of organizing a house party to perfection, as Stevens remembers it (552).” Mr. Stevens does not show any regret about his employment to Lord Darlington. His view of his employer and his time as a butler is clearly shown as he states; “I gave thirty-five years’ service to Lord Darlington; one would surely not be unjustified in claiming that during those years, one was, in the truest terms, ‘attached to a distinguished household’”(133). It is hard for Mr. Stevens to admit and come to terms with the fact that Lord Darlington was perhaps not that great a man, as it would mean that the butler was not attached to a distinguished household after all. This is part of Mr. Stevens’ self-deception. He does not want to have spent thirty-five years for nothing.

On the day of the secret diplomatic meeting, when Mr. Stevens passes by Miss Kenton’s room to give her some instructions, she reminds him that she has taken the evening off, in order to meet an acquaintance of hers. She informs Mr. Stevens that her acquaintance has asked her to marry him, but she stresses the fact that she is “still giving the matter thought” (225). Mr. Stevens does not seem alarmed or vexed by this information, even though it almost seems as if Miss Kenton is desperate to provoke him into showing some feeling. They have after all had, what might be called a latent love story going on since the time Miss Kenton started working at Darlington Hall, even though Mr. Stevens might not admit to this. As Brian W. Schaffer brings up in *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro*, Mr. Stevens “defensively justifies” his and Miss Kenton’s evening meetings over cocoa as strictly professional in nature (77). While never really abandoning a professional manner towards each other, Miss Kenton’s acts of kindness such as bringing flowers to Mr. Stevens’ room and helping to take care of his father shows that at least on her side, there is some affection.

When Miss Kenton returns after meeting her acquaintance later during the evening, Mr. Stevens is eager to return to service the gentlemen of the meeting, but Miss Kenton manages to tell him that she has accepted the offer of marriage given to her. He offers his congratulations but excuses himself. Miss Kenton asks if he really has not any “more words to greet the news of [her] possible departure” (229). She is clearly frustrated by how little he seems to care about her impending marriage. Mr. Stevens offer his congratulations again but then tries to excuse himself, stating that “there are matters of global significance taking place upstairs and I must return to my post” (230). However, Miss Kenton continues to talk to him in what again seems to be an effort to provoke Mr. Stevens into showing some kind of feeling. She tells him that she and her acquaintance “often pass the time amusing ourselves with anecdotes about you” (230). Mr. Stevens does not in any way show if he is offended or not, but excuses himself again and goes upstairs. When serving some brandy to Mr. Cardinal, Mr. Cardinal asks him whether he is all right. Echoing the episode of the death of his father, he answers that he is “perfectly alright”, although “a little tired, perhaps” (231). Even though he does not want to confess it, it is easy to assume that he is shaken by Miss Kenton’s rude comments and about her leaving the Hall. On his way to get some port wine for the gentlemen he meets Miss Kenton again. She tries to apologize and Mr. Stevens reassures her that has not taken anything she said “to heart” (237). Whether he actually has or not is hard to know, but he would never allow himself to admit that to Miss Kenton anyway. After he has got the port wine and is hurrying up to the gentlemen he passes Miss Kenton’s parlour. He is then struck by the conviction that Miss Kenton is inside, crying. He does not know why, as he does not hear any crying. He hesitates but does not investigate. It is an emotional moment, very similar to when he decides to serve guests rather than be at his father’s deathbed. The remaining hour of the meeting Mr. Stevens is waiting on the gentlemen, but is not called for. This gives him time to ponder the events of the evening. He states: “At first, my mood was... somewhat downcast” (238) but that he then became filled with a “sense of triumph” (239). He considers his work this evening as a great accomplishment, but he deceives himself as this is in fact the moment when both Lord Darlington’s reputation and his own chance for love are destroyed.

