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# Blindness in the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro: dignity or denial?

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► **To cite this version:**

James Dalrymple. Blindness in the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro: dignity or denial?. Literature. 2011. dumas-00932137

**HAL Id: dumas-00932137**

**<https://dumas.ccsd.cnrs.fr/dumas-00932137>**

Submitted on 16 Jan 2014

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# **Blindness in the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro: dignity or denial?**

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**UFR ETUDES ANGLOPHONES**

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**Mémoire de master 2 recherche**

30 crédits

Mention **Langues littératures et civilisations étrangères**

Spécialité ou Parcours : **Etudes anglophones**

Sous la direction de **Mme Catherine DELMAS**

**Année universitaire 2010-2011**



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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank Madame Catherine Delmas, for her astute guidance and advice, and my wife, Rebecca, and my daughter, Isobel, for their tireless support and encouragement. Without them this dissertation would not have been possible.



## **Blindness in the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro: dignity or denial?**

### ***Introduction***

Born of Japanese parents in Nagasaki in 1954, author Kazuo Ishiguro moved with his family to Britain for his father's job when he was five years old. Having spent the rest of his childhood in Surrey he studied English and Philosophy at University of Kent, Canterbury, and later obtained a Master's Degree in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia. Having practised as a social worker he published his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, in 1982, winning the Winifred Holtby Prize of the Royal Society of Literature. Set in Nagasaki and England, the novel explores the themes of regret, cultural displacement and the trauma of war which Ishiguro has often returned to in his fiction, particularly in his subsequent two novels. He also employs a Japanese setting for the Whitbread Book of the Year Award-winning *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), while his most famous novel *The Remains of the Day* (1989) – which won the Booker Prize and was adapted into a Merchant-Ivory film starring Anthony Hopkins in 1993 – is set in England.

While hints of the ghostly atmosphere and suicide theme carry over from Ishiguro's debut novel into his second, and the later novel's narrator Ono recalls a character (Ogata-san) from *A Pale View of Hills*, it is arguably *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) and *The Remains of the Day* (1989) which have the greater resemblance. While it has been noted that the three novels form "an informal trilogy," (Lewis 2000, 133) each novel most closely resembling the last, the latter two novels both have male narrators of comparable age who, more importantly, find themselves looking back from the post-war period to their actions in the 1930s. This sets them apart somewhat from *A Pale View of Hills* which is narrated by an expatriated Japanese woman looking back from the modern day to events that take place in post-war (and post atomic bomb) Nagasaki. Although Ishiguro returned to the context of the Second World War for his fifth novel, *When We Were Orphans* (2000), *The Unconsoled* (1995) and *Never Let Me Go* (2005) have represented departures from such grounding in historicity, the former resembling a surrealist nightmare and the latter a re-imagined past with undertones of science fiction. Nevertheless, these ostensibly more experimental works still touch upon themes common to his earlier



novels: the elusiveness of memory, coping with regret, and awakening to human failings, all rendered through the use of first person narrators.

The Ishiguro novels I have chosen to discuss – *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* – both revolve around protagonists impaired by what we will call “blindness”: how men harbour or possibly even nurture delusory experiences of the world; and how these delusions contributed to the catastrophe of the Second World War and hindered man’s subsequent attempts to live in its shadow. In both novels unreliable first person narrators – Stevens the butler in *The Remains of the Day* and Ono the retired painter in *An Artist of the Floating World* – are employed by the author to portray men who are blind to the shifting values of societies rebuilding themselves in the wake of global conflict.

In diary-style entries written at precisely dated post-war intervals, the two narrators find themselves searching their past for consolation from – and explanation for – a present world which has rendered them obsolete. They discover that the values of their generation are no longer shared by the new societies they find themselves in, yet they can’t shed the beliefs which give meaning to their world. Impelled to revisit their past, particularly their actions in the 1930s, Ono and Stevens are haunted by regret concerning their past decisions and seek to reconfigure these regrets so that they are more palatable. Regular addresses to a narratee (“you”) reveal the narrators’ lonely search for consolation from an alien and alienating post-war environment, as they attempt to distance themselves from their failures in the act of writing them down.

Ono and Stevens depend on denial and distortion of the truth to maintain their dignity to the reader and, thus, themselves. They use the journal form as a way to transform the past into a narrative that will provide them reassurance in the present, an act which ultimately fails as the beliefs underpinning their sense of self-worth are gradually loosened. This tension between the narrators’ wish to uphold their dignity while engaging in acts of denial puts the reader in the position of asking himself whether Ishiguro’s narrators are ultimately victims of their cultural history – blinded by ingrained but misguided cultural mores pertaining to dignity, gentlemanliness and national character, before and after the Second World War – or, if they are active agents in their delusion, complicit in a wider malaise of denial, domination and subordination that forms part of the context for conflict itself.

If Ono and Stevens uphold ideas of dignity that stop them seeing how things really are and how they are perceived by others, to what extent does Ishiguro invite sympathy for their struggle to remain dignified, while the foundations of their lives are shaken by the conflict? If the narrators' blindness to reality is an act of wilful denial that makes them complicit in societal problems that form part of the context of the Second World War, then does the author invite us to criticise them? The novels can be read as parables for the destructiveness of nationalism, duty and empire; but is the narrators' failure to accept wrongdoing – or that the world they believed in was fictitious or now obsolete – an evil in itself? This central ambiguity is key to our reading of the novels and infuses the text of each until their final paragraphs.

In addressing these questions, we will examine the psychological means by which the narrators cope with regret, and how the repression of this regret manifests itself in their interaction with others and the world. Furthermore, we will examine the strategies they use to manipulate their own stories in a manner that will be more comforting to them, which in turn raises questions of narrative technique. As the stories themselves and the way they are told diverge from one another, the reader is impelled to look beyond not just the narrators' blindness but also the misinformation and evasions of unreliable narration. Also, we will examine the wider implications that the narrators' storytelling gives rise to: in what way are we all blind to many of the ideological prescriptions of culture, be they linguistic, historiographic or even existential? Finally, we will look at the way in which the novels address issues of nationalism and the boundaries of culpability: can Ono and Stevens's blindness to the pervasive abstractions of national identity excuse their participation in – and justifications for – the destructive culture of domination and subservience to which they subscribe? Dignity and denial – which could just as easily be “pride and prejudice” – are meant to reflect this tension at the heart of the two novels between active and passive participation in one's own failures, and the failures of nations themselves.



## *Chapter One: Dignity, denial and displacement*

The ways in which the unreliable narrators of *Remains of the Day* and *An Artist of the Floating World* perceive themselves and others are undermined by repressed guilt and regret concerning decisions they made before the war. In both novels, the narrators either displace onto other people values with which they would like to be associated, or accuse them of indignities of which they themselves are guilty. This reveals their existential crisis: how can they retain their dignity when the present judges them to have made mistakes in the past. These acts of displacement and repression – which owe themselves to a Freudian view of the mind – embody one of Ishiguro’s chief concerns: people who “have done things they later regret” and, moreover, “how they come to terms with it.” (Graver 1989, 3)

Ishiguro confirms that when he “was writing *The Remains of the Day*,” he “imbibed a lot of reflexes from [...] Freudian ideas.” (Matthews 2009, 120) Therefore, in order to better understand the behaviour of Ishiguro’s narrators, we will borrow a number of terms from Freudian psychoanalytic theory. These tendencies, such as *wish fulfilment*, *negation*, *projection* and *displacement*, fall into the broader condition of *repression*. Repression for Freud was a “defensive measure,” one of many “employed by the ego [...] that we use to defend ourselves against things that are painful and unbearable.” (Freud 2006, 74) In the novels, repression manifests itself in different ways: the motivated forgetting of traumatic events from the past; the displacement of unconscious desires onto a substitute; the projection of repressed fears onto another person; the expression of unconscious desire through fantasy; or unprompted denials which alert the reader to repressed emotions. We will look at these manifestations in our reading of the novels.

### **Repression**

Ono in *An Artist of the Floating World* and Stevens in *The Remains of the Day* both undertake personal journeys that are led under false pretences. Their first person narratives are intruded by memories that lead us to doubt the veracity of their motives in the present and their carefully constructed self-image. Both novels are told in the post-war period (England in 1956 for Stevens; Japan between 1948–1950 for Ono), but their narrators are impelled to reflect upon events in the 1930s. Both hero-

narrators are certainly what Freud would describe as ‘repressed,’ in the sense that they employ strategies to defend themselves “against things that are painful and unbearable,” (Freud 2006, 74) particularly concerning mistakes they made in the past.

Ono is concerned that his prior role as a military propagandist is spoiling his youngest daughter Noriko’s marriage prospects. Marriage negotiations with another family (the Miyakes) have fallen through and Ono starts to suspect that they withdrew due to his altered reputation after the war. According to the customs of arranged marriage in Japan, the parents of the potential couple were wont to hire detectives to investigate anything that might make them reconsider the engagement. He is prompted by his eldest daughter Setsuko to look up his old acquaintances from the war-time period to make sure that they are prepared for such enquiries and to reassure himself that they will not jeopardize Noriko’s eligibility. In *The Remains of the Day*, the butler-narrator Stevens tells us he has been given reason to believe that a former colleague at Darlington Hall, the stately home in which he is employed, has expressed a desire to return to work with him. This housekeeper, Miss Kenton – who left Darlington Hall before the war – has apparently written him a letter implying this, and he sets out on a cross-country car trip to meet with her.

The premise of both narrations is gradually undermined as we realize the heroes’ motives are more complicated than they would like the reader to believe. Ono tells us he is concerned with his daughter’s marriage prospects but he turns detective himself by investigating his own past and its relationship to his post-war ostracism. Stevens, meanwhile, tells us he wants to visit his pre-war colleague for professional reasons, though we quickly intuit that he has romantic feelings for her that he is unable to admit to himself. As Freud might say, in both cases, “the ego has repressed these non-ego-compatible tendencies, that is, it has withdrawn its interest from them and blocked them both from reaching consciousness.” (Freud 2006, 118) Ono can’t accept that history has judged him to have wasted his artistic talents on political propaganda, while Stevens cannot face the fact that he has denied himself an intimate life with Miss Kenton in order to serve to a man, Lord Darlington, who has since been disgraced as a Nazi appeaser. Both struggle to maintain their notions of human dignity – which owe themselves in part to cultural mores found weakened in the post-war context – in the face of these difficult realizations. They believe themselves to be undergoing one project when in fact they are blindly (unwillingly or unconsciously)

undergoing another, “disillusioning themselves as a way to seek comfort from a difficult past.” (Wong 2005, 4)

At the beginning of *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ono claims that the Miyakes’ withdrawal from the marriage negotiations remains “a mystery” (AFW, 18) to him. We learn that Ono’s post-war stigma, and unconscious guilt, revolve around Kuroda, a former protégé of Ono’s whom he betrayed to the militarists before the war for having been unpatriotic but has now been released from prison. Ono is shocked to learn that Dr Saito, the father of a new potential groom for his daughter, is acquainted with Kuroda and Ono worries this could jeopardise the marriage negotiations. Ono mentions the news of this acquaintance to his daughters in an offhand way, which is extraordinary given what we later come to learn about their friendship and points to the hitherto repressed guilt he feels towards his former pupil. Ono’s eldest daughter Setsuko suggests he contact Kuroda and “other such acquaintances from the past,” to which Ono replies with incredulity, “I’m not sure I follow what you’re saying.” (AFW, 85) Ono’s apparent incomprehension, as Freud would say, is a defence mechanism he uses against guilt and regret.

It is in this rather offhand manner (“I suppose I might mention here [...]” AFW, 77) that Ono begins his haunting recollection of the one time he has seen Kuroda since the war. He recalls experiencing a “strange shock,” when surveying the bomb damage at the pleasure district and realising that Kuroda was “looking expressionlessly” (AFW, 77) at him from beneath his umbrella. Neither man speaks, but Ono notes how Kuroda’s once-healthy face “had hollowed out around the cheekbones,” before they walk off in separate directions. Ono quickly cuts the recollection short (“it was not my intention to dwell on Kuroda here,” AFW, 78), in a manner that suggests the repression of his betrayal, which at this stage the reader doesn’t fully know. The unreal, dream-like quality of the memory also hints that it could be a figment of Ono’s mind, where he is haunted by visions of destruction amalgamated with that of the student he betrayed, both of which he feels unconsciously guilty for.

Repression in the two narratives is also evident in gaps or absences in the story. The key scene concerning Ono’s betrayal of Kuroda is conspicuously missing from the narrative, while a number of characters are mentioned only in passing. For example, Ono’s late wife, who was killed in an American bombing raid, is barely mentioned. In one of the few moments she is evoked, Ono says to his old friend

Matsuda, “‘It’s something of a comfort to remember her with you [...] I remember back in the old days then.” (AFW, 91) Ono’s reference to the “old days” is significant because in fact she does not appear in any of his more nostalgic recollections of the past. Ono’s reference to the “comfort” their brief discussion arouses in him suggests that dwelling on her absence in the present is too painful to bear. Thus her absence in his life is manifest in her absence in the narrative. Given that Ono is also largely reticent on his son Kenji’s death in the war, we can certainly pose the question as to whether, at some level, Ono considers himself partly responsible for both deaths given his links to the military authorities that brought the conflict into fruition. Only once do we see this guilt bubbling up from his unconscious (almost) unhindered when he thinks he hears his daughter say:

‘There is no doubt Father devoted the most careful thought to my brother’s upbringing. Nevertheless, in the light of what came to pass, we can see that [...] Mother may in fact have had the more correct ideas.’ (AFW, 158)

As he quickly admits the possibility that he “misinterpreted entirely” (AFW, 158) Setsuko’s hurtful words, the incident speaks of either Ono’s guilt about his son’s death, or the fact that his late wife blamed him for it, or both. As Cynthia Wong says, “Too much explicit grievance” over the deaths of his wife and son “may begin a process of self-blame and regret that may be more than Ono can bear.” (Wong 2005, 49) Similarly, in *The Remains of the Day* Stevens mentions in passing that his brother died in the Boer War, acknowledging that his “father would have felt the loss quite keenly.” (RD, 41) While noting that he was just a boy at the time of his brother’s death, no mention is made of his own grief. These gaps “reveal the tremendous anguish surrounding their stories,” Cynthia Wong says, “what they do not tell is as dynamic as what they reveal.” (Wong 2005, 65, 17) Like Stevens’s *misreading* of Miss Kenton’s letter, which we will look at shortly, Ono’s *mishearing* could be what Freud defines as a “lapse” or “slip” which reveals a repressed idea. (Freud 2006, 327) Furthermore, in speculating that he is not sure if his daughter said it or not, Ono appears a man struggling to distinguish between the real and the imaginary.

For Stevens – arguably a more fully-realised study in Freudian repression – defense mechanisms are employed both against regret and sexual satisfaction. Stevens goes out of his way to reassure the reader (“let me make it immediately clear”) that his trip to the West Country to meet with Miss Kenton will be undertaken with only “professional matters” (RD, 5) in mind. His repeated insistence of an exclusively

“professional” relationship with Miss Kenton has the inadvertent effect of drawing attention to his unrequited feelings for her. It also hints at a man who represses his emotions for the sake of remaining dignified to the reader and, of course, himself. For Freud this type of repression is “the expression of conflicts between the ego and those sexual tendencies that appear to the ego to be contrary to its integrity or its ethical assertions.” (Freud 2006, 118) In Stevens’s case, his “integrity” or “ethical assertions” are given lengthy treatises in the narrative and pertain to his sense of dignity in the name of professional duty.

One clue to Stevens’s repression is when he praises the “emotional restraint” of the English compared to “Celts” and “Continental” who are not able to control themselves, and “who are like a man who will, at the slightest provocation, tear off his suit and run about screaming.” (*RD*, 44) Setting aside for now the jingoistic tone of this passage, the extraordinary image of the screaming man seems to suggest something of Stevens’s turbulent inner feelings that he desperately seeks to suppress. In one of his recollections, Miss Kenton says to Stevens: “It occurs to me you must be a well-contented man [...] every aspect of your domain well under control.” (*RD*, 182) It is hard to judge whether Miss Kenton means this to sound quite as sardonic as it does but Stevens is at a loss to respond and an awkward silence ensues. The evocation of a domain “under control” speaks of an external self at odds with an internal one rife with self doubt and the all-pervasive sense of restraint which governs Stevens’s every impulse.

On his journey to the West Country, Stevens finds himself pondering on the reasons their relationship declined in the mid-30s. He describes an incident in which Miss Kenton visits him in his pantry “not engaged in professional matters,” (*RD*, 175) but reading. Her insistence that he show her his book is met with resistance, but one which induces a proximity that is as close as they come to consummating their mutual attraction. He describes how “the atmosphere underwent a peculiar change – almost as though the two of us had been suddenly thrust on to some other plane of being altogether.” (*RD*, 175) The sexually charged moment passes, and despite Stevens’s adept description of the intensity of the moment, he seems at a loss as to its meaning. Finally she has to “prise” the book out of his hands, only to exclaim with the surprise it isn’t “scandalous” after all, “simply a sentimental love story.” (*RD*, 176) Stevens is neither able to respond to Miss Kenton’s near-advances nor to accept the fact that he is reading a love story out of emotional need. Indeed, he creates a ludicrous



justification that he reads the book only as a means to develop his “command of the English language.” (*RD*, 176) He then makes the extraordinary confession that he “did at times gain a sort of incidental enjoyment” from such stories, before posing the rhetorical question: “what shame is there in it?” (*RD*, 177) This bizarre passage of needless self-justification reaches a peak – vital to our understanding of Stevens – when he says that an aspiring butler “should never allow himself to be off-duty in the presence of others.” (*RD*, 178) That Stevens should feel the need to absolve himself from the “shame” of reading a sentimental novel points to his repression and self-deprivation in the name of professional duty; “as if he needs to convince himself that he has no emotional life.” (Lewis 2000, 86) The misguided sense of dignity that he has structured around himself in the name of professional duty negates any possibility of intimacy with another.

The rhetorical device “what shame is there in it?” – like a “gesture of appeal” (James 2009, 61) – has echoes elsewhere in the novel. Later, when finally realizing that he could have had a life together with Miss Kenton, he asks himself “why should I not admit it? – at that moment, my heart was breaking.” (*RD*, 252) The rhetorical aspect of his narration is something we will look at in more detail but in the context of Stevens’s self-denial or repression we can say he is looking for a consolation from the loneliness of the predicament in which he finds himself.

### **Projection and displacement**

The impulse to displace or project unconscious feelings onto another person or activity is a common manifestation of repression in both novels. For the purposes of this analysis, we will distinguish between acts of *projection* (in which the narrators project their own unconscious fears and insecurities onto other people or things) and *displacement* (in which, for example, actions are undertaken in the name of another motive than the repressed one, or the significance of a memory is displaced for a more palatable one). The theory of projection was developed by Sigmund Freud in “Draft H” of his letters to Wilhelm Fliess in which he claimed “[T]he purpose of paranoia is thus to fend off an idea that is incompatible with the ego, by projecting its substance onto the external world.” (de Mijolla 2005, 209) Displacement, on the other hand, can involve shifting the target of one action to another, and when this is not possible, changing the action altogether to a second, normally more trivial target which will

resemble the first in some sense. It is, according to Freud an “inherent characteristic in the psychology of the obsessional neurotic to make the fullest possible use of the mechanism of *displacement* [...] especially apt to become displaced on to what is most insignificant and small.” (Freud 1984, 120–21) There are many examples of displacement and projection in the novels, most concerning memories in which resistance to the truth ushers in a “distortion and the displacement of what is being recalled.” (Freud 2006, 87)

### *Projection*

Projection in the two novels takes two distinct forms. One is when the narrators displace what they unconsciously perceive to be their own negative traits onto another character. The second is when they imbue other people, things or memories with qualities with which they themselves would like to be associated. We will deal with the former first.

In *An Artist of the Floating World*, Noriko’s rejection at the hands of the Miyakes becomes a kind of surrogate for Ono’s own sense of rejection in post-war Japan. In effect, to understand the reasons for one is to acknowledge the other. When Ono expresses his concern for his daughter’s marriage prospects he says, “The war has made things difficult for her.” (AFW, 92) Again, what Ono really means is that the war has made things difficult for him, and that this has potentially stigmatized his daughter by proxy. Thus, we are left to speculate, what is driving Ono’s investigation, a need to solve his daughter’s rejection, or his own? When Ono embarks on marriage negotiations with another family, the Saitos, he remarks upon “the marked contrast between the assured way Dr Saito has responded to the slightly awkward situation, and the nervous, clumsy way the Miyake family had handled things.” (AFW, 80) Ono would like to think that, as a man of status and integrity akin to Dr Saito, he too navigates the course of such exchanges in an “assured way.” However, his criticisms of the Miyake family start to look like a projection of his own “clumsy” and “nervous” manner with Dr Saito. These reach a peak at the *miai*, a traditional ceremony recognizing the union of the two families, where he feels impelled to clumsily unburden himself of his guilt.

Ono also projects some of his insecurities onto a former pupil of his, Shintaro, now a fellow drinker in an otherwise empty bar. Ono portrays Shintaro as a deluded

man who “likes to believe” he is still an artist despite having “long since ceased to be [one].” (AFW, 22) These statements have a special resonance for the reader as they could equally be made about Ono, who we later discover no longer paints and abandoned “real art” for state propaganda before the war. The fact that he unconsciously projects these repressed self-perceptions onto another is filled with pathos, especially considering the fact that Shintaro has remained loyal where others have distanced themselves from the stigma of his acquaintance.

Ono later recalls an episode in which Shintaro visits him at home with a request to write to the committee considering his application for a high school teaching post. Shintaro asks him to confirm statements he had made to the committee about his war-time political leanings – namely that he had disagreed with Ono over his work during the China crisis, an incident Ono inevitably claims not to remember. Ono loses his temper with Shintaro, accusing him of attempting to dissociate himself from his influence: ““Why don’t you simply face up to the past? [...] The world may now have a different opinion of your work, but there’s no need to lie about yourself.”” (AFW, 103–04) Again Ono makes accusations which could just as easily be leveled at him. Indeed, he had just made a similar request to his old friend Matsuda in an attempt to pre-empt any enquiries that might be made by the Saitos’ detective. He still cannot see the similarity of Shintaro’s “efforts to shirk his responsibilities,” (AFW, 104) and his own attempts to convince old acquaintances to lie on his behalf. In his letters to Wilhelm Fliess Freud identified a similar act of projection when unfaithful men accuse their wives of having cheated on them: “acquittal by his conscience – if he projects his own impulses to faithlessness on to the partner to whom he owes faith.” (Freud 1955, 223) Indeed, when he reflects bitterly on the end of his friendship with both Shintaro and, before the war, a fellow student nicknamed the Tortoise, he identifies without irony their “lack of frankness [and] their capacity for treachery,” (AFW, 159) both of which could be displaced perceptions of himself. After all, Ono never really apologizes for his own treachery (of Kuroda), and only accepts his past wrongdoing as a condition for securing his daughter’s future happiness.

Stevens’s makes a similar projection in *The Remains of the Day*. Speculating on the implications of Miss Kenton’s letter, he decides with some confidence that, having separated from her husband, “she is pondering with regret decisions made in the far-off past that have now left her, deep in middle age, so alone and desperate.” (RD, 50) Not only does this strike the reader as highly presumptuous when he has not

seen Miss Kenton in twenty years, he could also just as easily be talking about himself. As Cynthia Wong says, “he could well be identifying a condition of his own existence,” (Wong 2005, 57) revealing something about his unconscious fears by projecting them onto someone else.

Similarly, Stevens is haunted by memories of his under-butler father that have frightening implications for his life in the present. When he recalls visiting his father’s room, Stevens is taken aback by the “smallness and starkness of it,” before comparing it to a “prison cell.” (*RD*, 67) However, this is not dissimilar to Miss Kenton’s earlier description of Stevens’s own dreary parlour: “all one needs is a small bed in the corner and one could well imagine a condemned man spending their last hours here.” (*RD*, 174) It is as if Stevens suddenly sees in his father’s room something of his own bleak life, and something of his future in a man who worked himself to death. These memories are uncomfortably pertinent to his situation in the present where, like his father, he is struggling to cope with his duties in older age, and where the remains of his day stretch out “as an emptiness” before him.

