



## A Post-Modernistic Perspectives in Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day*

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Literature, in its broad sense, in all its forms it can be seen as written records and it has been the most powerful medium of provoking human emotions and thoughts. Kazuo Ishiguro is one of the most talented and accomplished contemporary writers of his generation. The short story author, television writer and novelist, included twice in Granta's list of Best Young British Writers, has over the past twenty-five years produced the work which is critically- admired as it is popular with the readers. Like the writings of Ian McEwan, Kazuo Ishiguro's work is concerned with creating discursive platforms for issues of class, ethics, national hood, place, gender and surrounding problems. Kazuo Ishiguro is a magnificently diverse and elusive writer.

Ishiguro's novels are preoccupied by memories, their potential to digress and distort, to forget and to haunt. The first – person narrators of Ishiguro's first volume of novels reflected on personal losses in the context of following events: friends and families dead from atomic bombings in Japan, their sufferings, unrealized romances, wrong choices and lives founded on visualization. In narrating these sorrows and their fruitless optimism, Ishiguro gives his readers a way to empathize with his characters' situations. These characters long for clarity and forgiveness. Ishiguro once elucidated to a probe that the emotional force of his novels and the characters are set within "an internal world it's an emotional logic that is being played out" (24). Ishiguro's fiction is remarkable at once for its technical and formal execution; his writings are highlighted by an aesthetic integrity, and a kind of modernity.

*The Remains of the Day*, as a novel, is a unique example of how a story of a personal fate of one man can reflect on such large, historical and social scale. In the realm of postmodern theory, the possibility of producing a critical history with recourse to postmodernism is a cause for concern. According to Stephen Best and Douglas Kellner, "a Postmodernist is someone who claims that there are fundamental changes in society and history which require new theories and conceptions". The theme of guilt looms large in Kazuo Ishiguro's fiction. Ishiguro pursued the issues of guilt and regret in *The Remains of the Day* beyond the narrator's record and investigate how the novel deals with a complicity that is inherent in the forms. In Remains, guilt as complicity is a principle at work on the level of genre as well as in the imagined lives of the characters.

Ishiguro's novels are generally based on a process of self-questioning by their narrators, which turns guilty and arrogantly self-justifying. As Gabriele Annan noted in his review of *Remains*: "Ishiguro had used a detective fiction format in every one of his novels up to that date" (29). Each relies on the play between willed ignorance and a compulsive following of clues for its tension. It is the presence of this genre, the classical English detective story, explicitly brings in the question of guilt. In *Remains*, it is arguably more easily identified than in the other novels. The distinct British genre of the country-house novel cultivated from Jane Austen onwards is part of the tradition so forcefully evoked by *Remains*. The sentimental values of upstairs-downstairs melodrama derive from an age when servants were an essential part of it is arguably more easily identified than in the other novels. The distinct British genre of the country-house novel cultivated from Jane Austen onwards is part of the tradition so forcefully evoked by *Remains*. The sentimental values of upstairs-downstairs melodrama derive from an age when servants were an essential part of class society, and could be used in literary works as a reflection and a counterpoint to the more dignified embroilments of their masters and mistresses.

Living in a post-war world, Ishiguro's characters find themselves in a dilemma. This dilemma manifests itself in the inconsistencies between the past and the present. This creates a state of uncertainty about the kind of lives they are living. That is to say they are suffering from an identity crisis. In other words, Ishiguro's characters experience a conflict between what they do, narrate or seem to be and the reality of the interpretation of their actions or narrations. Their memories of the past are distorted. Such memories are rendered in a way that contradicts their present being or identity. Consequently, they are distracted between the past and the present and this represents the core of the identity crisis they are suffering from. As Cynthia Wong in her book *Kazuo Ishiguro: Writers and Their Work* aptly observe:

Ishiguro's characters are revealed to be carrying complicated states of being. Their narratives are riddled with inconsistencies or awkward insistence; this may be the result of a memory that is also struggling to bring to the surface painful events and to find a language that can adequately express the unending trauma of their affiliation. (24)

