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BEYOND FIDELITY: THE TRANSLATION PROCESS IN TWO ADAPTATIONS OF
JUAN MARSÉ'S *EL EMBRUJO DE SHANGHAI*

by

Jessie L. Christensen

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Spanish and Portuguese

Brigham Young University

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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ABSTRACT

BEYOND FIDELITY: THE TRANSLATION PROCESS IN TWO ADAPTATIONS OF JUAN MARSÉ'S *EL EMBRUJO DE SHANGHAI*

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Master of Arts

In the past, the study of film adapted from literature has focused largely on the question of fidelity. This thesis explores new ways to look at the relationship between literature and film by showing how concepts from the field of translation studies, particularly literary translation, can enrich the study of adaptation theory. An application is made to the case of Spanish novelist Juan Marsé's work *El embrujo de Shanghai*, which has been adapted to film by Fernando Trueba and to screenplay by Victor Érice. Rather than taking a hierarchical approach to the novel and its two variations, a comparative approach is used that seeks to understand the unique choices of each director and how his vision can illuminate the source novel. An adaptation of a novel does not diminish its source; instead, it opens up a space for dialogue between the two works, thus enriching the world of both literature and film.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Fernando Trueba.....	18
Chapter Two: Victor Érice.....	33
Conclusion.....	47
Works Cited.....	54

INTRODUCTION

As the most recently developed form of art, film still has an uncertain place in the intellectual canon. For most of its brief lifetime, cinema has been regarded as merely popular entertainment not worthy of academic scrutiny. However, in recent decades film has gained legitimacy to the point that “film studies” is now a core area in many humanities departments and an increasingly popular field of study. Unfortunately, one area of film studies that is still struggling for respect is that of adaptation theory. At least half of all films made each year are adapted from previous sources, not just novels but also plays, short stories, biographies, and other literary works. Despite the fact that film relies so heavily on literature for its inspiration, the relationship between the two has not been analyzed in a consistent manner. Literary critics tend to look most closely at the original document and focus on the deficiencies of the film when compared to its source, while most film criticism focuses more on the finished film than on the source material. This thesis will attempt to explore new ways to look at the relationship between literature and film by showing how concepts from the field of translation studies, particularly literary translation, can enrich the study of adaptation theory.

On the surface, adaptation and translation have the same goal: to transfer a written work into another language. But even this rough definition exemplifies the problematic nature of the comparison. Is film a language? Early structuralist critics of film would agree, and even go so far as to find examples of equivalence between the two forms. Others would disagree, arguing that translation is only reserved for written languages and that to translate a novel into anything less than another novel is not translation. Attempts

to compare or unite the fields of translation theory and adaptation theory highlight the fundamental issues at the core of each.

The question of film adaptation as translation has already been addressed by a number of critics in a variety of ways. Sometimes the word “translation” is used as a form of shorthand for the process of adapting a written work to the screen; for example, Brenda Cooper and David Descutner title their study of one adaptation “Sydney Pollack’s film *translation* of Isak Dinesen’s *Out of Africa*” (emphasis added). In this case, there is no critical evaluation of the relationship between “adaptation” and “translation”, when referring to film, and they are assumed simply to be synonyms.

Other critics use the word “translation” to refer to film adaptation in very specific circumstances: a literal, one-to-one transfer of the content of a written work to the screen. For example, when Karen Kline identifies four paradigms of adaptation criticism, she refers to the first as the “translation paradigm,” and defines it as judging “the film’s effectiveness primarily in terms of its ‘fidelity’ to the novel, particularly with regard to narrative elements, such as character, setting, and theme” (70). The translation paradigm is often contrasted with the idea of adaptation as a critique or interpretation of the text, and is usually dismissed as short-sighted and dogmatic in its allegiance to fidelity and equivalence. This adoption of the term “translation” to refer to the process of adapting a written work to film reflects an incomplete understanding of the nature of the translation process. To most other critics outside of the field of translation theory, translation is simply a method of finding direct equivalents for meaning in a new language; however, the field of translation studies encompasses a variety of critical approaches focusing on the possibility of equivalence and the nature of language itself. While to a film critic,

“translation” is simply a reference to literalism, within the field of translation itself the term means much more.

In response to those who assume that a film adaptation of a novel is the same as a translation of the novel into another language, Umberto Eco points out that while text translation moves between two objects within the same semiotic system, film adaptation mediates intersemiotically (157). Like Robert Richardson, who refers to adaptation as a form of translation only to denigrate it because it “inevitably loses something, often much, in the process” (15), Eco dismisses the legitimacy of adaptation by stating that it can never achieve equivalence and either “says too much or says too little” (158). As noted earlier, many film critics have an incomplete understanding of translation theory and Eco is justified in noting that it is overreaching to state that film adaptation is simply another form of translation and that explanations of one will apply directly to the other. But it is also time to move beyond dismissing adaptation as either impossibility or a hopelessly flawed art form. The similarities between film adaptation and translation justify a look at how the two theories might complement each other to provide a fuller understanding of the adaptive process.

Patrick Cattrysse advocates the application of translation theories to film adaptation by asserting that both are “concerned with the transformation of source into target texts under some condition of ‘invariance’ or equivalence” (54). He addresses the concern that the translation angle is just another call for literal equivalence by calling for the use of polysystem theories in translation, which attack many of the weaknesses of earlier theories. These weaknesses include a focus on the source text, a prescriptive rather than descriptive approach to criticism, and a bias towards individual examples rather than

holistic observation of the mechanisms of translation itself (54). By identifying problems common to both translation and adaptation, Cattrysse shows the ways in which a sensitive combination of the two fields can enrich both. Three questions common to both translation theory and adaptation theory are fidelity, originality, and status. After looking at each of these issues in some detail, possible solutions for these problems will be presented based on ideas currently being used in translation theory.

Fidelity

An oft-cited Italian proverb declares “*Traduttore, traditore*”—“translator, traitor.” This play on words illustrates a central metaphor used to describe translation: fidelity. Translations are often said to “betray” their originals, to somehow be unfaithful to them by misrepresenting them. This talk of fidelity and betrayal has permeated the discourse on translation for centuries. It seems that to write about translation is also to write about the impossibility of translation, and most work written about the subject wrestles with this very problem. Attempts to somehow transfer meaning between two languages raise fundamental questions: What is language? How does language relate to “meaning”? Is “meaning” something external or something created by language itself? Many have settled on the idea that an utterance refers to some sort of intrinsic kernel of meaning, and therefore a poor, or “unfaithful” translation deviates from that meaning in some way.

Interestingly, studies of film adaptation have adopted the fidelity discourse in describing cinema that comes from a literary source. Although many have written about the relationship between literature and film from the early days of cinema, one of the first to systematically study this relationship was George Bluestone. His pioneering work,

Novels into Film, was published in 1957 and explores the relationship between the two forms of art. Bluestone begins by stating that film and novel are completely different forms and that “changes are *inevitable* the moment one abandons the linguistic for the visual medium” (5). He challenges the assumption that a novel has some sort of inherent, immutable “spirit” or “content” that can be seamlessly transferred to the screen.

Bluestone notes that this assumption inevitably fails, leading most critics to declare that the film is somehow inferior to the original novel because it cannot reproduce it exactly. He acknowledges this central question of adaptation theory, and attempts to avoid it. Unfortunately, his attempts to find a better way to look at adaptation fail; for example, the second half of his book compares several novels to their filmed versions, and Bluestone often finds the films inferior to their source material—he calls Vincent Minnelli’s *Madame Bovary* a “marked failure of the pictorial imagination” (198).

The work of George Bluestone sets the tone for much of the adaptation criticism that follows for the next few decades. Most critics after Bluestone take a structuralist approach in comparing novel to film; in his work *Literature and Film*, Robert Richardson dedicates an entire chapter to the “language” of film. According to Richardson, “the vocabulary of film is the simple photographed image; the grammar and syntax of film are the editing, cutting, or montage processes by which the shots are arranged” (65). Building on the idea that equivalents for written language can be found in film, critics will then compare specific passages of a novel to its film version in an effort to find equivalents. However, like Bluestone, their attempts to find an approach beyond fidelity often end up only showing how the language of film inadequately approximates the written language of the source texts.

Although most critics these days have moved beyond structuralism and a restricted view of equivalence, many still find themselves falling back into the trap of looking for faithful reproductions of items from the original text. During the last two decades of the twentieth century, adaptation criticism began to incorporate elements of emerging critical methods such as New Historicism and Post-Structuralism to examine the context in which an adaptation occurs. For example, when writing about the film adaptation of *Out of Africa*, Brenda Cooper and David Descutner conclude that the film misrepresents author Isaak Dinesen's life and political views (229). They reach this conclusion not through a strict comparison of "film language" to written language, but by also considering cultural factors and movie-making conventions that influenced screen writing decisions. But despite the fact that they have expanded their considerations beyond simple equivalence between narrative events and dialogue, these critics still continue to evaluate a film adaptation on a hierarchical basis informed by ideas of fidelity.

Some critics have even attempted to sidestep the question of equivalence by viewing adaptation as something other than an attempt to directly transfer the content of a text to the screen, but the discourse of infidelity remains the same. Neil Sinyard writes:

...the best adaptations of books for film can often best be approached as an activity of literary criticism, not as a pictorialization of the complete novel, but a critical essay which stresses what it sees as the main theme. Like a critical essay, the film adaptation selects some episodes, excludes others, and offers preferred alternatives. (117)

Although seeming to avoid the question of form and content by calling an adaptation a “critical essay,” Sinyard still assumes some sort of “main theme” in a book that can be picked out and expanded on. Even more telling is the word choice in the first line of this quote; by focusing on the “best adaptations,” Sinyard remains trapped in the system of fidelity and betrayal. The biggest problem with criticism based on an ideal of fidelity is the value judgments it places on artistic creations. Fidelity discourse assumes that certain ideas are inherently better than others; generally those ideas that most closely reflect the source text are determined to be more purely art, and therefore more critically acceptable.