Much of Stevens’s existential struggle stems from the fact he devoted his life to Lord Darlington, who has been disgraced after the war as a Nazi appeaser. As Darlington’s butler, no-one has asked him to share his former master’s disgrace, yet once again it could just as easily be himself to whom he refers when he talks about his Lord Darlington’s work having “turned out today to look, at best, a sad waste.” (*RD*, 211) In effect, Stevens has made a further displacement by supplanting the loss of his romantic life with Miss Kenton – the sadness of which he is barely able to articulate in the narrative – by sharing the burden of Lord Darlington’s wasted life.

Not all of these projections are negative however; there are many other instances in which the narrators displace positive qualities they would like to have associated with themselves onto other things or people. In most of these cases, the displacement reveals an aspect of wish fulfilment on the narrators’ part, one manifestation of the repressed regret they feel for mistakes they have made. Such a manifestation can be seen again in Stevens’s references to Miss Kenton’s letter, into which he projects “hints” about a desire to return to Darlington Hall, and upon which he bases his trip to see her. The existence of these “hints” becomes less likely as the novel progresses. At the beginning Stevens feels the need to “make it clear” that he has “re-read” the letter “several times” before deducing that he can’t be “imagining” (*RD*, 10) her desire to return. Given that the word “hints” suggests something

ambiguous in her letter that requires careful re-reading, and that he even evokes the possibility of his imagining, raises uncertainty about their existence. He returns to the letter periodically, finding it increasingly difficult to identify the hints in the text before finally realizing that “one may have previously – perhaps through wishful thinking of a professional kind – exaggerated what evidence there was regarding such a desire on her part.” (*RD*, 149) The shift from “I” to “one” is significant, as Stevens struggles to distance himself from his “wishful thinking,” a thinking he still seeks to repackage as purely professional. A Freudian analysis of this would be a “mechanism for delusion” that involves “turning away from the real world and its motives, on the one hand, and on the other the influence of wish fulfillment on the contents of the delusion.” (Freud 2006, 87) Stevens’s “wishful thinking” is thus really a form of delusional wish fulfillment.

Such projections are not limited to people, however. One early passage in *The Remains of the Day* finds Stevens at a local beauty spot marvelling at the English countryside’s “lack of obvious drama” and “sense of restraint.” (*RD*, 29) He then compares the landscape of his country favourably to those more superficially dramatic elsewhere, which are “inferior on account of their unseemly demonstrativeness.” (*RD*, 29) By putting the English landscape in opposition to “demonstrativeness,” he transposes onto another context qualities he would like to be associated with. Equally, in extolling “restraint” he is attempting to justify his self-deprivation. As the author himself put it, Stevens is “saying something about himself” when he talks about “what the British landscape does with its surface calm: the ability to actually keep down turmoil and emotion.” (Vorda and Herzinger 1991, 141–42) Stevens’s projection of himself onto the landscape resounds as he emerges as someone vexed by a lack of professional recognition. He expresses frustration at having to listen to praise of a rival butler, whose “conspicuous style” (*RD*, 30) echoes his distaste for “unseemly demonstrativeness.” This frustration seems to be one motivating factor behind Stevens’s lengthy treatises on the qualities of great butlers; a very English notion of dignity being at the heart of his theory. Dignity for Stevens necessarily includes an inconspicuousness that justifies the fact he is hardly noticed.

His frustration with this lack of recognition finds a different outlet to Ono, who reminds us too often of his lack of awareness concerning his high status, a feature of his narration we will return to. In one of Stevens’s treatises on professional greatness, he stops short of naming himself, to acknowledge that his “father was

indeed the embodiment of ‘dignity,’” (*RD*, 34) going on to recount two stories by way of example. In the first, his father – while chauffeuring – faces down two drunken guests who are making insulting remarks about his employer. Stevens speculates on how his father “must have looked that day, framed by the doorway of the vehicle, his dark, severe presence quite blotting out the effect of the gentle Hertfordshire scenery behind him.” (*RD*, 40) The image is entirely imagined, showing how the tale has taken on heroic proportions in Stevens’s mind. Moreover, it doesn’t square at all well with the depiction of Stevens’s father later in the book, albeit at a later age. The effect of the story seems to speak of Stevens’s own projected fantasy about facing down those less gentlemanly members of the ruling class, a desire that seems likely to forever remain just that: a fantasy. In Freudian terms, such a fantasy represents “an unconscious, otherwise repressed tendency which strives for satisfaction – wish fulfilment.” (Freud 2006, 113) However, when Stevens imagines his father’s “expression balanced perfectly between personal dignity and readiness to oblige,” (*RD*, 39) he reveals a fundamental disbalance in his own life. His father does perhaps display a dignity in this story, but arguably has to risk his job to do so, something Stevens would never be prepared to do.

Later Stevens extols his father’s ability to “hide his feelings” (*RD*, 43) when confronted, while butlering, the General who led a botched attack during the Boer War, in which his son, and Stevens’s elder brother died. What is interesting about this second example of his father’s dignity is that it more closely resembles Stevens’s own acquiescence in the face of difficult emotional circumstances. Indeed, the story is recounted in order to exemplify his father’s strength of character, but rather than see the tragedy of his father having to serve the general, Stevens praises him for suppressing his emotions.

The two stories show quite different reactions on his father’s part, but it is the latter that serves as an indication of Stevens’s own contradictory worldview. It also suggests the ways in which Stevens projects some of his own “dignified” qualities – intertwined as they are with submissiveness or even cowardice – onto his father, in order to displace or distance himself from their self-evident contradictions. As Cynthia Wong suggests, “Stevens has truly managed to subvert his father’s existence by imprinting the meaning of his own life upon that existence;” (Wong 2005, 61) even if the “meaning of his own life” is itself contradictory. Whereas it might sometimes be necessary to hide one’s feelings in the name of professional duty, there

is no triumph, only pathos, in the second story. Moreover, as his reticence on his brother's death suggests, "professional duty" for Stevens has become all-pervasive, so that he hides not only his feelings from other people, but from himself as well. In a later, but related remark, Stevens explains the secret of good waiting as "that balance between attentiveness and the illusion of absence." (*RD*, 75) This could also be a metaphor for Stevens's physical presence but emotional absence in his work, as he has repressed his feelings in the name of professional duty.

When Stevens first comes to describe an encounter between himself and his father, the depiction jars strikingly with the mythologizing that preceded it. Stevens has to approach his ailing father to discuss reducing his duties at Darlington Hall, noting that the few conversations they did have at that stage "took place in an atmosphere of mutual embarrassment." (*RD*, 66) As Barry Lewis observes, the incident reveals that Stevens had in fact been "idealising a father with whom, in reality, he had little in common." (Lewis 2000, 132) Their exchanges are not just one of "mutual embarrassment" but also coldness and, on the part of Stevens's father, near hostility. Stevens's use of the formal, capitalized 'Father' highlights the emotional distance between them, and "the repressive sense of propriety that forces them to maintain such a distance." (Shibata and Sugano, 22) We could also speculate on the impact of his father's coldness on Stevens's own aloofness with others, particularly Miss Kenton, yet we pity Stevens's prior need to eulogize a man who was perhaps more of a missing figure in his life than "a figure of unusual distinction." It is possible that Stevens feels guilty for having reached a higher professional level than his father. As Freud said, "there must be a feeling of guilt of our father in childhood, with the undervaluation that had replaced that overvaluation that had prevailed in early childhood. It seems as though the essential aspect of success lies in getting further than one's father, as though wishing to outdo one's father were forbidden." (Freud 2006, 76) It is perhaps such a guilt that drives Stevens to over-evaluate a man with whom he had little in common and whose professional unreliability has become a source of embarrassment for him at Darlington Hall.

Whereas here Stevens projects himself into a semi-mythological anecdote concerning his father, Ono's memories can be equally fantastic. At one point he recounts an incident in his early career when he defends a fellow painter, nicknamed the Tortoise, for his slow work-rate. "That's enough, can't you see you're talking to someone with artistic integrity?" he recalls railing against his friends' tormentors,

before admitting “I cannot vouch that those were my exact words.” (*AFW*, 68–69) This not only lends uncertainty to the veracity of his memories but it points to ‘wish fulfilment’ on his part. In acting honourably in the Tortoise’s defence, in reality or in his imagination, Ono seeks to redress his own doubts about the use of his talent and defend his career choices. He goes on to say, unapologetically, that “it is inevitable that with repeated telling, such accounts begin to take on a life of their own.” (*AFW*, 72) He acknowledges that the words are his own invention, but then dismisses the significance of such artifice by claiming that the words nevertheless “do represent accurately enough my attitude and resolve at that point in my life.” (*AFW*, 72) Here, Ono deceives himself that he can rewrite the past by attributing himself with qualities possessed by more honourable men, namely Kuroda. Indeed, the only reason he is aware of these more virtuous qualities and feels the need to insert them into his past is because hindsight has proven him to have taken the wrong moral path. If Japan had won the war, there would be nothing for him to have to alter about his memories.

Similarly, in one passage he attributes some words to his former teacher Moriyama that he quickly admits sound more like the kind of pronouncement he would make to his own pupils: “‘When I look back over my life and see I have devoted it to the task of capturing the unique beauty of the world, I believe I will be well satisfied. And no man will make me believe I’ve wasted my time.’” (*AFW*, 150–51) Although he readily allows the possibility that Moriyama did not say these words, this does not strike Ono as problematic. He explains away this tendency to confuse his former teacher’s words with his own as if part of a natural teacher-pupil paradigm. A near identical confusion comes later when he remembers Mr Moriyama’s reaction to the new, nationalistic tone to his work. “‘You seem to be exploring curious avenues,’” Ono recalls his former teacher saying, before concluding that these were probably his “own words to Kuroda on that later occasion in that same pavilion.” (*AFW*, 177) The later conversation with Kuroda is curiously absent in the novel, and with the re-attribution of the words to the earlier exchange, we can guess why. In the latter context of Ono’s work for the military regime, it takes on the darker aspect of a threat, something Ono has repressed. That the two events are linked improbably to the same pavilion speaks of their unconscious connection in Ono’s mind. On some level Ono recognizes that he betrayed both his teacher’s noble artistic ideals and, later, his artistic integrity when he reported Kuroda to the authorities for unpatriotic behaviour. Ono refuses to countenance the fact he betrayed “the task of capturing the unique



beauty of world” in favour of producing propaganda, as he is blind to the fact that the two are incompatible.

Indeed, having apparently described his former teacher as having been “arrogant and possessive” (*AFW*, 181) over Ono’s change of artistic direction, he segues seamlessly into a memory of Kuroda’s capture by the military police. It then becomes apparent that some of his preceding observations – that it is “understandable, if not entirely excusable, that the teacher lose for a moment his sense of proportion and do things he may later regret” (*AFW*, 181) – are not what we think they are. At the moment of their utterance, we assume Ono is referring to Mr Moriyama, but as this bleeds into a memory concerning Kuroda, it becomes evident that he is also talking about himself. The transition suggests his failure to distinguish between the dubious motives of his artistic change and Kuroda’s resistance to producing propaganda. Moreover, the shame of this realization is causing the line between two inter-connected memories to blur. Despite the “clear time frames” in the novels, Cynthia Wong argues, “these time frames become complicated, and, at times, distorted by emotion.” (Wong 2005, 18)

Given this tendency to misplace such words, are we to believe Ono’s earlier memories of Kuroda praising Ono so sycophantically about his esteem (“how typical of Sensei’s modest nature that he is unaware of this,” *AFW*, 25). The fact that Ono’s former protégé later resisted the nationalistic themes in his teacher’s art makes this memory dubious. This is heightened when Ono is later shown to be jealous of Kuroda’s post-war success, making the reference to his esteem seem like a twisted displacement of his own insecurities. Ono later observes that “such of are the ways of this world” (*AFW*, 108) that Kuroda’s years in prison gave him great credibility after the war, forming the basis for a successful career. If we can detect faint praise, or even jealousy in these words, he acknowledges it may seem “perverse” of him to say that he is in fact “proud” of Kuroda’s success. Indeed, “perverse” is exactly what it seems that Ono should try and claim credit for Kuroda’s success despite having betrayed him.

Ono later wishes to portray himself as someone that aspired “to rise above the mediocre, to be something more than ordinary,” and whose “failure was quite unlike the undignified failures of more ordinary lives.” (*AFW*, 134) It should come as no surprise that he is not talking directly about himself here, but displacing these self-perceptions onto Sugimura, the former owner of his home. An almost identical

projection happens when he justifies the high-handed behaviour of his former mentor, Mr Moriyama, saying that, “anyone who has held ambitions on a grand scale, anyone who has been in a position to achieve something large and has felt the need to impart his ideas as thoroughly as possible, will have some sympathy for the way Mori-san conducted things.” (AFW, 144) Despite having concluded in the previous chapter that “there is certainly a satisfaction and dignity to be gained in coming to terms with the mistakes one has made,” (AFW, 124–25) Ono believes that he had a higher purpose which justifies these errors. In both instances Ono projects his failures onto another seemingly as a way to put distance between himself and the idea, using these other men as a canvas upon which he can repaint his past in a manner less painful to bear, so that his failures are recast as successes.

One of the most clear-cut delusional fantasies on Ono’s part happens when his daughter Setsuko suggests that Dr Saito didn’t know who he was until the marriage negotiations. “My recollection of the first time I ever met [Dr Saito] remains quite vivid, and I am thus confident enough of its accuracy.” (AFW, 131) Again, by saying he is “confident enough” of the “accuracy” of his memory draws attention to areas in which his powers of recall have faltered either naturally or intentionally. Indeed, the “vivid” nature of the recollection, with Dr Saito’s telling repetition of “a great honour to have an artist of your stature in our neighbourhood,” (AFW, 131) has the dream-like quality of outright fantasy. The episode seems to have been entirely invented – perhaps unconsciously – to respond to Setsuko’s suggestion, an extremely hurtful one for Ono, who is at pains to convince himself of his own high standing. The use of the word “accuracy” has echoes later when Ono ruminates on his first nationalistic painting, the details of which remain so vivid to him that he feels he “could quite accurately recreate” (AFW, 165) it years later. Thus the reader’s attention is drawn to the link between painting – that is to say, representing the world – and memory. Ono’s memory is sometimes subject to painterly retouches, others – like his first meeting with Dr Saito – are like a painter’s work of pure imagination.

### *Displacement*

Similar to projection, displacement sees the painful object of attention moved to another context. Both narrators are haunted by words which they struggle to correctly attribute and which have special resonance for them, even if they don’t consciously

recognise why. In a conversation with his daughter's former fiancé, Jiro Miyake, Ono recalls the young man referring to the company men complicit in the military regime who had resumed civilian life unscathed after the war. He is particularly struck by the phrase "the greatest cowardice of all," (*AFW*, 56) speculating instead that it is a comment more likely to have been said by his son in law, Suichi, on the occasion of his son Kenji's funeral. That Ono struggles to correctly attribute the phrase hints at his unconscious guilt about not confronting his past misdeeds and its consequence on his daughter in the present. By relocating the phrase to the memory of Kenji's funeral, he also reveals how this guilt is intertwined with that of his son's death and his daughter's rejection, which prompted the memory to begin with.

Stevens is also found attributing words or phrases to the wrong person. He recalls a conversation with Miss Kenton in which she warns him of his ailing father's difficulty performing his duties, remembering her saying "these errors may be trivial in themselves, but you must yourself realize their larger significance." (*RD*, 63) However, he later decides that this would have been out of character for her and attributes the words instead to Lord Darlington. Besides from entering an element of doubt and unreliability into Stevens's narration, his attribution of the comment from one person to another lends the words a particular resonance that haunts Stevens as the novel progresses. The trivial errors that have a "larger significance" could apply, not just to his father, but himself, as he too struggles to perform his duties in the present of the narrative. The projection of the phrase from Miss Kenton to Lord Darlington, two figures key to Stevens's sense of self, also suggests that there is more than professional pride at stake. It also reflects Stevens's dread that he will too befall the lonely fate of his father, who worked himself to death. Furthermore, the "trivial errors" could equally apply to Lord Darlington's own blundering politics, something that has a "larger significance" for Stevens's sense of his life's worth. The unusually emphatic syntax "*you must yourself realize*" (my emphasis) – whether real or imagined – hints at these as-yet unconscious ramifications for him.

Despite having given the impression of not having given thought to the Miyake's withdrawal Ono quickly reaches the conclusion that "it was simply a matter of family status," that the family didn't feel comfortable "at the thought of their son marrying above his station." (*AFW*, 19) Therefore, Ono intuitively understands that the reasons for the withdrawal owe something to his own reputation, but instead of deducing that it is due to his tarnished reputation – which he has difficulty accepting – he twists it so that the

opposite is true. For Ono there can be no other explanation for the withdrawal other than that the Miyakes felt unworthy of the match, something that strikes the reader as both snobbish and unlikely. As Freud says, such delusions “are attempts at explanation and recuperation” that owe their “power of conviction to the segment of historical truth that it substitutes for the rejected reality.” (Freud 2006, 88) Ono acknowledges the link between his reputation and his daughter’s rejection, but reverses it to make it less painful to himself.

While Ono comes to partly accept wrongdoing in the past, the crucial scenes directly involving his betrayal of Kuroda are absent in the narrative. This oversight also draws parallels in psychoanalysis, where Freud identified that patients often accept the truth of a construction provided by the physician as “it suits his resistance to go on covering up the truth he is hiding by agreeing with us.” (Freud 2006, 82–83) Ono can only accept that he made mistakes in the past if he can supplant his misguided judgement for a self-justification based on “the ability to think and judge for myself, even if it meant going against the sway of those around me.” (AFW, 69) There are several episodes in Ono’s narrative in which he tries to demonstrate this, most significantly in defying his father’s plans for his career, and in taking a different artistic course to that advised by his mentor, Mr Moriyama. Ono wishes to show these key life events in the same light, yet they differ wildly in implication. Whereas his disobedience of his father to pursue an artistic career is noble, Ono confuses his departure from Mr Moriyama’s tutelage to devote his talents to producing nationalistic propaganda with “going against the sway,” when in fact he was just replacing one “sway” for another, more sinister force. Likewise, when Ono leaves the Takeda firm earlier in the novel, he tells his friend the Tortoise, “all too often men talk of loyalty and follow blindly. I for one have no wish to lead my life like that.” (AFW, 72) Here again Ono wants to associate his collusion with the Imperial junta as an act of independence. That most people followed – in most cases because they had no choice – the “sway” of Japanese militarism in the 30s does not occur to Ono. Furthermore, he never evaluates Kuroda’s resistance to this “sway,” and the far greater price he had to pay for it than Ono’s post-war ostracism.

Similarly, in *The Remains of the Day* Stevens gropes for a plausible explanation for denying, after the war, ever having worked for Lord Darlington, and the only one he can find is that he doesn’t want to hear any more “nonsense concerning his lordship.” (RD, 132) This rather twists these incidents so that their

implication is reversed: that his lies are founded on a sense of loyalty rather than shame. The issue of loyalty – indeed Stevens’s misplaced loyalty to Lord Darlington at the expense of his personal life – is at the heart of his denial, but like Ono he substitutes “the segment of historical truth” in this “rejected reality” for a delusory interpretation.

Stevens displaces an intimate life with professional duty using dignity as a means of justification. By displacing his personal needs onto the needs of the house, Stevens can avoid confronting his unrequited desire for Miss Kenton. In Freudian terms, professionalism for Stevens is “a sexual substitute satisfaction, but the symptom cannot yet fully escape the influence of the repressive forces, and must consequently make do with alterations and displacements [...] through which its characteristic sexual satisfaction becomes indecipherable.” (Freud 2006, 118) As we saw when Stevens feels impelled to justify reading a love story, he associates the need for intimacy with shame. His natural urges appear instead to have been displaced onto the needs of Darlington Hall. In the chapter “Day Three – Evening” he recalls the period in which Miss Kenton was being courted by her future husband, raising the possibility of her departure in his mind:

This was indeed a disturbing notion, for it was not hard to see that Miss Kenton’s departure would constitute a professional loss of some magnitude, a loss Darlington Hall would have some difficulty recovering from. (*RD*, 180)

In this sentence we could easily replace the word “professional” with “personal” and “Darlington Hall” with the first person “I,” which on some psychological level we can imagine he has done. In order to justify such self-sacrifice in the name of professional duty, he constructs a theory on great butlers from an exclusive ‘Hayes Society’ and its publication *A Quarterly for the Gentleman’s Gentleman*. The most important prerequisite for membership to the society is given rather cryptically as being “possessed of a dignity in keeping with his position.” (*RD*, 33) Stevens appropriates this rather snobbish criterion in order to distinguish between great butlers and ordinary ones. As dignity becomes a by-word for modesty and restraint, then he sets a trap for himself by not being able to bestow greatness upon himself. David James reads this sympathetically: “the pathos of the situation is that Stevens ends up rehearsing a discussion of esteem for which he refuses to become the ideal case study.” (James 2009, 57)

By contrast, Ono has no difficulty naming himself as a case study for esteem. By the end of *An Artist of the Floating World* Ono has entirely displaced his failures for successes, unwilling to confront Stevens's fear that his life has turned out "a sad waste." Ono finds himself at the end of the novel seeking out Mr Moriyama's villa – where his career blossomed and then diverged into politics. Instead of feeling melancholy, he experiences "a deep sense of triumph and satisfaction," convinced that he was justified in risking "everything in the endeavour to rise above the mediocre." (AFW, 204) Whereas Stevens takes little comfort in his life choices at the end of *The Remains of the Day*, Ono's displacement of failure for triumph is one that he retains until the end of his narrative.

Similarly, Stevens supplants moments of great emotional strain, even personal tragedy, with professional "triumph." When Stevens's father dies during an important political meeting at Darlington Hall, he declines to see him on his death bed, having become embroiled in the demeaning task of attending to a French minister's feet. That his father would have wished him to continue, as Stevens claims, may be true, but it does not really justify Stevens's dereliction of emotional duty in favour of a trivial professional one. By burying himself in his work he is able to avoid confrontation with the pain of his father's death; nothing abnormal in that. What is odd however is the way in which Stevens feels the need to twist the memory at the end: "For all its sad associations, whenever I recall that evening today, I find I do so with a large sense of triumph." (RD, 115) The passage shows how Stevens represses his feelings and displaces them: taking triumph from his ability to conduct his job in difficult emotional circumstances, just as his father did with the Boer War General. "By normal yardsticks," Barry Lewis writes, "the butler's priorities seem perversely awry, but he manages to recast his behaviour as a professional victory." (Lewis 2000, 83) In the world-view Stevens has constructed for himself there would have been no dignity in allowing his father's death to prevent him from his duties. Even in hindsight, he is unable to acknowledge the pathos in having been unable to stop work to see his father on his deathbed.