Mr. Stevens tries so hard to be a “great butler” that he represses his own self and simply hides behinds his professional role, repressing his emotions and political conscience. Mr. Stevens has always followed Lord Darlington, trusting him blindly that he was on the right path. Brian W. Schaffer states: “Stevens indirectly worked for Hitler and directly worked to maintain his own status as a ‘slave’... of Lord Darlington” (85). Mr. Stevens realizes that

he has only been the puppet of a puppet, so to speak. While talking to a stranger he meets in Weymouth he breaks down. He says: "I can't even say I made my own mistakes... what dignity is there in that?" (256). In the final moments of the novel he realizes how misguided he has been. After thinking for a while though, he decides to renew his efforts in pleasing his current employer and to take up a more positive attitude. He decides to make the most of the "remains of [his] day", a metaphor for the remains of his life.

In conclusion, Mr. Stevens can be said to be an unreliable narrator, both on the account of his failing memory and his unwillingness to admit any personal feelings. As Mr. Stevens is aiming to be a great butler all other things have to be repressed, leading to a dislocation of his priorities. He chooses to serve Lord Darlington over family and love, justifying his choice by the claim that what he is doing is something dignified and noble. He represses every hint that suggests that perhaps he has made the wrong choice, or that he is not helping the greater good. This leads to self-deception, and we can see how his self-deception is accountable for his unreliability. As he is not true to himself, he is not true to others. Crucial to the point is that if none of these factors, i.e. his failing memory and inhibited personality, were to apply to Mr. Stevens he would not be an unreliable narrator, and without an unreliable narrator, the essence of the novel would be lost.

Narration in the Film

Watching a film is not that different from reading a novel. In a novel we read the words on the page and with the help of our imagination we create images in our mind of what the characters and events described in a text look like. When watching a film the spectator is presented with images directly, but still needs to actively put them together for the film to make sense. In *Narration and Film Form* David Bordwell puts it this way: "The narrative film is so made as to encourage the spectator to execute story-constructing activities"(33). A person watching a film will have their own ideas and guesses of what might happen next and relating what is happening on screen to previous scenes. The spectator is not limited only to what is shown on screen but capable of concluding what might take place off screen. Bordwell suggests that people are able to sense what is actually important to a story's point and what is non-essential (34). It is not necessary to show Mr. Stevens' motoring trip in its entirety, for example.

The film version of *The Remains of the Day* starts with a voice-over by Miss Kenton. She is in fact reading the letter discussed in the previous chapter. Accompanying the

voice-over are a few shots of Mr. Stevens doing housework. Former employees and even a younger Miss Kenton fade away as the butler goes about his work, suggesting that they once existed and worked in Darlington Hall, but are now gone. These fading characters are most likely part of either Miss Kenton's or Mr. Stevens' memory. As Bordwell states, "most flashback sequences are... to some degree... representing character memory" (78). Although not strictly flashbacks, these scenes can be seen as a sort of compressed comparison between past and current events. When Mr. Stevens peers into a corridor and sees a fading Miss Kenton there, it is a representation of him reminiscing about the days when she used to work there. Miss Kenton's voiceover is followed by another voiceover. This time it is Mr. Stevens' answer to her letter, stating that he will soon travel to the West Country in order to see her.

With Miss Kenton's voice-over, we have encountered a difference to the narrative structure of the novel, as we are not limited only to Mr. Stevens' viewpoint. Hutcheon states that "attempts to use the camera for first-person narration – to let the spectator see only what the protagonist sees – are infrequent" (54). The camera perspective in most of the scenes in the film is in third person. Even though Mr. Stevens is the main character, he is still not present in all scenes. We can see ourselves, for example, the mistakes made by Mr. Stevens Senior due to his old age. We are thus provided with an objective account of these events and of who provided what remarks, where as in the novel we have to rely on Mr. Stevens' unclear memories of who had made some certain comments.

