

Emotions and Theme in *El Secreto de sus Ojos* and *Secret in Their Eyes*: Exploring Stories through the Hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the relationship between emotions and themes in the stories presented in *El Secreto de sus Ojos* (Campanella, 2009) and its remake *Secret in Their Eyes* (Jackson & Johnson, 2015). The approach draws from Paul Ricoeur's method for the interpretation of texts, which stems from the analytic study of their discourse. This makes it possible to infer an interpretation of the theme (what the story aims at) starting from an itemized study of the plot (characters in action within a dramatic structure). The article looks into the way in which some emotions are presented in each story, the characters involved, why, where, and when they show up, their effects, etc. It examines the inciting moment of the plots, the relationship between plots and subplots, the emotions revealed in the midpoint and the resolutions. At the end, and following Ricoeur and García-Noblejas, I propose that the different articulation of the emotions in the two films explains the difference in their understanding of the theme they are exploring: the meaning of justice.

KEYWORDS

Screenwriting; Narrative; Paul Ricoeur; Poetics; Theme; Emotions; Aristotle; Hermeneutics.

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1 | INTRODUCTION

This article examines two films, *El Secreto de sus Ojos* (2009), written and directed by the Argentinian film-maker Juan José Campanella, and its American remake, *Secret in Their Eyes* (2015), written and directed by Billy Ray, from the viewpoint of the relationship between the characters' emotions and the theme.

I have opted for a theoretical-practical approach. The theoretical dimension explores the use of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics (2003) as the framework underpinning the narrative analysis and interpretation of the theme in both films. The practical dimension shows how the decisions related to the characters' characterization and their emotions affect the theme of the story.

By emotions in plots I mean the external manifestations of the characters' deepest inclinations or motivations. It is obvious that there is no necessary correlation between emotion and motivation, yet in a screenplay the characters show who they are through the decisions they take, which moves them to act in a certain way (McKee, 1999). Very often, what motivates these decisions is an emotion, that is, an inclination for or against something. I have used the word "theme" in the sense in which screenwriting manuals generally refer to the core of the narrative and dramatic plot (Flinn, 1999; Russin, 2012; Selbo, 2007).

This article shows how the characters' motivations and the emotions caused by those motivations make up the thematic axes that give a sense of unity to each story. I have chosen a film and its remake because they are formally very similar in the way in which their plots hang together. This formal similarity allows us to see more clearly how the characters' dissimilar motivations lead to different dramatic resolutions, which, in my view, point to different thematic proposals about the notion of justice.

In addition, the study of emotions and themes shows that the Argentinian version has a greater internal unity because the protagonist's motivation is the pivot joining the two plots, the love story and the thriller. By contrast, the American version has less unity because its two plots bear hardly any relation to each other.

Before going into Ricoeur and his proposal, I should explain my choice of theoretical framework. According to Friedman (2010, 2012) formalism, structuralism, and materialism are relevant approaches to film studies, because they deal with films as objects. She also notes that these perspectives do not generally consider that in addition to films being objects, they are "works of art [that] can manifest the human capacity for free creation and action in the world" (Friedman, 2012, p. 118). Friedman (2010) suggests that authors such as Ricoeur (1995, 2003, 2012) and Gadamer (2013), offer film studies a humanistic perspective that makes it possible to understand films as instances for the exercise of the ethical dimension inherent to human beings.

Although this is not the most frequently adopted viewpoint in film studies, some authors have done so. For example, Makarushka (2008) resorts to Ricoeur in her study of Paul Haggis' *Crash* (2004). Egan (2004) suggests that the theory of the threefold mimesis, which Ricoeur hints at in *The Rule of Metaphor* (Ricoeur, 2003) and develops in *Time and Narrative* (2010a, 2010b, 2012), is a valid criterion to determine the ethical nature of entertainment television. Vela Valdecabres (2012) does an experiment and applies Ricoeur's threefold mimesis to the teaching of film history and the critical reception of films to university students. Brenes (2012) turns to Ricoeur to study the poetic nature of characters and differentiate them from persons, and suggests that the ethical dimension is to be found not only in the

diegetic actions of the characters, but also in the way in which the story is structured. Similarly, studies by Aichinger and Türschmann (2009) refer to Ricoeur in connection with movies. These authors make Ricoeur engage in a dialogue with postmodern self-reflexivity and structuralism, from which Ricoeur distances himself. Frago (2005), following García-Noblejas (1982) footsteps, refers to Ricoeur's studies on Aristotle's *Poetics* and suggests that the adaptation of a literary text into an audiovisual text is a dialog between the adaptor and the original text around the notion of poetic myth. Recently, García-Noblejas (2017), in line with Ricoeur, has once again raised the point of the pertinence of practical philosophy to assess the ethical and anthropological content of television series and audiovisual productions.