At one stage in the same evening, Lord Darlington remarks that Stevens looks as though he is crying, for which Stevens practically apologizes. This is one of two references to Stevens's crying in his narration that are both imparted to the reader indirectly, a strange way to allude to such information in a first person narrative. Barry Lewis refers to these moments as "when the mask of composure slips to reveal

the human face beneath,” (Lewis 2000, 96) a choice of words echoed by Cynthia Wong: “this mask is too great a burden to bear and he is seen [...] sobbing.” (Wong 2005, 53) Stevens alludes to the “sad associations” of the memory, without really confronting them. There are no confrontations with his feelings about his father or, indeed, their relationship. Instead he displaces the “sad associations” for “triumph,” in an effort to highlight his dignity, despite “the indignity of struggling to appear dignified in undignifying situations.” (Lewis 2000, 84)

Stevens makes an almost identical displacement while recalling a later meeting at Darlington Hall in which Miss Kenton announces she is quitting her job to get married. Having angered her with his indifference to her departure he reflects upon a moment, “persistently lodged” in his memory, of hesitating outside her door “quite certain that if I were to knock and enter, I would discover her in tears.” (*RD*, 237) Firstly, he displaces the memory of Miss Kenton’s tears with the false one that she was upset by her aunt’s death, which in fact occurred months later. Secondly, unable to understand the preoccupying significance of his hesitation outside the door, he instead recalls the feeling of triumph he experienced at having overcome a difficult day professionally in stressful circumstances. As Barry Lewis asks, “is Stevens’s sense of professional triumph simply a displacement of his personal loss in these two instances”? (Lewis 2000, 84) He suggests that Stevens “simply discounts his obligations as a son and a potential husband” and treats them instead “as interruptions to his public duty. Tries, but fails.” (Lewis 2000, 84) That Stevens should twice displace personal regret with professional triumph again shows how “the ego has repressed [...] non-ego-compatible tendencies,” (Freud 2006, 118) so that he can maintain his dignity.

### **Negation and denial**

Both Stevens and Ono constantly draw attention to aspects of their character or past that are repressed by seeking to negate them, largely unprovoked. As Freud defined it, “The content of a repressed idea or thought can get through to consciousness, then, on condition that it is *negated*. Negation is a way of acknowledging the repressed, indeed it amounts to a lifting of the repression, although not, of course, an acceptance of what is repressed.” (Freud 2006, 97) In Ono’s case, this manifests itself with his repeated assertion that he is unaware of his social standing. “I have never at any point in my

life been very aware of my own social standing,” (AFW, 19) There are numerous examples of this in *An Artist of the Floating World*, which serve to illuminate the falseness of Ono’s modesty. They also gradually draw the reader’s attention to the fact that Ono’s reputation has not just been tarnished by his war-time politics, but that he has inflated his standing before the war too. This constant impulse to negate his awareness of his social standing is also a pathology identified by Freud: “the compulsion to repeat is attributable to the unconscious repressed within him.” (Freud 2006, 146) The more Ono attempts to play down his awareness of his status, the more we are alerted to the importance of “social standing” in his worldview, and his difficulty coping with post-war stigmatization. Barry Lewis describes Ono as “a vain, self-serving man who is desperate to be admired by others for having made a contribution to something,” and also proffers the possibility that “Ono has vastly overestimated his importance in the scheme of things.” (Lewis 2000, 54)

For Stevens the negation comes in the form of post-war incidents in which he is impelled to deny his connection to Lord Darlington. In the first, he rebuts a man’s enquires if he had ever worked under his former master, an act which troubles his conscience and provokes the memory of a similar denial made to an American couple, the Wakefields, visiting Darlington Hall. The latter incident has consequences as Mrs Wakefield suggests to his new American employer Mr Farraday that Darlington Hall and Stevens himself were “mock,” (RD, 130) or inauthentic. Farraday demands an explanation from Stevens, who weakly (and deceptively) says “that it is not customary in England for an employee to discuss his past employers,” (RD, 131) a claim that he decides in retrospect is not totally untrue but nevertheless unsatisfactory. He insists that “nothing could be further from the truth” than the idea that he is “ashamed” (RD, 132) of his association with Lord Darlington. Rather, he explains that he has “chosen to tell white lies in both instances as the simplest means of avoiding unpleasantness.” (RD, 132) Stevens’s laboured consideration of his motives might fool someone into thinking he is in fact self-inquisitive. However, this careful reflection, common to the narrators of both novels, is really a “guise for more purposeful deflection of injurious details.” (Wong 2000, 16) In denying the motives for his denials, Stevens alerts the reader to his repressed shame. At the end of the chapter, as he overstates the case by reaffirming this loyalty, it becomes increasingly apparent that sustaining this fiction is the only way that Stevens can maintain his sense of dignity. As Cynthia Wong puts it, “He is unable to account for his



equivocation without revealing the nature of his own wasted existence.” (Wong 2005, 54)

The two incidents are introduced in ‘Day Two – Afternoon,’ a chapter beginning with an immediate negation. “I have no wish, let me make clear,” he reassures the reader, “to retract any of my ideas on ‘dignity’ and its crucial link with ‘greatness.’” (*RD*, 119) Yet he is impelled to readdress the Hayes Society’s insistence that its members “be attached to a distinguished household.” (*RD*, 119) In his view, a household can only be distinguished if in service of a gentleman of great “moral status.” (*RD*, 120) Having moved to negate the possibility of retracting his statements on dignity and professional duty, he qualifies it with an ethical dimension he is unable to apply to Lord Darlington, a man at best naïve to the Nazis’ intentions and ideology, if not sympathetic to them. In the light of his denials, Stevens thus struggles to coherently maintain the philosophy that he has used to excuse his life-long self-deprivation. Stevens is then impelled to further revise his theory by deeming it impossible to be at the same time critical to an employer’s politics and provide good service, as if the latter took precedence in such a consideration. He ponders that, “There must surely come a time” when one must say, “‘This employer embodies all that I find noble and admirable. I will hereafter devote myself to serving him’. This is loyalty *intelligently* bestowed. What is there ‘undignified’ in this?” (*RD*, 210–11) However, this is clearly untenable if Stevens is to acknowledge, as he does, that Lord Darlington was not quite so “noble and admirable” after all.

It is interesting to compare the way Stevens struggles with, and has to reconstitute, his view of loyalty, to that of Ono. Ono also denies following blindly in the name of loyalty, using examples from his life where he asserted his independence, cleverly avoiding his unquestioning service to the Japanese militarism. Stevens, by contrast, holds loyalty to be in keeping with his values of dignity and professional duty, but has repressed – at least until the end of the novel – the fact that his unquestioning service to Darlington was not “*intelligently* bestowed” or dignified after all. As Ishiguro himself says, “I was interested in how people lie to themselves just to make things palatable [...] we all dignify our failures a little bit.” (Ishiguro 2008, 117) Dignifying their failures is what Stevens and Ono seek to do throughout the novels, although Ono succeeds in deluding himself more fully than Stevens.

Stevens’s unprompted negations here are echoed in Ono’s ruminations on the Bridge of Hesitation, which links his area to the despairing visions of destruction that

has befallen the old pleasure district. Having explained that the bridge's name owes itself to the "conscience-troubled men" (AFW, 99) hesitating between evenings of entertainment and returning home to their spouses, he moves to negate his own motives for pausing there: "It is not that I am hesitating. It is simply that I enjoy standing there as the sun sets, surveying [...] the changes taking place around me." (AFW, 99) Whether Ono should feel guilty for having been one of these pleasure-seeking men is perhaps less important than the other connotations brought about for Ono by the expression "conscience-troubled;" in moving to deny his own uncertainty and hesitation, Ono exposes himself as doing just that.

As we have seen, Ono and Stevens's repression is manifest in the *projections*, *displacements* and *negations* that enable them to sustain fictions about themselves and their past. Doubt is cast on their recollections and perceptions of themselves and others by the "weight of the unsaid" and the narrators' "nuanced unreliability." (Shibata and Sugano, 26) These repressive strategies lead the reader to the unresolved pain that the narrators unconsciously try to hide or deflect.



## ***Chapter Two: The anachronistic narrator***

From Stevens's road trip to the West Country to Ono's prevaricating on the 'Bridge of Hesitation' in the present of the novels, the narrators must cope with being estranged from their sense of home in a way that renders them unwittingly anachronistic. As we see in Stevens's encounters with ordinary English people on his road trip, and in Ono's difficulty relating to his daughters and grandson, they are blind to the ways in which the Second World War has rendered their thinking outmoded. This sense of homelessness owes itself to a world that seems to them unfamiliar or, in Freudian terms, *uncanny*.

Ono and Stevens's sense of isolation and displacement is rendered through Ishiguro's narrative technique, particularly the rigid application of the first person in what can be deduced as the narrators' private journals. The fact that the diary entries are 'staged' at different intervals over the post-war period enables Ishiguro to introduce a subtle shifting of the narrators' perspective. It also creates a more dynamic relationship between the past and present of the narratives than would be afforded if it had been narrated from a single temporal standpoint. We will look at the ways in which the narrators' capacity for delusion, as seen in the previous chapter, enters into discourse through such narrative technique.

### **The Uncanny**

The narrators' struggle to deflect or repress their regret owes itself in part to the fact that they find themselves estranged from their sense of home. For Stevens, this is manifest in his journey to the West Country where he encounters ordinary working people the likes of whom he has never met. Ono, by contrast, finds himself in a city destroyed by American bombs and about to undergo a reconstruction that will be equally unfamiliar to him. The sense of anxiety they experience at feeling alien in their own culture can be explained by Freud's theory of the Uncanny, in which he explains that the German word "*unheimlich* ['uncanny'] is clearly the opposite of *heimlich* ['homely'...] and it seems obvious that something should be frightening precisely because it is unknown and unfamiliar." (Freud 2003, 124–5) This feeling is what induces them to relive painful memories that they have previously repressed from themselves, a symptom again identified by Freud: "the Uncanny is what one

calls everything that was meant to remain secret and hidden has come into the open.” (Freud 2003, 130)

Both Stevens’s and Ono’s sense of home is under threat. In the former’s case, the sanctity of Darlington Hall has been violated for the narrator by the trivial errors that represent the weakening of his professional powers, which are undertaken in service of an American with whom he has difficulty relating. In Ono’s case it is a recognition that he has “taken to wandering into rooms for no purpose,” (AFW, 40–41) which reflects his propensity to “drift” or, indeed, “float” from one preoccupying memory to another. The arrival of the *unheimlich* in Ono’s home is also manifest in his difficulty playing with his grandson, who ignores his pleas to pretend to be a figure from Japanese myth in favour of US imports like Lone Ranger or Popeye. Such American characters – incomprehensible to Ono – are an encroachment of his home considering the fact he generally avoids referring to the ongoing US occupation and the American bombs which killed his wife. They also speak of a world that is undergoing an enormous cultural transformation, making him a stranger or an anachronism in his own country. This pervasive estrangement is also manifest in Noriko’s impertinence and his son-in-law’s bitterness, direct challenges to the patriarchal family role Ono presided over before the war.

To a lesser extent than Stevens, Ono doesn’t have to travel far before the world he called his home becomes unfamiliar and frightening. His fond memories of the pleasure district are sharply contrasted with the vision of Mrs Kawakami’s bar after the war, which he compares to “some outpost of civilisation” surrounded by “a desert of demolished rubble.” (AFW, 26) Ono’s description suggests the bar’s role in Ono’s life as a remnant of a past almost destroyed by American bombs. Ono sees himself as one of the last remaining people of a “civilisation” mostly destroyed except in his fallible memory, while he struggles to find a place of value in the new one.

Between the old, now-destroyed pleasure district and his home, “you pause at the Bridge of Hesitation and look back,” Ono says, employing “you” in this instance to perhaps deflect the pain of seeing the “columns of smoke rising from the rubble [...] like pyres at some abandoned funeral.” (AFW, 27–28) The mention of funeral pyres echoes a description of Mrs Kawakami bar situated “in the midst of a graveyard” (AFW, 27) of destroyed buildings. These sombre images evoke the deaths of Ono’s son and wife, whose conspicuous absence in the novel – as we have already discussed – indicates feelings that Ono goes at lengths to avoid.

Despite his attempts to portray himself as a man who has moved with the times by accepting his past failures, the clues in the text here and elsewhere point to a different story: a man who is being left behind as the country rebuilds itself in a new image. On the bridge Ono “is caught as he is between shame and guilt, glory and ignominy, his home and a homelessness of the mind,” (Lewis 2000, 67) lamenting the loss of the pleasure district to modern roads and concrete office blocks. He reflects that the half finished structures could be easily confused for ruins, suggesting the end of one “civilisation” and the beginning of another that will have an obliterating effect on Ono’s *heimlich* pleasure world as total as that of the bombs. Thus, “the mutating landscape of Japan,” as Barry Lewis called it, provides “a stage for [Ono’s] psychic drama” (Lewis 2000, 65)

When Stevens in *The Remains of the Day* sets off on his motoring trip to the West Country he is unsettled by how quickly the surroundings become unrecognizable, comparing the feeling to that of “setting sail in a ship, when one finally loses sight of the land.” (*RD*, 24) Stevens undertakes his motoring trip through the eyes of a stranger, finding himself increasingly far from his sense of home, in a country he has barely had occasion to explore. Stevens’s trip into the *unheimlich* becomes for some critics “a journey into his English sense of self;” (Lewis 2000, 79) or a “journey [...] from reminiscence to self-examination and finally to regret.” (James 2009, 62) Stevens’s earlier claim that he “did actually ‘see’ more of England than most [...] in houses where the greatest ladies and gentleman of the land gathered” (*RD*, 4) shows both his naiveté concerning the real England, and why he might feel *unheimlich* or anachronistic within it. That he begins the novel with an equivocal tone (“It seems increasingly likely that I really will undertake the expedition that has been preoccupying my imagination for some days” *RD*, 3) suggests his “reluctance to face the prospect of an expedition [...] that is also demanding in physical and emotional ways.” (Wong 2005, 56) If, as Barry Lewis says, dignity is “to be at home with oneself and one’s circumstances” then its opposite is “displacement,” which he defines as “being dislodged, occupying contradictory or incompatible positions.” (Lewis 2000, 2) On the trip Stevens therefore finds himself dislodged or displaced from both Darlington Hall and his dignified sense of self.

That Stevens is out of his element is evident in his ruminations on the country, presumably different in every respect to the formally-arranged gardens at Darlington Hall. He becomes alarmed “getting lost down narrow, twisting lanes” (*RD*, 127) on

the way to a local beauty spot and pondering the “possible catastrophes that might befall such an expedition” (*RD*, 127) should he damage his suit. His fear of the *unheimlich* and sense of “dislocation and homelessness,” (Lewis 2000, 2) it could be argued, is what loosens Stevens grip on his feelings and memories. If we follow the metaphor of Darlington Hall as representative of Stevens’s ego, the needs of which he confuses with his own, then his departure from the house constitutes a weakening of his control. As he can no longer claim mastery of his environment (as he was starting to do even at Darlington Hall anyway) he can no longer suppress his feelings.

Even more awkward for Stevens are his encounters with the ordinary people of the country with whom he is so unfamiliar. Having already expressed difficulty in the arts of “bantering” with his American employer, he tries to “add this skill to [his] professional armoury,” (*RD*, 138) but finds his efforts wanting. He makes an awkward attempt at a joke in a pub to which the locals laugh “in a somewhat bemused fashion;” (*RD*, 138) latterly spending the night tormented by the idea that he has offended them. He uses the episode “as a good illustration [...] of the hazards of uttering witticisms,” when “one gravely risks uttering all manner of unsuitable things.” (*RD*, 140) When you compare “the hazards [...] one gravely risks” with his earlier speculation of the “possible catastrophes that might befall such an expedition,” the picture of Stevens that emerges is one of being totally uncomfortable in the *unheimlich* world of post-war Britain.

### **Narrative technique**

To better understand how Ishiguro employs the Freudian notions of the unconscious we have examined it is necessary to look at how they are rendered in terms of technique. In particular we will examine the use of the first person, narrative form (in this instance, that of a journal or private diary), narrating time and narrative level in the two novels.

#### *First person narration*

In *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* Gérard Genette makes a distinction between *mood* and *voice*, “between the question *who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* and the very different question *who is the*

narrator?" (Genette 1980, 186) In *The Remains of the Day* and *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ishiguro employs narrators in Ono and Stevens who are stringently both. As Genette says, albeit before the publication of either novel, such rigorousness is rare, as it "implies in all strictness that the focal character never be described or even referred to from the outside, and that his thoughts or perceptions never be analysed objectively by the narrator." (Genette 1980, 192) Ono and Stevens certainly fit this description, since the reader is given neither details of their physical appearance nor objective analysis of their state of mind. Moreover, Ono and Stevens's perceptions of themselves and others are strictly limited to their point of view – or what Genette calls *internal focalization* – and subject to their tendency to avoid or distort unwelcome self-truths. Ishiguro circumnavigates these limitations by making his Ono and Stevens witness to things which offer clues to the reader about the narrators they are themselves unaware of.

This "restriction of field" (Genette 1980, 189) is evident in Ono's dealings with his daughters. His elder daughter Setsuko seems, superficially at least, to employ some of the reverence that would have been afforded such a family patriarch, yet it is she who gently pushes him to seek out old acquaintances to improve Noriko's marriage prospects. By contrast, Noriko constantly teases him, accusing him of "moping around," (AFW, 13) one of several such slights to his character that help form a picture of Ono other than the one he is trying to give us in the narrative. Ono, as we have seen, wants to assert the high esteem in which he is held, but throughout the novel we get a deflected impression of a man taken to wandering ponderously around the house or frequenting a near-empty bar in which he is prone to nostalgic moods; all of which jar against his generally confident powers of self-expression. Several times Ono evokes the impression his daughters have been talking about him behind his back; hints that, perhaps to a greater degree than Stevens, Ono's internal conflict is unwittingly visible to others. Stevens, by contrast, perhaps presents a more convincing self-image to the world, for he is mistaken by locals in Devon for a true "gentleman" and "member of parliament," (RD, 197) a misapprehension he feels impelled to prolong. Nevertheless, he is riven by uncertainty as to other people's motives, from the hints in Miss Kenton's letter to Mr Farraday's bantering.

This restriction of field has a secondary effect of rendering other characters as mysterious and unknowable. As Genette says, "systematically adopting the "point of view" of one of the protagonists permits an author to leave the feelings of the other



one almost completely in shadow, and thus construct for that other [...] a mysterious and ambiguous personality.” (Genette 1980, 201) Certainly this ambiguous quality is more intense in Setsuko than Noriko, who openly mocks her father. Yet what motivates Noriko’s sudden change at the *miai* from awkwardness to her “customary flippancy” (AFW, 124) – a transformation that successfully lightens the mood of the meeting – we can only guess at. Moreover, Setsuko – with her insinuations that Dr Saito had never known Ono before the marriage negotiations, and her one mysterious outburst (“Mother may in fact have had the more correct ideas,” AFW, 158) – certainly conforms to the type outlined by Genette, heightened by the fact that she maintains a veil of deference with him, her speech peppered with rhetorical pleas to “forgive” her.

Although Miss Kenton is certainly less oblique than that in *The Remains of the Day*, it is not clear whether she really wrote the parts of the letter (“I have no idea how I shall usefully fill the remainder of my life,” RD, 51) upon which Stevens bases his trip. She denies having done so at the end of the novel, but we understand, albeit through Stevens, that she has had marriage problems. When she confesses to having wondered what her life would have been like with Stevens, which causes him to admit that his “heart was breaking,” (RD, 252) it is not clear how strong her feelings for Stevens are at the time of his visit. As with many of the novel’s cast of characters, her thoughts remain largely obscured by the restrictedness of Stevens’s narrative situation and lonely predicament.

The restriction of point of view is also manifest in Stevens’s “modalizing locutions (*perhaps, undoubtedly, as if, seem, appear*) that allow the narrator to say hypothetically what he could not assert without stepping outside internal focalization.” (Genette 1980, 203) The multiplicity of such hypothetical locutions in the two novels “suggests much more the insolubility of the problem, and at the very least the incapacity of the narrator to resolve it,” (Genette 1980, 203) most manifest in the repressed memories that we have already attended to. To demonstrate this tendency we could take one of these words, *perhaps*. Take Ono’s worry that “*perhaps* the encounter itself [with the Miyake’s son] had helped bring about the withdrawal,” (AFW, 54) or, “*perhaps* I am being unfair if I credit young Miyake with such bitterness.” (AFW, 61) Given that Stevens’s predicament and fate is a lonelier one than Ono’s – he has no family after all – his hypotheses seem even more isolated and

uncertain (“you may not think I delude myself unduly if I go as far as to suggest that I did *perhaps* ...” *RD*, 115).

As Genette intuited, the choice of the first person is not a grammatical one but a choice “between two narrative postures [...] to have the story told by one of its ‘characters.’” (Genette 1980, 244) It also enables the omission of important information that makes the novels more than just studies in repression but also, for both narrator and reader, a type of detective novel. Genette pointed out that “the most classical detective story, although generally focalized through the investigating detective, most often hides from us a part of his discoveries and inductions until the final revelation.” (Genette 1980, 197) Ono and Stevens’s investigations differ, however, as their discoveries are not so much withheld from the reader but from themselves. Indeed we are indirectly made privy to things the narrators are unaware of. As Genette says, “narrative always says less than it knows, but it often makes known more than it says,” (Genette 1980, 198) but in the case of Ono and Stevens, there is an ongoing discourse about what they ‘know’ and what is buried in their unconscious.

### *The narrative as a journal*

Another essential characteristic of the narrative modes employed by Ishiguro is that of the private journal or diary, which both novels employ. Mostly the conceit is convincing, but there are moments, particularly in *The Remains of the Day*, when the reader must suspend his disbelief somewhat (we will come back to this). Ishiguro himself spoke of the benefits of adopting a “diary narrative,” in that “each entry can be written from a different emotional position [...] so we can actually watch [Ono’s] progress, and so that language itself changes slightly.” (Mason 1989, 334)

At one stage Ono describes how a pupil who has developed his own style at Mr Moriyama’s school was ostracized and accused of treachery. He cuts the recollection short by saying, “There seems little to be gained in my recalling such things here,” (*AFW*, 142) presumably because the memory has uncomfortable parallels with his own treachery of Kuroda and subsequent ostracism in post-war Japan. Moreover, the passage denotes a place (“here”) like a diary, where he can reconstruct – indeed, rewrite – his memories. It is a strategy that has echoes elsewhere in the novel. “It was not my intention to dwell on Kuroda here,” (*AFW*, 78) he says at

one stage, again indicating a sense of “intention” in his recall. Ono appears to be trying, and failing, to tell a particular version of his life, to make a narrative of it. Cynthia Wong notes that “Ono’s deception is linked to his falsified sincerity in locating some form of truth about his life,” and thus “Ishiguro has created a character who is the embodiment of ‘fictionalization.’” (Wong 2005, 39) Similar things could be said about Stevens, and although you could argue that his “locating some form of truth about his life” is more sincere than Ono’s, both novels are partly about the way people ‘fictionalize’ themselves through self-deception. The artist of *An Artist of the Floating World* is thus not just a painter, but a story-teller. “I cannot recall any colleague who could paint a self-portrait with absolute honesty,” he says at one point, “the personality represented rarely comes near the truth as others would see it.” (AFW, 67) This seems at once a recognition that there is a gap between his self-perception and how “others would see him,” and also of the unreliability of self-portraiture, not just in painting but in writing too.

Stevens similarly ‘fictionalizes’ himself when pondering over what caused his relationship with Miss Kenton to change for the worse in the mid-30s. He recounts with clarity an incident in which he reacted childishly to a fit of temper on her part by insisting that they communicate only by written messages from then on. Despite having previously claimed not to know what caused the decline in their friendship, he latterly speculates that this decision “constituted something of a key turning point” (RD, 185) in their relations. This is a deduction that he seeks to play down when he infers that “when with the benefits of hindsight one begins to search one’s past for such ‘turning points,’ one is apt to start seeing them everywhere.” (RD, 185) This is a telling observation from Stevens, who hasn’t apparently pieced together the “larger significance” of his recollections. His speculation on “turning points” reflects an unconscious awareness of a narrative it wasn’t his intention to write, one which results in unbearable realizations for its author and thus “offers an unusually dynamic way of examining truth-making in fictional texts.” (Wong 2005, 21)

The idea that we are reading a diary in *The Remains of the Day* is supported by chapter titles (‘Day One – Evening’; ‘Day Two – Morning’) that serve no other function except to indicate the time in which each entry is written. There are a number of passages in the novel that also alert the reader to the narrator’s act of writing. For example at one stage Stevens worries he will get distracted from writing about the English countryside, of which “I notice I have yet to record here anything.” (RD, 70)

The evocation of “here” roots the act of writing to his description at the beginning of ‘Day Two – Morning,’ when he refers to having woken from a bad night’s sleep “an hour or so ago” (*RD*, 49) and just having parted the curtains. The restless night in a strange bed puts him in a ponderous mood, “going over in my mind again passages from Miss Kenton’s letter,” (*RD*, 49) trying to reinforce his belief, through writing his journal, in the validity of his trip. Instead, he finds himself recalling a series of memories concerning Miss Kenton and his father that, like Ono, he interrupts as they provide him little comfort (“I see I am becoming preoccupied with these memories and perhaps this is a little foolish,” *RD*, 70). Such interventions in the present of both novels shift the emphasis from the story to the telling, to why and how we are being told things. As Genette says, such “simultaneousness” of the present tense “operates in favour of discourse:” (Genette 1980, 219) the discourse being, in the case of such evasions and interruptions, the narrators’ repression and unreliability. In the two novels the “act of narrating itself [...] fulfils a function in the diegesis [...] a function of distraction, for example, and/or obstruction.” (Genette 1980, 233) The present in *The Remains of the Day*, more than *An Artist of the Floating World*, is never far away; as he attempts to interrupt and qualify the memories it was not his intention to write about.