Originality

The question of originality relates to the idea of fidelity. Again, this is an issue that has been considered extensively within translation studies. The idea of originality as a criterion for artistic worth is a relatively new concept in literary criticism, dating only as far back as nineteenth century romanticism and its view of the artist. Renaissance translators borrowed freely from classical sources without feeling that this dialogue diminished their work. More recently, however, writers have condemned translation wholesale. Nabokov dismisses it as “profanation of the dead” and Milan Kundera thunders “death to all who dare rewrite what has been written” (both quoted in Wechsler 260, 96). Kundera explains that the author is a “unique being” who should “possess all rights over the thing that emanates exclusively from him” in order to justify the need for complete artistic control over any text that comes from him (Wechsler 99).

The issue of artistic control and authority has been somewhat softened by postmodern writing about intertextuality. The influence of other texts on a written work and their presence within it ameliorate the total control of the author. If his creation has

not come exclusively from his creative power there is no justification for the sort of reactionary control over his creations sought by Kundera. Also, the idea of Bakhtinian dialogue and intertextuality open the door for the possibility of translation; if texts can be combined and appropriated into a new product, surely that product can then be transformed into something new by the translator. The originality and autonomy of the author have diminished somewhat in the world of translation theory, but strains of the bias towards original creation can still be seen in film criticism.

Writing in the middle of the twentieth century, George Bluestone envisioned a day when the vogue for film adaptation has ended and “the film will doubtless rediscover its central principles” (216). In the fifty years since the publication of his work the number of films adapted from literature has not abated. Bluestone’s concern with the use of unoriginal material is that it has an “inhibiting effect, shriveling up the plastic imagination” (218). Critics of film adaptation continue to use this argument, assuming that a story originally created for the screen will somehow produce a film superior to one adapted from an earlier source.

Originality and film adaptation are also related due to the nature of film as a collaborative art. While auteur theory sought to elevate the status of the director to somewhere near that of an author, the problem remains that film is a group performance very unlike the solitary writing of an author. In a society focused on the ideal of the lone creative genius, collaboration in creation tends to be regarded as a weakness rather than a strength. The translator faces a similar reduction in status, because his work implies the participation—either directly or indirectly—of others. Also, a single original can engender a number of different translations or films by a number of different interpreters.

Does the existence of multiple texts derived from a single beginning point somehow weaken the original? Are these spin-offs and sequels to be judged as somehow inferior to the original? These questions apply equally to translation and adaptation theory and tie-in directly with the idea of originality.

Status

As Gregory Rabassa writes of translation: “It is a sort of literary suburb, lacking a core or personality of its own. If it is not clearly derivative, it is, then, treasonous and even treacherous” (21). Translators are rarely acknowledged in the literary world; reviews of translated books usually fail to mention a translator, giving the impression that the book itself was written in the target language. Translation is often considered a “craft” rather than an “art,” for it concerns itself more with the form of language than its content. However, this statement generalizes the role of translator and ignores the fact that form and content are inextricably connected and influence each other. The translator does not have to create the narrative action at the core of a story, but still has to work within the guidelines of what is already on the page. Another question that affects the status of the translator is the question of commercialization. Translation is most often a commercial act and the translator is paid for his work. Working within the romantic paradigm of artistic genius, the assumption is often made that a writer creates solely for satisfaction of the creative urge and that a translator does his work solely for monetary gain.

The question of commerciality also affects the world of film adaptation. Many films adapted from popular novels are done with monetary gain in mind; a best-selling novel has a built-in audience ready to view the film. This strategy usually backfires,

however, since most audiences will be predisposed to view such a film through the lens of fidelity and it inevitably falls short of their expectations. Film adaptation remains artistically inferior and viewers and critics alike affirm their bias that “the movie is never as good as the book.” The hierarchical relationship of film to literature is preserved with the film perpetually on the bottom.

The uncertain status of film adaptation is also related to the fact that film is still a relatively new art form with little of the academic cachet that literature possesses. Structuralist theory searches for direct equivalents for writing techniques within film; the job of comparing film and literature then becomes more quantifiable, giving film legitimacy as a real “language” and therefore “elevat[ing] film to the level of art and/or literature” (Winston 22). Early film criticism also focused primarily on works drawn from literature considered part of the classic canon, such as works by Dickens, Flaubert, the Brontes, Joyce, and Proust. Other sources that created strong films have largely been ignored in favor of criticism focusing on writers that are considered more “literary” than others. The advent of cultural studies has brought about a change in criticism in recent years; for example, a collection of essays edited by Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo in 2005 looks at *The Stepford Wives* and works from Africa as well as writing by Austen and Proust. Nevertheless, there remains a tendency to not only assign film adaptation and translation lower status in the hierarchy of art forms as well as the impulse to judge some works as more worthy of reproduction simply by their canonical status.

Solutions

If translation and adaptation deal with similar issues, it is not unreasonable to assume that ideas from one theory can be used to look at and consider similar questions

in another area of knowledge. For example, many theorists have discussed the problem of fidelity in relation to translation. Robert Wechsler advocates a move from the metaphor of monogamous marriage and infidelity to one of polygamy or family relations. A polygamist is obligated to multiple spouses equally and must balance these obligations differently from a person married to only one spouse. He writes:

The translator has to seek ways to reconcile these various obligations, while considering the interests of all, to balance his obligations to each so that no one feels too slighted, so that all his obligates get attention, although not of the same sort or amount. It isn't the translator's submissiveness that gives him these obligations; it's the fact that he's the one in the middle, the one in charge, the one who's acting. (107-8)

Adopting a polygamy metaphor takes the focus off betrayal and fidelity and places the translator in a more positive position, that of mediator. The translator's action is no longer betrayal of one side for another because there are multiple sides to take. Moving the translator to a centralized, active position also restores his legitimacy and his prominence in his role as go-between for two different literary cultures.

Wechsler's focus on multiple obligations also reminds us that a literary work contains so much more than simply words on a page. He includes the obligation to the source culture to represent it as accurately as possible to a new audience. The translator has an obligation to the target culture to introduce new ideas and forms without unnecessarily distorting the language. There is an obligation to the audience itself, and an obligation to the translator himself as an artist and creative writer. The idea of polygamous responsibility not only helps moderate questions of fidelity, but also

highlights the impossibility of passing final judgment on the finished product because with multiple obligations even the best translator will be unable to fulfill them all.

If the perfect, one-to-one equivalent translation is an impossible dream, how should translations be evaluated? While film adaptation studies still seem to be mired in the idea that perfect equivalence is possible and that most adaptations fail by falling short of this ideal, writers on translation have moved beyond fidelity in their study of translation. For example, in writing about recent trends in critical thinking, Lawrence Venuti points out that many theorists have adopted a “tool-kit approach” in describing translation strategies, which relies on using a variety of ideas “regardless of whether a concept originated in linguistics or literary criticism or cultural studies” (340). This inclusive philosophy accompanies a shift from analysis focusing solely on products to one focusing on production. Emphasis is placed on decision-making processes and choices in translation rather than the translation itself. This new focus on process acknowledges the translator’s varied responsibilities and flattens hierarchies that can exist between source and target.

A shift away from product-based analysis will move adaptation theory beyond the traditional dichotomy of film and source text. As Patrick Cattrysse notes, “one would not only be able to describe in a systematic way *how* movies were made, but also get one step closer to explaining *why* certain movies were made the way they were made” (67). A focus on adequacy and fidelity obscures deeper questions about both the source and target texts. Attempts to adapt parts of a novel such as dialogue into film can illuminate aspects of the source text that might not have been considered before. They can also raise new questions about film itself and why certain techniques are privileged more than

others. Although the comparative study of multiple translations of a single work is fairly common, comparisons between film versions of a text are still somewhat rare. This is partly due to the fact that film is still a young medium, but with thousands of films being made each year there exist multiple versions of a number of literary texts.

Comparative study reminds us that no adaptation is created in a vacuum; all artistic creations are influenced by their cultural surroundings to some extent. Just as a study of the process of adaptation can raise new questions about the text itself, it can also address the cultural factors involved in its creation and reception. Texts are translated multiple times because the nature of language change ensures that no version is ever final. As Gregory Rabassa states, "Translation is hard put to extend its life beyond its time. A translation, no matter how good, is apt to be too contemporary and rarely endures" (24). Language change in film is even more rapid than that of written language; technology changes create new techniques and cultural preferences shift quickly enough that a "cutting edge" adaptation might seem antiquated just a few decades later. In addition to illuminating the culture of the source text, the manner in which a particular text is adapted can also tell us much about the culture in which the adaptation is taking place.

Some analysis of translation has attempted to focus on the actual thought process used in switching between languages, often with the goal of facilitating machine translation. This research has been limited due to the fact that it can be very difficult to express and define what is happening in the brain during the translation process and translators have written little about how they do their work. In contrast, the creation of film today is often surrounded by a variety of works that comment on the creative

process. When a major film is released on DVD, it is usually accompanied by commentary by the director and others involved in its creation as well as shorter video segments about the making of the film. These items should make it easier to look at the process of adaptation and analyze a director or writer's choices. Commentary about the film reminds the critic that, like most translation work, filmmaking is a collective effort involving the participation of numerous people. Little critical attention has been paid to this fact when studying adaptations, nor to the fact that a source text is usually adapted into a screenplay before being filmed. Further study of adaptations can look at the influence of each of the participants in a film on the process and final product.

