

A Hat, a Handshake, and a Rainy Day: Translating Unspoken Emotion from Page to Screen in *The Remains of the Day*

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Abstract: Through a comparative analysis of Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* and its adapted films, this paper explores how emotional restraint is translated from literature to film. Focusing on the farewell scenes of Mr. Stevens and Miss Kenton, the study holds that adaptation should not be understood as a simple retelling, but as an intermediate form of translation. The novel relies on first-person narration, memory, and language restraint to imply repressed emotions, while the film reconfigures these internal states into visual and auditory forms, including lens composition, sound design, and performance. Based on adaptation theory and film research, this paper demonstrates that the film subtly externalizes psychology through figurative performance, spatial distance, and symbolic gestures such as handshakes and hat removal. By comparing the limitations of narrative and film expression, we find that emotional meaning is not lost in the adaptation process but is redistributed in different expression systems. Finally, the study argues that the film does not simplify the emotional complexity of the novel but transforms it into a sensory experience that makes unspoken emotions visible and direct. sensory experience that makes unspoken emotions visible and immediate.

Keywords: Adaptation; Intermedial translation; Emotional restraint; Film language; Performance

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1. Introduction

The author of the novel *The Remains of the Day* is Kazuo Ishiguro, and the film adaptation is directed by James Ivory. Both films focus on Stevens. He is a housekeeper who has devoted his life to maintaining professional dignity and emotional restraint. This article will focus on the differences between the scene of Mr. Stevens and Miss Kenton's farewell in the film and the novel. After years of secret love, the two finally said goodbye. The emotional tension of this scene comes not only from dialogue, but also from the audio-visual composition of the film, including rainy scenes, dim lights, restrained composition, and low sound effects. In Mr. Stevens's world of etiquette, hat-offs and handshakes are common. However, Ivory transforms

them into a visual metaphor of emotion, revealing the unspeakable inner world of the characters. Although the film version and the novel version express the emotion similarly in this scene, their artistic expression is completely different. Kazuo Ishiguro expresses emotional depression through narration and silence, while Ivory visualizes it through the arrangement of scenes and transforms psychological subtlety into visible sadness. Through the comparison of these two ways of expression, this paper holds that James Ivory's adaptation visualizes the subtle psychological description in Kazuo Ishiguro's works, making the unspoken emotions in the novel visible and audible.

To further understand the significance of this comparison, it is necessary for us to regard adaptation not only as a change of form, but also as a process involving cross-media translation. Adaptation is usually regarded as a retelling process, but it can also be understood as a change in the way meaning is conveyed. In this sense, the transition from novel to film is not simply to reproduce the narrative content; on the contrary, it reconfigures the expression and perception of emotional experience.

As Linda Hutcheon suggests, "Second, as a process of creation, the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation; this has been called both appropriation and salvaging, depending on your perspective"^[1]. It includes selecting, emphasizing, and reshaping elements from the source text to adapt to the conventions and expression possibilities of new media. This means that when a literary work is adapted into a film, it is not translated word for word, but in a way that reflects the enlightenment of the film language, because the novel and the film operate through fundamentally different expression systems^[2].

In *The Remains of the Day*, this shift is particularly important because the novel itself is characterized by emotional restraint and narrative subtlety. Its emotional depth is hidden beneath the surface of the text, embedded in silence, hesitation, and indirect expression. Therefore, when the story is adapted into a film, the challenge is not to simply retell the story, but to transform these subtle psychological elements into a form that can be seen and heard.

This process can be understood as a form of intermediate translation. McFarlane also emphasizes that adaptation involves not only the transfer of narrative content, but also the transformation of cross-media narrative techniques^[3]. Different from language translation, intermediary translation operates between different ways of expression. It needs to transform the inner thoughts into visual and auditory symbols. Therefore, film adaptation must find a way to externalize the inner content of the novel while retaining the emotional tone of the novel.

By defining adaptation as translation, people can better understand the differences between Kazuo Ishiguro's novels and Ivory's films. Rather than treating these differences as deviations, it is better to regard them as necessary changes arising from the transformation between media. This perspective allows us to analyze how emotional meaning is reshaped in the process of adaptation, and how different art forms produce different ways of experiencing the same narrative.