*The Remains of the Day* is a novel in which some aspects of postmodernism can be traced in Stevens' life and relationships with the people that he has lived with. Stevens struggles to come to term with his present through telling stories and anecdotes of his past life. Pinpointing the crisis that the modern man experiences as a result of his loss of a sense of identity, Daniela Carpi states:

The crisis concerning the idea of the subject is one of the main elements that typify our contemporary postmodern era. If some of the key words to understand the postmodern situations are in fact the terms "uncertainty"; homelessness and fragmentation. We may assert that the concept of subjectivity is also part of a more general transformation. The subject finds itself wavering between a plunge towards the past in search of a lost sense of roots, a drive to some kind of future freedom from all frets and limitations.(2)

Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day*, urges the reader to look into the consequences of the two world wars and the devastating impact they had created in the soul and mind of the modern man. The protagonist expresses fragmentation of the self as he lives distracted between his memories of the past and

present in which he shows how he is sometimes compelled to tell lies and at some other times he has to repress his feeling in a way to protect himself from painful experience and to maintain a new self that is a new identity. Memories are of great importance to recall certain events that are consistent with how he would have wanted to live.

*The Remains of the Day* portrays the suppressed emotions of the post-war people represented in the character of Stevens. The novel depicts the role that memories can play in reconstructing the past events so that the present can be meaningful in some way. As a post-war British individual, the protagonist of the novel tries to practice some kind of suppression over his emotions at the personal level as well as the professional level to construct a new identity. Stevens appears torn between memories of the past and the representation of the present. He is suffering from an identity crisis and striving to create a meaningful present for himself. Here, he attempts to adapt to the new world to harmonies both past and present.

As a man living in the post-war era, Stevens has to struggle at different levels. He is leading a life riddled with inconsistencies and contradictions. He cannot feel at home with the surrounding world as he is always busy trying to achieve some perfection that is not attainable in a world riddled with conflicts and struggle. It is a world where people feel that they no longer have that sense of integrated identity. Stevens tends to ignore or rather forget his own feelings and, moreover, he tends to forget some Memories of the past as a means to co-exist with the present. He is torn between the past and the present. As the critic, Cynthia Wong in Kazuo Ishiguro: Writers and Their Work points out "Stevens is unable to account equivocation without revealing the nature of his own wasted existence"(7).

Having lived a life riddled with distraction and disharmony, Stevens comes to justify his past life in a way that enables him to make of the present something meaningful in some way. Now, in the form of memories, he recalls how he has conducted himself and how it has been a life characterized by a set of personal values that he sees as the principles of his professional life. The whole of Stevens' life amounts to his professional as a butler. He philosophizes that his aim in life is to achieve perfection. He states: "Great butlers will not be shaken by external events, however surprising, alarming or vexed. They wear their professionalism as a decent gentleman will wear his suit; he will not let ruffians or circumstances tear it off him in the public gaze. It is, as I say, a matter of dignity"(23).

In narrating his past, Stevens suppresses his feeling in a way to protect himself and to maintain his own sense of dignity. Sometimes what he narrates is unreliable as he sees, sometimes, in telling lies a means to avoid pain and he tries to be proud of his achievement as a butler. Stevens' life is also riddled with misunderstanding and incoherence as a result of his past life as a dedicated butler at Darlington Hall. Stevens lives a life of distraction devoid of harmony. Teruko points out "Stevens is caught between the necessity of confession and the anxiety of inhabitation as he remembers his past experiences"(366).

As a modern man, Stevens' dilemma also lies in a lot of inconsistencies and contradictions that he has in his character between the life he has lived and the life he is leading at the present time. Such inconsistencies and contradictions are especially connected with his profession. Stevens uses these contradictions and inconsistencies to conceal certain feelings regarding his past life. In this regard, Zuzana Foniokova remarks: "Stevens tries to justify his actions by presenting it as the only possible way of dealing with the situation and

uses his devotion to the ideal of great butler, His philosophy of dignity serves as a means to rationalize his suppression of emotions"(94).