The fact that we are reading a diary also explains some of the syntactic peculiarities of the text and the way that Stevens is able to approach his memories only “when objectified as topics [...] repackaged and protected from being recalled as potentially more traumatic instances of self-doubt or regret.” (James 2009, 57) “Aspects of self-control thus become a stylistic feature,” James continues, “self-command [...] twists into self-constraint.” (James 2009, 60) Stevens’s control over his prose is thus a kind of emotional straight jacket; in a diary Stevens can truly employ all the linguistic strategies at his disposal to distort or obscure the truth to make it less traumatic. It is a format particularly suited to characters wishing “to hide painful memories from themselves (and from their readers) and who attempt, unsuccessfully to remake themselves in the light of what they fear were shameful, even damning, past decisions.” (Shaffer 2009, 10) The cheerful tone of the narration, often in contrast or in defiance of the rather painful acknowledgements and half-realizations the narrators undergo, is certainly redolent of a private journal, which is by nature a form of “fictionalization.” It is this general cheerfulness of both Ono and Stevens’s

narration “coupled with their ability to remain forward-looking” that “adds a poignant dimension” (Wong 2005, 24) to the novels.

By contrast, John Mullan perceives *The Remains of the Day* as a “novel spoken rather than written,” its “stilted circumlocutions [...] belonged in a narration that kept reminding the reader, in its very affectation of formality, that it might be supposed to be a speech.” (Mullan 2009, 107) The idea of the narration as a speech, in its similar constructedness and evocation of apologia, is compatible with some of the novel’s themes but illogical in the light of Stevens’ observations in the present (on the pier at the end of the novel, for example, or “sitting [...] having recently finished lunch,” *RD*, 215), which add temporal and spatial dimensions to the writing. Moreover, the circumlocutions do not disprove the effect of reading a journal, but rather add to its pathos. The discursive aspects heighten the characters’ isolation, their search for consolation, and the rhetorical strategies they employ to distance themselves from their failures.

Stevens’s words, says David James, “are purposely arranged rather than spontaneous, more strategically organized than we might expect from a story composed from involuntary memories.” (James 2009, 56) The fact that the narrations are presented in diary form, therefore shows how the narrators “fictionalize” their life, making it “more palatable in the very act of telling.” (Wong 2005, 38) Despite both Ono and Stevens’s attempts to deflect, distort or omit memories, their efforts have the opposite effect, drawing the reader’s attention to their inconsistency and inner pain. This is particular to first person narratives which “require us to be agile in warding off incredulity [and] encourage us to know how, and why, we are becoming absorbed in the memories, self-examinations, and diversions.” (James 2009, 54)

### *Narrating time*

G rard Genette makes some useful insights into what he felt was the much overlooked concept of narrating time, which he distinguishes from writing time. The act of “telling takes time,” he said, and has “a temporal dimension,” a fact that is complicated in his analysis of Proust, but is a simpler consideration in readings of the two Ishiguro novels. In theory at least, the diary constructions mean that the narrating instance and the writing instance are fundamentally fused together, as we are not given reason to believe that they are being read by another person who has somehow

discovered these journals at a later date. Or we could say that the narrating instance *is* the act of reading, as if we are the first to be made privy to it, the narrating time devouring itself as we read. From the writing/narrating times the narrators then find themselves delving back into memories, able to reflect on the import of these recollections in the present. This is a form of past-tense narrating that “can be split up and inserted between the various moments of the story [...] a common practice with correspondence and private diary [...] or the novel in the form of a journal.” (Genette 1980, 217)

In *An Artist of the Floating World* there are four dated chapters which are spread between October 1948 and June 1950. We can assume that these dates indicate one or several writing instances located in the eponymous period as they include present tense references to the rebuilding effort that are markers of spatial and temporal evolution. In one chapter ‘April, 1949,’ as Ono ruminates on the half-finished constructions visible from the Bridge of Hesitation, he refers to “the hill down which I have just come,” (*AFW*, 99) the one that we understand brings him to his home. This is one of the closest points between the narrating time and past events being recounted, except when Ono refers to his own impressions and feelings in the present. Otherwise, the events being recounted range from the day before (for example in the last chapter) to many years before the war, keeping a measure of distance between Ono and his recollections despite the authorial equivocations and qualifications.

There are moments of temporal improbability in *The Remains of the Day*, such as at the end of the novel when Stevens says, “a moment ago, I learnt from an official that the lights would be switched on ‘fairly soon’, and so I have decided to sit down here and await the event.” (*RD*, 243) This presumably provides Stevens time necessary to write the ensuing passage in which he brings the reader up to date with his final encounter with Miss Kenton. I say ‘presumably’ as, after a short break in the text signifying the end of that episode, he begins a new paragraph by saying “The pier lights have been switched on and behind me a crowd of people have just given a loud cheer to greet this event.” (*RD*, 252) It would be some challenge for Stevens to write close to ten pages of prose text in what amounts to the “past half-hour.” Nevertheless, the conceit of the present of Stevens’s writing is maintained after his encounter with the (possibly spectral) butler-stranger when he says, “It is now some twenty minutes since the man left, but I have remained here on this bench to await the event that has

just taken place – namely the switching on of the pier lights.” (RD, 257) This phenomenon of the past tense narrative catching up with the narrator in the present “could hardly be without some degree of awkwardness.” (Genette 1980, 64) Yet at the end of *The Remains of the Day* it has the heightening effect of emphasizing Stevens’s self-awakening: he is suddenly among people in the real world, not hiding behind stylized self-perceptions and unreliable forays into the past. Arguably, Ono’s “deep sense of triumph and satisfaction,” (AFW, 204) at the end of *An Artist of the Floating World* is intrinsically less reliable since Ono has dated it as having taken place the day before the writing. By maintaining Ono’s authorial distance – even if only by one day – from the events he recalls, Ishiguro perhaps gives him the time to (re)structure his feelings following Matsuda’s death in a favourable manner. Genette describes a “subtle friction,” in this form of narrating: “the narrator is at one and the same time still the hero and already someone else: the events of the day are already in the past” (Genette 1980, 218) The spontaneity of Stevens’s writing at the end of *The Remains of the Day*, for all its ambiguity, affords the narrator less luxury than his Japanese counterpart, manifest in the fact he accepts his failures more sincerely.

#### *Narrative level and memory*

It would be easy to miss the importance of the journal narrative if we don’t go back and reconsider its significance in structuring the narrative. In *The Remains of the Day* Stevens alludes to the idea that he should be recording his impressions of his motoring trip but finds himself dwelling on other things. The motive for Ono’s writings are less clear, but – as for Stevens – his interruptions of the painful memories it was not his “intention” to discuss (“again I have drifted”, AFW, 151) suggest that he had an objective that he has unwillingly digressed from. He begins the narrative by talking about how he came to acquire his house, but his description of the war damage sustained to it leads him inevitably to his family and his daughter’s marriage prospects, and the memories start to unfold. Each chapter sees the rebuilding effort in Japan’s bombed cities advance a little further, which has the effect of making Ono seem increasingly left-behind (indeed, anachronistic) in his stubborn resistance to guilt and regret. In *The Remains of the Day*, each chapter comprises a recollection of what the narrator has just experienced on his motoring trip, from which he more often than not digresses by delving into the memories those experiences provoke. When

Stevens begins 'Day Two – Afternoon' by revising his theories on dignity, we don't know why until later in the chapter when we learn that he has been left pondering his denial of having worked for Lord Darlington.

Cynthia Wong also turned to Gérard Genette in her assertion that Ono and Stevens are able to project their insecurities onto others, to invent and displace memories, precisely because as narrators they are both *extradiegetic* and *homodiegetic*. An *extradiegetic* narrator is the voice that narrates the past and a *homodiegetic* narrator is the figure of the narrator as a character within these memories. The effect, according to Wong, is that Ono and Stevens are both inside and outside – “both central and peripheral to” (Wong 2005, 14) – the stories they tell. “The effect of being ‘above’ the story,” is confused when it transpires that Ono and Stevens are “still very much deeply involved in the emotional turmoil” (Wong 2005, 19) of the periods they are describing. It is a mode Gérard Genette identifies as one in which “the story and the narrating can become entangled in such a way that the latter has an effect on the former;” (Genette 1980, 217) memories becoming subject to evasive distortions in the act of telling. David James describes the way “Stevens oscillates between reporting, even recreating, the past and probing with hindsight the extent to which he might have acted otherwise” in a “cycle of enchantment and detachment.” (James 2009, 60) This tension between extradiegetic and homodiegetic modes of narration are a manifestation of Stevens's – and Ono's – use of the diary form to seek a sort of authorial control over powerful feelings. Both narrator effectively uses the medium of writing to “dissociate his present self from his past self,” (Wong 2005, 6) one of the arsenal of strategies they employ – diegetic, syntactical, rhetorical – to cope with regret.

Genette could have been discussing the Ishiguro novels rather than Proust when he describes “an event that at the time of its occurrence has already been provided with a meaning, has this first interpretation replaced afterward by another (not necessarily better) one.” (Genette 1980, 58) In *An Artist of the Floating World* Ono is recounting one memory of a conversation with Noriko which incites him to cast his mind back to an encounter with Jiro Miyake, “searching it for significance.” (AFW, 53) The passage is important for the way in which Ono recollects another act of remembering: “only after a week after the actual encounter, I could hardly recall the conversation.” (AFW, 54) Despite this observation he admits he had “pondered over the whole business during the days which followed [and] a new idea struck me:



perhaps the encounter itself had helped bring about the [Miyakes'] withdrawal." (AFW, 54) Having dismissed this theory, he then finds himself "obliged to think back yet again to that encounter with Miyake, to turn it over from yet another perspective." (AFW, 54) He is then miraculously able to recover a large section of dialogue from a conversation he had already admitted being barely able to remember. He then seizes upon one phrase from this exchange in particular – "the greatest cowardice of all" (AFW, 56) – deciding instead that it is a comment more likely to have been said by his son in law, Suichi, on another occasion. This then provokes a further memory of Ono's son's funeral, in which Suichi expresses sentiments very much in keeping with those Ono is attributing to Jiro Miyake. A similar turn backward from an initial recollection happens in *The Remains of the Day*, immediately after Stevens's equivocation over "turning points" in his relationship with Miss Kenton. He recalls that the news of her aunt's death "had arrived some hours earlier; indeed I had myself knocked on the door [...] to hand her the letter." (RD, 185) The juxtaposition of the memories is significant because it is only later that Stevens intuits that he has transposed the memory of this bad news onto another memory of Miss Kenton's crying, of which he was the real cause.

In addition to the extradiegetic displacements made upon the significance of past events, these passages show how one memory unfolds into another. In both instances the narrator reverts from the past perfect – ("I *had* myself knocked on the door") to indicate an event that happened before the initial recollection – to the preterit, and the reader easily forgets that we have assumed a different narrative level. Genette describes such memories-within-memories as "embeddings," which can be complex in that "many readers do not notice the spatio-temporal detour that gave rise to it and think it a simple [...] 'return backward' without a change in narrative level." (Genette 1980, 240) The multiplication of narrative levels has the function of pulling the reader into the drift from one memory to the next that, the narrators try but fail to seek control of. It heightens the sense of Ono and Stevens's unreliability, and – as we have seen – the instability of their memory.

In conclusion, Ishiguro's use of the first person and extradiegetic and homodiegetic modes of narration in the two novels serves to heighten the narrators' anachronism and displacement from an *unheimlich* post-war world, setting them both inside and outside the stories they tell. These first person strategies also enable Ono and Stevens

to reconstruct and distort their memories so that their past becomes “more palatable in the very act of telling.” The diary-style format the narrators employ is a perfect environment in which to use equivocal language to obfuscate the truth or hide it from themselves. However, because this past is so very unpalatable to them, their memories have the reverse effect of destabilising their sense of self and life’s worth in the present.



### *Chapter Three: Storytelling, reading, language and ideology*

If *The Remains of the Day* and *An Artist of the Floating World* take place in “a mythical landscape which is supposed to work at a metaphorical level,” (Vorda and Herzinger 1993, 140) and invite us to consider the way we blind ourselves to the repressive (and indeed, ideological) constructs of culture, then they reveal Ishiguro as a discretely postmodern author. A reading of the novels in this way becomes concerned less with their realism or veracity and more an “exploration of the way in which narratives [...] structure how we see ourselves and how we construct our notions of self, in the present and in the past.” (Hutcheon 1989, 7) Furthermore, the novels depict the effect on the individual when societies undergo deep self-examination; how cultural mores are exposed as mythological constructs rooted in ideology. “The main point of [Ishiguro’s] writing,” says Cynthia Wong, is thus “to rework or to undermine certain ideals or mythologies structuring individuals, communities or their nations, mainly in efforts to regard the impact of such visions on people’s actual lives.” (Wong 2005, 13)

This postmodern and discretely metafictional dimension in the novels calls into question the signifying systems we use to represent our culture and history. Far from being attempts at realism, the novels suggest something of the fakery behind certain social roles and mores that not only challenges assumptions of Englishness and Japaneseness but all prescriptive views of culture. Indeed, through the use of metaphor and parody our very “notions of selfhood or subjectivity [are] called into question.” (Hutcheon 1989, 13) Ishiguro’s themes not only prioritise the universal over the local, but they also question the very idea of cultural authenticity against which some critics attempt to measure his books. The atmosphere of both novels is thus one of displacement: the world to which the narrators are accustomed has come slightly off its axis, the cultural centre – be it a construct – has shifted.

Despite their diary-entry form, the novels read as a form of apologia that address the reader directly (“you”), suggesting a failed attempt at dialogue. Yet the narrators are blind to the ways in which their anachronistic means of presenting the world to the reader abstracts and “doxifies” (Hutcheon 1989, 49) it. Their command of language and self-expression – complicated by the fact that Ono is supposed to be Japanese, although *An Artist of the Floating World* was written in English – is used to avoid confrontation with harsh truths. The effort which they put into this strategy is

not without difficulties though, and strain is evident in the elegant but somewhat contrived turns of phrase. “Despite the clarity of Ishiguro’s texts,” Sean Matthews and Sebastien Groes suggest, “the language becomes overstrained and constructed to the point of collapse.” (Matthews and Groes 2009, 7)

By borrowing structural elements from the detective genre, the two novels also foreground the hermeneutic role of the reader in producing a story that the narrators do not want to tell. What Ishiguro calls the “language of self-deception and self protection” (Mason 1989, 337) exposes the narrators’ delusion that language can be mastered: that signifiers always correlate with the signified. Indeed, in many cases the narrators not only not say what they mean but they also do not mean what they say. Both Stevens and Ono are revealed to employ a language that does not belong to them but is inherited by powerful forces in their lives. In particular, Stevens’s rather forced demonstrations of his mastery of English conversely show the language to be foreign to him, the language of the ruling classes.

### **Storytelling and historiographic metafiction**

Ishiguro has made it clear in interviews that he is not interested in the type of metafiction he defines as “books about the nature of fiction,” but rather “storytelling in the sense of what a community or a nation tells itself about its past and by implication therefore where it is at the moment.” (Matthews 2009, 117) Ono and Stevens, as we have seen, are storytellers who use a diary narrative as a canvas on which to reconstruct their memories and manage their regret. However, more than just studies in repression, the novels are also more broadly metaphoric, and less realist than many critics have taken them for. The narrators are telling a story which is not just “a privatized form of experience but [...] asserting a communicational bond between the teller and the told within a context that is historical, social, and political.” (Hutcheon 1989, 51) Indeed, “the issue of storytelling is an important one,” the author suggests, “if you want to draw a parallel between how individuals come to terms with their past and decide what to do next, and how a nation or a community approaches such things.” (Matthews 2009, 117)

Thus, despite having distanced himself from metafiction and postmodernism, Ishiguro’s novels share, or at least reflect, concerns echoed by some writers and thinkers on those broad subjects. We will take in this analysis Linda Hutcheon’s

definition – in *The Politics of Postmodernism* – of what she calls “postmodern historiographic metafiction”: a novelistic form that asks “us to question how we represent – how we construct – our view of reality and of our selves.” (Hutcheon 1989, 42) Such novels do not only concern themselves with ‘the nature of fiction’ itself, but rather seek to express some of the (post)modern uncertainties undermining our view of history and representation, namely our suspicion that they too are forms of narrative driven by ideology. Such uncertainties can be traced back (and beyond) to structuralist and post-structuralist thinkers such as Roland Barthes, who claimed that “Historical discourse is in its essence a form of ideological elaboration, or to put it more precisely, an *imaginary* elaboration.” (Barthes 1997, 121) Moreover, the tendency to impose upon history a “narrative structure, which was originally developed within the cauldron of fiction (in myths and first epics)” has erroneously become “at once the sign and the proof of reality” (Barthes 1997, 123) in historiography. According to Linda Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction foregrounds such uncertainty since “the narrativization of past events is not hidden; the events no longer seem to speak for themselves, but are shown to be consciously composed into a narrative, whose constructed – not found – order is imposed upon them, often overtly by the narrating figure.” (Hutcheon 1989, 66) The representation of the historic past in the novels is consigned to unreliable recollections, and subject to the distortions our culture enacts on memory in general.

As we have seen, the narrators of *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* find themselves making a narrative of (indeed, ‘fictionalizing’) their pre-war actions in a way that reflects not just their own struggle to cope with regret, but that of their society too, situated as their stories are at important crossroads for both Japan and Britain. While it would be strange to categorize the novels as – in Linda Hutcheon’s definition – “overtly narcissistic” (i.e., explicitly self-referential), these narrational reflexes nevertheless reveal the novels’ “self-awareness in explicit thematizations or allegorizations of their diegetic or linguistic identity.” (Hutcheon 1984, 7) As we are constantly reminded of the linguistic and diegetic identity of Ono and Stevens’s journal narratives, we can call them forms of metafiction. The interventions in the text that Ono employs (“there seems little to be gained in my recalling such things here,” *AFW*, 142) not only alert the reader’s attention to his use of the journal to suppress painful memories, David James says, but also “our sense of the importance of the novel’s form.” (James 2009, 57) These reminders that what we

are reading is not so much a story – or indeed history – as unreliable narrative, challenge “the seamless quality of the history/fiction (or world/art) join implied by realist narrative” and ask readers “to question the processes by which we represent ourselves and our world to ourselves and to become aware of the means by which we *make* sense of and *construct* order out of experience.” (Hutcheon 1989, 54)

Similarly, Stevens’s narrative is controlled by “surprising new perspectives on topics one imagined one had long ago thought through thoroughly;” (*RD*, 123) revisiting the past, searching it for clues, reinterpreting it. Elsewhere he remarks that “you will agree that such is often the way with matters one has given abiding thought to over a period of time; one is not struck by the truth until prompted quite accidentally by some external event” (*RD*, 10) Like Britain at large Stevens is prompted to re-examine his past by the external event of the Second World War. His sense of homelessness in the world necessitates a re-writing of history as if it will provide a remedy for the present.

According to Roland Barthes, the diary narrative is normally employed for “realistic effect,” since its “distinctive trait [...] is precisely that it signifies that the event represented has *really* taken place.” (Barthes 1997, 122) However, Ishiguro subverts this with a proliferation of misremembering and – in some cases – possible fantasy that point to the unreliability of the world being represented. Indeed, “by refiguring fiction-making as the primary mode of consciousness [...] postmodern narrative emphasizes the power of invention and fabrication to the point [...] of making it the foundation of discourse, the subject of the book.” (Ermarth 1997, 50) Invention and fabrication in the novels, as we have already discussed, draw attention away from the story and towards the discourse of (story)telling. Ishiguro asks, “when we tell ourselves stories as a nation about why we did something, what is the motivation? What drives the process? Are we being honest or are we trying to deceive, or comfort ourselves?” (Matthews 2009, 117) Moreover, the author invites us to view this as a human trait, not one limited to fabulists and (self-) deceivers. As Peter Brooks argues: ‘We live immersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meaning of our past actions, anticipating the outcome of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed.’ (Brooks 1984, 3)

Ono and Stevens’s Freudian displacements suggest a difficulty in coming to terms with the past that is not just personal but part of a broader social context too. When Ono struggles to attribute the phrase “the greatest cowardice of all,” (*AFW*, 56)

he embodies not just a private repressed shame, but a repressed shame for those who sent a younger generation to die for their misguided ideals. Likewise, Stevens's failure to correctly attribute the expression, "these errors may be trivial in themselves, but you must yourself realize their larger significance," (*RD*, 63) reflects both his private recognition of his wasted life and Britain's larger failure to recognize its own diminished powers as an Empire, manifest in its appeasement of the Nazis. "History could well be made under this roof," (*RD*, 81) Stevens recalls himself saying before one important political gathering at Darlington Hall, rather star-struck at the thought of having a role in play among Europe's policy-makers. The comment is however also self-reflexive, acknowledging the fictional act which is *making* history, both in the novel and in historiography. Both Ono and Stevens find themselves "searching" their past "for significance" (*AFW*, 53) and "turning points," only – as Stevens admits – "to start seeing them everywhere." (*RD*, 185) This searching leads them not only to recognize their failures as – for example – a teacher, father, son or (potential) husband, but also their complicity in a socio-political culture that has since been discredited. Indeed, the two are intertwined in both novels so that the narrator's searching is orientated towards 'what went wrong,' not just for them personally, but their culture in general. The two novels are structured so that their personal failures are fully realized simultaneously with their political ones. In Stevens's case – at the final political meeting with Herr Ribbentrop – he repeatedly denies comprehension of Mr Cardinal's assertion that Lord Darlington is being "manoeuvred like a pawn" (*RD*, 233) by the Nazis, while simultaneously failing to say anything that will convince Miss Kenton not to leave and marry another man. The two acts of denial coincide and intertwine in a single memory, but, given that Stevens expresses doubt about the temporal location of his hesitation outside Miss Kenton's door, can we trust their simultaneity? Likewise, Ono's betrayal of his artistic ideals and the betrayal of his protégé – events we understand to have taken place years apart – become melded together at the pavilion. The convergence of the narrators' personal regret and acts of political transgression are staged in the theatre of their minds.