2. Narrative restraint and emotional suppression in the novel

In the novel, Mr. Stevens's farewell to Miss Kenton is filled with emotional repression and self-deception. Stevens tells the story in a calm and almost detached tone, suggesting that Stevens cannot face his feelings. For example, when Miss Kenton said, "For instance, I get to thinking about a life I may have had with you, Mr. Stevens", although Mr. Stevens was heartbroken, "Indeed — why should I not admit it? — at that

moment, my heart was breaking”^[4]. But he just politely kept his distance and said, “You’re very correct, Mrs. Benn. As you say, it is too late to turn back the clock”^[4]. Kazuo Ishiguro describes in detail Mr. Stevens’s sad but seemingly calm behavior, revealing Stevens’s inability to face the troubles of emotional trauma. He avoided Miss Kenton’s pain and his own unspoken love. Kazuo Ishiguro’s first-person narrative limits what readers can see and hear. Although Stevens shows inner pain, he also reflects that he cannot express his emotions frankly. The narrative framework of the novel is completely confined to Stevens’s consciousness, excluding the things he does not want to admit. This narrative restraint reveals the core of Kazuo Ishiguro’s aesthetics: emotion can only exist in hints.

In addition to the narrative perspective, the time structure of the novel also helps to express emotional repression. Stevens tells about the past events that he has filtered through memory and reflection. This retrospective narrative creates a gap between the experience and the narrative, enabling Stevens to reinterpret the event in a way that is consistent with his sense of dignity. Therefore, emotions are not only suppressed at that moment but also reshaped over time. This temporal distance makes the reader’s understanding of Stevens’s character more complicated. Because the narrative is mediated through memory, it is difficult to determine what is truly felt and what is rebuilt. Stevens often describes his past decisions as rational and legitimate, even if these decisions are clearly related to emotional avoidance. This creates a tension between what the narrator says and what the reader perceives.

In addition, the language used by Stevens reinforces this sense of restraint. His speech is formal, restrained, and highly structured, reflecting his professional identity as a housekeeper. Even when he is emotional, he uses polite expressions and indirect words. This form of language is an obstacle to the full expression of emotions. For instance, Stevens embellishes his own statements in an overly complicated way: “But let me make it immediately clear what I mean by this...”^[4]. Such linguistic hesitation signals not only his inability to articulate genuine emotions but also invites readers to question his reliability as a narrator. This linguistic hesitation not only shows that he cannot express his true feelings, but also makes readers question his reliability as a narrator. This suppression becomes more obvious at moments that usually require emotional expression. When his father seeks a last-minute connection, Stevens deflects the intimacy by responding with apparent politeness rather than sincerity. Similarly, after his father’s death, he curbed his grief and returned to his job, reducing his personal loss to the level of occupational sedation^[4]. His interaction with Miss Kenton further reveals this emotional detachment. Instead of acknowledging Miss Kenton’s vulnerability, he prioritized rank and discipline, even correcting her way of addressing her or criticizing her management style^[4]. The result is a narrative that requires readers’ active interpretation. Readers must read between the lines, not only pay attention to the content, but also pay attention to the missing content. Silence becomes a form of meaning, and the depth of emotion is expressed through hints rather than directly.

This narrative strategy highlights the limitations of language in expressing emotions. Studies have shown that some emotions cannot be fully expressed, especially when constrained by social roles and expectations. Stevens’s status as a housekeeper required him to control his emotions, and this professional discipline extended into his personal life. Therefore, the emotional power of the novel lies not in the explicit confession, but in the repressed recognition. The reason why readers can realize Stevens’s emotional tragedy is that he cannot express it completely. This makes the novel’s expression of emotion both subtle and profound.