Steven's moral paralysis displays itself most powerfully, perhaps, when his notion of dignity founders during an exchange that occurs at Moscombe on the third day of his travels. Generally, dignity can be defined as having the quality or developing a state of being that is appreciated as worthy, honoured and esteemed in any social context. However, to Stevens, dignity has a different meaning with different connotations. He looks upon dignity only from his own professional standpoint. For him "dignity" has a meaning that is completely connected with profession. As the story tells, he sees dignity as repressing feeling and this he takes as his ideal goal in life. Stevens' concept of dignity entails repressing any wish, emotions or even opinion that do not conform to the principles of his profession. In his view, a butler should remain a butler regardless of any circumstances. His Professional dignity never revealed his true feelings toward others.

Stevens rationalizes his philosophy of dignity on his own way. He thinks that memories of the past enables him to construct a new identity and that such memories are the means for finding solace in a world that is not consolable. He sees self-contained dignity as inevitably crucial to his sense of professionalism. Lalrinfeli points out: "the concept of identity which is constructed in narratives is dependent on the function of memories and the kind of access it gives to the past. In essence, memory is the fundamental force behind identity formation and self-understanding"(9).

Stevens employs the concept of "dignity" to rationalize his absurd behaviour during a crucial scene with Miss Kenton, which underlines the theme of sexual repression and, not surprisingly, precipitates a crisis in their relationship. The incident, as Stevens recalls it, goes like this; One evening he was sitting in the pantry "a crucial office," which he compares with "a general's headquarters during a battle"(165), taking advantage of a rare hour off duty to read a book, when Miss Kenton enters and insists on seeing what he's reading.

As the story begins, Stevens has been working for thirty four years at Darlington Hall. He has worked thirty years for Lord Darlington and four years for the American Mr. Farraday. Throughout these thirty four years, Stevens has been a very dedicated butler devoting his life to the service of his employers. To Lord Darlington, he has shown all commitments and full responsibility. Stevens' service to him has been marked by blind obedience and perfection. On the one hand, Lord Darlington sees Stevens as a perfect butler in whom he has great trust and reliance. On the other hand, Stevens develops a great sense of professionalism and perfection accompanied by a great sense of satisfaction and self-complacence.

On his trip to the West Country, Stevens recollects his memories at Darlington Hall with Lord Darlington. In recollecting such memories, Stevens appears as dutiful, serious-minded and anxious to do only what he sees as right in the name of professionalism. He is caught up in his own dream of serving a gentleman of international fame. As the story progresses, Stevens goes on recalling situations in which he appears so proud of working for Lord Darlington. Furthermore, there is some mutual understanding between him and his employer that maintains some great intimacy between the two. Such understanding is achieved mainly as a result of his high sense of professionalism. Stevens develops a firm belief and a firm impression about the goodness of his master. He develops a set of values of his own insight of the different circumstances that have shaped him as a butler. He could create a world of his own in which he creates words like "dignity" and

professionalism to achieve perfection. The critic Iverson in *The Butler in The Passage: The Liminal Narratvie* points out: "Stevens has become a prisoner of his own values, of his time and of his perception. He is trapped inside his own illusion and imaged of "the great butler, the way he has chosen to live doesn't give him any alternation"(47). Stevens always thinks of Lord Darlington highly considering him as the best employer. He spends his life endeavouring to serve him perfectly. There is little else in his life to identify himself with other than his role as a perfect butler. He claims:

If a butler is to be of any wrath to anything or anybody in his life, there must surely come a time when he ceases his search, a time when he must say to himself this employer embodies all that to find noble and admirable. I will hereafter devote myself to serving him.( 133)

The post-war period has witnessed a lot of turmoil on the international level especially in the European region. The international political map has undergone some changes especially after the deterioration of the power of the British Empire. As a novel set after World War I, *The Remains of the Day* depicts the overwhelming impact of the war on the European nations. Lord Darlington is a man of high profile and international fame especially among the European countries. He is in the habit of entertaining people of high statures from different parts of Europe. He also holds international conferences in an attempt to settle the differences among the conflicting parties. Lord Darlington is generally known as having some sympathy toward Germany.