In the case of *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ono is haunted by his betrayal of Kuroda and realization that he devoted his life and talents to a cause (Japanese Imperialism) which brought about the near-total destruction of his country and killed his own wife and son. To avoid confrontation with his complicity in this catastrophe, he 'floats' from flat denial to an acceptance of his failure recast as a kind of personal



victory. “We took some bold steps and often did things with much single-mindedness,” Ono reflects near the end of the novel, “but this is surely preferable to never putting one’s convictions to the test, for lack of will or courage.” (AFW, 202) Thus Ono finds himself appealing to the very notions of courage and conviction that are ideologically bound to cultural mythology – typified by his nationalistic painting ‘Complacency,’ whose politics he has supposedly abandoned. This piece of aggressive propaganda imagery that he produced before the war features street children in “classic kendo stances” and wearing “the manly scowls of samurai warriors ready to fight.” (AFW, 168) We will come back to the expressions of nationalism and nationhood in the novel but in this context Ishiguro shows how the virtuous quality of “bravery” can be tied to potentially dangerous cultural myths. Indeed, Ono must tell himself that his son “died very bravely” (AFW, 58) in combat to reassure himself that his death was not in vain. The Second World War may have done much to disrupt our sense of our selves and our history, Ishiguro is saying, but the cultural codes that give our life meaning do not vanish instantaneously with such catastrophe, however much they are tested. As Linda Hutcheon says, “We may no longer have recourse to the grand narratives that once made sense of life for us, but we still have recourse to narrative representations of some kind in most of our verbal discourses.” (Hutcheon 1989, 49) For Ono the narrative of courage, which has its roots in the mythology of many cultures, not just Japanese, cannot be abandoned in his language of self-reassurance. Ono’s great fear is that history should show him to have been a coward as opposed to courageous, notions which are inseparable from the nationalistic spirit that the younger generation is bitterly rejecting. As Hutcheon puts it, “the postmodern’s initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as ‘natural’ [...] are in fact ‘cultural’; made by us, not given to us.” (Hutcheon 1989, 2) Unlike the younger generation, Ono is an heir to those national virtues which are made and given rather than natural.

According to postmodern theory, nationalism and nationhood are forms of metanarrative – “a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience” (Stephens 1989, 6) – that underpin culture and its (self)representations. In his seminal work *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-François Lyotard defined the “postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives” in which the “narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its

great voyages, its great goal.” (Lyotard 1997, 36) Ishiguro explores how the Second World War exposed the fallacy of the cultural myths such as those Ono appeals to in his evocation of samurai warriors and brave deaths. As Ono’s son-in-law makes explicit: “half of my high school graduation year have died courageous deaths. They were all for stupid causes, though they were never to know that.” (AFW, 58) When Ono’s friend Shintaro shares his fantasy about bringing back his former entourage to Mrs Kawakami’s bar, he appeals to these same ideologically-charged myths, albeit humouring a deluded old man: “in olden times, if a lord had his troops scattered after a battle, he’d soon go about gathering them together again.” (AFW, 77) It can’t be a coincidence that Stevens appeals to similar military mythology when recounting his preparations for a political meeting that would itself have implications for Europe’s descent into war: “I thus set about preparing for the days ahead as, I imagine, a general might prepare for a battle [...] I even gave the staff a military-style ‘pep-talk.’” (RD, 81) Once again Ishiguro imbues the idioms used by the narrators with a charge which, given the context, can only be political and ideological.

Another aspect of the novels which allies them with the concerns of historiographic metafiction is the fact that they are ultimately about men who picked a losing side in the Second World War: Ono, obviously, as a propagandist for the defeated Japanese Imperialists; but Stevens too, as both willing servant to a British aristocracy in decline and to a man disgraced as a Nazi appeaser. “We may indeed get few postmodern narrative representations of the heroic victors who have traditionally defined who and what made it into History,” says Linda Hutcheon, “often we get instead both the story and the story-telling of the non-combatants and the losers.” (Hutcheon 1989, 51) The melancholy tone of *The Remains of the Day* reflects the sense of defeat that permeates a Britain forced to reassess its self-image as a colonial power. That Lord Darlington has been disgraced and his home sold, like many others of their kind, hasn’t yet awakened Stevens to the fact that the era of the “ladies and gentleman of the land” (RD, 4) is over, casting him on the side of the defeated. Ono’s ambiguous or diluted acceptance of his failures created unease among Japanese critics, according to Motoyuki Shibata and Motoko Sugano, but this discomfort “towards Ono’s occluded political views serves, ironically, to accentuate the success of Ishiguro’s complex, recurrent address to issues concerning the dialectics of individual and collective responsibility generally, as much as specifically in terms of Japan.” (Shibata and Sugano, 28) Therefore, if *An Artist of the Floating World* is a

metaphor for Japan's difficulty coming to terms with its past, the success of that project is reflected in its uneasy critical reception.

### **Art, text and fiction-making**

We have already seen how Ono and Stevens manipulate their past, fictionalizing themselves in the process and failing to impose a favourable order upon disparate memories. However, these psychological traits are also thematized through the use of metaphor throughout the novels that can also be seen to meditate – discretely, but self-reflexively nonetheless – on the fiction-making process. Ono sets out to prove his “artist’s eye” as evidence of his powers of re-creating verisimilar representations. He claims he often surprised his artist peers with an “ability to realize a scene on canvas based only on the briefest of passing glances,” (AFW, 41) yet it is Ono’s very relationship to reality, re-presented through his journal entries, that is called into question. Nevertheless, tellingly, Ono counts himself among those who cannot “paint a self-portrait with absolute honesty [...] the personality represented rarely comes near the truth as others would see it.” (AFW, 67) At once a tacit recognition of the difference between Ono’s self-perception and other people’s perception of him, these inferences in the text hint to the problem of representation, of narrating the past, which is constantly subject to the kind of revisions and obfuscations that we looked at in the first chapter. As Ono admits, “It is inevitable with repeated telling,” that past events “begin to take on a life of their own.” (AFW, 72) While *An Artist of the Floating World* is not self-reflective in the sense of being about the processes of fiction *per se*, art and representation carry an important metaphoric weight in the novel. Ono is an artist not just by trade but in the sense of retelling the past in a way that suits him. “When I try today to summon a picture of Mori-san’s villa,” (AFW, 137) Ono begins one recollection, the link between painting and the ‘artistic’ representation of memory implicit.

Such self-reflexivity is nevertheless discrete, and Ishiguro is at pains not to draw attention to his own creative processes in the novels despite these allusions to fiction-making. The author has said, “I’m only interested in literary experiment insofar as it serves a purpose of exploring certain themes with an emotional dimension. I always try to disguise those elements.” (Mason 1989, 346) Yet this discretion is itself allegorized in *An Artist of the Floating World* when Ono recalls

arguments among Mori-san's pupils about their teacher's subtle changes of technique. The pupils comment on a new painting's "low perspective," bickering as to whether it is employed to render its pitiful subject "a subtle power" or whether it is a deliberate act against artistic convention, "to liberate use from such arbitrary and confining habits." (AFW, 139) Mori-san remains aloof, refusing to explain the rationale behind the change in technique. The suggestion seems to be that art, like fiction, can be simultaneously emotionally affecting and draw attention to technique without the artist/author explicitly stating his intentions. In *The Remains of the Day*, too, Ishiguro might be said to be echoing this authorial play when Stevens talks about achieving the "balance between attentiveness and the illusion of absence." (RD, 75) Contrary to many people's view of postmodern fiction, possibly even Ishiguro's, such a novel does not necessarily "disconnect itself from history or the world," (Hutcheon 1989, 54) it can be self-conscious and moving at the same time.

The significance of the theme of art as exemplified above is not to be taken for granted as of minor significance in the novel. The fact that Ono abandons his teacher's humanistic quest to "capture beauty wherever he finds it" (AFW, 172) in favour of propaganda, thematizes the ideological potential of representation. Ono initially resists the Okada-Shingen Society's advances, arguing that getting artists to promote their mission to restore the Emperor to the head of state was "founded on a naïve mistake about what art can and cannot do." (AFW, 172) That Ono doubts the power of art to change the world here is telling as he later feels a disproportionate sense of responsibility for his nation's defeat, aligning his failures with Sugimura's "grand catastrophe." (AFW, 159)

Ono's betrayal of his teacher's values is manifest in his use of traditional methods – as opposed to Mori-san's European influence – such as the "extensive use of the hard outline." (AFW, 174) Hard outlines might suit propaganda but are of course incompatible with the school's priority to "capture the fragile lantern light of the pleasure world." (AFW, 174) The idea is ironized however in the fact that Ono's self-representation is itself "not delineated in bold outlines" (Lewis 2000, 136) – e.g., "frankness" (AFW, 159) or defined beliefs, political or otherwise. Again, the *Artist* of the novel's title is not simply Ono the painter but Ono the narrator, whose representation is as almost fleeting and unfixed as the *Floating World* itself.

In *The Remains of the Day* Stevens considers himself an artist in a different sense, that of professional excellence. Yet Stevens's relationship with art and

literature also draws the reader's attention to artistry of another kind. Whereas neither novel is explicitly intertextual – another prominent feature of metafiction but one that Ishiguro has distanced himself from (Matthews 2009, 124) – allusions to imaginary texts in the novel highlight the function of such representations to order and reinforce our cultural preconceptions of the world. As we have seen, Stevens constructs an entire belief system from a membership criterion to an exclusive society, which underlines the class assumptions involved in being “possessed of a dignity in keeping with [one's] position.” (RD, 33) The title of the publication in which the criterion is published, *A Quarterly for the Gentleman's Gentleman*, underlines the self-reflexive conceit. If a gentleman is a fictive concept bound up in ideology, then Steven's is indeed a *Gentleman's Gentleman*, someone literally owned by that fiction; a parody of a gentleman. This is further ironized by the fact that The Hayes Society is members-only, showing that Steven's gentleman status is provisional, contingent upon authorization from a social echelon he can never claim inherent belonging to.

It is to another such text that Stevens turns for his journey into the *unheimlich* world of post-war Britain. His guide for the trip is “Mrs Jane Symons's *The Wonder of England*,” (RD, 11) a fictional set of books describing the British Isles. Given that Mrs Symons was apparently a regular guest at Darlington Hall herself before the war, coupled with the book's somewhat triumphalist title, *The Wonder of England* becomes complicit in the class-bound ideology to which Stevens subscribes. Furthermore, the word *wonder* has a dual meaning here, suggesting both awe and, for Stevens, bewilderment and estrangement. “They were written during the thirties,” he says, “but much of it would still be up to date – after all, I do not imagine German bombs have altered our countryside so significantly.” (RD, 12) Whereas German bombs may not have visibly altered the countryside, Stevens is not prepared for the impact of war on the Britain's political landscape, itself in the process of rejecting the very value systems that Stevens most holds dear – the Ladies and Gentlemen of the land. Neither, ironically, has he yet contemplated the war's impact on his own sense of his life's worth.

As we saw in the preceding chapters, Stevens has never really had occasion to travel, and believes himself to have seen the best of his country through the esteemed guests who came to visit Darlington Hall. That post-war Britain is an alien environment is hardly surprising for someone who finds himself looking in Mrs Symons's book at photographs and, “to my mind even more evocative [...] artist's

sketches,” of the West Country and therefore feels “able to gain some sense of the sort of place Miss Kenton had gone to live her married life.” (RD, 12) That he should find the sketches more evocative than the photos is telling, perhaps they are more compatible with Stevens’s romanticized and reductive view of his nation. They also suggest how far removed from reality his imaginings of Miss Kenton’s life are likely to be, and the pitiful futility of his project to go and see her. Stevens’s perception of other landscapes is also narrowly mediated through representations. “I have seen in encyclopaedias and *National Geographic Magazine* breath-taking photographs of sights from various corners of the globe” (RD, 28) he suggests, before rejecting them in favour of the subtler wonders of the English countryside. The use of the full italicised title *National Geographic Magazine* seems to hint at Stevens’s suspicion towards a US publication, betrayed by his dismissal of the American landscape’s “unseemly demonstrativeness.” (RD, 29)

Meanwhile, Lord Darlington could be said to personify the link between text and ideology. Stevens recounts “a ploy of Lord Darlington’s to stand at his shelf studying the spines” of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and “pretend to be engrossed” in a volume “to increase the effect of an accidental meeting.” (RD, 63) Setting aside the fakery here, which we will come back to, Ishiguro here makes an interesting contrast between Lord Darlington’s bumbling awkwardness and the volumes of *Britannica* which could be said to represent Britain’s imperial legacy, its totalizing attempt to describe the world through its own belief systems. A postmodern and postcolonial reading of such texts would be that they maintained a parochial view of the world with Britain at its centre. “While laying claim to the ownership of “universal” knowledge,” says Iain Chambers, “Europeans were simultaneously involved in the paradoxical exercise of inventing the myths and traditions of the emerging modern (European) state and the national identities that sustained such a claim.” (Chambers 1997, 79) Such humanist acquisition of knowledge is thus inseparable from constructions of national identity and otherness. We will come back to the theme of nationhood and nationalism later.

Lord Darlington is portrayed as “a decent chap” with “a cultivated amateurism, especially in political affairs.” (Lewis 2000, 91) Yet for all his harmless ineffectuality, Lord Darlington represents, along with his *Britannica*, white Anglo-Saxon male hegemony in not just Britain, but all over the world. As Linda Hutcheon says, such representations in postmodern fiction mean “not dodging history,” but

rather “taking into account class, race, gender, and nationality [...] de-naturalizing English social assumptions about each.” (Hutcheon 1989, 6) Lord Darlington is later seen “as usual resorted to holding open a book” (*RD*, 84) – this time *Who’s Who?* – as a strategy to ask Stevens a delicate question. Despite Stevens’s claims to his master’s role in “furthering the progress of humanity,” (*RD*, 120) Lord Darlington’s browsing the library shelves is portrayed as a subterfuge to mask his embarrassment at asking a favour – a decidedly British awkwardness – and feigning an air of intellectual preoccupation in the process. Indeed *Who’s Who?*, like the *Britannica*, represents a reference publication that denotes knowledge ordered around an ideologically distorted view of the world. Furthermore, *Who’s Who?* also becomes ironized literally later in the novel when Stevens is mistaken for a real gentleman by locals in Devon, a misapprehension he allows to proceed but almost ends in disaster. As much as Stevens seems to speak the language and look the part, he remains merely a parodic *Gentleman’s Gentleman*, at best a guest in a members-only society.

As we have seen, Stevens is at pains to show that any enjoyment he derives from his sentimental love story is purely “incidental,” (*RD*, 177) and that he uses the text to develop his “command of the English language.” (*RD*, 176) The issue of Stevens’s language is one of importance that we will return to, but in this context the episode shows that much of his interaction with the world – romance included – is mediated through representations. His refusal to show the book he is reading to Miss Kenton (*RD*, 176) is also a manifestation of his refusal to show her his private, “off-duty” self. To stretch the metaphor, the fact that this “off-duty” self should be characterized by a novel is analogous to the fact that his diary narrative is fictitious too. As we have discussed, Stevens ‘fictionalizes’ himself, and his childish refusal to let go of the book becomes symbolic of his stubborn maintenance of the narrative in his hands, blotting out the story itself.

### **Detection and interpretation**

As we saw in the first chapter, the two novels are structured and narrated in such a way that important information is omitted or concealed until later in the narrative. There are aspects of the story – for example the nightmarish vision of Kuroda after the war in *An Artist of the Floating World*, or Stevens’s preoccupation with a memory of hesitating outside Miss Kenton’s door, convinced she is crying in her room – that

act as mysterious flashbacks, clues that the narrator must solve, and which depend on the interpretive faculties of the reader to assign meaning. We don't know at first why Ono should need to contact Kuroda and "other such acquaintances from the past," (AFW, 85) and the difficulty the narrator has attributing "the greatest cowardice of all" imbues the phrase with a cryptic resonance that the reader suspects will become pollinated with meaning later in the narrative. Likewise, the "hints" Stevens reads into Miss Kenton's letter concerning her desire to return to Darlington Hall function as clues the narrator uses as a gateway to investigations into his own memory. These memories gradually reveal the actions that Stevens unwittingly took to alienate her, reaching a peak in the narrative in parallel with Lord Darlington's own crucial mistake, meeting Herr Ribbentrop. For the reader, this renders the novels a type of detective story, albeit one which results in the recovery of repressed memories as opposed to solving crimes. While neither overtly subscribes to the genre, something of the detective novel hangs over both *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*.

In the earlier novel, it is Ono's belief that the Saitos have hired a detective that motivates his quest to seek reassurances over his daughter's future. However, this induces Ono to turn detective himself, trying to piece together the clues which explain his own post-war ostracism and troubling memories. Moreover, despite the fact that Ono claims he hired a detective to investigate the Miyake family the year before, there is no concrete suggestion in the text that the Saitos have done the same. The detective Ono is trying to pre-empt is thus just a kind of MacGuffin that impels him to write his own mystery. As Linda Hutcheon said in *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, "The stylized properties of detective fiction – when either parodied overtly or covertly used as structural principles – are employed to point to the text in its existence as literature, as patterned, ordered art." (Hutcheon 1984, 74) Indeed, the lugubrious – maybe imagined – scene in which Ono encounters Kuroda watching him from under his umbrella, "the spokes of his umbrella [...] broken, causing some splashing just beside his foot" (AFW, 77) bears the hallmarks of hard-boiled film noir. This is confirmed by Barry Lewis's cinematic reading of the novel's structure which he says displaces the "emphasis away from the story and towards the *mise-en-scène*." (Lewis 2000, 70) If *The Remains of the Day* shares structural similarities with the earlier novel it recalls less film noir than other genres associated with the detective story, namely the manor house *Whodunits?* by the likes of Agatha



Christie. Indeed, in her 1926 novel *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, it is the butler Parker who is initially suspected for the eponymous killing.

Ishiguro later went on to develop and subvert the detective theme explicitly in *When We Were Orphans* (2000), but what is more important in *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* is the “important textual function of the hermeneutic act of reading” (Hutcheon 1984, 71) characteristic of the genre. The major moment of crisis for the narrators is arguably the war itself, when Ono lost his son and wife and Stevens bore witness to Lord Darlington’s disgrace, but this central period is absent from both novels. The omissions, silences and cryptic clues in the novels “are textually functional in an explicit manner” (Hutcheon 1984, 72) as they make the “act of reading into one of active ‘production,’ of imagining, interpreting, decoding, ordering, in short of constructing the literary universe through the fictive referents of the words.” (Hutcheon 1984, 86) According to reader-response critics such as Wolfgang Iser, all novels do this in one way or another, as “meaning must clearly be the product of an interaction between the textual signals and the reader’s acts of comprehension [...] the activity stimulated in him will link him to the text and induce him to create the conditions necessary for the effectiveness of that text.” (Iser 1978, 10) Nevertheless, as Linda Hutcheon argues, the detective stories often self-consciously manipulate the reader’s role in making the text mean, as they “explicitly thematize this hermeneutic paradigm” (Hutcheon 1984, 72) by withholding key information. As Gérard Genette said, “the most classical detective story, although generally focalized through the investigating detective, most often hides from us a part of his discoveries and inductions until the final revelation.” (Genette 1980, 197) What Genette would thus call “a restriction of field,” that is “just as artificial in the first person as in the third,” (Genette 1980, 194) is employed to subversive effect in the novels. While the narrators *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* are hiding their (self) discoveries from the reader, they are also hiding them from themselves. Yet the “artificial” – or, as Linda Hutcheon would put it – “self-reflexive” – structural conceit of the detective genre remains. Such an act of reading is thus determined by “a mutually restrictive and magnifying interaction between the explicit and the implicit, between revelation and concealment.” (Iser 1980, 111)

Whereas we can agree with the author when he says that these elements of technique are brought in to serve “a purpose of exploring certain themes with an emotional dimension” (Mason 1989, 346) – not just to ruminate on the nature of

fiction itself – some critics have asserted that their experience of reading Ishiguro’s work “is enhanced precisely *because* of our consciousness of form.” (James 2009, 55) The strategy the author adopts unavoidably draws the reader’s attention to form because “the stories [the narrators] tell and the way they tell them do not always seem to coincide.” (Wong 2005, 18) Indeed, the stories are arguably less important than the way they are told, precisely because the author is drawing attention why individuals – and indeed nations – tell themselves stories to cope with regret.

### **Role-playing and the decentring of the self**

Both *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* examine the impact of the Second World War on individual consciousness. They don’t just ask us to consider the way people cope with the trauma of conflict and its aftermath, but its affect on people’s very sense of self: that is, a sense of self which is rooted in culture and society. Thematic concerns and the use of parody in the novels reveal the narrators to be inhabiting social roles which have not only been rendered obsolete by the Second World War, but exposed as partly fiction in the first place. As Sean Matthews and Sebastien Groes argue, a “key tension present in Ishiguro’s work” is that “we as individuals are not proper, rounded subjects but merely ghostly actors and performers inhabiting roles that are allocated to us randomly by the context in which we find ourselves.” (Matthews and Groes 2009, 8) The suggestion of role-playing and counterfeiting both subverts the cultural coding complicit in depicting particular cultures, and alerts the reader’s attention to the status of what we read as fiction. Indeed the novels “foreground many of the usually unacknowledged and naturalized implications of narrative representation.” (Hutcheon 1989, 35)

In *An Artist of the Floating World* Ono refers to the “new ways” (AFW, 19) of the younger generation which threaten the customs of arranged marriage to which he subscribes for his daughters. He refers to the fact that Noriko had been disappointed by the failure of marriage negotiations with the Miyake family as “she’d been insisting it was a “love match,” so when it fell through, she’d be obliged to behave accordingly. But perhaps it wasn’t all play-acting.” (AFW, 18) Both the awkwardness of the term “love match” and the speech marks around it suggest a misappropriation from the English imported by the American occupiers and/or simply the alien quality with which Ono regards such a concept which runs contrary to his social beliefs. In

any case, the suggestion that she was “play-acting” at being upset due to the collapse of the marriage negotiations speaks of a set of assumed behaviours which are cultural in essence. It never occurs to Ono that the rituals and customs of arranged marriage are themselves as artificial as the ones he suspects a “love match” to be. As Ishiguro left Japan at the age of five to grow up in Britain, he is particularly sensitive to the falseness of such cultural beliefs. As he said, “I’ve always been aware that a society’s mores can be quite artificial constructs that don’t carry over necessarily to a different culture, because that was actually my experience and at a very personal crucial level.” (Wachtel 1996, 23)

Ono reflects before the *miai* that “the Saitos were not the old-fashioned sort of family who preferred their female members to be silent and demure” and claims that during their preparations for the occasion that he “had stressed my opinion that Noriko should as far as appropriate emphasize her lively, intelligent qualities.” (AFW, 119) That Ono counts himself as patriarch of an “old-fashioned sort of family” is manifest in his relationship with his eldest daughter Setsuko, who is indeed the “silent and demure” type, even if there are hints of a more worldly calculating nature beneath the façade of politeness. That Ono wants Noriko to behave with her “customary flippancy” (AFW, 124) shows him to be an opportunist, at least with the idea of her performing a role to suit the needs of occasion (just as he was in his career, following Imperialism to succeed). The fact that he mistakenly believes it necessary and appropriate to unburden himself of guilt at the *miai* shows him to be incapable of judging what role to play in the new Japan where “people feel the need to express their views openly and strongly.” (AFW, 120)

Noriko, however, confounds her father by acting exactly the opposite to the way she does at home, demurely and without confidence. This contrasts with the way she had apparently behaved during the *miai* with the Miyake family the year before when she and Jiro Miyake “had continued to exchange mischievous glances across the table, as though to mock the formality of the occasion.” (AFW, 121) Again this is redolent of the generational shift that is occurring; like Ono, Noriko is unsure how to behave because the culture is changing around her. There is no such inhibition and uncertainty in Dr Saito and Taro Saito’s relationship, who joke that “it’s the father who’s far more liberal than the son” (AFW, 120) That family gender roles are loosening is also manifest in Ichiro’s remark that ““Sometimes at home [...] Father wants to do something and Mother tells him it’s not allowed. Sometimes even

Father's no match for Mother'" (AFW, 188) – a situation that would have been unthinkable before the war. When his daughters object to Ono's wish that Ichiro drink sake, he complains "You women sometimes don't have enough sympathy for a boy's pride." (AFW, 157) This recalls Ono's earlier recollections of the Migi-Hidari bar, where "one could get drunk [...] with pride and dignity." (AFW, 73) Pride, Ishiguro seems to be saying, is a male construct used to justify his more infantile behaviour, reinforced by patriarchal social domination but finding itself challenged in the post-war period, as the dictated values of the past start to ring hollow.