3. Visualizing emotion: Cinematic techniques in the film

James Ivory made a new visual remodeling of the farewell bridge in the film, and accurately excavated Stevens's suppressed real emotions under his calm appearance. The film takes a rainy night as the core scene background, and the overall atmosphere is gloomy and bleak, which is highly consistent with the sadness of the characters. At the same time, the film adopts symmetrical lens composition, and the picture composition is regular and balanced, but it creates an alienated character relationship at the visual level, which subtly highlights the feelings hidden under the character's restrained appearance. After Miss Kenton boarded the car, the camera focused on a close-up picture of the two holding hands, stripping the body movement from the surrounding environment, so that the short physical touch became a visual metaphor for the interpretation of emotional fragmentation. As the fingers of the two people slowly loosened, the shooting technique of the slow lens lengthened the moment of departure and greatly amplified the emotional tension of the scene. The director uses minimalist body movements as parting symbols and uses pure visual language to intuitively present the emotional cracks implied only by words in the novel. Multiple scene elements such as a rainy night atmosphere, dim light and shadow, and character space arrangement cooperate with each other to reproduce the obscure emotional depression and deep sadness in Ishiguro's words, and present Stevens's introverted and never exposed complex mood to the audience intuitively and stereoscopically.

Timothy Corrigan points out in his chapter on film terminology, "...the camera frame may include certain actions and exclude others..." ^[5]. In this film scene, the camera composition excludes the bustling world outside the station and other passengers other than Miss Kenton, focusing only on the two characters. When the bus is about to leave, Stevens' lonely figure still lingers on the edge of the picture, and the rain blurs his outline.

In the farewell scene, Miss Kenton stares at Mr. Stevens with tears in her eyes, while Stevens takes off her hat and bows down. In this exclusive set of footage, the hat is not only a symbol of Stevens's professional identity, but also an invisible barrier to conceal his personal feelings. The ritualized action of taking off his hat means that he has temporarily removed the professional camouflage that has bound him for a long time. He no longer relies on language to express his feelings but silently conveys his respect and tolerance for Miss Kenton in a physical ceremony. The lens composition of the film is in sharp contrast to the narrative technique of the novel. Kazuo Ishiguro uses the first-person narrative to completely imprison the reader's perspective in Stevens's personal inner world, and the emotional expression is extremely introverted and closed. In contrast, James Ivory's image composition breaks the limitations of text narration and completely releases the repressed emotions of the characters through multiple visual images, so that the audience can truly feel the heavy mood of the characters hidden in their hearts. This media difference intuitively reflects the core transformation of film and television adaptation: transforming the text narrative perspective into a visual lens perspective, and making the lens language become the core carrier of transmitting implicit emotions.

4. Embodiment, sound, and the redistribution of meaning

The Remains of the Day adapted film's sound arrangement for Mr. Stevens and Miss Kenton's farewell plays vividly explains how the auditory elements rely on restrained character dialogues to highlight the overall emotional tension. Miss Kenton choked up a little and said, "Thank you Mr. Stevens, thank you so much for coming. It's so very kind of you. It's so nice to see you again." Her trembling voice revealed her efforts

to stay calm and the depression she tried to conceal with words. In stark contrast, Stevens calmly replied, "It's my pleasure to see you again." His steady and restrained voice accurately fits the character traits of his consistently repressed emotions. A soft and stable voice line contrast, intuitive externalization of the insurmountable emotional estrangement between the two. The background music of the whole scene has a soothing rhythm and a deep style, which properly renders a quiet and sad parting atmosphere. At the same time, it will not suppress the original sound of the characters and retain the true texture of the emotions. At the same time, the roar of the bus engine and the scattered rain are intertwined to form a very contrasting auditory rhythm: the continuous engine sound symbolizes that the departure has become a foregone conclusion and irreversible, and the intermittent rain sound implies the loneliness of the characters' hearts. The integration of multiple auditory elements makes the seemingly polite and insipid daily dialogue, the hidden endless regret, and the forbearance of love, so that the audience can intuitively capture the real mood of the characters. This kind of film and television sound effect technique successfully transforms the hidden inner state of the characters into an externally perceptible audio-visual experience. This transformation from internal psychological narrative to external stage interpretation has built a new text ideographic system, so that the film no longer relies on simple inner monologue but relies on performance and audio-visual images to complete emotional output.

