

Comparison of the Book and the Film *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro

Author: Zuzana Malá

The practical part (pages 13-41) of this thesis (which is 42 pages in total), when its author Zuzana Malá compares the novel *Never Let Me Go* and its film adaptation in great detail, is very good to excellent. The only criticism would be the odd slip in use of English, typos (e.g. “Tommy t to” on page 17, many missing articles), etc.

This reviewer, however, is not quite as smitten with the theoretical part of the essay.

Ms. Malá’s central argument runs that film adaptations are “generally (and perhaps inevitably) more flimsy than the books they are based on” (page 5). This argument seems rather simplistic to this reviewer – but why make the argument at all? Why do the two art forms have to be in *competition* with one another? There is no doubt they are different but why does one have to be *better* – even *generally* as Malá states? Does it not depend on the actual artists involved – whether that be the writer(s) of the novel or the cast and crew for a film? If this particular adaptation (*Never Let Me Go*) is not up to the original – why does that have to hold true, even *generally*, for other adaptations?

Malá’s argumentation regarding film adaptation is broken into three points with an emphasis on the first point regarding a stream-lined plotline: **1.** film cannot pack everything in that a novel can **2.** Character motivation and character psychology is often not clear in films **3.** Romantic elements are put to the forefront in film at the expense of social critique.

Dealing with **point 1** of this argumentation first – that film cuts down the plotline:

Malá quotes James Monaco (NOTE: Why is James Monaco a “noteworthy” film critic? This needs substantiation if it is going to be written) on page 7 of her thesis “But commercial film still can’t reproduce the range of the novel in time” and then Malá continues in her own words “An average novel is three or even four times longer than an average screenplay that has about 125 to 150 typescript pages. So it is obvious that the details of a book are nearly perpetually lost in the transition to film”.

Malá is not thinking of the director’s ability to fracture time using the editing process, e.g., one second characters can be on the sea at night and the next second it can be five years later at noon-time with the same characters having lunch.

And what about “a picture being worth a thousand words” and “less is more”. Cannot omission be a positive thing in at least some cases?

Furthermore, comparing the length of a novel to a screenplay does not make much sense because a screenplay does not contain only words to be spoken by actors – but also the locations, the lighting, camera movements, etc. Films and books are different media – and a screenplay is *not* a film.

(over)

On page 8 Malá writes: “Unlike a novel, where the words are (sic) typed on the paper cannot be changed, when watching a film it can change according to what you are paying close attention”. By the word “it” Malá probably means “meaning” – but what she implies can be equally said about books – that it all depends on the reader – and whether or not he/she is paying attention.

Regarding **point 2** of the argumentation: that character motivation and character psychology is often not clear in films. What about the use of POV (point of view) shots? What about Voice Over? What about the ability of actors? Why about symbolism in shots? What about the director’s ability – that he/she can compose very detailed shots along the principles of *mise en scène* to create mood or explain something to the audience by careful editing?

Regarding **point 3** of Malá’s argumentation: romantic elements are put to the forefront in film at the expense of social critique.

Once again, this all depends on the artist in question and what he/she wishes to accomplish.

It is interesting that Malá cites that the director of the *Never Let Me Go* adaptation *Marek* (sic – page 11) Romanek wants to emulate Stanley Kubrick. Kubrick was a master at social critique (e.g., *Dr. Strangelove*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *Eyes Wide Shut*, etc.) and a master of adaptation. Many of Kubrick’s films are seen as being better than their source material (e.g., his adaptations of Stephen King’s *The Shining* or Arthur C. Clarke’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* (rather hilariously called *Spaceship Odyssey* by Malá – page 12).

Finally, regarding the secondary material utilized: the sources on the Works Cited page (page 43) are rather scant (and one book *Film Theory and Criticism* is there twice it seems, although in two different editions). More books on film criticism, and specifically ones that deal with adaptation, were needed.

So: a well-done practical part to the thesis with a lesser theoretical one.

Recommended Grade: 2 (Velmi Dobře).

Mark Farrell, May 2012