Hans Vermeer emphasizes the need to study the process of translation itself in his *skopos* theory, which analyzes the aim or purpose of a translation. Even though literary texts like novels may have a less obvious purpose or goal, it is still possible to define their *skopos*. Understanding and defining the *skopos* of the source text leads to a better understanding of its reception and function within the culture. According to Vermeer, "one must know what one is doing, and what the consequences of such action are, e. g. what the effect of a text created in this way will be in the target culture and how much the effect will differ from that of the source text in the source culture" (223). In the same way, comparative analysis of the film with the source text can illuminate key differences between the two; however, the analytical goal should be an understanding of why these differences arise, rather than which text is superior to the other.

Application

In a piece written in the late 1960s, Jirí Levý describes translation as a decision-making process; when moving a text from one language to another, the translator must

choose from a variety of alternatives in the target language in order to express an idea rendered in the source language. The number of possible alternatives is naturally limited by the linguistic constraints of the target language, but there is almost always more than one choice available. Thus, translation becomes a type of game in which each choice determines the consequent choices, and the end product is the result of all the individual decisions made during the process (Levy 149). By looking at the problem of translation from this angle, one can conclude that “incorrect” or “bad” translations do not really exist; instead, seemingly wrong translations are the result of choosing options in the target language that do not fulfill source language functions quite as well as other options might.

The next two chapters in this thesis will attempt to apply Levy’s ideas to film criticism by looking closely at two recent film adaptations of Juan Marsé’s novel *El embrujo de Shanghai*. The novel as well as its film versions all originate in Spain, and both adaptations were made relatively soon after publication of the novel, so there are no cross-linguistic or cross-cultural factors involved (i.e. adaptation in a different time period or language). However, the two adaptations, one by Victor Érice and the other by Fernando Trueba, are radically different in their approaches. An analysis of the process of bringing this novel to the screen can illuminate aspects of the individual text in an attempt to more fully understand film and literature in general. This analysis will look at the process of adaptation and what it says about each text involved, rather than attempting to assign value judgments and prove that the novel is “better” than either film or vice versa.

Juan Marsé published the novel *El embrujo de Shanghai* in 1992. The novel itself is densely populated with numerous characters whose lives intertwine in several different story threads. The protagonist, Dani, lives alone with his mother in Barcelona in 1947, his father having disappeared years earlier during the Spanish Civil War. Fourteen-year-old Dani has finished school and is waiting to begin an apprenticeship as a jeweler. His mother arranges for him to eat lunch with their neighbor Doña Concha, who then recruits Dani to accompany her eccentric husband Captain Blay as he wanders the neighborhood dressed as “The Invisible Man.” As the novel opens, Captain Blay detects a gas leak in the plaza, and soon conflates it into a conspiracy to destroy the city. He writes a petition against a nearby factory, whose smokestack dominates the neighborhood, and Dani becomes his assistant in circulating the petition gathering signatures.

The petition by Captain Blay introduces Dani to Susana, a fifteen-year old girl who lives nearby. Susana is a mysterious figure in the neighborhood, because she lives in a dilapidated home known as “the tower” with her mother Anita, wife of the mysterious hero of the resistance known as “El Kim.” Susana has been confined to her bedroom while recovering from tuberculosis, which Captain Blay asserts has been caused by the factory’s fumes. To accompany the petition, Dani is to draw a picture of Susana languishing on her bed. Dani befriends Susana and soon begins spending his afternoon in her bedroom working on his drawing. One day a friend of Kim’s, Nandu Forcat, appears at the house to care for Anita and Susana. Forcat tells Susana that Kim has gone to Shanghai in order to protect the wife of a dying friend. The story of Kim in Shanghai takes on a life of its own, and the action of the novel begins to jump between the ordinary

lives of Dani and Susana in Barcelona and the daring adventures of Kim in a foreign city. Dani and Susana's idyll is cut short, however when another associate of Kim's, turns up.

Kim's former comrade, Denis exposes Forcat's story as a fraud and reveals that Kim has disappeared with his wife and child, instead of accompanying them across the border from Spain into France. Denis expels Forcat from the tower and takes his place in the lives of Susana and Anita. Dani is also exiled from the tower and gone from Susana's life forever. Captain Blay dies, Dani begins his apprenticeship, and his mother remarries, events that all serve to cut Dani off from his childhood and thrust him into the world of adulthood. He also reports that Susana eventually recovers from tuberculosis and moves out of the tower with Denis. Forcat returns, rescues Susana from Denis, and returns her to her mother. Less than a week later, Denis arrives at the tower and attempts to take Susana back. He is unsuccessful and ends up dead, although the exact details of his death are unclear. A few years later Dani visits the movie theater where Susana has taken her mother's place in the box office, but she sells him a ticket without recognizing him.

After the publication of Marsé's novel, producer Andrés Vicente Gómez acquired the screen rights for the story and announced that director Victor Érice would direct the film. Érice began writing a script and scouting locations for the film, but soon ran into problems with the producer over the projected length of his work (three hours). Gómez stopped working with Érice and chose another director, Fernando Trueba, to make the film instead. Trueba adapted the novel himself and his film version debuted in 2002; during that same time period, Érice published his screenplay under the title *La promesa de Shanghai* (Deveny 719-20, Egea 19).

Just as a translator must make decisions when converting a text from one language to another, a filmmaker makes many decisions in the process of adapting a novel to the screen. The two versions of Marsé's novel provide an excellent opportunity to compare adaptation strategies objectively by looking at the decision making process. Several critics have compared the two versions, with some lamenting the fact that Érice's picture never reached completion and thus was never able to prove its superiority to Trueba's (Egea 21, Romea Castro 70). Although any comparison will be somewhat incomplete because it involves a film and a screenplay rather than two films, an analysis of the two works can illuminate the decisions made by each director and what those decisions say about both the vision of the adaptor and the source itself.

CHAPTER ONE

Fernando Trueba's film foregrounds one motif running throughout Juan Marsé's novel: the importance of movies in the lives of the characters. Anita works in the box office of the theater, Susana's father once had a job selling movie projectors, and although Susana cannot attend movies anymore, she spends a lot of her time thinking about them, so much so that she tells Dani "A veces veo películas en mis sueños" (Marsé 55). Forcat takes the details of his story about Kim in Shanghai directly from the adventure and detective films of the 1940s, and throughout the book Dani refers to Susana's room as similar to a movie theater. It is a dream-space, with its "ámbito de ensoñación ...que diariamente me acogía y me protegía de la mentira y la miseria del exterior" (Marsé 196). Like Forcat's construction of a movie to enchant his audience, Dani throughout the novel self-consciously constructs the narrative of his life in order to understand how his past and his present fit together.

Trueba's film makes use of both explicit connections to movies as well as the implied connections between storytelling on screen, fantasy, reality, and history in *El Embrujo de Shanghai*. On one level, Marsé's incorporation of film references (and Trueba's as well) serves simply as a way to place the text in a certain cultural context and pay homage to the postmodern obsession with allusions to pop culture. These references can also be seen as an acknowledgement of the importance of cinema in contemporary culture; the "mitología popular instaurada en la realidad cotidiana de la España de la posguerra" (Marí 452). On an even deeper level, a fascination with the art of movie-making underscores a central theme in Marsé's novel: the power of storytelling to change

our perception of reality. Jorge Marí refers to this as “la narración como vehículo de superación de las limitaciones espacio-temporales de la realidad” (464). Trueba’s film attempts to capture elements of all three of these levels of meaning through the following techniques: explicit references to cinema, particularly movies that were contemporary with the story; the use of techniques from films of the 1940s to portray the contrast between the mythification of the movie hero and the demythification of the heroes of the Spanish Civil War; and film techniques such as voice over and multiple endings that seek to portray the self-conscious narration of the novel.

Explicit Movie Connections

For his film, Trueba keeps the title of the novel: *El embrujo de Shanghai*. This title is also shared by the Spanish version of an American movie, *The Shanghai Gesture*, produced in 1941 but not released in Spain until 1946 (Érice 9). Although the name of the film does not show up in the novel, an early edition of the book had a shot from the movie on the cover; “mediante este recurso editorial, el libro, como objeto físico con capacidad de incorporar imágenes en sus tapas, añade al texto una referencia explícita que éste había evitado” (Marí 451). The only other reference to the movie in the novel occurs when Dani first meets Susana; when he shows her his drawings he includes one that shows “Gene Tierney con un vestido verde muy ceñido y sentada sobre el mostrador de un casino, insinuante y despeinada, el humo del cigarrillo enroscado en su cara” (Marsé 48). Dani has copied the drawing from a film flyer and even though he qualifies it as only “regular,” Susana chooses it as her favorite. This drawing does not show up in Trueba’s film; though Susana is shown a headshot of a beautiful woman who does somewhat resemble Gene Tierney.

The director also refers to another famous Gene Tierney film, *Laura*, which is showing at the theater when Anita is first introduced in the beginning of the film. As the voice of Dani describes Anita as “la más guapa del barrio,” the camera pans over the poster from *Laura* and lingers on the name Gene Tierney before dropping down to focus on Anita working in the ticket booth. Later, Trueba makes the connection with *The Shanghai Gesture* even more explicit by choosing to have Ariadna Gil, who depicts Anita, play the part of Chen, the Chinese woman that Kim is sent to protect. The original film from 1941 starred Gene Tierney (a Caucasian) as an Amerasian girl with Ona Munson (also Caucasian) playing the part of her Chinese mother, a fairly normal practice in Hollywood during a time when ethnic minorities were generally relegated to the role of extras.