This study follows in the steps of this humanistic tradition and has analyzed *El Secreto de sus Ojos* and *Secret in Their Eyes* in their condition as poetic works that address spectators and suggest a human "orient" that they can look at (Ricoeur, 2006).

I shall start by presenting Ricoeur's proposal for a theory of text. The bulk of the study will deal with the analysis of some dramatic and narrative points of both stories. Following Steinbock (2014) I shall use ordinary language to describe the moral emotions of grief, guilt and revenge that appear in the plots and characters. In particular, I shall refer to 1) the inciting point for the action, 2) the presentation of the protagonists of the love plot and their relationship with the thriller plot, 3) the representation of grief, 4) the motivations revealed in the midpoint and, finally, 5) the study of the emotions that characterize the crisis, climax and resolution.

This overview will finish with my personal conjecture on the notion of justice underpinning each of the stories, as their thematic core.

2 | PAUL RICOEUR'S HERMENEUTICS

My references to Ricoeur's proposals are based on his work *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II* and, in particular, on the chapters "What is a Text?" and "Explanation and Understanding" (Ricoeur, 2006, pp. 127–168). Here, he develops a method for the interpretation of texts stemming from the analytic study of their discourse. This makes it possible to infer an interpretation of the theme (what the story aims at) starting from an

itemized study of the plot (characters in action within a dramatic structure).

Let us now look into the assumptions of this hermeneutic method. A recurring theme in Paul Ricoeur's thought, when he speaks of text, action and history hermeneutics, is the existing relation between explaining and understanding. Ricoeur suggests that instead of a direct confrontation between these two methods, one characteristic of natural sciences (explaining, *Erklären*), and the other, of human sciences (understanding, *Verstehen*), there is coordination between them which he sums up as "to explain more is to understand better" (Greimas, Ricoeur, Perron, & Collins, 1989, p. 552).

Ricoeur says that the traditional belief is that there is an excluding dichotomy between the structural analysis of a text and its comprehension and interpretation.

"For those analysts that favour an explanation that does not consider comprehension, the text is a purely self-contained machine that should not be asked any questions — believed to be psychologizing — related to origin and the author's intention, or to its final reception by an audience; or to the depth of the text, in terms of sense; or to a message that differs from the form itself, that is, differs from the intertwining of the text codes. For Romantic hermeneuts, the structural analysis stems from an objectification that is independent from the text message and inseparable from the author's intention: understanding involves establishing communication between the reader's soul and the author's soul, similar to communication during a face-to-face dialogue" (Ricoeur, 2006, pp. 152–153).

Instead, Ricoeur (2006) suggests that structural analysis, and even the analysis of larger units such as narrations, makes sense if it admits the possibility of undertaking an interpretation of the world that the text describes or points to, drawn from the text itself (and does not exclude it, as suggested by the "Romantic hermeneuts").

In his discussion with Lévi-Strauss (1967), Ricoeur says that the function of structural analysis is "to reject surface semantics, that is, the semantics of the narrated myth, to bring about a deep semantics,

which is, I daresay, the living semantics of the myth" (Ricoeur, 2006, p. 143). Thus, structural analysis becomes a "stage — and a necessary one — between a naïve interpretation and a critical interpretation, between a surface interpretation and a depth interpretation" (Ricoeur, 2006, p. 144). "To interpret is to follow the path of thought opened by the text, to place oneself towards the *orient* of the text" (Ricoeur, 2006, p. 144).

In order to define in a better way which is or may be the "sense" that a narrative text points to, Ricoeur refers to Aristotle's *Poetics*, when he says that "the *mythos* of tragedy, that is, both the story and the plot, is *mimesis*, the creative imitation of human action" (Ricoeur, 2006, p. 162). In other words, the sense towards which a text points is in relation to some of the dimensions of human action (García-Noblejas, 1982, 2017; Pellauer & Dauenhauer, 2016; Ricoeur, 2006).

This non-dichotomistic but complementary tension between explanation and understanding makes it possible to eliminate the subjectivity load generally assigned to comprehension. The reason for this is that the comprehension of a text, that is, its relation with each individual reader and their world, stems from an itemized study of the text itself.