In addition to the differences between narrative techniques and visual presentation, the artistic transformation of *The Remains of the Day* from novel text to film and television images can also be interpreted by means of the avatar theory of performance. The original novel relies on Stevens's first-person inner monologue to carry all the emotional core, and the emotional experience of the characters is limited to the subjective psychological narrative. The film adaptation breaks the limitation of this single expression and splits the emotional tension of the characters into multiple audio-visual expression vectors, which are presented in multiple forms such as the actor's body movements, facial expressions, and scene space positions. In this process, the interpretation of Anthony Hopkins has become the core carrier of the film to shape the characters and convey the deep meaning. His restrained body movements, alienated eye contact, and calm and measured posture accurately restore Stevens's character traits. At the same time, this kind of concrete performance also completely presents the emotional contradiction and internal psychological tension that have not been directly revealed in the novel text.

Many scholars of film adaptation research have pointed out that actor performance occupies a central position in the process of transforming the inner mood of the character into the visual screen. As Robert Stam argues, Adaptation belongs to the process of "inter-symbol conversion", and the meaning of the text will be transferred and reconstructed in different symbol systems ^[6]. This theoretical trait is most vividly reflected in the adaptation of *The Remains of the Day*. The film relies on the performance of the actor to successfully externalize the character's restrained emotional state. The actor's many subtle body details, such as the subconsciously tightened jaw and the hesitant gaze, all correspond visually to Stevens's repressed and introverted inner emotions. These delicate micro-performance details allow the audience to capture the hidden mood of the characters that have not resorted to words, making up for the shortcomings of the film and television media that cannot directly show the inner monologue of the characters.

In addition, the film's design of spatial distance further deepens the core theme of emotional alienation. In the whole farewell scene, even if Stevens and Miss Kenton talk face to face, the two always maintain a fixed safety distance. This spatial layout of the lens intuitively and visually presents the emotional

estrangement and psychological gap formed by the two over the years. As Bordwell and Thompson note, Spatial composition is the core element of film narrative, which can guide the audience's focus and influence the audience's interpretation of the emotional core of the film ^[7]. In this farewell play, the creator's meticulous design of the characters' positions creates a strong sense of alienation and separation, which intuitively reflects the regret that the hero and heroine have always been unable to break through psychological barriers and establish emotional connections.

Another key highlight of the film adaptation is the reshaping of the silent narrative function. The novel hides silence in Stevens's narrative, which is indirectly reflected in the implicit form of narrative ellipsis and indirect statement. In contrast to the film, silence is transformed from a textual narrative skill into a perceptible auditory experience. The blank space of the characters' dialogues is often accompanied by environmental sound effects such as rain sound and distant engine sound, which sets off the emotional atmosphere of the scene and amplifies the internal emotional tension. As Michel Chion points out, the silence in the film is not an absolute silent blank, but a carefully constructed expression space that guides the audience to focus on delicate sensory details and characters' emotions ^[8]. Especially in the farewell drama of the film, the blankness of the lines and the immersive silent atmosphere allow the audience to focus on capturing the physical state and inner fluctuations of the characters, making silence a very appealing screen expression.

The film adaptation also fully highlights the narrative and communication value of body gestures. In the original text, the character gestures are only briefly mentioned, always attached to the main narrative, and do not have independent ideographic functions. The film has completely changed this logic of expression, amplifying the proportion of the lens of gestures, and upgrading it to the core ideographic element that conveys emotions and shapes the plot. Taking the handshake scene between Stevens and Miss Kenton as an example, this action is a conventional etiquette behavior in the normal life of Stevens's adherence to professional norms, but it is endowed with strong and complex deep emotional connotation under the support of the camera. In the study of Kazuo Ishiguro's works, Wong pointed out that the emotional expression of *The Remains of the Day* has always been restrained ^[9]. Most of the characters' moods are indirectly revealed by physical behavior, rather than relying on straightforward language. The film adaptation continues and expands this artistic trait, builds body gestures as the core carrier of character emotional output, and further enriches the implicit emotional narrative system of the film.