The events in the film do not follow a strict chronological order, but changes back and forth between current and earlier events. Although this does not occur as often as in the novel, it is done in a similar way. As Bordwell suggests, changing the normal temporal order makes "the viewer... evaluate early material in the light of new information" (78). The film moves rather seamlessly between scenes taking place in the past at Darlington Hall and scenes of the current motoring trip Mr. Stevens is on, allowing the spectator to follow both the events of Mr. Stevens' motor trip and the events at Darlington Hall, thus making it possible to link events that have taken place in the past to the current encounters Mr. Stevens comes across when motoring to the West Country.

The majority of the film takes place at Darlington Hall, during the time of both Mr. Stevens and Miss Kenton's employment. There is no narrator who reflects on these past events, unless one counts the voiceovers present in the early parts of the film. However, these voiceovers do not really narrate the story, but function as a way to show Mr. Stevens' and Miss Kenton's communication by letter. It is safe to suggest that there is no real narrator. Bordwell states that "most films... do not provide anything like... a definable narrator" (62).

This would mean that there really is no narratee either. Without someone to act as a sort of sounding board to Mr. Stevens' ideas, some of the thoughts and reflections he makes in the novel are left unsaid.

With the events of the film not described through the eyes of an unreliable narrator, but through a more objective camera perspective, some of the moments in the text that Mr. Stevens can only give a partial or uncertain description of are portrayed as more definite in the film. For example; as the contents of Miss Kenton's letter are fully revealed in the film, the spectator can for itself see what the letter might imply, and does not have to rely on the small snippets of it Mr. Stevens represents to the narratee. The letter does arguably seem to contain some hints of her wish to return to Darlington Hall, containing such phrases as: "The years stretch before me. If only I knew how to fill them" and "I would like to be useful again". If the letter had been unambiguously negative to the idea of returning to Darlington Hall it would not serve as a very good plot device, as it is the possibility of Miss Kenton returning to Darlington Hall that makes Mr. Stevens want to see her. The difference in storytelling here between the novel and the film is not particularly large, as the letter fills the same function in both the film and the novel, but of course, as the spectator has full knowledge of what the letter contains, there are no scenes where Mr. Stevens is reflecting upon it.

The main difference between the narration of *The Remains of the Day* in novel form and in the film comes down to point of view and who tells the story. As Mr. Stevens does not have to be present in all scenes this makes some things more flexible. Having a scene, for example, of Miss Kenton talking to her husband about their daughter allows the spectator to receive information that would otherwise, in the novel, have to have been referred to by a letter or something similar. The fact that there is no unreliable narrator that we have to receive the story from means that the spectator can trust what is happening on the screen. Even though going from an unreliable first person narrator to a third-person point of view, the narration in the film *The Remains of the Day* is able to stand on its own. One does not necessary have to have read the book in order to understand the plot.

Dealing with the Unreliable Narrator in the Film

Even though the movie does not contain an unreliable narrator, it still portrays the various characteristics that make Mr. Stevens one. His misguided sense of duty, the reluctance to show feelings, all are there. The only thing that is not really present in the film that is present

in the novel which contributes to Mr. Stevens' unreliable narration is his failing memory. In other words, most of the things that cause Mr. Stevens' narration to be so unreliable in the novel are present in the film. As Mr. Stevens is not the one telling the story his personality does not affect the narration directly, but it still affects the story. The unreliable narrator of the novel comes to life in the film, showing what kind of person Mr. Stevens is, and allows the spectator to recognize his behavior as both inhibited and misguided.

Some of the things that make Mr. Stevens an unreliable narrator are present in the scene where Mr. Stevens and Mr. Benn, Sir Geoffrey's butler, are talking during Sir Geoffrey's visit to Darlington Hall. Mr. Stevens states that he will only be able to call himself a "well contented man" when he has done all he can to service his employer, as long as that employer is superior in "moral stature", among other things. Mr. Benn is not so sure that what is going on at the dinner is very moral. He states that he has heard some "very fishy things", to which Mr. Stevens responds: "I hear nothing Mr. Benn", which seems to suggest that Mr. Stevens does not care about his employer's political opinions, but still trusts the fact that Lord Darlington is a person of moral stature. The "fishy things" Mr. Benn is referring to is the rather open racism of Sir Geoffrey, who is probably a member of the British Union of Fascists. The fact that Lord Darlington is consorting with sympathizers of the Nazi party in Germany is something that Mr. Stevens simply turns a deaf ear to.