Some critics have linked this theme in Ishiguro's novels to postmodernism, in which "professional, national, and [...] gender identities are destroyed not only by the unspeakable catastrophic event [of the war], but also by the processes and institutions of nationhood, government, and ideology that determine, and then mediate, such events." (Baillie and Matthews 2009, 46) In this sense, Ishiguro's narrators fit a number of postmodern definitions of the individual as "not a unity, not autonomous, but a process, perpetually in construction, perpetually contradictory." (Belsey 1980, 132) This is echoed by Linda Hutcheon's view of subjectivity in postmodernism as "something in process, never as fixed and never as autonomous, outside history," but "always a gendered subjectivity, rooted also in class, race, ethnicity." (Hutcheon 1989, 40)

Similarly, Ono has difficulties relating to his grandson Ichiro, who – growing up under the American occupation – ignores his pleas "to pretend to be someone like Lord Yoshitsune," (AFW, 30) a figure from Japanese myth, in favour of Lone Ranger or Popeye. Ono's son-in-law "believes its better [Ichiro] likes cowboys than that he idolize people like Miyamoto Musashi [...] American heroes are the better role models for children now." (AFW, 36) Not only does this episode speak of the loss of one culture to another which owes itself to military occupation, but also to the idea of role-playing as a cultural construct. Ono plays the role of esteemed artist, family patriarch and, finally, repentant war criminal – all of which are undermined in one way or another. What is interesting about the references to Japanese mythology is that Ono adopted such imagery in his propaganda work 'Complacency.' Even this early nationalistic effort turns out to be a work in progress however, the street children in "classic kendo stances" changed to "stern-faced soldiers" for a later poster named 'Eyes to the Horizon' calling for Japanese territorial expansion. The connection made between children play-acting as a samurai such as Miyamoto Musashi and fighting in

a war is complete – showing how ideologically charged such cultural (meta)narratives can be. As Linda Hutcheon suggests, “we do not [...] take leave of fiction-making when we abandon fairy tales and childhood games. We always tell stories – to escape, to remake, to alter our past and our future.” (Hutcheon 1984, 89) Indeed, Ono likes to imagine himself as a “Lord [who] must gather his men,” (*AFW*, 77) and has not abandoned hope of a restoration of the “old ways.” (*AFW*, 185)

At the same time, Ichiro’s wilful disobedience of his grandfather, and the US cartoons he watches, make him a “strong proponent of American individualism and idealism.” (Wong 2005, 50) As Ono proffers at one stage, “don’t you worry at times we might be a little too hasty in following the Americans? [...] Indeed, sometimes Japan has come to look like a small child learning from a strange adult.” (*AFW*, 185) This suggests that Japan during the cultural crossroads of American occupation, like Ono, was a place of muddled values, not sure how much of its past to abandon and what to keep. Like Japan, Ichiro is learning from strange adults: a grandfather who tries to make him drink sake, American cartoon heroes that tell him to eat spinach.

The word “pretend” makes frequent appearances in both novels. When Ono describes the delicate game of marriage negotiation he enters into with Dr Saito, he remarks that “it did not seem proper to discuss them openly; but then it would have been absurd to pretend they were not going on.” (*AFW*, 80) Again, here the suggestion is of culturally-constructed mores that the two men have to observe to the extent of pretending, as if in a form of performance. Role-playing is also a recurrent theme of Ono’s recollections of Mr Moriyama’s school, where “one supposes all groups of pupils tend to have a leader figure.” (*AFW*, 142) Indeed, when Ono expresses surprise to learn that his new son-in-law also has an acquaintance nicknamed the Tortoise, Taro Saito replies: “In fact, just as every group has a natural leader, I suspect every group has its ‘Tortoise.’” (*AFW*, 159) The implication seems to be that cultures tend to dispatch roles to people as – like narratives – they help us make sense of the world around us, a notion Ono seems oblivious to. Such sense-organising relationships however also tend to have their roots in a game of power and submission. That he fails to distinguish between what he said and his teacher said shows how he sees himself to have acquired the patriarchal role of tutor and mentor, a pattern of hierarchical ascension that is a cultural construct: “I am aware [...] that certain of my mannerisms [...] I originally acquired from Mori-san, my former teacher. And perhaps I will not be flattering myself unduly were I suppose many of

my own pupils will in turn have gained such small inheritances from me.” (*AFW*, 137) The suggestion is that Ono’s elevation to *sensei* status was contingent upon mimicking his master’s manner, one which his pupils would have subsequently learnt from him.

Role-playing is of even greater significance for Stevens in *The Remains of the Day*, for whom the butler’s costume becomes a symbol of both his repression and counterfeiting. “It is important that one be attired at such times in a manner worthy of one’s position” (*RD*, 11) he says early in the novel, clearly suggesting that his position is one worthy of a nice suit. The paradox of this is that though Stevens has mastered the language and image of the ruling classes, as a butler he does not belong to them. Indeed, there is a suggestion – which we will come back to in our analysis of language in the novels – that Stevens should speak in the no-nonsense working-class vernacular of his father but has acquired a verbal dexterity worthy of those he serves. For him, “‘dignity’ has to do crucially with a butler’s ability not to abandon the professional being he inhabits [...] the great butlers are great by virtue of their ability to inhabit their professional role and inhabit it to the utmost; they will not be shaken out by external events.” (*RD*, 43) The word ‘inhabit’ is telling as it suggests that being a butler is a role or guise he chooses to wear, even if at all times. If a butler wears his “professionalism as a decent gentleman will wear his suit,” (*RD*, 44) then by that logic there would come a time when he could abandon it, yet he takes it with him on his motoring trip, with disastrous results for his sense of self. “His protestations of belief in his professional being sound hollow, precisely because they are so pleading and overwrought,” says Barry Lewis, “he is always conscious of himself as a butler, therefore he is never able to be natural and spontaneous in his vocation.” (Lewis 2000, 85) The role-playing conceit is highlighted again when Stevens says “It’s a great privilege, after all, to have been given a part to play, however small, on the world’s stage,” (*RD*, 188) simultaneously linking historical representation to performance and unwittingly putting the accent on his purely decorative role in the great affairs, despite his wish to have contributed something.

As we have discussed, Stevens’s belief that a butler should be “off-duty in the presence of others” (*RD*, 178) is an indicator of his repression, someone that favours restraint over those “who will, at the slightest provocation, tear off his suit and run about screaming.” (*RD*, 44) This relentless professionalism infuriates and alienates Miss Kenton, who at one stage says to him: “Why, Mr Stevens, why, why, why do

you always have to *pretend*?” (RD, 162) This is a reference to his claim that he disapproved of Lord Darlington’s decision to sack two Jewish maids from the house in the 1930s, a task which Stevens carries out on his behalf without question. We learn that Miss Kenton threatened to resign over the incident but confesses she couldn’t go through with it out of “cowardice.” (AFW, 161) Yet when Stevens later admits to sharing her objections, she becomes angry that he chose to withhold his feelings at the time of the incident. Moreover, the word ‘pretend’ is carefully employed here to refer to the intrinsic fakery that lies behind not just Stevens’s butler persona, but the world of the manor house and the class system that it represents.

“A butler of any quality must be seen to inhabit his role, utterly and fully, he cannot be seen casting it aside one moment,” Stevens suggests elsewhere, “as though it were nothing more than a pantomime costume.” (RD, 178) Yet as many of the stately homes like Darlington Hall are sold off after the war, the butler’s profession itself becomes something of a pantomime, consigned to the *whodunit?* and period dramas. As Barry Lewis says, “now that an American has taken over Darlington Hall, the manservant is little more than an exhibit in a museum.” (Lewis 2000, 90) His perseverance with this pantomime seems to convince the working people he meets in Noscombe that he is an authentic gentleman, and the incident – which backfires badly for Stevens – he calls an “unfortunate misunderstanding concerning my person.” (RD, 203) Ishiguro cleverly infuses this sentence with irony here without sacrificing the credibility of the language: the idiom of “my person” to represent “me” is subverted so that it sounds as if he is referring to an alter-ego, which in one sense he is. In another episode, Stevens has to “quickly go outside and conceal my person behind the large rhododendron bush,” to feign an accidental meeting – just as Lord Darlington is wont to do – which was “not, admittedly, the most subtle of strategies.” (RD, 92) Again, the link is made between concealment, alter-egos and play acting, of which Stevens and Lord Darlington are both made complicit. That Stevens repeats Lord Darlington’s clumsy “ploy” of feigning an accidental meeting emphasizes the fact that his master too is only playing at being a gentleman – itself, Ishiguro seems to suggest, a mythological construct.

Furthermore, wealthy American visitors to Darlington Hall suspect that period details in the house are “very skilful, but mock,” (RD, 130) in an incident that prompts Mr Farraday to ask Stevens “this *is* a genuine grand old English house, isn’t it? That’s what I paid for. And you’re a genuine old-fashioned English butler, not just some

waiter pretending to be one.” (*RD*, 131) As Seonjoo Park says, Stevens’s “whole identity is closely associated with the idea of “mocking” through his stylization and performance.” (Park 2008, 56) These clues in the text point to the artificiality of social roles like the butler and the gentleman, and also, perhaps, a self-reflexivity on the part of the author concerning Stevens’s fictiveness as a literary construct.

### **Parody, realism and authenticity**

We have already looked at the way in which Ishiguro borrows structural elements from the detective genre when writing *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*. If we are to consider the issue of role-playing in the novels we must also take into account to what extent the novels parody other works and literary or cultural conventions. The use of parody in historiographic metafiction, Linda Hutcheon argues, “provokes the questions of how we make meaning in culture, how we ‘de-doxify’ the systems of meaning (and representation) by which we know our culture and ourselves.” (Hutcheon 1989, 29)

As we have discussed, the issue of painting and storytelling become intertwined in Ono’s narrative, to the extent where we doubt his relationship to reality. Furthermore there is a proliferation of imagery in *An Artist of the Floating World* that is self-consciously Japanese. At one stage Ono describes an establishment he frequented as a student of Mr Moriayama, “where the proprietress never tired of reminding us how year’s before, when she had been working as a geisha in Akihara, Mori-san had used her as a model for a series of wood-block prints which had proved immensely popular.” (*AFW*, 145) Here Ishiguro links the geisha as a visual signifier of exotic Far East with a medium (the wood-block print) that can deliver endless facsimile reproductions. When Ono recalls his work at the Takeda firm he explains that “the essential point about the sort of things we were commissioned to paint – geishas, cherry trees, swimming carps, temples, was that they look “Japanese” to the foreigners to whom they were shipped out.” (*AFW*, 69) Here again the author deliberately undermines some of the visual language of Japan that he has created through his narrator, the suggestion being seemingly that we all, to a certain extent, are harbingers and producers of our own cultural signifiers. This shifts the reader’s focus “away from the ‘reality’ represented by the novel to the illusion of reality



produced by the act of representation itself [...] towards the more chthonic assumptions underlying the image of Japan.” (Lewis 2000, 27)

Similarly the scene of the *miai* takes place at what was once “amongst the most pleasant of Western-style hotels,” but which is now, Ono tells us, decorated in “a somewhat vulgar manner – intended, no doubt, to strike the American clientele [...] as being charmingly ‘Japanese.’” (AFW, 116) As Barry Lewis says “even here there is a hint of some counterfeiting [...] the Japan of the Kasuga Park Hotel is patently a simulated Japan, a Japan displaced through American expectations.” (Lewis 2000, 52) Ishiguro has insisted, to counter readings of his novels that concentrate heavily on his Japanese heritage, that his representation of Japan is an imaginary one, “a mixture of imagination, memory and speculation.” (Clee 1989, 1328) Far from an attempt at realism, the author refuses to hide the ‘counterfeiting’ behind his depiction of Japanese culture, indeed makes it one of the novel’s themes. As the author says, “I wished to recreate this Japan – put together from all these memories, and these imaginary ideas I had about this landscape which I called Japan,” (Oe and Ishiguro 1991, 110) which he left when he was very young. Others argue that he “did not recover the Japan he knew as a small child” at all, “but rather re-invented or re-imagined a Japan he (almost) never knew, using Japanese films and novels as his chief raw materials of inspiration.” (Shibata and Sugano 2009, 25)

Is it any coincidence, for example, that some of Ono’s more nostalgic memories are almost indistinguishable from the genre of painting Mori-san and his pupils devote themselves to producing? For example, Ono recalls “the fragrance of seasonal blossoms from the night air” at a teahouse called ‘Water Lanterns,’ where “the lanterns of the establishment could be seen reflected in the canal.” (AFW, 145) Yet elsewhere Ono tells us it was “a hallmark of Mori-san’s work that a lantern would always figure somewhere in the picture, by implication if not in actuality.” (AFW, 141) Significantly, lanterns, with their capacity to create illusory qualities of light, feature prominently in Ono’s nostalgic memories, “causing objects around me to throw exaggerated shadows,” (AFW, 146) or “causing one picture to fade into shadow and then another to appear.” (AFW, 149) Thus are we to assume that Ono’s memories are as constructed as his teacher’s painting? Tellingly, in his final confrontation with Mori-san in the pavilion, which bleeds into a different memory of a later confrontation with his own wayward pupil, Kuroda, Ono remembers lighting “more and more lanterns,” but that “Mori-san’s figure remained in silhouette [...] his back to

me.” (AFW, 178) No matter how many lanterns Ono lights in this memory, certain aspects remain obscure to him, as if he is seeking to illuminate something that remains dark and troublesome to him. Moreover, the lantern’s “transitory, illusory qualities,” (AFW, 150) illuminating and then obscuring, then seem not just a metaphor for tendency of memory to produce abstractions, but also the illusory qualities such cultural representations bring to our sense of the world and the past. Just as Ono has confused what he might have said with that of his teacher – and his memory of his betrayal of Mori-san’s artistic ideals with Kuroda’s resistance to nationalism – Ono has arguably confused the nostalgic, fragile ‘Floating World’ of the paintings for the real world. Here he is fictionalising his past in a way that is not just a psychological defence mechanism, but a natural tendency of humans to produce narratives out of memories, appealing to cultural signifiers (lanterns, geishas) as we go. Furthermore, is Ishiguro not discretely saying that this is what he has done himself, in his Japan of the “imagination, memory and speculation?”

It has been suggested that in the Japanese translated title *Ukiyo no Gaka*, the emphasis on the “mythical ‘floating world’ evokes an archetypal, perhaps even stereotypical image of an exotic Japan,” (Shibata and Sugano 2009, 26) yet I would suggest it does the same thing in the original English. Moreover, I would suggest that *An Artist of the Floating World* is indeed “self-conscious about [...] narrative representation,” as Linda Hutcheon defines postmodern fiction, which “overtly ‘de-doxifies’ received notions about the process of representing the actual in narrative [...] The past really did exist, but we can only know it today through its textual traces, its often complex and indirect representations in the present.” (Hutcheon 1989, 78) Barry Lewis concurs, seeing the novel as about “the nature of Japaneseness and its [...] representations; the constitution of national identity and its relation to subjective memory.” (Lewis 2000, 72)

The notion of subjectivity for Stevens and Ono is exposed as one mediated through culture and ideology. “Such a reading might partially *excuse*, or even *explain* an Ono, a Stevens,” Sean Matthews and Sebastien Groes argue, “on the grounds of their historically or ideologically determined false consciousness.” (Matthews and Groes 2009, 3) Certainly I would argue that Ishiguro invites us to feel compassion for those blinded by culture, their very consciousness distorted by it. When the cultural centre is “called into question, interrogated as to its power and its politics,” Linda Hutcheon asks, “what happens to the idea of ‘centered’ subjectivity, the subject of

representation?” (Hutcheon 1989, 38) Ishiguro’s narrators are not quite the rational, autonomous individuals they believe themselves to be but are very much products of their time and cultural context. The author describes Stevens in *The Remains of the Day* as “someone who thinks like a member of his class, and he can’t quite get out of that [...] to some extent we are all in some sense butlers; at an ethical and political level [...] We don’t stand outside our milieu and evaluate it.” (Matthews 2009, 115)

*The Remains of the Day* is perhaps more explicitly parodic than the earlier novel, resembling as Barry Lewis notes, “the domestic service farce epitomized by P.G. Wodehouse’s ‘Jeeves’ stories [...] a tactical choice: who, among fictional characters, is more English than Jeeves?” (Lewis 2000, 12) As we have discussed, there are suggestions that Stevens can only play at being a butler because the role of the butler is itself part-fiction, part-myth. Stevens remarks that his generation of butlers were “all essentially cut from the same cloth,” (*RD*, 19) emphasizing the notion of fabrication and reproduction that lies behind this myth, and unwittingly alluding again to the idea of the butler’s profession being like a tailored suit or “costume.” Hélène Machinal highlights the importance of “the emblematic social role of the butler” to “distil and codify [...] a range of ontological, social, political, and ideological facets” (Machinal 2009, 89) of British society between the wars. Stevens confirms this himself, albeit unintentionally, when he says, “when you think of a great butler, he is bound, almost by definition, to be an Englishman.” (*RD*, 43) Although he means to say that the English intrinsically make better butlers, he suggests by proxy that butlers are a very English myth. As the author said, he set out to “rework a particular myth about a certain kind of mythical England.” (Vorda and Herzinger 1991, 139)

The butler’s status as part-myth is also acknowledged by Stevens himself in the narrative. At one point he recalls his father – whom Stevens demonstrates his own tendency to mythologize – recounting a legend in which an unflappable butler dispatches a tiger in his master’s dining room. Stevens concludes that his father “must have striven to *become* that butler of his story,” (*RD*, 37) hinting at the way people seek such cultural narratives to romanticise their own role in the world, and – by projecting it onto his father – betraying his repressed desire to have his work take on a heroic hue. That the story should be set in India, one of Britain’s former colonies, is telling. To what extent, the author suggests, do the British romanticise their Imperial

past, and what role do semi-mythological figures like the butler play in maintaining these fictions?

Ishiguro has joked that *The Remains of the Day* is “more English than English,” (Vorda and Herzinger 1991, 14) while critics have referred to Stevens as a “parody of a parody.” (Lewis 2000, 75) At one stage, a guest at Darlington Hall compliments Stevens on his dinner service by saying, “I could have sworn you were at least three people.” (RD, 112) A ‘*Gentleman’s Gentleman*,’ “a parody of a parody” reduced concealing his “person,” Stevens is at once many people and nobody; the embodiment and harbinger of a set of cultural codes which are rendered anachronistic after the war, as the era of the stately home begins to decline. If the novel takes place, as Ishiguro says, in “a mythical landscape which is supposed to work at a metaphorical level,” then it is a “mythic [...] England that is often used by the heritage or nostalgia industry to sell tablecloths or teacups.” (Lewis 2000, 78) According to Seonjoo Park, Stevens’s “parodic stylization” opens up a “fundamental complicity and deep implication on the part of readers in the entire process of constituting, maintaining, and displacing the dignified stylization of ‘Englishness.’” (Park 2008, 66) When reading *The Remains of the Day*, we participate in a vision of Englishness that we acknowledge is a common, shared one; our mythological preconceptions of Britain called into play.

Barry Lewis also claims that *The Remains of the Day* is “not only about Englishness, but also engaged with recognisable English literary traditions,” noting that the opening line’s tentative politeness [...] could be from a novel a century earlier.” (Lewis 2000, 11) As Linda Hutcheon says, such parody not only “points to art as art, but also to art as inescapably bound to its aesthetic and even social past,” and reflects “a certain self-consciousness about our culture’s means of ideological legitimation.” (Hutcheon 1989, 101) From Stevens’s exaggerated Englishness to *An Artist of the Floating World*’s proliferation of lanterns, both novels express the author’s distrust of the way culture represents itself to itself, and how it is represented by other cultures. As Linda Hutcheon says, “the representation of history becomes the history of representation [...] both exploited and commented on critically through irony and parody.” (Hutcheon 1989, 58)

A reading of the novels that takes into account the thematizing of storytelling, role-playing and parody must also acknowledge that they are not nearly as realist as they might initially seem. In fact, there are features of the novels that border on the

fantastical and ghostly, even if such elements are just phantasms of the mind. In *An Artist of the Floating World* Ishiguro constantly draws our attention to the unreliability of Ono's recollections in a way that gives certain scenes an almost supernatural quality. Take, for instance, Ono's recollection of Mori-san half-lit in lantern light, so that "I could only see his silhouette," (AFW, 147) reiterated later in the episode in the pavilion, throughout which his former mentor "remained in silhouette." (AFW, 178) The implication is that like the "fragile beauty" of "those pleasurable things that disappear with the morning light," (AFW, 180) memories are intangible, even spectral things. Indeed, they haunt the narrators. The way this is expressed in the novel through evocative *mise-en-scène* is certainly not realist. Likewise, in Ono's lugubrious encounter with Kuroda and his fantastically vivid recollection of his first meeting with Dr Saito, we are given the impression of a painterly conceit; memories refracted through a repressed and socio-historically constituted consciousness.

It seems few critics have commented on the figure of the stranger that Stevens encounters at the end of *The Remains of the Day*. There is something strangely reflexive about this "heavily built man, probably in his late sixties" (RD, 253) – a butler, significantly – that reminds us of Stevens's father. Stevens is struck by the fact that when the man says, "the evening was the best part of the day, the part they most looked forward to," he was "speaking figuratively." (RD, 253) The prophetic quality of his words, that provide the essence of the novel's title, suggest something spectral about the encounter, some manifestation of Stevens's conscience. He supposes that the man "had been sitting here next to me for some minutes without my noticing him," and that "I do not think I registered his presence on the bench at all" until they have their "curious" (RD, 253) conversation. Most tellingly though, Stevens explains that he revealed to the man some "professional 'secrets'" including "various 'sleights-of-hand' – the equivalent of a conjuror's – by which a butler could cause a thing to occur at just the right time and place." (RD, 254) The conjuring act is both Stevens's and the author's, the man appearing just in time to reassure Stevens that he should look forward to retirement – the remains of his day. Ishiguro plants a self-reflexive clue to the artificiality of the man's intervention while imbuing it with a certain ghostly resemblance to his butler father. Alternatively, the man could represent the ordinary yet contented butler Stevens could have been if he hadn't been so misguidedly ambitious.

Ishiguro claimed in an interview that he prefers to “move away from realism [...] not so much into out-and-out fantasy” but towards using “the landscape that you do know in a metaphorical way.” (Vorda and Herzinger 1991, 137–38) Neither realism nor outright fantasy, the novels reflect the author’s intention to use settings to bring out his metaphorical themes which are supposed to be universal rather than simply contemporaneous or specific to one culture. As Barry Lewis says, “the Japanese setting is made even more metaphorical in *An Artist of the Floating World* by [...] deliberately not naming the city in which it takes place,” while the representation of England in *The Remains of the Day* “conforms to ‘heritage’ stereotypes and is severely underdescribed.” (Lewis 2000, 127) Ishiguro has tried to warn people off looking to his novels for cultural authenticity, saying that he’s “turned to history almost for dramatic effect” and that although “you’ve got to say to your readers that the novel is set in a particular time and place [...] hopefully they’ll be able to see that it’s also about things that are happening over and over again.” (Matthews 2009, 118) His insinuations come in response to readings of his novels that concentrate on his Japaneseness, when in fact he sees himself as an international writer. As Cynthia Wong argues, Ishiguro “uses Japan as a starting point to orchestrate crucial themes [...] he is not one Japanese speaking for all Japanese about Japan.” (Wong 2005, 10)

Arguably, the illusion of realism comes less from the settings than from the first person perspective which Roland Barthes, we remind ourselves, claimed is often used to signify “that the event represented has *really* taken place.” (Barthes 1997, 122) It is an assumption that is subverted in the novels, a “challenge to the realist notion of representation that presumes the transparency of the medium.” (Hutcheon 1989, 34) The notions of subjectivity that were so fundamental to modernism have been undermined by an increasing uncertainty about the influence of culture, historiography and ideology on our consciousness. With techniques such as the first person, “which are usually employed to authenticate the core universe, the narrator manages to achieve opposite results [...] the voice of the narrator is not an exterior authenticating authorial one; it is the voice of a character.” (Hutcheon 1984, 63) If such characters “don’t stand outside [their] milieu and evaluate it,” (Matthews 2009, 115) it’s because they are, like most of us, “ordinary men with no special gifts of insight,” (*AFW*, 200) unable to see beyond the cultural forces that impose themselves on our identity.