This point leads us to the analysis of *El Secreto de sus Ojos*, (Campanella, 2009) and its remake (Jackson & Johnson, 2015). There will be an initial analysis of the respective structures and plots to see how some human emotions appear in the characters and how they move the action forward. I shall later consider the story as a single unit and shall venture a personal interpretation of the direction towards which both texts orient.

3 | ANALYTIC STUDY OF THE STORIES

3.1 THE PLOTS: FORMAL SIMILITUDES

Before going into a detailed analysis of these films it may be useful to refer briefly to their plots and characters in order to see the similarities and differences between them. To make following the descriptions easier, the Argentinian version will be referred to as *El Secreto*, 2009, and the American version as *Secret*, 2015.

In *El Secreto*, 2009, there are two main plots that intertwine. On the one hand, there is the love story between Benjamín Espósito (Ricardo Darín) and

Irene Menéndez Hastings (Soledad Villamil), and on the other, the thriller revolving around who killed Liliana Coloto (Carla Quevedo), the wife of Ricardo Morales (Pablo Rago), and the search for her murderer, Isidoro Gómez (Javier Godino). Here, the love-story is the main plot; the thriller is a sub-plot. The film begins and ends with images of the love story: hands on the train window, and a door closing after Benjamín, when Soledad tells him to come into her office.

The American version, *Secret*, 2015, has the same structure. The love story involves Ray Kasten (Chiwetel Ejiofor) and Claire Sloane (Nicole Kidman), and the thriller deals with finding out who killed Carolyn Cobb (Zoe Graham), Jessica Cobb's daughter (Julia Roberts), and hunting down her killer Marzin/Beckwith (Joe Cole).

However, in this remake the thriller is the main story: the opening shots show Ray looking for the killer and the closing shots show his approving look of what Jessica does, to bring the drama of her daughter's murder to an end. On the other hand, the love story is a subplot that ends before the climax of the thriller plot.

In both stories there is a third character which, following Greimas' terminology (1984), functions as a *helper* for the protagonists. In the Argentinian version, it is Benjamin's best friend, Pablo Sandoval (Guillermo Francella); in the American version, it is Bumpy Willis (Dean Norris), a colleague of Ray's. The difference between both characters is that the helper is a comic character in the Argentinian version and a dramatic character in the American version.

Another similarity between the stories is that both take place in the present and in the past. In *El Secreto*, 2009 the shifts in time are shown through a change in colour (ochre tones prevail in the past, and bright colours in the present) and through the protagonists' make-up (particularly, the grey hair of men). In *Secret*, 2015, the changes in time are more difficult to detect. They can be deduced — at times this is not quite clear — through the protagonist's grey hair. In this version, the female characters' only change is their hair-style.

In the following analysis, we shall see how emotions move the plots forward in both films and compare what happens. Following Bordwell & Thompson

(2010) I shall make some references to the narrative use of the sound track and editing.

3.2 THE CHARACTERS' MOTIVATION AT THE INCITING MOMENT OF THE ACTION

In *El Secreto*, 2009, the grief that the character of Benjamin feels in the past when he sees the corpse of Liliana Coloto is the inciting engine of the thriller plot. His grief, however, does not lead into anger but into a wish to know. Such wish drives the action forward in the present: Benjamín wants to write a novel. Thus, in this film we see that the love-plot that unfolds in the present is closely linked with the thriller-plot of the past.

In *Secret*, 2015, Ray's motivation in the past is to capture Carolyn Cobb's killer. His motivation in the present continues to be his wish to capture Carolyn's killer. Later, we shall find out that this motivation is triggered by the fact that Ray feels guilty. When after 13 years Ray rejoins the Police Department, we see that he is also attracted to Claire.

When we compare these openings, we can see that Benjamín is moved by a loving grief, which turns into a wish to know, whereas Ray is moved by a wish for justice, and the attraction he feels for the girl appears later and not as a consequence of the previous emotion.

3.3 THE LINK BETWEEN THE LOVE PLOT AND THE THRILLER

Let us now examine the protagonists' emotions in the love plot. In *El Secreto*, 2009, when Benjamín and Irene meet for the first time, in the present of the story, she feels happy and he feels attracted to her. The comedy tone gives a festive and light atmosphere to this sequence. In the course of this encounter, the screen shows photos of Irene's children foreshadowing a story of forbidden love (Polti, 1924; Tobias, 2012). A suggestion of Irene about the novel that Benjamin wants to write makes him remember the past, and we see that he has felt attracted to her since he first saw her. The end of this flashback and the return to the present has the same soundtrack always used in the love plot.