Mr. Stevens is confronted with his employer's views directly when Lord Darlington requests that Mr. Stevens fire the two Jewish maids in the staff. Mr. Stevens' manner suggests that he does not like to do this. He stresses the fact that the maids are both good workers and looks rather shocked when Lord Darlington reveals that the reason for wanting to fire them is simply because they are Jewish. Despite of what Mr. Stevens may feel, he still washes his hands of it, so to speak, stating to Miss Kenton when she objects that "his lordship has made his decision - there is nothing for you and I to discuss". He reveres Lord Darlington so much that he suppresses the fact that Lord Darlington might not live up to the moral standards as well as he would like.

Evidently, Mr. Stevens self deception is present in the film as well. His pride in working for Lord Darlington is what makes him describe him as such an admirable person in the novel. However, there is one scene in the film where Mr. Stevens denies knowing his employer. When Mr. Stevens buys a couple of apples from a local shop during his journey, the shopkeeper asks him if he knows anything about Lord Darlington. Mr. Stevens then denies having any connection to Lord Darlington. In the novel, he discusses his reasons for denying any connection to Lord Darlington with the narratee, but this is impossible in the

film. It could be argued that Mr. Stevens simply could have provided some reason for it to another character in the film, but that would really change his character. Mr. Stevens can confide in the narratee in the novel over some things, as the narratee seems to be in total sympathy with him. Another character, more central to the story would question him more about his motives. More importantly, as this episode takes place in current time, during his motoring trip, there are fewer characters for him to interact with.

Mr. Stevens' denial of having known Lord Darlington here creates a slightly different effect in the film than it does in the novel. The scene with the apple purchase is not in the novel, but works well for this comparison. In the novel Mr. Stevens tries to come up with a reason for having denied any association with Lord Darlington. In a way, he excuses himself, and though it is a rather inadequate excuse, it is easier to gain some insight into the feelings Mr. Stevens has for Lord Darlington. In the film his behavior seems less sympathetic, even though it is possible to gather that Mr. Stevens wants to avoid some sort of confrontation, or having to defend Lord Darlington's good name from the shopkeeper.

When reading the novel, we often have to guess how Mr. Stevens is feeling as he might not always tell. In the film version this kind of guesswork is impossible as we can see the actors for ourselves. Instead the spectator must interpret the actor's facial expressions. The scene where Mr. Stevens' father has died and Mr. Stevens' is serving guests is portrayed in the film very similarly to how it is portrayed in the novel. Although Lord Darlington's line in the novel: "You look as though you're crying" (110) is slightly more suggestive than "you're coming down with a cold or something?" from the film, the spectator is able to see how Mr. Stevens is feeling by observing his drooping posture.

Mr. Stevens' questionable memory is hardly present in the film, but when he finally meets Miss Kenton over tea, he keeps addressing her as Miss Kenton, forgetting that she is actually called Mrs. Benn now. Of course, this can also be seen as his unwillingness to see the fact that Miss Kenton is not really available anymore, or to suggest the notion that Mr. Stevens still thinks of her as Miss Kenton, as she was called that when they worked together.

In the novel, after Mr. Stevens has realized that Miss Kenton is not set on returning to Darlington Hall, he admits to himself that "[his] heart was breaking" (252). There is no such line in the film; instead we have a close up of him looking very sad. While it might be argued that there really is no facial expression to express these revealing words, Mr. Stevens going from a slightly hopeful expression as Miss Kenton mentions the subject of returning to Darlington Hall to one of sadness and disappointment is very effective. While the end of the film is slightly different from that of the novel, as the film includes some final

scenes at Darlington Hall, it is still possible to see the outcome of Mr. Stevens' journey as clearly in the film as in the novel. As various shots display Mr. Stevens directing people working to refurbish Darlington Hall we can see how he has decided to focus the remains of his day to the service of his new employer.