Based on the above analysis, it can be found that the film adaptation of *The Remains of the Day* is not a simple change of media form. Its essence is the reconstruction and redistribution of text meaning in different artistic expression systems. The narrative meaning of the novel is highly dependent on the text language and subjective narrative construction. All kinds of delicate emotional foreshadowing, implicit psychological changes, and narrative blanks require readers to actively figure out, interpret, and understand. Different from the one-way narrative mode of the text, the film dismantles the core meaning and disperses it in multiple audio-visual dimensions such as visual images, auditory sound effects, and actor performances, making the originally implicit and obscure characters' emotions intuitive and more empathetic. This cross-media reconstruction of meaning does not weaken or simplify the narrative level and ideological core of the original work but reshapes the construction logic of emotional depth and innovates the way the audience perceives and understands text emotion and character core.

In addition to the innovation of performance, space, and sound expression, the media transformation

from novel to film can also be interpreted from the perspective of audience participation and emotional accessibility. Relying on the fragmented narrative structure and delicate language foreshadowing, the original book guides readers to actively piece together and restore Stevens's true inner state, relying on readers' subjective interpretation and speculative derivation. The film breaks this narrative mode, reconstructs the audience's reception mode with intuitive sensory experience, and completely changes the audience's participation logic in interpreting stories and characters. The emotional expression of literary texts is delayed and indirect, which requires readers to study deeply and understand calmly in order to capture the emotional core hidden behind the text. In contrast, the film, relying on audio-visual multi-dimensional information output, can quickly awaken the audience's direct emotional feedback. The narrative of the novel naturally constructs an aesthetic distance between the characters and the readers. Stevens's rational deconstruction and emotional repression of the past experience urge the readers to constantly examine their unreliable narration and actively deduce the hidden emotional truth. This reading mode is highly speculative, but the overall emotional expression is restrained and alienated. The film effectively shortens the aesthetic distance. Through close-ups, light and shadow scheduling, sound design, and other film and television techniques, it intuitively presents the emotional clues of the characters, allowing the audience to accurately capture Stevens's inner world. This also makes the emotional experience of the film no longer rely on the subjective interpretation of the audience but more rely on intuitive audio-visual perception.

Although the film has greatly reduced the audience's emotional perception threshold, this more intuitive experience has not simplified the narrative core of the original work but has created a new complex form. The narrative ambiguity of the novel is mainly due to the limitation of the first-person narrative perspective and the restraint of the expression of the text; the ambiguity and tension of the film are hidden in the delicate lens language and the details of the actor's performance. Taking the characterization of the protagonist Stevens as an example, its subtle facial expression and restrained body movements often imply hidden emotions that have never been directly revealed through the lines. This requires the audience to still maintain the state of active interpretation, but the carrier of reasoning and discrimination, from the text language to the intuitive sensory signal. This cross-media narrative transformation fully reflects the adaptation characteristics of literary adaptation: although the narrative expression form of the work has undergone a thorough innovation, the ideological level and artistic complexity of the text can be completely retained and presented differently.

In addition, the film's emphasis on sensory experience reflects the typical characteristics of film narratives that are different from literary texts. Literary creation is highly dependent on the written language to complete the expression, and the film can integrate multiple communication dimensions, including visual composition, sound design, actor performance, and other forms of expression, to build a rich level of emotional experience. Relying on this multi-integrated narrative feature, the film can accurately convey a delicate and obscure emotional state without the help of straightforward lines. Taking the farewell bridge section of the film as an example, the rain sound atmosphere, narrative blank space, and restrained body movements are combined with each other to create a strong emotional atmosphere. Without direct language bedding, the inner loss and regret of the characters are fully conveyed.

In summary, the comparison between the novel and the film is sufficient to show that the film adaptation does not simply make the meaning of the text easy to understand but reconstructs the way the audience perceives the meaning. The two media are not simply copying the same emotional core in different forms but guiding the audience to understand the character's emotions and story core from a completely different

perspective. The film narrative has completed the experience transformation from text interpretation to sensory perception, redefined the expression of forbearance, made the characters' repressed emotions more intuitive and sensible, and given the narrative a new visual level and artistic complexity.

The film jumps out of the limitations of text narrative, relying on visual and auditory double clues to convey the emotions of the characters, allowing the audience to skip the intermediate links of language interpretation and directly perceive the inner fluctuations of the characters. This also makes the emotional expression of the film no longer a simple copy of the original emotions, but transforms the deep psychological activities of the characters into a concrete sensory experience, so that the original implicit emotions become visible, sensible, and intuitive.