In *Secret*, 2015, the sequence showing the first encounter between Ray and Claire is more brief and tense. The dialogue makes no reference to the characters' personal feelings and there is no physical proximity between them. The jump to the past, to

show when they met, takes place within the thriller plot. 9/11 has just taken place and the agents have been relocated as reinforcements for the war against terror. This explains why Ray meets Claire on the day they must have their photo taken to join the service. Once back to the present, they go on talking about work and the thriller plot moves on, with Jess (the murdered girl's mother) entering and Ray saying that he has found the alleged killer.

When we compare what the characters feel, we can see that in *El Secreto*, 2009, both plots are linked: he is in love with her and wants to write a novel to understand a murder that affected her in the past, which is why he has come back.

In *Secrets*, 2015, the protagonist has one single motivation: solving a murder. His sentimental interest in Claire, with whom he fell in love thirteen years ago, is not what made him come back. The love interest revives after his return.

This absence of an emotional connection between the plot and the subplot accounts for *Secrets*, 2015 having less internal unity than *El Secreto*, 2009.

3.4 GRIEF IN RICARDO AND IN JESS

Let us now go into how grief is presented in the love plot. Here, grief is embodied in those who have experienced the loss of someone they love. Ricardo mourns the death of Liliana, his wife, and Jess, the death of her daughter, Carolyn. In *El Secreto*, 2009, what triggers the beginning of the plot is the moment when Ricardo recalls learning about his wife's death. In *Secrets*, 2015, it is the moment in which Ray tells Jess that he has found the murderer.

In *El Secreto*, 2009, the first time we see Ricardo is when the policeman questions him about the murder of his wife. Ricardo can only answer the officer's questions with gestures and short phrases. There is a medium shot of Ricardo, who is leaning against a table, while the rest of the scene is out of focus. To mark the end of the sequence and the return to the present, in which Benjamín is writing, the film uses the sound and image of a boiling kettle, which provides the narrative connection between both scenes. In addition, there is a melody joining the scene of the past and Benjamín in the present trying to write. These two elements highlight the fact that it is the dramatic thread of the love plot that triggers the memories related to the thriller plot.

In *Secrets*, 2015, when Ray tells Jess that her daughter is dead, Jess reacts bursting into a fit of screams and cries and throws herself into the dumpster where the body is. There is a gesture that shows the transformation of a police officer into a mother: she takes off the gloves the police usually wear to avoid contaminating a crime scene with fingerprints and holds her daughter's dead body with her bare hands. The transition to the present is abrupt from the point of view of the sound track: the film goes back to the moment when Ray has just told Claire and Jess that he has found the murderer and wants to reopen the case. Claire asks Jess what she thinks. Those of us who've seen the film know that Jess cannot agree. What the movie shows at that point is a new abrupt cut to the past, immediately after the scene of the meeting of Jess and her daughter. Now Ray and Jess are on the sidewalk discussing clues pointing to the possible murderer. The personal dimension of Jess' grief remains in the background.

Thus, in *El Secreto*, 2009 we can see again that Benjamin's grief in the thriller plot is closely related to his writer's block in the love plot (his initial motivation). On the contrary, in *Secrets*, 2015, the mother's grief appears in the form of a memory — we do not know whether it is of Ray or of Jess — and bears no relation whatsoever with Ray's feelings for Claire.

3.5 THE MOTIVATIONS REVEALED IN THE MIDPOINT

The midpoint of both movies is the discovery of the key to find the murderer: passion for football in *El Secreto*, 2009, and passion for baseball in *Secrets*, 2015.

The motivation that leads to getting on with the investigation has different sources. In *El Secreto*, 2009, Benjamín provides the motivation since, as we have seen from the very beginning, he was moved by the death of Liliana and by the love he sees in her husband, Ricardo. In *Secrets*, 2015, it is Jess who provides the motivation because she feels guilty for her daughter's death since she forbade her to go on a date with a boy, and begged her to go to the office picnic where the murderer saw her. In addition, Ray also has motives to get on with the case: his own guilty conscience. In fact, as the plot unfolds, we learn that Ray knows that he should have been keeping Carolyn company on the day she was killed, but failed to turn up because he was distracted by something that happened at work. "There is where I have been

these 13 years”, is a twice-repeated phrase he says, which is consistent with the beginning of the story.

In *El Secreto*, 2009, none of the characters show feelings of guilt at any time. Their actions are caused more by the desire to love and the desire to understand why they have not loved as others have.