A third movie reference appears in the final scene of the film, when Dani goes to the theater where Susana now works. As the camera pans down it reveals that the current movie is Alfred Hitchcock’s *Shadow of a Doubt*. The book does not specify a film and Dani notes that “durante un buen rato no me enteré de qué iba en la pantalla,” so Trueba’s choice of film has some symbolic significance (Marsé 238). Like Susana’s mysterious father, Hitchcock’s Uncle Charlie has been a mythical family figure for “young Charlie,” his namesake. When Uncle Charlie finally comes to town, however, she puts together the pieces and realizes that he is a con man. After Charlie realizes that his niece knows the truth, a dangerous game of cat and mouse ensues. The movie ends when young Charlie is able to accept that her uncle is not what she thought him to be and is able to literally push him out of her life.

These three movies—*The Shanghai Gesture*, *Laura*, and *Shadow of a Doubt* have more in common than the simple fact that they were all made during the 1940s and therefore contemporary to the time period. Each movie is a mystery and has at its center a beautiful, young woman who has become the object of manipulation by the men in her life, just like Susana is, first by Forcat and later by Denis. Susana also has to figure out the mystery surrounding her father and undergo the process of demythification about her origins, just as Charlie does at the end of *Shadow of a Doubt* and Poppy does in *The Shanghai Gesture*.

The Movie within the Movie

One of the key elements of Marsé's novel is the intercalated story of Kim in Shanghai, which takes up one quarter of the text of the book (Deveny 721). As Thomas Deveny notes, Forcat's purpose in telling the story is to enchant (*embrujar*) Susana and her mother: "In the Sophist tradition, Forcat uses artful language with the aim of persuading without being concerned with the truth" (722). Dani realizes his intent, although he refers to the "conjuro de su voz" and notes "tenía Forcat el don de hacernos ver lo que contaba" (Marsé 152, 201). Throughout the novel, Dani's gift as an artist and his ability to create drawings is implicitly compared to the gift of Forcat to tell stories, perhaps explaining why Dani finds himself drawn to Forcat even while recognizing his duplicity.

In Trueba's film, the story of Kim's voyage to Shanghai becomes part of the plot as seen on screen, filmed in black and white and stylized to resemble a movie from the 1940s. Trueba's choice of using cinematic conventions to portray Dani's vision of Shanghai as a *film noir* paradise of ex-nazis, gangsters, and beautiful women has several

rhetorical functions. In a society dominated by defeat the need for new heroes was critical. At the time, many looked to movies for heroic models, and they found them in such leading men as Humphrey Bogart or Robert Mitchum. These new heroes contrasted with their former heroes, men like Kim who were now living in exile or who had disappeared under Franco's regime: "héroes, al fin y al cabo, de cartón, frágiles, cansados. Héroes que regresan sólo con la intención de...enterarse a sí mismos en el absoluto anonimato" (Belmonte Serrano 11). Men like Kim could not be remembered for their valor during the war and were now forced to live in hiding within their own country or in exile in another. By combining the figure of Kim with the world of adventure films, Forcat gives him a space in which he can once again act heroically and save the world from fascists. As a movie hero, Kim is free to play his part safe from persecution because he has crossed the line from reality to myth.

In the novel, Marsé makes the connection between film and Kim as he exists in Susana's mind. Susana liked to pass time by cutting up figures from movie ads and pasting them in new positions. After describing various famous figures that appeared in her collages, the narrator adds that "entre ese revoltijo de recuerdos estaba el de su padre la última vez que vino a verla cruzando la frontera clandestinamente..." (Marsé 55-56). For Susana, her father is another mythic hero. He does not exist in the "real" world that Dani and Susana inhabit; instead, he seems to have stepped right off the screen of the latest film. For Dani and Susana, "el cine ofrece la posibilidad de escaparse de una realidad dolorosa al transformar al espectador en viajero emocional" (Labanyi 165). By transforming Kim into a movie character, his actions begin to make sense and Susana can preserve her love and respect for him. He hasn't disappeared because of a lack of love for

her or her mother, but instead because of his “secret mission” and the important things he needs to accomplish. The arrival of Denis forces Susana to realize the truth, and it shatters her entire world. Both she and Dani enter the world of adulthood and their shared story is never seen again.

In the closing scene of the novel, Dani visits the theater where Susana works and purchases a ticket from her, but she does not recognize him. He then enters the theater but doesn't watch the movie, instead returning to the past narrative. In his mind, he sees a boat moving through the darkness, carrying “Susana dejándose llevar en su sueño y en mi recuerdo a pesar del desencanto, las perversiones del ideal y el tiempo transcurrido, hoy como ayer, rumbo a Shanghai” (Marsé 237). Trueba's film does not show this vision; instead, it ends with a close-up of Dani's face in the theater as tears stream down his cheeks. In the film, Dani's thoughts about Susana are not made explicit to the viewer, but are implied through his reaction to his encounter with her.

Trueba has also chosen to have the same actress, Ariadna Gil, portray both Susana's mother and Chen Jing, the Chinese woman that Kim goes to Shanghai to protect. The effect is somewhat disconcerting, because even when she has dark hair and is dressed in Chinese clothes, the actress does not look Chinese and remains recognizable as Anita. However, realism does not seem to be what Fernando Trueba is seeking for in the intercalated sequences. In fact, having the same actress play Anita and Chen Jing serves two purposes. In the first place it highlights the complete unreality of the Shanghai sequences and their ties with old adventure movies. As discussed earlier, the use of a Caucasian actress to play a Chinese woman is directly linked with old Hollywood practice in general and specifically *The Shanghai Gesture*.

In the second place, the dual role of Anita/Chen Jing demonstrates the purpose of Forcat's tale, which is to redeem Susana's father. In real life, Kim has proven to be less than a hero by running off with another man's wife rather than rescuing his own wife and daughter. In the "film version" that Forcat creates and Dani visualizes, Kim protects another man's wife, even when she does not seem to need protecting. In Forcat's vision of him, Kim is loyal to his friends and debonair with their women. Even when he realizes that his mission was undertaken for false pretenses, he is willing to leave Chen Jing with her lover and refuses to kill him. Trueba's version of the story is done differently, and ends with Omar dead and Chen Jing and Kim escaping together in a boat. Both versions of the story have open endings, for they are both interrupted at that moment by the apparition of Denis, who has come to provide his own ending and explanation for Kim's absence. Kim is not in Shanghai, and is not loyal to his friends or to their women. Even Dani's vision of Anita as the lovely and protected Chen Jing cannot stand up to the facts of reality as they are provided by Denis.

Not only does the adventure film serve as the pattern for creating a new hero in the figure of Kim and his redemption of Anita, but it also serves as a metaphor for the experience of movies as a whole. Watching a movie is an opportunity for the spectator to be transported to another time and place; it is a form of travel, and in a closed society like that of Spain during the 1940s, the *only* available form of travel (Labanyi 161). Surely part of the reason why Dani imagines the journey to Shanghai in such a stylized, filmic manner is because the only people he has seen able to travel are his on-screen heroes. When he prepares the second drawing of Susana, the one depicting her in a Chinese *chipao*, Susana contends that Dani has drawn the dress incorrectly. He defends himself

by citing what he has seen on screen: “Lo he visto en las películas y son así” (Marsé 177).

Cinematographer Jose Luis López Linares writes that the contrast between the fantasy world of the movies and the real world was deliberately heightened during filming: “en este caso, utilizamos el color para contar una historia triste y melancólica y reservamos el blanco y negro para lo que es producto de la fantasía” (“La fotografía”). This technique actually contrasts with film history, in which more realistic, gritty crime movies were filmed in black and white while musicals and other stylized films appeared in Technicolor. The inversion of technique mirrors the inverted world of *film noir* referenced throughout the novel: “when anything can mean its opposite, we are no longer able to proceed from assured principles” (Copjec viii). Dani and Susana realize that the “assured principles” they once thought true, like the fact that the *maquis*—the Republican soldiers who retreated to France and continued to fight against Franco after the end of the Spanish Civil war—are virtuous heroes, are based on falsehood. As Dani writes his story he realizes that every story has multiple facets and that “anything can mean its opposite.”

Narrative Strategies

Narration in the novel presents several possible problems for adaptation into film. In the first place, the novel is in first person, a point-of-view that is nearly impossible to recreate on screen because of the nature of the camera itself. Throughout the book, Dani remains the focalizer and director of the action, although he is a self-consciously unreliable narrator. Rather than simply telling the story from his exclusive point of view, he constantly reminds us that he may not be remembering things correctly, that some things he only knows from neighborhood gossip, and that some things he tells are

influenced more by his emotion than by any sort of verifiable facts. Dani is aware that the act of writing his story is a way of constructing a narrative of the past that may or may not reflect how things really happened. As Jorge Marí writes regarding the novel:

El embrujo se manifiesta a través de un conglomerado de perspectivas, especulaciones y rumores contradictorios, que ni se confirman ni se desmienten y que se entrelazan con el recuento de las experiencias del narrador principal y con la reconstrucción del fantasioso relato de Forcat. (464-5)

The narrative of Shanghai as told by Forcat interrupts Dani's first-person writings. This adds even more layers of unreliability to Dani's narrative, as Forcat is supposedly relaying a story told to him by Kim. The use of multiple voices and multiple perspectives works quite well in writing, but film's nature as a visual medium makes the use of multiple perspectives somewhat problematic. Film tends to be immediate, linear, and visual, so the explanations of a narrator can become intrusive (Seger 22-27).