There are essential differences between novels and movies in the presentation of repressed emotions. In the original work, Stevens's emotional restraint is mainly reflected by his unreliable narrative tone. The author will not directly reveal the character's mood, and the reader can only rely on the text details to infer his true feelings. The film and television version has made a significant breakthrough. The details of Stevens's handshake with Miss Kenton, hat-off greeting, and eye contact all intuitively show the hidden emotions deliberately hidden in the original work, so that the audience can clearly see the inner grief that the characters cannot say. With the help of text narration, Kazuo Ishiguro abstracted and blanked the characters' emotions, while James Ivory used images and sound effects to make this foreboding sadness concrete. Even if the film presents Stevens's sadness intuitively, it always fits the core aesthetic tone of the original's restrained restraint.

The media differences between the two also further explore the core characteristics of cross-media emotional expression. Literature and film have different creative rules and expression advantages, which directly determine the narrative form and emotional output of the story. Literature is good at digging deep into the inner psychology and thinking activities of the characters, while film relies more on external lens presentation and actor interpretation. The two modes have completely changed the way the audience receives emotions. When reading a novel, readers need to take the initiative to disassemble the narrative text, capture subtle clues, and independently piece together to restore the hidden emotional core. The whole process requires deep thinking and careful reading, and cannot immediately obtain emotional connotation. In contrast, the film relies on intuitive audio-visual presentation.

This comparison fully embodies the media adaptability of narrative meaning, the same emotional core, and can rely on different art forms to complete multiple expressions. Literature and film have their own advantages and disadvantages, shaping the audience's reading perception and emotional feedback from different dimensions. Film and television adaptations are not a simple content simplification, but a complete artistic transformation. As Cartmell and Whelehan argue, the evaluation criteria of the adapted works can not only refer to the degree of fit with the original works, but also consider their ability to reconstruct the meaning of the text in the new media, and adapt to the artistic characteristics of the new media to complete the second interpretation ^[10]. Sanders further shows that the adaptation is not a mechanical reproduction of the original work, but an innovative interpretation based on a new cultural and artistic context ^[11].

Defining film adaptation as cross-media translation can better clarify the emotional communication logic of different art forms and the reconstruction path of text meaning in the process of adaptation. This kind of media transformation also fits the narrative reception habits of modern audiences. In the current context of visual culture, the public's emotional experience relies more on intuitive sensory perception than in-

depth textual speculative interpretation. The film adaptation of *The Remains of the Day* accurately fits this communication trend. On the basis of retaining the delicate aesthetics of the original work, the hidden inner emotions of the characters are more easily perceived by the audience, and the artistic gap between literary introspective narrative and visual expression of film and television is smoothly connected. This also means that film and television adaptation is not only an adaptation adjustment to the difference of media forms, but also an artistic innovation that conforms to the change of audience perception mode and aesthetic demand.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the farewell bridge between Stevens and Miss Kenton in *The Remains of the Day* clearly shows how the literary adaptation transforms the introverted inner emotions of the characters into a perceptible audio-visual language. Ishiguro's original style of writing is restrained. Relying on implicit text description and unreliable narrative perspective, the characters' emotions are hidden in the blank space of the text. Readers need to take the initiative to scrutinize and interpret to explore the real mood of the characters' depression. In contrast, James Ivory's film version relies on film and television techniques such as scene layout, lens composition, and sound design to completely externalize the hidden inner emotions, so that the audience can intuitively capture the emotional changes of the characters. The environmental atmosphere of the station on a rainy night, the dim and soft tone of light and shadow, the slowly loosened hands, the quiet and moving voice contrast, these audio-visual elements cooperate with each other to build a set of exclusive film and television narrative language, which accurately interprets the character's emotional depression and being full of regret. The novel and the film finally convey the same core theme: when the persistence of professional dignity conflicts with sincere personal feelings, it will only lead to an irretrievable regret. Ishiguro relies on text narrative; James Ivory relies on image expression and uses graphic art to jointly expose Stevens's life tragedy of adhering to the professional dignity of the housekeeper and abandoning personal emotions.

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