3.6 THE RESOLUTION OF THE PLOTS

The different way in which emotions evolve in each case provides the key to the resolution of both plots. In *El Secreto*, 2009, in the scene that marks the climax of the second act, Benjamin’s grief at parting with Irene, which he feels almost like a death, makes him ask how he can live a life that is empty, “a life full of nothing”. Benjamin knows that his grief relates to the fact that 25 years ago, he was incapable of declaring his love for Irene and does not want that to happen again. There is also the death of his friend Pablo. He never knew if he was mistakenly killed or if Pablo gave his life for his sake. These two motives make Benjamin face his grief and make an effort to understand.

Irene joins him in his wish not to leave any loose ends. They find out Ricardo Morales’ present address and Benjamin goes there on his own. This marks the beginning of the last climax and the final resolution. Benjamin has an initial meeting with Morales and the latter confesses to having killed Isidoro. However, Benjamin has doubts and returns to Morales’ place, where he catches him in a shed where Isidoro has been locked up all this time. Morales keeps muttering: “You said a life sentence”. At the end of the scene, Benjamin leaves the shed and Morales grabs his head with his hands, and leans against the table. This image closes the thriller plot. The following sequences, quickly bring the other plots to an end: Benjamin has just finished his novel; he takes flowers to Pablo’s grave, which he hadn’t found the courage to visit before; and then goes to the Court House to find Irene, this time to tell her he loves her.

In contrast, in *Secret*, 2015, Ray, deals with his guilt in a different way. He wants to take justice into his own hands. He seeks Carolyn’s murderer, mistakenly assuming that a guy named Beckwith is the killer. When he finally finds him, he goes after him. During the persecution, Seifert, a police officer with whom Ray did not get along, gets killed. This death moves Jess to confess that Carolyn’s murderer is not Beckwith, but Marzin (the actual murderer) whom she killed 12 years before. In the climax of the film, Ray

discovers that Jess has not actually killed Marzin, but has kept him locked up in a cage in the garden of her house.

When Ray finds Jess and Marzin, he leaves his gun on a table inside the cabin where Jess has taken Marzin, and goes out to the garden carrying a shovel to dig a grave. Ray is convinced that Jess will kill the man, and the ending of the film proves him right.

As for the love plot, there is no happy end. It ended previously with Claire’s husband discovering the lovers, and their subsequent curt farewell in front of her house. Although Claire wants to take this last conversation to a personal level, Ray keeps thinking of Jess and her recent confession.

4 | A THEMATIC CONJECTURE: WHICH NOTION OF JUSTICE?

A brief summary of the information gleaned so far may be of use at this point. I shall focus on the different motivations, which, after all, account for the development of both plots.

In *El Secreto*, 2009, Benjamin’s motivation is to understand how Ricardo Morales has managed to live without his wife Liliana. Besides this, Benjamin also wants to know whether his friend Pablo died for his sake or whether his death was a mere accident. Solving both uncertainties is crucial for Benjamin to return to Irene and finally declare his love to her.

Ricardo Morales’ motivation, prompted by love and grief, is to avenge Liliana’s murder. Convinced that the country’s legal system will not punish the killer, Ricardo decides to take justice into his own hands.

In *Secret*, 2015, Ray’s motivation is to be free of the guilt he feels for Carolyn’s murder. To attain this, he must find the murderer and punish him.

Jess’ motivation is to avenge the death of her daughter Carolyn and silence her guilty conscience. Although the character never refers to this, there is a sequence showing Jess, which allows the spectator to infer that she feels guilty. Jess gets into an elevator and there is a flashback showing a conversation of Jess and her daughter, in which Jess insists that her daughter should go to the office party. This is immediately followed by Jess violently hitting the lift mirror. The dialog of the past, which continues to be heard in the present, acts as a bridge between both scenes.

At the end of the story, when she realizes that she can count on Ray, Jess kills the murderer and this brings her relief. We can see this in Jess' final close up, in which a hint of a smile appears on her face.

All this leads to a conjecture on the notion of justice proposed by each film, which I would like to end with. Following Ricoeur's (2006) hermeneutic proposal, this is a personal conjecture which, as García-Noblejas (2004, 2017) says, calls into question the worldview of the person analyzing both films.

In *El Secreto*, 2009, the motivation that drives Benjamín is to understand how Morales has been capable of loving with such passion. When he "sees" what love has led him to do — lock up the murderer for 25 years — he realizes that he must also prove himself capable of doing something to win Irene's love. Morales' motivation is to punish Liliana's murderer, by locking him up. Morales' final shot, with his hands clutching his head, half-lying on the table, conveys the idea that the character knows that by locking up the murderer he has also locked himself up.