In the novel, Dani seems to be aware of both the artificiality of his narrative and of Forcat's story as well. The third paragraph begins "Así empieza mi historia" (Marsé 9), and throughout the book he constantly reminds his readers that he is attempting to recall events correctly, and even more importantly to understand their significance in his life, such as when he adds "no sé si lo estoy contando bien" (201). As an adult looking back, Dani is now able to begin to identify with Forcat and to seek to understand his motivations: "en qué estaría pensando, *me pregunto hoy*, ya instalado como él entonces en la certeza de que todo es transitorio y es lo mismo, la máscara y la cara..." (Marsé 215, emphasis added). Within the novel, the contrast between past, present and future and

the power of language to create meaning serve as important themes. While film can make use of flashback to create a sense of contrast between present and past, it can be difficult to fully convey the nuances of a story constructed on the page from the memories of the narrator.

From the beginning of Trueba's film, Dani's voice dominates the story, just as it dominates the novel. During the opening credits, the camera pans over a series of objects that foreshadow the story of Shanghai that is to come: first a yellow rose, then a book with Chinese characters and a lipstick print on the cover, and then a smoking opium pipe. The camera follows the smoke up until it becomes thick and dense, and then pans down to show that it is now smoke from the factory chimney. At this point the screen goes black and Dani's voice is heard: "No sé muy bien por dónde empezar mi historia" (Trueba). This line contrasts with the certainty of the narrator in the book—"Así empieza mi historia"—and when combined with the series of images from Shanghai and the factory chimney, references both Shanghai and Barcelona. Dani does not know where to begin his story, figuratively or literally. This beginning sets the stage for the conflation of fiction and reality that the two places represent.

After the credits, the first ten minutes of the film are spent introducing the major characters of the story. From off-screen, Dani's voice describes his mother, his absent father (whose dead body is briefly seen lying in a snow-covered trench), Finito Chacón, Captain Blay and his wife, Anita, Susana, and Forcat. This sort of compressed introduction using voiceover is a conventional choice in filmmaking, because it allows a large volume of information to be presented to the viewer in a minimum of time. We can quickly become familiar with the major players in the story as well as the basic outlines

of what is going to happen during the rest of the film. Dani's voice disappears for the majority of the body of the film, but returns after the appearance of Denis. Dani again narrates for the viewer as we see the final events of the story: Susana's exile and return, the confrontation between Forcat and Denis, and Dani's mother's wedding. The final scene of the film is the encounter between Dani and Susana at the box office, done without voice-over. Dani's voice controls much of the film and reminds the viewer that it is an introspective narrative constructed after the events have already taken place.

Forcat's voice is also present in the film, and usually connected to his body as we see him beginning to narrate the events in Shanghai while the film cuts to show what he is telling. As Joan Copjec has written, there is a difference between a voice attached to a visible person and a disembodied voice (184). The voice that is never attached to a body retains its authority and can exercise complete control over the image. Interestingly, although the novel implies that the Dani narrating the story is temporally removed from the events, in the film the voiceover is done by the same actor and therefore sounds contemporary to the story. Nevertheless, this voiceover retains the past-tense, reflective quality of the novel and we never see Dani on screen physically narrating the words that are present in his voiceover segments. By the absence of Dani from the screen while he is narrating, his voice takes on more importance and we are able to focus solely on his control of the story.

Forcat's presence effectively kills the power of his voice; it is impossible for the viewer to be completely enchanted by the story in Shanghai because we know who its author is. Although both Marsé and Trueba attempt to bestow some sort of magical powers on Forcat through scenes such as the warming of the glass of milk and the

incident with the fireflies, the fact that the viewer can see him telling the story takes away from his authority. In the novel, Dani and Susana are able to believe his story and are mesmerized by his voice, because he presents himself as channeling the voice of and story of Kim. But in the film the viewer does not feel the same sense of enchantment due to the presence of Forcat and his obvious role as storyteller.

Perspective: Multiple Endings

The climactic scene where Denis is shot epitomizes the narrative equivocation present in the rest of the novel. Dani explains that he no longer has first-hand knowledge of what happens and that he can only rely on “comentarios y chismes del vecindario,” but he reassures his readers that these “no merecen menos crédito que mi testimonio” (Marsé 229). After Susana has spent some time with Denis, Forcat appears and brings her back to the tower. Denis goes to the tower to get Susana back and ends up dead. Anita describes what she saw years later, after “la bebida y la mala conciencia ya habían devastado su memoria” (Marsé 230). According to Anita, Denis came to the house and confronted Forcat in an attempt to get Susana back for himself. Denis and Forcat argued violently and Denis ended up dead. According to Anita and his own confession, Forcat was the one who fired the gun. However, later Anita plants the doubt in Dani’s mind that perhaps Susana had something to do with the shooting after all. Dani feels that this theory makes sense, since she had access to the gun and she had a good reason to shoot Denis. In fact, Dani reports, “me gustó este desvarío, me gustó desde el primer día que lo escuché, y en el transcurso de los años lo he cultivado secretamente en mi corazón...más que una hipótesis, era un sentimiento” (Marsé 233). Once again, Dani has shown a preference for remembered emotions over remembered facts. In his mind, Denis’ death at Susana’s

hand is a much more plausible scenario simply because it fits his emotional viewpoint. It preserves Susana as the vengeful victim, and places Forcat back in his position as the man who lies to protect her from the consequences of the truth.

Thus, the novel has two versions of the death: the first has Forcat shooting Denis by himself, and the second implying Susana's involvement. Only the first version is described in detail, with the possibility that Susana fired the first shots in the house later mentioned but not described. However, in the film, Trueba offers three versions of the ending. This is an unusual choice in a film, because convention favors a linear plot with only one version of the climactic scene. It is also unusual that Trueba has added a third version, one in which Anita shoots Denis.

Dani introduces each version in voiceover. First, we hear "la noticia [que] salió en el periódico" while we see a close-up shot of the back of Denis' head at the door of the tower. The camera follows Denis closely as he pushes past Forcat at the door, runs up the stairs, and confronts Susana in the bathroom. He attempts to pull her out of the bathroom but we hear a shot and he suddenly stops. The camera turns to reveal Forcat holding a gun at the top of the stairs. Denis stumbles down the stairs and collapses outside in the garden; Forcat shoots him several more times, then sits down in a chair to wait for the police.

The second version of the shooting is similar, but Dani introduces it by saying "Aunque en el barrio corrió una versión diferente de lo que sucedió." It starts the same way, with a close-up of Denis at the door and follows him up the stairs to the bathroom. This time, however, it is Anita that shoots Denis. After he is shot, Forcat takes the gun and leaves, presumably following Denis outside. The camera remains on Anita, who is

holding Susana, while several shots are heard off screen. Dani introduces the third version: “Pero yo siempre he imaginado lo ocurrido de otra manera.” In contrast to the jerky camera movements and rapid cutting of the first two versions, the third is filmed in slow motion. Denis enters the house looking for Susana, and knocks both Anita and Forcat to the floor. Suddenly we hear a shot and Denis stops short, while the camera turns to show Susana on the stairs holding the gun. She slumps down and Forcat takes the gun from her; at this point, camera speed returns to normal and the scene where Forcat follows Denis to the garden and shoots him is replayed from the first version.

Conclusions

Critical reaction to Fernando Trueba’s adaptation of Juan Marsé’s novel has been mixed. The author himself referred to the film as the best screen adaptation of any of his novels (quoted in Deveny 735). Focusing primarily on the theme of demythification, Kwang-Hee Kim refers to the “fidelidad traidora” of Trueba’s work and writes that “la fidelidad a la que se aferra el cineasta tanto en el argumento como en los diálogos hace que el texto fílmico pierda fuerza narrativa y que alcance solo un resultado mediocre” (341). Celia Romea Castro also faults the fidelity of the adaptation: “el director se ha fijado, sobre todo, en la aventura, por lo que su interior se ha visto afectado y en muchos momentos es hueco, vacío, sin vida” (59). Trueba’s film, from its title to its extensive voiceover sequences taken directly from the novel itself, follows Marsé’s novel more closely than Victor Érice’s version does. Trueba weaves together references to the films of the time period to demonstrate cinema’s role as cultural mediator and mythmaker for the twentieth century. The link between film and storytelling in Dani’s mind is brought out to show how the *maquis* like Kim took their place in popular memory, but proved to

be nothing more than flickering shadows like the *film noir* heroes portrayed on screen in Dani and Susana's beloved films. As Ana Luengo notes about the intersection between dreams, film, and memory, "en la obra se plantearía así ese mundo de las ilusiones, las películas y los sueños, como una forma de escape de la realidad circundante. Pero no se puede olvidar que esa realidad sigue allí" (141). In Trueba's version of the novel, the contrast between reality and dream is presented on screen as a contrast between reality and film—an appropriate way of showing the role of popular media in shaping history and memory during the twentieth century.

CHAPTER TWO

Víctor Érice presents his script *La Promesa de Shanghai* as an adaptation of Juan Marsé's novel *El embrujo de Shanghai*, and although it retains many elements of the original, it is substantially different as well. One of the reasons why Érice's script was pulled from the project was his movie's projected length of three hours, which is at least one hour longer than the average film. The director adds many new scenes that are not in the novel and leaves out other parts of the plot. Such radical changes from text to screen are usually dismissed as infidelity and used to judge the final product as a failure in some way. However, the text that Érice produces is still faithful to Marsé's book in many ways and the basis for the changes can be found within the original novel. Érice has chosen to emphasize certain themes present in the novel: the distance between fantasy and reality; the effects of the Spanish Civil War on children, particularly the loss of the father figure; and nostalgia for the past, mythologized world of childhood in contrast to the present.

Title: "Promise" or "Spell"?