## Reader-response and “you”

Ishiguro has suggested that “it is important is to look at writing as a dialogue between author and serious readers.” (Matthews 2009, 121) Yet critics have commented upon the fact that Ishiguro has structured his novels in the first person “as a vehicle for concealing his authorial self.” (James 2009, 63) Ono and Stevens, as historically and culturally “constituted subjects,” (Wong 2005, 19) are clearly not to be confused with the perspective of the author. However, the narrators have the curious habit of addressing a reader directly, an unusual feature of both novels (particularly *The Remains of the Day*) given, as we have seen, that the texts are structured as diary entries. This begs the question, to whom are they addressing themselves, and why? And what effect does this have for the actual reader?

Such appeals to an imaginary reader, who may share the narrators’ values or empathise with their predicament, suggest a desire for consolation from the sense of loss and isolation in which they find themselves. By situating an imagined reader (on the part of the narrators) in the text with whom we resist affinity, the author is encouraging us to question our role as a reader in a way that brings some reader-response theory into play. If, according to Wolfgang Iser, “the reader is situated in such a position that he can assemble the meaning toward which the perspectives of the text have guided him,” (Iser 1978, 38) then Ishiguro’s writing seems to foreground and deliberately subvert these perspectives.

Linda Hutcheon has remarked that direct addresses to the reader in fiction “overtly point to two subject positions in the text, that of both reader and producer.” (Hutcheon 1984, xvi) As we have seen, the novels borrow some of the structural conventions from detective fiction in such a manner that places self-consciously explicit demands on the reader: offering cryptic clues, withholding information, making revelations of dubious value and veracity. However, the assumption that the reader addressed in the text as “you” is a recognition of the reader as “producer” is complicated by the fact that many of these instances appeal to a reader who is clearly not meant to be us, but often one complicit in the narrator’s historically and culturally constituted worldview. Indeed, as Gérard Genette says, such a fictional narratee, “does not merge a priori with the reader (even an implied reader) any more than the narrator necessarily merges with the author.” (Genette 1980, 259)

Given the loneliness of the predicament in which the narrators find themselves, the addresses to an imaginary reader – one that shares their worldview – become increasingly charged with pathos as their attempts at self-justification become more strained. However, even if (and perhaps because) the reader addressed is clearly dissimilar to actual readers, attention is nevertheless drawn to our role as interpreters and critics of the world represented. As Genette said, traditionally “a novel in the form of a diary does not in principle aim at any public or any reader,” (Genette 1980, 230) but Ishiguro seems to subvert this by structuring the novels in such a way that “the absent presence of the receiver becomes the dominant (obsessive) element of the discourse.” (Genette 1980, 256) To a certain extent then, *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* also play with the conventions of the epistolary novel form. Although we are not lead to believe the narratives are letters, and the fictional narratee is not defined as a particular character to whom the narrators wish to address, the effect is the “thematizing and structuralizing of the reading role” (Hutcheon 1984, 28) characteristic to that genre. One could therefore argue that – like the detective Ono is trying to pre-empt by visiting old acquaintances, and the butler-stranger Stevens meets on the pier – the narratee signified by “you” in the text is another ‘sleight-of-hand,’ a phantasm born of psychological (on the part of the narrator) or formalistic (on the part of the author) necessity.

If “we, the readers, cannot identify ourselves with those fictive narratees anymore than those intradiegetic narrators can address themselves to us, or even assume our existence,” (Genette 1980, 260) then Ishiguro seems to accentuate this isolating distance by thematizing it in the narrative. Indeed this distance is characteristic of such a strategy, as the fictional narratee “is always interposed between the narrator and us,” (Genette 1980, 260) reminding us of our role as a reader, interpreter and critic of the text. Again, this technique aligns the novels with the concerns of metafiction, in which “the reader or the act of reading itself often become thematized parts of the narrative situation, *acknowledged* as having a co-producing function.” (Hutcheon 1984, 37)

Reader-response theorists such as Wolfgang Iser define the meaning of a text a “product of an interaction between the textual signals and the reader’s acts of comprehension,” emphasizing that “the effectiveness of that text” (Iser 1978, 10) depends on the hermeneutic act of reading. Iser defines several types of fictitious reader that are “present in the text by way of a large variety of different signals [but]



not independent of the other textual perspectives, such as narrator, characters, and plot-line.” (Iser 1978, 33) In other words, the text *implies* a reader through the textual elements at his disposal, even if this implied reader himself does not correspond with any actual reader of the novel whose interpretation is guided, but not dictated by the text. Iser insists that this “fictitious reader is, in fact, just one of several perspectives, all of which interlink and interact” and that “the role of the reader emerges from this interplay of perspectives, for he finds himself called upon to mediate between them.” (Iser 1978, 33) In Ishiguro’s novels, the reader is indeed “called upon to mediate” between perspectives, of which the fictional narratee is one. This narratee is really just another character, or another phantasm perhaps, but one whose presence has an important role for actual readers. By giving us cause to consider the reasons for their presence, the narratees guide the actual reader closer to the perspective implied by the text. In other words, the narratee in the text is one means with which the author appeals to the reader’s hermeneutic faculties to consider his own position vis-à-vis the narrators, as well as question what the narrators are trying to tell us and why. We will now look at different instances of these rhetorical characteristics in the narration, what different implications they have for the narrator and what effect this has on the act of reading the novels.

In *An Artist of the Floating World* the way Ono addresses the reader sometimes seems to owe itself to the defense-mechanisms we examined in the first chapter, a displacement of injurious feelings onto another. At one stage he creates a hypothetical situation out of the fictive reader as a way to express something that had clearly happened to him: “If you were to come out of Mrs Kawakami’s as the darkness was setting in, you might feel compelled to pause a moment and gaze at that wasted expanse before you.” (AFW, 27) Here his descriptions of the *unheimlich* ruins of the former pleasure district seem to necessitate a distancing, rhetorical approach, a switch from the first person to the second. Elsewhere in *An Artist of the Floating World*, however, the addresses to the reader take on the effect of manifesting his skepticism towards his own immodesties and contradictions. “You may think I am taking too much credit in relating this small episode; after all the point I was making [...] would occur to anyone with any respect for serious art,” (AFW, 69) Ono says, having clearly exaggerated and maybe invented a story about defending his friend’s artistic integrity. The effect is one of (repressed) acknowledgement, as if he is aware of the pretentiousness of his own words but, instead of retracting them, appeals to a

narratee who shares his concerns for “serious art.” In other words, he is talking to himself. “As I recount this I am aware that Mori-san’s behavior may strike you as somewhat arrogant,” (*AFW*, 139) he reflects at one point, changing from the first to the second person mid-sentence as if to deflect from the tacit realization of his own patriarchal pomposity towards his pupils, that he freely admits were inherited from his former teacher. Given that the fictional narratee most often tends to resemble the narrators themselves in the two novels, we could argue that they are trying to assume the role of reader for us, in an unconscious attempt to pre-empt any misinterpretation of his contradictory statements. Cynthia Wong calls this “the splitting and conjoining of reading and writing selves” which “allow the narrators to produce focused, if limited, versions of their stories.” (Wong 2005, 65)

Ono’s address to the reader on the first page of the novel warrants the close attention. Here, he establishes a narratee who is both a product of Ono’s world but somehow coming to it afresh:

The imposing air of the house will be accounted for, perhaps, if I inform you that it was built by my predecessor, none other than Akira Sugimura. Of course, you may be new to this city, in which case the name [...] may not be familiar to you. But mention it to anyone who lived here before the war and you will learn that [he] was unquestionably one of the city’s most respected and influential men. (*AFW*, 7)

Here Ono constructs an empathetic reader who shares a certain cultural sensibility with him but is as yet unaware of his personal history; only the latter of which of course is true for most actual readers. Ono assumes of the reader a certain deference and awe concerning men of prestige and influence, which only serves to highlight his own strategies to portray himself as such. Indeed, he uses the story of Sugimura’s decline in influence as a way to recontextualize his own fall from grace. Actual readers may not question their position vis-à-vis the addressee (“you”) immediately in the course of these opening paragraphs, but Ono’s repeated appeals to this narratee’s knowledge of (the fictional) Sugimura throughout the novel ring hollow. The more Ono addresses the narratee, the more conspicuous is the silence that greets him. A similar effect is produced, somewhat more comically, when Stevens (who also frets about his professional status) indulges in some namedropping – a roll-call distinguished valets and butlers who have visited Darlington Hall but would be unlikely to impress a reader even if they were real. Appealing to prior knowledge of

these false references also serves to alert actual readers to the fictiveness of what we are reading, but, even though such instances invite us to react critically, they are also vital for the way they establish the narrators' character. We could then argue then that "the reader lives in a world he is forced to acknowledge is fictional [yet] paradoxically the text also demands that he participate, that he engage himself intellectually, imaginatively, and affectively in its creation." (Hutcheon 1984, 7)

When, in 'November, 1949' Ono says, "Perhaps you will agree with me that Kawabe Park is the most rewarding of parks" but that "you will no doubt recall passing certain isolated patches of grass," (AFW, 132–33) he seems to appeal to a reader who is now familiar with the city. I say 'now' because the chapter is dated later than that of Ono's opening address to a reader possibly "new to this city." Later still he invokes "the Izumimachi area, [which] as you may be aware, has become very popular with young couples." (AFW, 156) These references seem to suggest a reader in Ono's mind that shares his own mixed sense of the familiar and the *unheimlich* in a city undergoing enormous rebuilding and transformation. We could argue then that Ono's imagined narratee is an extension of his self, evolving in tandem with him, feeling a stranger in his own city and bearing witness to its changes.

In *The Remains of the Day* this function of the narration is more pronounced, as Stevens constantly seeks understanding from a narratee whose absence becomes increasingly conspicuous as the narrator's worldview becomes more contradictory. Indeed, it is to this imagined reader that Stevens addresses much of his discourse on the nature of great butlers: "If you have ever had the privilege of meeting such men, you will no doubt know of the quality they possess to which I refer." (RD, 29) Stevens thus situates his fictional reader firmly in his psychological "domain," as embodied by the stately home, to the extent where the narratee might be presumed to be a butler himself, not unlike the stranger on the pier at the end of the novel. When Stevens co-opts us into his hierarchical worldview, the gap between us actual readers of the text and the fictional narratee widens. "Such great affairs will always be beyond the understanding of those such as you and I," (RD, 199) he says at one stage, and "the likes of you and I will never be in a position to comprehend the great affairs of today's world, and our best course will always be to put our trust in an employer we judge to be wise and honorable." (RD, 201) While we congratulate ourselves for the fact we do not subscribe to this anachronistic and regressive way of thinking, by making us complicit ("the likes of you and I") we sense nevertheless Ishiguro is

inviting us to consider our own acquiescence to higher forces. As the author says, “to some extent we are all butlers; at an ethical and political level [...] we take our orders, we do our jobs, we accept our place in the hierarchy.” (Matthews 2009, 115) The voice of the butler in *The Remains of the Day* may be parodic, one that invites us to question what Englishness is, but we are also asked to reflect upon the fact that “the average person is a butler in that the most he or she can do with their life is to use their small talents to serve higher interests.” (Lewis 2000, 77)

The addresses to the narratee also prompt actual readers to confront the fact that, even if we aren't literally butlers, as suggested by some of Stevens's pronouncements to this effect, we somehow subscribe to the myth: “You will no doubt agree that the hardest of situations as regards dinner-waiting is when there are just two diners present.” (*RD*, 75) As most people have never had the fortune to be served by a butler, Stevens's asides come across on one hand as absurd and on the other as self-reflexive: from where do our notions of a butler's skills derive, except film, television and literature? At one stage Stevens avails us of his professional secret of listening outside doors before entering, in comically earnest fashion: “You may not be in the habit of taking this small precaution to avoid knocking at some highly inappropriate moment, but I have always been and can vouch that it is common practice.” (*RD*, 98) The inevitable association of such behavior with eavesdropping and voyeurism, amusing for the sincerity that Stevens ascribes to it, brings to mind the early mutoscope film *What the Butler Saw*. The fame of this coin-slot ‘peep-show,’ which featured a woman undressing as if seen unaware through a keyhole, charges the very word *butler* with a certain seaside smuttiness. The parody is made poignant by Stevens's apparent innocence in matters of physical intimacy, and his self-deprivation in the name of professional duty. This self-denial is made manifest, of course, in another instance of hesitating outside a door, listening to Miss Kenton cry yet unable to go to her and stop her leaving Darlington Hall. It is a moment charged with cryptic significance for Stevens, who revisits the memory several times uncertain of its meaning; one in which professional decorum, self-denial and parody converge.

Stevens's debate on great butlering is all the more affecting for the fact that propriety dictates – even in the private realm of his diary – that he can't name himself as a case study for professional excellence. “You will not dispute, I presume [...] perhaps you might be persuaded [...] but you may think me merely biased,” he squirms, before bestowing greatness on his father, who doesn't seem to fit the bill. It

corresponds with Linda Hutcheon's description of Pirandello's *Uno, nessuno, e centomila*, in which the "narrator addresses the reader as if in a soliloquy, bringing him almost onto the stage, as if to invite (but fail at) dialogue." (Hutcheon 1984, 28) David James describes this narrational strategy as "co-opting us as jury members open to being persuaded," concurring that the "change of register is revealing of the connection between characterization and narrative discourse." (James 2009, 62) Stevens's dialogue with an imaginary narratee only highlights the conspicuous silence that greets his rhetoric: like Ono, Stevens is effectively talking to himself. His addresses to the reader draw our attention to the (failed) strategies he employs to deflect focus away from his own desires. In asking the reader to "excuse [his] impropriety in referring to" (*RD*, 50) Miss Kenton by her maiden name, he only highlights his discomfort in using her married name 'Mrs Benn', which is treated with the suspicious fingers of quotation marks. Seonjoo Park suggests the possibility that Stevens's narratee "could be Miss Kenton, considering that Stevens constantly thinks about her and her letter." (Park 2008, 65–66) In another nod to (and subversion of) the genre of the epistolary novel form, one could make a case for Stevens's journal as a kind of letter of reply to Miss Kenton that will, out of professional propriety and emotional cowardice, never be sent.

There are signs that Stevens recognizes the unlikelihood of his narratee sharing his anachronistic worldview. For example, when he says: "I am sure you will agree once I have explained the full context of those days," (*RD*, 73) he seems to acknowledge that the context for the reader has changed as it has for him, even if he could not possibly imagine by how much. By addressing "you" as someone mostly likely the actual reader isn't, the author both challenges us to respond and also makes us complicit in the narrators' worldview. As Iser identifies, when reading we always "think the thoughts of another person [and] whatever these thoughts may be, they must to a greater or lesser degree represent an unfamiliar experience." (Iser 1978, 126) Ishiguro plays on this tension by using a first person to restrict the perspective to one (unreliable) point of view, but instead of inviting us to immerse ourselves in this perspective he reminds us of our status as a reader.

In summary Stevens and Ono's narratees, as characterized by "you," problematize and thematize the reader's role. We know that the "you" being addressed is not us, yet we are still impelled to consider the perspective being offered by it. When Stevens says "I should make clear I would not have dreamt of prying into

these areas were it not that I did have, you might recall, important professional reasons for doing so,” (RD, 246) we *do* recall Stevens’s insistence on professional matters, but the narrator fails to convince us that this all he is interested in. This tension between taking the role of the fictional narratee and then abandoning it seems to be a thematization of the “reader’s continual oscillation between involvement and observation” which enables the reader to experience “the text as a living event.” (Iser 1978, 128)

### **Speech, ideology and ventriloquism**

In his work *The Dialogic Imagination* the Russian philosopher M.M. Bakhtin introduced two terms that have been of enormous influence in literary theory: *heteroglossia* and *dialogism*. The first term is generally understood as the “multiplicity of social voices” or the “social diversity of speech types” (Bakhtin 1981, 263) in the language of the novel. Language according to Bakhtin is never neutral but always bound to ideological and socio-historical forces and thus the novel is “multiform in style and variform in speech and voice.” (Bakhtin 1981, 261) As language is shaped by historical and social forces, “the living utterance [...] cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads [...] it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue.” (Bakhtin 1981, 276) It is thus that Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism was formed in his essay *Discourse in the Novel*, albeit referred to rather obliquely and now generally employed as a term denoting intertextuality – the way novels refer to each other directly and indirectly through style, parody and allusion. The voice of the author, narrators, characters and genre conventions rub up against each other, become “dialogized” in a “tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgements and accents.” (Bakhtin 1981, 276)

These terms are useful tools for readings of *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* due to the pervasive effect of culture and ideology on the narrators’ worldview. We have looked at the way in which this affects their sense of self and of the world around them, now we will look at how this is reflected in their use of language. The issue is complicated by the fact that the earlier novel was written in English but set in Japan, but is relevant to both novels in the sense that they are presented in the first person as the written voice of a historically constituted narrator. Thus the means with which they choose to express themselves tell us a lot about their

social and cultural conditioning. The Bakhtinian reading is useful in that it shows us that language is never exclusively our own, but is always “half someone else's [...] it does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language [...] but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions.” (Bakhtin 1981, 294) By subscribing to what they believe to be national values, and believing their role in society to be a harbinger of those values, the narrators expose themselves as speaking a language that is not fully their own. This tendency has enormous “significance in an individual's ideological becoming,” as “another's discourse performs here [...] to determine the very basis of our ideological interrelations with the world.” (Bakhtin 1981, 342) Furthermore, it is through heteroglossia that we can understand how Ishiguro's narrators always say more than they mean, and in many cases, give us the opposite impression to that intended. As Bakhtin scholar Michael Holquist puts it, “My voice gives the illusion of unity to what I say; I am, in fact, constantly expressing a plenitude of meanings, some intended, others of which I am unaware.” (Bakhtin 1981, xx)

Both novels could be said to thematize Bakhtin's idea that our speech is “overpopulated with the intentions of others” and that “forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process.” (Bakhtin 1981, 294) As we have seen, the narrators struggle to correctly attribute certain expressions to the right person, either projecting their own words onto someone else, or finding themselves appropriating theirs. Further to the implication of this for the narrators' unconscious, as we have already seen, some of these displacements owe themselves to the teacher-pupil, master-servant paradigm, particularly important themes in *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*, respectively.

Ono often finds himself struck that his words are not in fact his own but belong instead to his teacher. After one such instance he remarks that “this is probably another example of my inheriting a characteristic from my former teacher,” (AFW, 178) as if he was consciously presenting another example of what he sees as a ‘natural’ tendency to follow and imitate one's mentor. “It is surely understandable,” he repeats twice in one passage, that the “teacher lose for a moment his sense of proportion and react in ways he later regret.” (AFW, 181) He is referring to his former teacher Mr Moriyama here but throughout the novel we are drawn to parallels – sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit – with his later high-handedness with his own protégé, Kuroda. Unlike at Moriyama's school, however, Kuroda's resistance to

Ono's artistic direction was met by more than ostracism but beatings and imprisonment. His appeals to a natural cycle of tutelage and rebellion ("surely understandable") not only contradict his self-proclaimed quality of being able "to think and judge for myself," (AFW, 69) but belong to someone else. He goes as far to admit this himself when he says "certain inflexions in my voice when I am trying to convey irony or impatience, even whole phrases I am fond of using that people have come to think of as my own [...] are all traits I originally acquired from Mori-san, my former teacher." (AFW, 151) This tendency, also rife in Stevens's narration, is what I will call their ventriloquism, the subjugation of their voice to power and, indeed, the dictates of culture.

Similarly, Ishiguro suggests that the script Ono disingenuously employs at the *miai* to account for his mistakes is a borrowed one, another act of ventriloquism. During the *miai* he remarks that "Dr Saito was watching me rather like a teacher waiting for a pupil to go on with a lesson he has learnt by heart." (AFW, 123) Ono, who seems almost emasculated by Dr Saito's relaxed handling of the marriage negotiations, and is desperate that people believe they have a long-standing acquaintance, feels induced to submit to his counterpart's authority. Ironically, the Saitos seem to be a family liberated from such patriarchal strictures, and Ono's "confession" – perhaps one "he has learnt by heart" from the public figures forced to acknowledge their shame for Japan's catastrophe in the Second World War – is entirely unwarranted. Ono's worldview revolves entirely around the teacher-pupil dichotomy of power and submission, and he is impelled to acquiesce to an imagined will.

Although Ono wishes to depict his betrayal of Moriyama's artistic ideals as a willful act of "going against the sway," (AFW, 69) he ultimately replaces the patriarchy of his mentor for another, that of the state – as represented by his friend Matsuda. When Matsuda first tries to convince him to use his artistic skills to further the interests of Japanese Imperialism, Ono resists by insisting that "an artist's concern is to capture beauty wherever he finds it." (AFW, 172) This we already know is his former teacher's philosophy, one that Ono confuses for its own, despite the fact that his later actions have proved otherwise. At one stage he recounts Mori-san saying, "When I look back over my life and see I have devoted in to the task of capturing the unique beauty of that world, I will believe I will be well satisfied." (AFW, 150– 51) Having speculated that these were not the exact words used, Ono then suggests that



they were his own from another occasion, before finally deciding that it didn't matter because "phrases and expressions which came to be most characteristic of me I actually inherited from Mori-san." (AFW, 151)

This lack of conviction in his own words and ideas allows Ono to be manipulated by Matsuda into working for the state. When Ono parrots his master's life goal to "capture beauty," Matsuda asks him "is that your own personal opinion? Or it what your teacher happened to decree?" (AFW, 88) In another episode, he puts a heroic accent on his memory of leaving the Takeda firm ("all too often men talk of loyalty and follow blindly," AFW, 72), rewriting his memories with a new language of independence that owes itself in part to Matsuda's insinuations. Thus Ono's recurrent address to the teacher-pupil relationship, and its companion themes of gaining independence and thinking for oneself, show him to be without a language of his own. Instead his words belong to his former teacher and, moreover, to the cultural ideology that naturalises notions of hierarchy, power and submission. The Japanese word *sensei* – which is employed by Ono and his fellow pupils in reference to Moriyama, and in Ono's memories of his own pupils kowtowing to him – is more nuanced than the English word 'teacher'. The word comprises *sen* meaning "previous," and *sei* meaning "birth," which normally denotes someone who has mastered a particular discipline through past experience. The author's use of this Japanese term instead of a translated equivalent serves as an obvious, perhaps parodic, signifier of Japaneseness in the Western consciousness (not least for its association with martial arts). Moreover its implication of previous birth becomes charged with additional significance when we consider that Ono's notions of artistic integrity and the teacher's prerogative are inherited from his former master. Moreover, in modern Japan the word *sensei* tends to denote sycophancy or the exaggerated adulation of a leader figure, and is often said sarcastically or treated with *katakana*, the equivalent of quote marks, in print. No such indicators of irony are employed in Ono's (perhaps dubious) recollections of his fawning pupils who praise their "Sensei's modest nature." (AFW, 25)

In the passages describing Moriyama's treatment of traitors Ono could equally be describing his own attitudes and actions. Ono constantly interrupts his memories of being a pupil under Moriyama, concerned that he is portraying him as "arrogant" or "high-handed," because his identity is so confused with that of his former teacher. "Sometimes, when one has nurtured a gifted pupil long and hard," Ono says – reverting to "one" here in order to naturalize the statement, to make it self-evident –

“it is difficult to see any such maturing of talent as anything other than treachery, and some regrettable situations are to arise.” (AFW, 142) Again, these appeals to a particular discourse, one likely not shared by the reader, is another manifestation of the novel’s postmodern qualities. As Elizabeth Ermarth argues of the postmodern novel, the “‘neutrality’ that language might once have appeared to possess remains conspicuously absent [...] language means residence in a particular discourse.” (Ermarth 1997, 48)

Like Ono, Stevens is out of step with the times, dismissing the socialism of ordinary people he meets on his road trip as “idealistic,” (RD, 204) privately castigating them for having “strong opinions” when there is “a real limit to how much [they] can learn and know.” (RD, 204) However, he is revealed to be parroting sentiments made by Lord Darlington himself, who says the “world’s a complicated place” and that “the man in the street can’t be expected to know enough about politics, economics and what have you.” (RD, 209) Stevens acknowledges that these anti-democratic opinions sound, in retrospect, “odd – even, at times, unattractive,” without recognizing that this is how his own opinions sound for being identical. Stevens and Ono’s ventriloquism is like the simpleton Hirayama boy in *An Artist of the Floating World* who is praised before the war for singing nationalistic songs but beaten up for doing the same thing after the Japanese defeat. “Nobody minded idiots in those days,” (AFW, 61) Ono reflects tellingly on the boy’s pre-war favour. He and Stevens realize it is now best to keep their Imperial pride private, but the language of their diaries reveals them to be – like the Hirayama boy – incapable of changing their tune.