These events and the way in which they are shown makes it possible to venture that the notion of justice prevailing in *El Secreto*, 2009, is based on personal relationships. Benjamín's transformation comes from having experienced very strong emotions in his relations with other people in the past. He was upset and moved by Liliana's death and this death generates a link with her husband, whose love for his wife touches him deeply. Years later, he discovers what human beings can do for love: Morales' love for his wife and Pablo Sandoval's love for a friend. Because of this realization, there is a change in the character of Benjamín and the love plot attains a happy end. The closing scenes of the thriller show Ricardo and his wife's murderer locked up in a cage. What Benjamín will do about this revenge remains unclear.

Secret, 2015, is governed by a slightly different internal logic or "deep structure" (Ricoeur, 2006). In this case, the idea of justice and fairness depends on the different individuals and the motivation for the characters' actions is to get rid of uncomfortable emotions of guilt.

Ray's objective is to kill the girl's murderer and his motivation is the guilt he feels for her death. As already mentioned, going back to Claire is a consequence of this main motivation.

In turn, Jess feels guilty again, this time because of Seifert's death, and she wants to prevent more deaths. Therefore, she confesses: "I cannot live with that". Later, when Ray finds her in the cabin where she has put Marzin in a cage, she decides to kill Marzin and attempts to justify herself by saying: "Life sentence, Ray".

The resolution of the plot shows Claire filing the case, Jess taking one last look at her daughter's room and Ray digging up a hole where he will presumably bury Marzin.

Both Ray and Jess aspire to "turn over the page" and go back to living as if nothing has happened. Marzin's murder is the way to achieve this peace. Here Marzin's rights do not exist. What is relevant is that both police officers ultimately attain their own peace of mind by taking justice into their own hands.

In both films the characters flout the notion of the rule of law through their actions. Both in the world of *El Secreto*, 2009 and of *Secret*, 2015, the political power is being criticized because the administration of justice has failed. In both films, the characters "take the law into their own hands" and, by doing so, they commit a miscarriage of justice (Ricoeur, 2009).

However, the setting of the scene in which the characters take justice into their own hands marks a difference between both films: In the case of *El Secreto*, 2009, the scene in which Benjamín leaves the house where Morales has locked up the killer ends with the camera outside the front door, and we can see Morales in the background with his head in his hands and leaning on the table. This allows us to interpret the film ending on a tragic note. Although the characters appear to have accepted the fact that Morales has done himself justice, the image of this character leaning on the table is a cue for the spectator to pass judgement on this action of revenge as something morally negative.

By contrast, in *Secret*, 2015, the thriller ends with two shots of Jess and of Ray, in which both characters have a slight smile on their faces. The music in the last scene — Ray burying Jess's daughter's murderer — is also the music we hear as the credits roll. With this ending, the film suggests the characters' actions should be understood as ethically acceptable: neither image nor sound admit the possibility of a different interpretation.

All this seems to point to the possibility of saying that *El Secreto*, 2009, suggests, or at least does not

prevent the reading of justice as something that is beyond the individual will of anybody. Campanella's film allows thinking that justice, one way or another, also depends on other people getting their due: not taking others into account always bodes ill for the person who acts like that.

This difference falls under the sphere of interpretation, but is derived from the analysis of plots and from each film's proposal to resolve its conflicts.

As I said initially, this two-pronged way of dealing with the analysis of stories on a formal level and on an interpretive level may be of use to screenwriters at the rewriting stage, given that it is at this stage that the author wonders about the story's unity or global sense. With Ricoeur (2006), we understand this unity to refer to the human condition. Each story has a nucleus or core, which is what provides the sense of all the actions and emotions of the characters. This center or core of the story is not predetermined from the beginning. But is the final result of the evolution of the dramatic action (Brenes, 2011). It is this core that invites the dialog with the audience, and often brings about their discarding the common place, engrained ways of thinking, stereotypes, prejudices or clichés (Todorov, 2007, p. 26).

In the stories we have analyzed, justice is the central theme proposed by both films. What happens in practice is that in each of them, the way in which plot and characters' actions are articulated results in different conjectures about what is just or unjust. The vision of society of *El Secreto de sus Ojos* appears to be one in which the "other" defines what is humane and what is not, whereas *Secret in Their Eyes* appears to propose a more individualistic vision of society.

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