In the introduction to his script, Víctor Érice writes that this film has influenced his script in a more personal manner than simple visual imitation. As a youth, he surreptitiously watched *El embrujo de Shanghai* after sneaking into the theater where the movie (which was termed "highly dangerous" by the government) was being shown. His experience with the movie lingered in his mind as a vision of glamour and suspense that slowly faded with the disillusionment of age (Érice 9-11). As Érice explains, "Su título, *La promesa de Shanghai* —es decir ni *gesture* ni *embujo*: solo promesa, promesa del mundo—, sugiere que, como cineasta, o no he podido, ni quizá podré nunca, viajar

verdaderamente a Shanghai más que a través de lo imaginario” (14). Érice echoes the quote from Luis García Moreno that Marsé employs as the epigraph for his novel:

La verdadera nostalgia, la más honda, no tiene que ver con el pasado, sino con el futuro. Yo siento con frecuencia la nostalgia del futuro, quiero decir, nostalgia de aquellos días de fiesta, cuando todo merodeaba por delante y el futuro aún estaba en su sitio. (Marsé 8)

In his role as director, Érice projects his youthful experiences on his subject; Dani becomes his younger self, and the older Dani who is writing down his memories is the older Érice who has come to realize the impossibility of achieving his youthful dreams. Shanghai does not exist in the world of the real, and from the perspective of an older, more experienced Dani, it never did. All he had at the time was the distant promise of a different, magical world; this is the “nostalgia del futuro” referred to. The changing of the title to “promise” rather than “enchantment” announces Érice’s intention to deemphasize the Shanghai narrative and make explicit Dani’s journey into adulthood through the disillusionment of youth.

Narrative Strategies

Érice chooses to divide the action into episodes, each marked by a scene of the adult Daniel writing about his past. He has chosen to make explicit what is implicit in the novel: the story is being told in flashback form by a first person narrator, who is obviously Dani at some point later in time. Although in the book there is no indication of temporal distance between the Dani that is narrating and the action that is taking place, Érice indicates that the first image in the film will be “la mano de un hombre de edad madura” writing on paper (23). Towards the end of the book, after Dani returns briefly to

his old neighborhood before leaving with the military, he realizes that “por mucho que uno mire hacia el futuro, uno crece siempre hacia el pasado, en busca tal vez del primer deslumbramiento” (Marsé 236). The image of an older, wiser Dani writing his history reflects this idea of reaching back into the past at the same time as reaching forward to the future.

The flashback framed by the older narrator is a standard trope in film, but runs the risk of becoming simply “a sentimental gimmick for placing the action in the past and having it represent the former, rich, active life of the protagonist who, in the frame narrative is revealed as older and wiser, remorseful or nostalgic, etc.” (Pipolo 167). In Érice’s film nothing is revealed about the narrator of the frame other than the fact that he is older, which can often imply wisdom. Érice adds meaning to the original text, which is vague on the temporal placement of the narrator, and by so doing emphasizes the story as one of maturity and growth.

The Loss of Dani’s Father

Marsé’s novel opens with Dani and Captain Blay together in the plaza; the captain seems to detect the odor of gas and is trying to make Dani smell it as well. Dani notes that he feels lost without his father, and that he would have liked to have had him near “para no sentirme tan indefenso ante los delirios del capitán Blay y ante mis propios sueños” (Marsé 9). Dani sees his father as someone who would have been able to help him distinguish between fantasy and reality, someone who could help him find a secure place in the world. In the third paragraph of the novel, Dani introduces the fact that his father is missing in the war and that Captain Blay is but a pale substitute. The search for a father figure comes up throughout the novel as Dani searches for some sort of spiritual

guide. Among the figures he tries to emulate are Captain Blay, the Chacón brothers, and Nandu Forcat.

Érice begins his film emphasizing the loss of Dani's father and doesn't introduce Captain Blay until later. The first image of the film is Dani's hand writing about his father, and the action cuts to a scene of a battlefield. Érice describes this scene as composed of only two colors, black and white, and writes that it is "quizá más soñada que real" (23). The voice of the narrator (distinguished in the script from the voice of the younger Dani portrayed on screen) begins:

Así empieza mi historia, y me habría gustado que hubiese en ella un lugar para mi padre, tenerlo cerca para aconsejarme, para no sentirme tan indefenso ante mis propios sueños, pero en esa época a él ya lo consideraban definitivamente desaparecido, y nunca volvería a casa.
(Érice 23)

These lines are taken directly from the book, with the exception that the reference to Captain Blay has been removed in order to keep the focus on the death of Dani's father. After this opening scene with the battlefield, the film goes on to several more scenes about the missing father.

The scene cuts from the battlefield to the newspaper and its notices seeking information about missing soldiers. Various voices read the notices as the screen returns to the battlefield and the camera lingers on the bodies of the dead. The last notice is read by Dani's mother and describes his father. The next cut is to Dani's bedroom, where the camera pans from a drawing of the dead soldier in the trench to Dani asleep on his bed in a similar posture. The camera notes various objects, such as a wristwatch, a typewriter, a

photo of a *fútbol* team, and a pair of cleats. The voice of the narrator notes that his longing for his father grew as he reached adolescence and that he was never able to put on his father's old cleats. In this scene, Érice establishes the search for a father as a central motif for his film; it is a motif that exists in the source text, but only briefly.

Throughout the film, Érice returns to the scene of the battlefield, where snow falls on the body of a Republican soldier. These visions mark some sort of transition in the action, just like the interspersed scenes of the adult Dani writing at his desk. Érice's repetition of the visions of the battlefield where the soldier lies covered in snow emphasize the nature of Dani's narrative as a way to understand his past in order to move forward into the maturity of adulthood. The final image of the film is the black and white battlefield again. This time, the soldier's body has been completely covered by the snow until its presence is something that "se adivina más que se ve" (Érice 393). The image slowly fades to black as the movie ends.

Towards the end of the novel Dani notes that after his mother's remarriage and his move away from his old neighborhood, the image of his dead father soon began to fade from his mind and lost its emotional connection (Marsé 234). One day he and his mother discuss his childhood vision of his dead father on the battlefield, and his mother reveals that she deliberately did not disabuse him of his fantasy even though she knew it was false. Érice dramatizes this scene and enhances it with material from the beginning sequence in Dani's room. The exchange with his mother takes place in their half-empty apartment the morning of their move to Braulio's apartment. Dani is packing his things, including the drawing of his father in the trench. His mother sees it and reveals that she never dissuaded him from his belief in this image because it gave him something to

remember. The theme of fantasy being better than reality is emphasized by the line (taken from the book): “No te lo dije porque para un niño como tú, que no tenía ningún recuerdo de su padre, mejor era eso que nada” (Érice 337). The emotional epiphany noted in the novel is portrayed on film by a subsequent scene of Dani putting on his father’s football cleats and joining his friends.

Father Figures

Dani looks up to Finito and Juan Chacón, despite the fact that they are close to his same age. They are orphans who live on the street, supporting themselves by selling comics and pulp novels. Although they are minor characters in the novel, they contrast with Dani through their freedom from obligations and their self confidence. Although Dani has the security of a mother, a home, and future employment, after one encounter with Finito he notes “le odiaba y secretamente le envidiaba; en los tres meses que llevábamos sin vernos, él había aprendido artimañas para matar el hambre traficando con tebeos usados ... y en cambio yo no había aprendido nada” (Marsé 25). Juan and Finito represent the sort of self-determination that Dani hopes to achieve some day, although without his father to guide him he is unsure of how to reach it.

The *hermanos Chacón* play a relatively minor part in the novel; they set up their newsstand outside Susana’s home and bring her gifts, and Finito serves as Dani’s connection to all the neighborhood gossip. In Érice’s film, however, the director shifts them to the level of major characters and Dani spends a good portion of his time conversing with them. As in the novel, they are Susana’s self-appointed guardians, but in Érice’s version of the story, Finito and Juan—not Captain Blay—suggest that the smoke from the factory is harming her:

DANI: La chimenea tendría que ser más alta.

FINITO CHACÓN: Más alta, sí, pero sobre todo que no soltara tanta mierda. Los que viven en esta calle lo saben, pero en vez de protestar se callan como muertos.

El capitán se ha puesto en pie, observando con sus prismáticos la chimenea. (Érice 100)

In this scene, Captain Blay is only observing and noting the action of the others, not participating in it as he does in the novel. In the film the smoke has been turned into a real, actual threat that sickens little girls and turns laundry gray (Érice 100), not the imagined “tufarada tóxica” that only the captain worries about (Marsé 38).

In the novel, Captain Blay is the first major character introduced by Dani, who describes his influence in the second paragraph: “el capitán tenía el don de sugestionarme con su voz mineral” (Marsé 9). Dani recognizes the captain’s insanity and worries that it will somehow corrupt him; after the captain’s death he realizes that “el viejo pirado había conseguido contagiarme una brizna de aquel virus que le sorbía el entendimiento” (Marsé 196). Juan Marsé implies a connection between Blay and Don Quijote, for example writing in one scene that he swings his arms like windmills and in another that he is constantly fighting a losing battle against imagined enemies (11, 196).

Victor Érice makes the connection with Don Quijote and Sancho Panza more explicit throughout his script. Unlike Marsé’s captain who spends several years writing fruitless letters to the owners of the toxic factory, Érice’s Captain Blay attacks the factory in person, addressing the business as an enemy and inviting it to come out and fight him (105-108). While in the novel Captain Blay is eccentric, he is still capable of giving

guidance to Dani; in Érice's script he appears more lost in his own delusions and needs Dani to guide him; for example, when Dani must patiently point out that the odor they smell comes not from "the plague" but from the factory (Érice 103). The director makes this connection clear by referring to the pair as "caballero y escudero" (88, 189). Just as *Don Quijote* eventually dies amid confusion and disillusionment, Captain Blay leaves Dani alone without someone to guide him.