Conclusion

As already established, the novel *The Remains of the Day* is narrated by an unreliable narrator. This mode of narration creates a gap between the reader and the character telling the story, as the reader must sometimes be prepared to see the narrator's description of events and persons with a critical eye. This does not only affect the story but Mr. Stevens as well. In the novel we can detect what makes Mr. Stevens an unreliable narrator, and even though Mr. Stevens does not have the role as the unreliable narrator in the film, it is still possible to detect the traits that contribute to him being an unreliable narrator.

The film adaptation of *The Remains of the Day* is successful in capturing the essence of Kazuo Ishiguro's main character, as we can see how the Mr. Stevens of the film is like the one in the novel. Granted, some events from the novel are not presented in the film, and the filmmakers have taken the liberty to introduce some scenes not present in the novel while slightly changing others. Even so, the film can still be considered as rather true to the original source as the essence of the story is present. For example, how Miss Kenton's letter is presented is quite different in the film compared to the novel, but it serves the same purpose in both of them, as it is the letter that makes Mr. Stevens go and see Miss Kenton.

Mr. Stevens' self-deception and inhibited nature is evident in both the novel and the film. The spectator can see Mr. Stevens' behavior and facial expressions in the film and determine how and whether he is actually trying to hide his feelings or not. In the novel the reader cannot see these things directly but must look for them in the text, as other characters give revealing questions or comments about Mr. Stevens' countenance. In the novel we can see who Mr. Stevens is by sifting through what he says and indeed, does not say, about himself. His actions also reveal his nature as we can see examples of Mr. Stevens' suppressions in both the novel and the film. His suppressed political conscience is apparent as he refuses to confront his employer's political standpoints, and his emotional suppression manifests itself in the way he treats his father and Miss Kenton. It is these sorts of things that cause Mr. Stevens' narration in the novel to become unreliable in the novel. In the film, even with the changed point of view, we can still see the nature of Mr. Stevens'.

To conclude things, the unreliability of Mr. Stevens is present in the film, just as it is in the novel. Therefore it could be argued that something of profound importance to the novel, the unreliable narrator, is not lost in the film, even if there is no unreliable narration. We can see who Mr. Stevens is in other ways. Essentially; if Mr. Stevens *were* the narrator in the film, his account of things would be as unreliable as they are in the novel.

Works Cited

Primary sources:

Ishiguro, Kazuo. *The Remains of the Day*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1989. Print.

The Remains of the Day. Dir. James Ivory. Perf. Anthony Hopkins, Emma Tomphson. Columbia Pictures, 1993.

Secondary sources:

Baldick, Chris, *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Oxford University Press; Oxford, 1990 – (Unreliable narrator) Print.

Bordwell, David. *Narration in the Fiction Film*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985. Print.

Furst, Lilian R. "Memory's Fragile Power in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Remains of the Day* and W.G. Sebald's "Max Ferber". *Contemporary Literature*, 48:4 (2007): 530-553. Project Muse. Web. 17 February 2012.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.

Keen, Suzanne, *Narrative Form*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. Print.

Leitch, Thomas. "Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory". *Criticism* Vol. 45, No. 2, Spring (2003): 149-171. Web. 17 February 2012.

MacPhee, Graham. "Escape from Responsibility: Ideology and Storytelling in Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*". *College Literature*, Winter2011, Vol. 38 Issue 1, p176-201. Web. 9 May 2012.

McFarlane, Brian. "'It wasn't like that in the book'". *Literature Film Quarterly*, 2000, Vol. 28 Issue 3, p163. Web. 9 May 2012.

Shaffer, Brian W. *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro*, Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 1998. Print.