He is greatly influenced by the conditions of the German people especially his close friend Mr. Bremann. Mr. Bremann has committed suicide because of the bad economic condition in which he has lived. Also, some visitors of Darlington Hall have been anti-semitic and members at the British Fascist Union. Such visitors have been of great influence on Lord Darlington. To please his guests, Lord Darlington develops sympathy with the Nazi.

Stevens addresses his father in the third person as if he were an abstract entity. In his relationship with his father, Stevens goes to suppress his emotions in the name of professionalism. Stevens and his father do not speak with each other than professional matters and the little communication takes place in an atmosphere of embarrassment. As Foniokova remarks: "They have suppressed their emotions with the aim of becoming great butlers, but they have lost their ability to pursue human conversation" (93). Of course, such lack of communication creates some sort of lack in understanding between the two. Ignoring his father's age, Stevens goes to treat him coldly leaving no space for intimacy or gratitude.

Again, Stevens' relationship with his father is not an intimate one rather it is a formal one. Despite living in the same house, he rarely visits his father in his chamber justifying this by saying: "I had rarely had reason to enter my father's room ... and I was newly struck by the smallness and starkness of it"(43). Furthermore, Stevens's formal conduct with his father can be clearly seen in Stevens' reference to his father in recollecting his memories at the Darlington Hall using the capital "F". Here, Stevens refers to his father as a formal title but not as an ordinary father. Thus, Stevens' formal conduct with his father is looked upon within his concept of professional "dignity" As Susie G. Brien remarks: "Stevens' attitude to his father is consistent with his reliance on an anachronistic social order to provide him with a sense of self-definition"(806).

As a matter of fact, Miss Kenton's letter does not include any hint at her desire to return to the Darlington Hall but Stevens constitutes such an impression out of his wishful thinking. In his phantasy Stevens figures out that she has briefly left her husband and that she is in trouble seeking his help. In his first response, Stevens projects his own attributively into her. He states:

It is of course tragic that her marriage is now ending in failure. No doubt she is pondering with regret decisions that have left her, deep in • middle age, so alone and desolate.... Of course, Miss Kenton cannot hope..... to retrieve those lost years .... I cannot say why her seeing out her working years there should not offer a very genuine consolation to a life that has come to be dominated by a sense of waste. (32)

Toward the end of the novel and after his encounter with Miss Kenton Stevens' character and attitude experience drastic changes that expose him as a mere postmodern figure suffering from anxiety. In fact, such anxiety is a direct result of his changing attitudes toward the people around him especially his master Lord Darlington, his father and Miss Kenton. Thus, Stevens appears as suffering from an identity crisis on account of the inconsistencies and contradictions that characterize him throughout the novel. Stevens regrets all his past conducts. He reaches good understanding of the reality of life. As Penner remarks: "Stevens has undergone a series of experiences and introspections which brings him at the end to some sort of deepened understanding of the social realm that has escaped him. It has become a socializing experience, marked by moments of creative self-reflection which leaves him changed and more fully realized within the suffocating routine which had been his life". (29). This article acknowledges the point that the first person narration pulls the reader into the emotionality of the story. Thus *The Remains of the Day* is a cautionary tale that warns against the disregard of the inner emotional life and points to an undeniable existence of emotions whether or not one allows oneself to feel them. Further the researcher pinpoints a few avenues of Ishiguro's novel where further research may be conducted in the light of post-colonial aspects, diasporic elements and hegemonic process. There is also scope for gleaning imperialistic elements from the text. Thus Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* could skilfully provide an example of a postmodern man who finds in his past life a driving force for constructing a better life in the present to live the remains of his life.

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