The arrival of Nandu Forcat introduces a third possible guide for Dani, although Érice's script does not spend as much time on Forcat as the novel does. Unlike Fernando Trueba, Érice chooses not to dramatize the story of Kim on screen, so Forcat's voice, and therefore his influence, is not as strong as it is in the book. With his portrayal of Forcat's character, the director does establish some ambiguity about the truth of his story as well as his seemingly magic abilities, such as warming a glass of milk with his hands (199) or his ability to speak Chinese (278).

Érice adds a sequence, not included in the novel, in which Dani follows Forcat to the docks and uncovers his deception. Dani discovers that the *Veracruz*, the ship that supposedly carried Kim to Shanghai, is actually a rusting wreck that hasn't sailed for years. Érice writes that, upon viewing the ship:

Una serie vertiginosa de ideas y sentimientos se atropellan en la mente de Dani, cuando, súbitamente, comprende algo que le deja anonadado: a lo largo del paseo por la ciudad siguiendo los pasos de Forcat, él no ha sido el perseguidor, como creía, sino el perseguido. Es más, todo el itinerario trazado en su deriva por el misterioso personaje parece no haber tenido

otro objeto que conducirlo hasta esta dársena donde yace olvidado el cascarón del *Veracruz*. (Érice 270)

Dani confronts Forcat, who explains that his stories of Kim have all been an elaborate ruse, complete with Chinese souvenirs bought from sailors at the docks.

At this moment, Forcat invites Dani to keep his secret—to become his co-conspirator in the deception of Susana and Anita. Directly after the segment with Forcat at the docks, Captain Blay suddenly passes away. By presenting in succession these two scenes, one taken directly from the source novel and one not, Érice emphasizes the transition that Dani makes from one spiritual guide to the other. The death of the captain and his replacement by Forcat change Dani's relationship with Susana. When the captain introduced him to the girl, Dani was using her as a means to end, a model for a portrait that Captain Blay needed for his own particular schemes. After a time they became friends and accomplices, but once Dani makes his discovery at the docks he enters into complicity with Forcat to deceive Susana (Érice 284). His relationship with her changes once again, only this time through the guidance and influence of Forcat. Rather than being an equal of Susana and her partner against Forcat, Dani has become another victim of Forcat's deception.

The novel concentrates on Dani's enchantment by Forcat's mysterious powers and his storytelling abilities. Because the novel is told from Dani's point of view looking back on facts, he knew that Forcat's story was invented and that his reasons for telling it were not pure. He states "hoy pienso que el gran embaucador, en el fondo de su corazón, siempre supo que lo suyo con esta mujer crédula y desdichada y vulnerable duraría lo que durase la débil llama que alumbraba el sueño de Susana" (Marsé 216). However, in the

novel, the presence of the story itself helps the reader to feel some of Dani's excitement about the adventures of Kim in Shanghai. In Érice's version the moment of disillusionment that is only speculated on in the novel is brought to life, while the illusion is left inside the heads of Dani and Susana.

Symbolic Networks

As Juan Egea notes, "objects on the screen are what save words in Érice's moving pictures. They are, first but not foremost, a very concrete means to link scenes and sequences. But they also play a substantial role in creating a sort of visual resonance very characteristic of his work" (21). The director incorporates a variety of objects that repeat themselves throughout the script in a symbolic network of meaning that is not present in the original novel. As noted earlier, the football cleats link Dani to his father and the moment he puts them on signals an acceptance of his loss. Captain Blay is always seen with his binoculars, which he uses to observe the factory; however, the day of the captain's death the script states: "un detalle: no lleva sus prismáticos" (Érice 285).

For Susana, the enchantment of Shanghai is represented by the *chipao*, or Chinese dress that Forcat brings her, ostensibly from her father. Susana puts it on and applies rice powder and lipstick to make herself look like a Chinese girl. When Dani sees her, he is transfixed by her transformation (Érice 233); later, Captain Blay visits her room and addresses her as the Chinese princess "Flor de Loto". When Susana protests that she is not a Chinese princess, the captain replies that "ese brujo de Forcat" has transformed her into one (Érice 243). The moment of her disillusionment by Denis is marked by her return to a normal appearance; she hides under her covers when he appears, only to emerge looking disheveled, and with her white makeup completely gone "su imagen

oriental se desvanece” (Érice 313). Through Forcat’s power Susana has been able to transform herself, but Denis breaks the spell and she is unable to recapture the magic.

Susana is never able to find Shanghai again, but in the penultimate scene of the movie Dani is able to recreate their youthful imaginings. When Dani enters the movie after Susana has sold him a ticket without recognizing him, he sees on the screen:

Un barco, blanco como la nieve, navega por un mar plateado, bajo la noche estrellada. Una muchachita pasea por la cubierta a la luz de la luna.

Viste un chipao de seda verde y lleva en sus manos un abanico.

Apoyándose en una barandilla—de la que cuelga un salvavidas con un nombre inscrito: *Veracruz*—enfrenta su rostro a la brisa. La muchacha no es otra que Susana, tal como era a sus trece años. Fascinada por el vasto mar fosforescente, busca en el horizonte las luces de la ciudad soñada.

Luego, poco a poco, cierra los ojos. (Érice 392)

Dani is able to see Susana as she had seen herself, transported by her magical *chipao* to the land of her fantasies represented by Shanghai.

The Ending

In Érice’s script, two versions of Denis’ death appear: one where the person shooting is not shown, and another in which Susana is the killer. The first version is shot from the point of view of the neighbors; the camera is outside the tower and the action inside is only heard, not seen. Denis arrives at the tower and rings the doorbell, and the script notes that “desde alguna ventana o balcón cercano más de un vecino sigue también con curiosidad lo que está pasando” (Érice 367). After Forcat opens the door, Denis pushes inside and an argument is heard coming from within the tower. Two shots are then

heard and the neighbors rush to their windows and balconies to observe the action. Denis stumbles from the tower into the garden and falls to the ground. Forcat emerges, shoots Denis three more times, and remains standing with a look that “parece buscar algo invisible en el aire” (Érice 368).

The film cuts from Forcat standing over Denis’ body to a scene of Anita slumped at a table in a bar next to a nearly empty wine bottle. After the narrator states that Anita insisted on discussing certain details about the events in the tower, Anita begins talking to an unseen audience. After she discusses her version of events, the scene shifts to Forcat opening the door for Denis at the tower. This time the confrontation takes place in the gallery, Susana’s former bedroom—which the director notes “da la impresión de ser un escenario de teatro vacío” (Érice 370). After Denis fights off both Forcat and Anita, he enters the hallway looking for Susana. Two shots are heard, after which the voice of Anita notes that “¡Susana no se defendió con un cuchillo! ¡No es verdad lo que dice la gente!” (374). Denis stumbles into the garden and is shot by Forcat, again in front of the eyes of the entire neighborhood. An additional scene that does not appear in the book supplements this version of his death; after the police arrive to arrest Forcat and take away Denis’ body, Susana and Anita remain in the gallery alone. Susana murmurs “ya se fue...”, but it is unclear whether she is referring to Forcat or to Denis (376).

Conclusion

Critical reception of Érice’s script has been positive, with most critics agreeing with Juan Bonilla’s assessment: “consigue traducir a cine puro la pura literatura de Marsé, contradiciendo todas las pesimistas teorías según las cuales sólo de una mala novela se puede hacer una buena película” (“La película”). Much of the praise for Érice’s

work not only comes from the fact that he is a brilliant filmmaker, but from the potential quality of the film itself. Juan Egea writes that “to approach the screenplay for *La promesa de Shanghai* is, after all, to imagine, to foresee, to envision, and ultimately and more than ever, to treat words as projected images” (19). Cecilia Romea Castro calls Érice “dichoso” because his work still exists as vision and possibility and therefore is somewhat free from critical judgment by virtue of its unrealized status (71).

The theme of representation present throughout the self-conscious narration of the book also comes through strongly in Érice’s script with its emphasis on the “states of *in-betweenness* that are involved in the process of representation itself” (Egea 20). It begins and ends with the image of an older narrator writing, and this image is repeated throughout the film as well. The repeated reminders of the framing device reinforce the theme of the ability of art to create reality that is present in the book. Forcat’s storytelling, Dani’s drawing, Captain Blay’s creation of a petition that links the tower to Susana’s illness, and Susana’s donning of Chinese costume work together to show Dani, and the reader, that reality can be molded by our perceptions of it. As Érice has Forcat say to Dani, “en esta vida decir la verdad a veces no sirve de nada” (282). Dani learns that the truth is not always as important as our vision of what we want the truth to be.

The search for the truth in the novel and the script captures the setting of the novel in postwar Barcelona, a place marked by loss and shrouded in the secrets of the past; “el recuerdo de los ausentes, sus apariciones ocasionales o la sospecha de que puedan aparecer en cualquier momento, es un estado de ánimo de atención permanente” (Romea Castro 45). Érice shows Dani’s longing for a father through the repeated scenes of the fallen soldier on the snowy battlefield as well as the repetition of symbolic objects like

his father's cleats and wristwatch and Dani's drawing of his death. The network of symbolic objects that repeat throughout the movie reinforce Dani's search for a person who can guide him in his discovery of the truth about his past and his future.

The director's use of voiceover and presentation of two different versions of the ending contribute to the theme of uncertainty about the truth. However, in other ways, Érice concretizes the ambiguity that exists in the novel and takes away some of the impact of this uncertainty. For example, in the book Dani merely imagines the possibility that Forcat bought the Chinese objects from somewhere on the dock, but in Érice's script this scene is dramatized and the process of Dani's disillusionment is spelled out explicitly. In the novel, the smoke from the factory is a menace only in Captain Blay's mind, but in Érice's script its threat is acknowledged by everyone who lives in the neighborhood. The penultimate scene of the script notes the presence of "dos dibujos a lápiz, desvaídos y amarillentos" on the narrator's desk (Érice 392). One is the drawing of Susana sick in her bed with the smokestack in the background; the other is of her dressed in her oriental costume. The fact that both these drawings are yellowed and aged reflects the opening line of the novel as spoken by Captain Blay: "los sueños juveniles se corrompen en boca de los adultos" (Marsé 9). Victor Érice's *La promesa de Shanghai* captures this sense of loss, perhaps even more profoundly than Marsé's original work.

CONCLUSION

Robert Wechsler describes translation as “a *pattern* of decisions, not just a bunch of them,” and points out that it is a fallacy to judge a translation by individual word choices that seem to be mistaken because “those ‘mistakes’ might actually be the result of a great deal of balancing, for example, making up in one place what had to be left out in another part of the work” (116). By examining the pattern of decisions each director makes as he adapts Juan Marsé’s novel to film, we can understand what each one takes from the book as its central ideas.

One theme in Marsé’s work that a number of critics have noted is the use of writing or storytelling as a way to understand their own lives. As José Belmonte Serrano notes, “la narrativa de Juan Marsé está plagada de escritores que se enfrentan a la realidad con ánimo de modificarla en beneficio propio, o bien porque sólo les queda la literatura como modo de protesta contra una sociedad que detestan” (13-14). The novel focuses on three main characters that have a gift for storytelling: Captain Blay and the story of the toxic gas that is poisoning the neighborhood, Forcat and his story of the exploits of Kim, and Dani who is writing about his past. Both Trueba and Érice address the central issue of writing as a means to create or confront reality. However, Trueba’s version does not visualize this aspect of the novel in the same way as Érice does. Trueba recreates Forcat’s tale on screen and dramatizes Captain Blay’s campaign against the gas, but does little to emphasize Dani’s writing as a means to understand his past. Érice foregrounds Dani’s literary journey, but does not dramatize Forcat’s tale. The result is

that Trueba's film spreads focus between the three main storytellers, while Érice keeps the focus on Dani throughout the film.

Along with the power of words to create reality, the novel is also concerned with the idea of disenchantment. An *embrujo* is a spell or enchantment; Dani and Susana are enchanted by the story told by Forcat and literally drawn into its spell. By using this enchantment, Forcat is able to distract them from their present reality. Érice chooses a more realistic style of direction that emphasizes Dani's control over the narrative, but that keeps the viewer at a distance from his thoughts and emotions. In Trueba's version of the novel, the viewer is invited along as a traveler in Dani's journey of memory. We are able to feel his wonder at being drawn into the *embrujo*, as well as his confusion over events of the past. As viewers, we are just as enchanted by the power of narrative and memory as any of the characters on screen.

One of the most powerful ways in which Trueba preserves the sense of enchantment is by depicting the intercalated tale of Shanghai on screen. In Trueba and Marsé's version of Dani's life, Shanghai did exist for a time. Within the world of the novel, no one questions the narrative or how Forcat is able to provide such a detailed account without witnessing any of the action for himself. The elaborate story joins together with other mysterious behavior by Forcat to surround him in an aura of mystery. Dani and Susana are taken in by his "embrujo" and are thoroughly enchanted by his abilities as storyteller. Even if it was really only an illusion conjured by magic, for Dani it was real and it did exist. Trueba includes scenes where Forcat removes Anita's headache by applying his hands to her forehead, the warming of the glass of milk, and the fireflies that Forcat brings in from outside. Unlike Érice, however, he never dramatizes any of the

evidence to the contrary, evidence that Dani accepts in the novel. On film, Forcat has power as an enchanter, a sorcerer who can create magical worlds; he is more than just another adult who cannot keep his promises. In each of the versions of the ending, Forcat is ultimately the one who takes care of Denis and saves Anita and Susana.

For Érice, the vision of the story itself is not what is important to share with the audience; instead, the coming of age of Daniel—his realization that things are not always what they seem and that adults may lie—is the driving force behind the action. As noted, Érice does not dramatize Forcat’s story of Shanghai and does add scenes where Dani finds out the truth about Forcat’s falsehoods. Celia Romea Castro prefers this version of the story and feels that it would have been better to leave Dani’s visions of Shanghai firmly inside his own head; she asks, “¿Quién desea sustituir la realidad del domingo por la tarde por la sugestión de lo que cree que puede ser cuando todavía es viernes?” (70). In this interpretation of the novel, the audience is kept at that stage in which disenchantment has already taken place and we are only left with that nostalgia for possibilities that one has after having one’s dreams shattered. In Trueba’s version of the novel, the audience is able to participate in Dani’s imagined journey to Shanghai and participate in both the magic and the disenchantment. This preserves Dani’s role as narrator and creator of his own story.

Another important theme in the novel, identified by both Kwang-Hee Kim and Ana Luengo, is the demythification of the *maquis*; in popular memory the *maquis* have been elevated to the status of mythic heroes, while officially their contributions to the history of Spain have been ignored. Kim and Luengo link this mythification to other major themes in the book, such as the power of storytelling and the importance of

disillusionment in Dani's coming of age. On film, Trueba shows the mythification of Kim in Dani's mind through the story that Forcat tells. Ultimately, however, the result of this technique is that more screen time is spent on the heroic Kim than on his later fall from grace through Denis's revelations about his character. Érice's film does not create such a mystique for Kim, and by dramatizing Forcat's duplicity and cowardice makes the demythification of the hero a more central theme in the film. According to Luengo, this critical dialogue with past, memory, and the myth of the *maquis* is central to understanding modern Spain, which still struggles with remembering fully its history during the last century (143).

In their own ways, both Trueba and Érice have sought to convey the spirit of the postmodern novel, one in which perspective and memory have become as much a focus of the text as the plot itself. As Mariano Baquero Goyanes points out, "la estructura novelesca perspectivista funciona, muchas veces, como expresión de un mundo—el de nuestros días—en el que nada parece seguro o sólido, amenazado como está, por todas partes, de rupturas, cambios [y] sospechas" (177). Each has sought to portray on screen the creative process as well as its product. Fernando Trueba chooses to do this through the use of voice-over, intercalated storytelling, and multiple versions of a single plot element. Victor Érice opts for a framing device that adds structure to the narrative and continually reminds the viewer that what he is seeing is the product of constructed memory. Although quite different from each other, each of these "translations" of Juan Marsé's *El embrujo de Shanghai* succeeds in its own way. Even more importantly, a comparison of the two illuminates the complexity of the book, showing both the

possibility for multiple interpretations of its meaning and the impossibility of fully defining that meaning.

Final Thoughts on Film, Literature, and Translation

At the end of the eighth chapter of *Don Quijote*, the action of the novel suddenly stops in the midst of a fevered battle between the knight errant and the *Vizcaino*. The narrator explains that the story's author was unable to find the rest of Don Quijote's story beyond this point. The narrator then begins an account of how one day in the market of Toledo he miraculously finds the notebooks of another historian, the famous Cid Hamete Benengeli, which pick up Don Quijote's story and include an illustration of the very moment that was left frozen in the original narrative. Robert Alter explains the significance of this labyrinthine passage and its self-consciousness about the nature of representation:

Its effect is like that of a mirror within a painting, or the deployment of still photographs within a film: through a sudden glimpse of multiple possibilities of representation we are brought up short and thus moved to ponder the nature of representation and the presence of the artful representer. (8)

As seen in *El embrujo de Shanghai* and its subsequent adaptations to film, the self-conscious narrative forces the viewer to ponder the "multiple possibilities of representation." The novel and both of its screen versions reflect self-consciousness in the construction of their narrative. The narrator of Marsé's novel hesitates, admits his own inadequacies, and acknowledges that the memoir he is writing is subject to the vagaries of memory. Both Trueba and Érice use voice-over and multiple endings to

highlight the artfulness of their representation, rather than attempting to create an illusion of verisimilitude.

As one of the possibilities of representation, translation has often served like a mirror that both reflects the original and opens up space for dialogue with the original.

André Lefevere refers to translations as “refractions” and writes:

A refraction (whether it is a translation, criticism, historiography) which tries to carry a work of literature over from one system into another, represents a compromise between two systems and is, as such, the perfect indicator of the dominant constraints in both systems. The gap between the two hierarchies of constraints explains why certain works do not “take”, or enjoy at best an ambiguous position in the system they are imported into.

(237)

The gap or space opened up by a translation is like that opened by a mirror in a Renaissance painting. Mirrors in paintings by artists such as Vermeer or Velazquez reflect something not contained in the paintings themselves, thus reminding the viewer of the world that exists outside the painting and opening up space in what would otherwise be a closed system (Stoichita 253). As the mirror in Velazquez’s painting *Las Meninas* reflects the king and queen beyond the canvas, it creates “a continuity between the area represented and existential space” (Stoichita 223).

In the same way, adaptations of literature to film open up space for dialogue and play between the two genres. This middle space reminds us that the adaptation is to be judged on its own terms—not solely as film and not solely as literature, but something new and different. It is in this space that new possibilities for representation open up;

because the liminal belongs to neither side it is available for any number of interpretations that may be acted upon it (Cundick 14). Adaptation of a text to film holds a mirror up to the text, not to produce an inferior reproduction, but to expand the text outward into a new space. In critiquing a text adapted to film, we should meet it on its own terms within its own space; rather than seeing the problems of border existence, we should embrace the possibilities of dialogue.

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