Another aspect of the narration of both novels is the proliferation of circumlocutions and equivocal rhetoric. As we have already discussed, these intrusions have the effect of reminding us we are reading a text, not an unmediated experience of the world. They also draw the attention to “the semantic, syntactic, and often also phonetic structure of the words which actually serve to structure as well as to constitute the work.” (Hutcheon 1984, 199) Moreover, the invasion of rhetorical and syntactic techniques reflects the way the narrators’ sense of propriety introduces “alien words, value judgements and accents” (Bakhtin 1981, 276) into their voice. This “hesitancy,” as David James says, “is more than a verbal tic. It is freighted with history, betraying a speaker who has become a victim of his own rhetorical propriety.” (James 2009, 62)

*An Artist of the Floating World* begins with two conditional sentences, and the destabilising tone of equivocation rarely ceases to pervade the text. If we take one of Ono's pronouncements elsewhere in the novel, we can see the way his language becomes strained under a landslide of qualifications (the emphasis is mine):

*Of course*, I do not pretend certain moments of that evening were not painful for me; *nor* do I claim I would so easily have made the sort of declaration that I did concerning the past had circumstances not impressed upon me the prudence of doing so. *Having said this, I must say* I find it hard to understand how any man who values his self-respect would wish for long to avoid responsibility for his past deeds; *it may not always be* an easy thing, but there is *certainly* a satisfaction and dignity to be gained in coming to terms with the mistakes one has made in the course of one's life. *In any case, there is surely no great shame* in mistakes made in the best of faith. *It is surely* a thing far more shameful to be unable or unwilling to acknowledge them. (AFW, 125)

Here we can see how Ono's appeals to self-evidence ("of course," "certainly," "surely"), rhetorical interventions ("*having said this*," "*in any case*") and modalizing phrases ("I *must* say," "it *may* not always be") all serve to disguise the absence of substance to his words. From his narration Ono would give the impression of a formidable interlocutor or orator, but given we are reading a written account, these syntactical strategies seem only attempts at obfuscating the fact that he repents, consciously at least, very little. Indeed, it takes closer reading to realize that Ono isn't really expressing regret after all, but reconfiguring his actions as triumphs. This is one example of the way in which the narrators' "language sometimes becomes overstrained to the point of collapse." (Matthews and Groes, 2009, 7)

Elsewhere in *An Artist of the Floating World* we frequently come across Ono's use of "suppose" to denote uncertainty, temper the significance of what he is saying or, in many cases, distance himself from his own spite:

I *suppose* I do not on the whole greatly admire the Tortoises of this world. While *one may appreciate* their plodding steadiness and ability to survive, *one suspects* their lack of frankness, their capacity for treachery. And *I suppose, in the end, one despises* their unwillingness to take chances in the name of ambition or for the sake of a principle they claim to believe in. (AFW, 159)

Here he switches from "I" to "one," shielding himself with the qualifying "suppose," to express his anger and jealousy at being abandoned by those whose reputations have

survived the war untarnished. It is propriety that stops him, even in the private realm of his diary, from saying *I suspect* or *I despise*. After all, what is such verbal propriety but the “tendency to assimilate others’ discourse [...] to determine the very basis of our ideological interrelations with the world.” (Bakhtin 1981, 342) This is, of course, ironized by the fact that Ono is accusing others of a lack of frankness, when decorum dictates that he can’t say frankly what he really means.

It is propriety that also characterizes the false modesty of the narrators of the two novels. As we have seen, Ono is at pains to deny his awareness of his own social standing, but yet his repetition of this claim becomes almost robotic. At one stage he says, “I am often surprised afresh when some event, or something someone may say, reminds me of the rather high esteem in which I am held,” and at another, “It was I suppose, another of those instances when one is struck by the realization that one is held in rather higher esteem than one supposed.” (AFW, 64) The rigidity of Ono’s pronouncements and the effect of propriety on his immodesty show him to be invoking what Bakhtin called “the hegemony of a single and unitary language.” (Bakhtin 1981, 367) In adopting the third person *one* in particular, both Ono and Stevens are invoking cultural myths concerning decorum and notions of esteem that have been called into question. Both are subject to what Bakhtin calls “the absolute hegemony of myth over language as well as the hegemony of language over the perception and conceptualization of reality.” (Bakhtin 1981, 369)

Stevens’s syntactical style is also characterized by circumlocutory prevarications, although his modesty is perhaps sincerer than Ono’s. At one stage he says, “if you consider the pressures contingent on me that night, *you may not think I delude myself unduly if I go as far as to suggest that I did perhaps display, in the face of everything, at least in some modest degree a ‘dignity’ worthy of [...] my father.*” (RD, 115, my emphasis) The stacking up of qualifying expressions reflects the tension between Stevens’s repressive sense of propriety and his frustration at lack of professional recognition. Those two forces seem to stretch the sentence to breaking point and alert the reader to precisely what is behind the language, not within it. If “language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions,” (Bakhtin 1982, 294) then Stevens and Ono’s circumlocutions reflect their attempt and failure to neutralize language of its anterior meanings and suggestions. Take for instance, Stevens’s unprompted insistences to the reader that his motive for seeing Miss Kenton is purely professional in nature. “But let

me make it immediately clear what I mean by this; what I mean to say is that [...]”(RD, 5) he blunders, alerting the reader to the unintended nuances of what he is saying.

While we could argue that a Bakhtinian reading of the language in *An Artist of the Floating World* is undermined by the fact it was written in English but set in Japan, there is no doubting the use of applying his theory of heteroglossia to the novel, in displaying “a diversity of social speech types.” (Bakhtin 1981, 262) If Ono’s voice resembles Stevens’s at times, it is because he shares to a degree his English counterpart’s snobbishness. However, Japanese words and rhetorical features punctuate the text, dialogizing them with English. When characters begin their exchanges with ‘Forgive me’, it not only denotes some of the hierarchical deference we associate with Japan – albeit likely through literature and film – but it sheds light on its similarity to the “sealed off” (Bakhtin 1981, 368) language of Britain’s upper echelons as represented by Darlington Hall.

Ono and Stevens use similar expressions, indeed are in dialogue with each other. At one stage Ono reflects that “Naturally, I did not allow the young man’s words to upset me unduly,” (AFW, 114) which is echoed in Stevens’s frequent use of the same word (“you may not think I delude myself unduly,” RD, 115). Indeed, Ono’s insistence on his “duty as a father” (AFW, 114) recalls Stevens’s constant reference to “professional duty” as a self-governing principle. In order to retain his dignity Ono must, like Stevens, carry out his duties. These dialogic echoes are perhaps unsurprising when we take into account Ishiguro’s claim that his first three novels (including his debut, *A Pale View of Hills*, 1982) were “three attempts to write the same book,” (Jaggi 1995, 28) and joked that *The Remains of the Day* could be called “The Butler of the Floating World.” (Clee 1989, 1327) That Ishiguro’s first three novels are “full of family resemblances” and constitute “an informal trilogy” – each novel most closely resembling the last (Lewis 2000, 133) – underlines the author’s priority of theme over context.

Although the language of *An Artist of the Floating World* could be said to be inauthentic, there is nothing about the language in *The Remains of the Day* which could be said to be more real or natural. Motoyuki Shibata and Motoko Sugano argue that “the use of speech inflections” in the earlier novel such as ‘Forgive me’ “reinforces Japaneseness in the translation, but it is a Japaneseness constructed through the fictional and cinematic worlds provided by [Yasujirō] Ozu and Akira

Kurosawa.” (Shibata and Sugano 2009, 27) However, the English of *The Remains of the Day* seems equally (rein)forced, curiously exaggerated. Indeed, some critics have pointed out that Stevens “speaks English as if it were a foreign language” because he feels obliged “to pretend that he is complicit with the class he serves.” (Lewis 2000, 94) As in our discussion on role-playing, Stevens does not just inhabit a role “as though it were nothing more than a pantomime costume,” (*RD*, 178) but the deception extends to the way he speaks too. In this context, his claim that he reads sentimental romances as “an extremely efficient way to maintain and develop one’s command of the English language,” (*RD*, 176) is given an unlikely credence.

Given that Stevens says his father does not possess attributes of “a superficial and decorative order” such as “good accent and command of language,” (*RD*, 35) we can only assume the language Stevens speaks is an acquired one, not the language of his childhood (a remote, undiscussed place in the novel). Despite having identified a butler’s display of such verbal skills as “superficial,” this is exactly how he speaks, and we could even assume that the difference in the two men’s use of language is one of the sources of “mutual embarrassment” (*RD*, 66) between them. When Stevens goes to tell his ailing father that his duties at Darlington Hall must be reduced, his father’s responses are terse to say the least. “Relate it briefly and concisely. I haven’t got all morning to listen to you chatter,” he says, to which Stevens responds “I will do my best to comply.” (*RD*, 68) His robotically formal reaction to his father’s hostility, that Steven’s tries to spin as “esteem for conciseness,” (*RD*, 68) highlights the gulf between their modes of speaking. Given that his father was an inarticulate man, we can deduce that Stevens learnt his verbose powers of self-expression from the ruling class he serves; indeed, like a “foreign language.”

When Stevens senior is dying, however, Stevens has no language to respond to his father’s emotional frankness, repeating more or less the same sentence (“I’m very glad Father is feeling better,” *RD*, 101) three times. Stevens’s inadequacy to find a verbal register suitable for confronting his dying father may also help us understand the omissions and silences common to both novels. If, as Ludwig Wittgenstein said, we can only conceive what we have language for, then maybe some of Ono and Stevens’s feelings are “‘anterior to language’ or inaccessible to the conscience and consciousness.” (Wong 2005, 45) While certain things remain repressed, the narrators have no language equal to expressing them. This instance of verbal repetition is charged with a special resonance when Lord Darlington and some male guests invite

him to respond to a series of questions pertaining to the economy. The aim of the guests is to prove that the ordinary man can have no opinion of value on the bigger issues affecting the nation. Despite recounting that he was in fact – after the initial surprise of being asked – able to offer an intelligent response, Stevens does what he thinks what Lord Darlington wants him to do – i.e., play the fool. “I’m very sorry, sir, but I am unable to be of assistance on this matter” (*RD*, 205) he answers robotically to three separate questions, an act of submissive ventriloquism that provides much amusement to Lord Darlington’s cronies. In other instances, however, the repetition shows him to be struggling to find a language suitable for the feelings of loss he is experiencing. At one point he considers what could have happened (albeit without being explicit) between him and Miss Kenton if he hadn’t alienated her with his behaviour, he repeats twice: “what is the sense in forever speculating?” (*RD*, 188)

When Stevens’s father dies, he declines to go up and see him on his death bed, having become embroiled in a demeaning (indeed, undignified) mission to attend to a temperamental French minister’s sore feet, saying ““please don’t think me unduly improper in not ascending to see my father in his deceased condition just at this moment.”” (*RD*, 111) Here we see in the use of language, at once formal and euphemistic (“unduly improper ... deceased condition”), how he is unable to step out of the professional mode that is so preoccupying him, and the linguistic strategies he employs to distance himself from emotional pain. Bakhtin refers to the “vast plenitude of national and [...] social languages – all of which are equally capable of being “languages of truth,” but [...] all of which are equally relative, reified and limited, as they are merely the languages of social groups, professions and other cross-sections of everyday life.” (Bakhtin 1981, 367) Stevens only speaks a language of his social group and profession, trying to deny it the heteroglossia of other speech types. Stevens’s “euphemisms and circumlocutions” thus form a “mask [that] hides his feelings, and his inward self, behind the façade of the fastidious butler.” (Lewis 2000, 95) “By its idiom of reserve,” David James echoes, “the novel paradoxically alerts us to all that lies beneath: the verbal convolutions that allow Stevens to elide his emotional responsibilities.” (James 2009, 57) In Bakhtin’s view, language “becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention.” (Bakhtin 1981, 294) Because of an oppressive sense of professional

propriety, Stevens is never able to do this, forcing all his expressive needs into “the hegemony of a single and unitary language.” (Bakhtin 1981, 367)

That Stevens’s English is a foreign language to him is thematized in the narrative when Stevens is alarmed by his new employer Mr Farraday’s “propensity to talk with [him] in a bantering tone.” (*RD*, 13) Finding that his attempts to engage in such an exchange resulted in awkwardness and embarrassment, Stevens sets about improving: “I have been endeavouring to add this skill to my professional armoury so as to fulfill with confidence all Mr Farraday’s expectations with respect to bantering.” (*RD*, 138) That he employs the word “armoury” is telling for it reminds us of the protective shell, like a suit, he adopts to defend and mask his “off-duty” self from “the presence of others.” (*RD*, 178) Moreover, his inability to see that such conversation is not something that can or should be learnt as a professional skill has a tragicomic pathos. As David James argues, Stevens’s “comic persistence in pursuing self-improvement by learning the art of witty conversation” has a poignant effect on the novel as the reader becomes receptive to the “affecting inevitability of [his] personal outcomes.” (James 2009, 57) Indeed, the very word ‘bantering’ suggests the alien quality of such exchanges to Stevens, as if he had reached for a dictionary (or indeed, the *Britannica*) to find out what it was Mr Farraday was doing. As David James says, Stevens’s “assuming verbal idioms that he knows he cannot expertly use” is an ironic implication on behalf of the author “that ‘bantering’ is actually less of an artifice than the professional ‘dignity’ that Stevens holds in such high esteem.” (James 2009, 64)

When he says “bantering is not a duty I feel I can ever discharge with enthusiasm,” (*RD*, 16) the word discharge has a dual quality of sounding at once military and corporeal. The former would echo his allusion to an “armoury” of professional skills, while the latter – with its connotations of bodily functions – would reflect something of the distaste with which he seems to consider it. The unintended multiplicity of meaning in his words reflects the fact that we are “constantly expressing a plenitude of meanings, some intended, others of which [we are] unaware.” (Holquist 1981, xx) Stevens is thus “both an inadequate and an unreliable narrator,” (Mullen 2009, 64) using too many words to express himself, and giving off unintended meanings in the process.

Stevens’s suspicion towards bantering, and the otherness the very word holds for him, is mirrored in part by his treatment of idioms in the narrative. He uses very few, and when he does, treats them with quotation marks as if they indeed belonged to



another language, as Ono does when he speaks of a “love match” (*AFW*, 18) in the earlier novel. Stevens refers to Mr Farraday’s “kind offer to ‘foot the bill for the gas’” (*RD*, 13) as if the American idiom should be treated as categorically outside of his own lexicon. When recounting preparations for a big political meeting at Darlington Hall he says “there was little time for ‘beating around the bush,’” (*RD*, 81) again to exclude the idiom from his professional or national lexicon. Yet, when Lord Darlington charges him with the task of relaying the facts of life to the young Mr Cardinal, surely a distraction from his principle duties, he resorts to emerging from behind a rhododendron bush to feign an accidental meeting. Here, as Barry Lewis observes, “the idiom is squeezed to the point where it almost becomes literal.” (Lewis 2000, 109) This linguistic play leads us back to the concerns of the postmodern novel, “demonstrating [its] awareness of both the limits and the power” (Hutcheon 1984, 23) of language, and drawing the reader’s attention to the fact that “he is reading words, words with their different textures and meanings.” (Hutcheon 1984, 118) This sentiment is echoed by Iain Chambers, who observes that, in “acknowledging the mechanisms of language [...] we also perceive that what is being represented is already in quotation marks, already a representation.” (Chambers 1997, 81) Moreover, it infers a heteroglossia of language that Stevens attempts to subjugate to an “absolute form of thought.” (Bakhtin 1982, 367) For Stevens, ‘beating around the bush’ is perhaps too abstract, too dissimilar to the context to which the idiom ordinarily attaches itself, ironized by its being made literal in the text.

At the end of the novel Stevens remarks of his conversation with the butler-stranger that “the man had been speaking figuratively, but it is rather interesting to see his words borne out so immediately at the literal level.” (*RD*, 253) Again Ishiguro adds a self-reflexive touch: Stevens may be surprised that such an abstract expression can conjure an image, but the author’s play here suggests that all words are “various ‘sleights-of-hand’ – the equivalent of a conjuror’s.” (*RD*, 254) As subtly postmodern novels, *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* represent a “reexamination” of the “constraint of language to primarily symbolic function.” (Ermarth 1997, 50) After all, so much of Ono and Stevens’s story is outside the words, anterior to their language. Of course, sometimes language “actually brings out something which is not stated by linguistic signs, and, indeed, it shows that what is meant is the opposite of what is said.” (Iser 1978, 121) This doubt is doubly reflected in the ‘hints’ in Miss Kenton’s letter which Stevens later casts doubts on, and the

phrases he attributes to her that she denies. These form the motivation for the trip that structures the narrative and give life to the novel; yet, like the Saito family's detective in *An Artist of the Floating World*, it is possible that this instigating spark is a literary conceit. Ishiguro himself 'hints' that it doesn't matter, words are conjuring tricks that "cause a thing to occur at just the right time and place." (*RD*, 254)

As we have seen, Ishiguro adopts a number of strategies to explore the ways in which culture and our means of representing it distort our worldview. The narrators of *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* believe themselves to be autonomous rational beings but instead are depicted as products of their own time and place, rendered anachronistic by social forces that have changed the context around them. Despite the eloquence with which the narrators tell their stories, the language they use is exposed as dictated by ideology, an act of ventriloquism. The elements of parody and genre experiment (the novel in the form of a diary, the epistolary novel, the detective story) serve to engage and undermine the reader, making us complicit in the process of storytelling and myth-making behind our constructions of culture and national identity.



#### ***Chapter Four: Loyalty, nation and empire***

*An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* operate on a metaphoric level for the collapse and humiliation of empires (British and Japanese) and explore the role of naivety and denial in, and after, their decline. Situated at periods of cultural transition, the narrators embody the self-deception and regret of the generation whose social values are about to be largely replaced. They struggle to maintain their faith in notions of service and loyalty to the nation now that history has shown them to have mispent their talents. These depictions of hierarchy and subordination are constructed to make the reader consider the role such servility plays in acts of greater wrongdoing, and examine the often contradictory assumptions behind democracy, imperialism and nationalism during the period. The recurrent address to this dichotomy of domination and submission, with its concurrent threat of cultural exile, aligns Ishiguro's writing with the concerns of postcolonial literatures.

Ono and Stevens are found convincing themselves – in different ways – of their role to play in the important affairs of state. However, now that the present has shown the politics of the past to have been discredited, they attempt to distance themselves from culpability. That the narrators are apparently unaware of these contradictory states of thinking leads the reader to consider the role of nations – Japanese and British – in deluding their citizens to their grandeur. This delusion is played out on a private and historical level in both novels. Ishiguro tests the boundaries of our compassion for these men while implicitly asking readers if they would have acted differently. Despite the narrators' claims to have been masters of their own destiny, and to have practised their professions at the highest level, history finally proves them not to have been exceptional after all, but all too ordinary.

#### **Domination, exile and hybridity**

Ishiguro has often been associated with postcolonial literatures, even if he does not fit that genre's traditional definition of writers originating from territories previously colonized by Britain or other European nations. Ishiguro left Japan when he was five years old and said he "had a happy childhood" (Jaggi 1995, 23) in his adopted home of the UK. Nevertheless, a number of Ishiguro's concerns overlap with postcolonial discourses, some of which we have already touched upon. *An Artist of the Floating*

*World* and *The Remains of the Day* explicitly share the “concern with place and displacement” that the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* define as a “special post-colonial crisis of identity [...] the concern with the development or recovery of an effective relationship between self and place.” (Ashcroft and Griffiths 2002, 8) While Stevens and Ono have not been displaced from their country of origin in geographic terms, they indeed find themselves uprooted from their sense of home, alienated in their own culture at a time of social upheaval. Furthermore, the novels reflect “a pervasive concern with the myths of identity and authenticity” shared by postcolonial writers, as well as – as I have argued of Stevens in *The Remains of the Day* – the “control over language” by an “imperial education system [which] installs a ‘standard’ version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalizes all ‘variants’ as impurities.” (Ashcroft and Griffiths 2002, 7–9)

It is in this light that some critics view Ishiguro “as a kind of writer of exile,” asserting that his own childhood experience as an immigrant informs “the emotional exile of his characters.” (Wong 2005, 6) Ishiguro has described himself “as a kind of homeless writer,” claiming “I had no obvious social role, because I wasn’t a very English Englishman and I wasn’t a very Japanese Japanese either.” (Oe and Ishiguro 1991, 82–83) Other critics have pointed to Ishiguro’s ‘homelessness’ as the mark of a truly international writer, “neither Japanese nor English, somewhere in-between departure and arrival, nostalgia and anticipation.” (Lewis 2000, 1) Thus, whereas Ishiguro does not originate from the former colony of a European power, nor was his relocation to Britain one of economic migration or flight from oppression, his hybrid cultural experience makes him feel “stuck on the margins,” (Vorda 1993, 12) and “thereby aligning himself with the postcolonial emphasis on the marginal, the liminal, the excluded.” (Lewis 2000, 13) Salman Rushdie, perhaps the most lauded of all post-colonial writers, captures the mood of Ishiguro’s novels best in describing his literary contemporaries:

It may be argued that the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity. Which seems to me self-evidently true; but I suggest that the writer who is out-of-country and even out-of-language may experience this loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity, of his being ‘elsewhere’. This may enable him to speak properly and concretely on a subject of universal significance and appeal. (Rushdie 2010, 12)

For Ono and Stevens, the past is indeed like “a country” from which they have “emigrated” and can never return. This sense of loss is felt even more keenly now that they experience their own nation as “elsewhere.” For Ishiguro “the creative process [i]s more to do with regret or melancholy. I don’t feel like I’ve regretted not having grown up in Japan [...] But it’s to do with the strong emotional relationships I had in Japan that were suddenly severed at a formative age, particularly with my grandfather.” (Jaggi 1995, 23) Regret and melancholy, preoccupation with the past, and national belonging are key themes in the novels, particularly manifest in the theme of exile.

As we saw in the first chapter, the post-war landscape for Ono and Stevens is an *unheimlich* one in which they feel increasingly estranged from their sense of home. Yet, through the narrators’ memories, Ishiguro also depicts cultures which have always sought to exclude and marginalize those “going against the sway,” (AFW, 69) as Ono puts it. In *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ono’s post-war ostracism is mirrored in his recollections of Moriyama’s school, where Ishiguro creates a patriarchal micro-society where disloyalty is punished by exile. At one stage, his friend the Tortoise is admonished by his fellow students and pleads for patience: “I beg you to be patient with me. It is my greatest wish to learn from you, my superior colleagues [...] I will do all I can to improve my poor standing in your eyes. I beg you to forgive me and to be patient a while longer.” (AFW, 68) Belonging and acceptance, and the provisional status of both, provide one of the novel’s key tensions.

Ono recalls that if his teacher’s protégé Sasaki would “suggest a person’s painting was in any way ‘disloyal’ to our teacher, this would almost always lead to immediate capitulation on the part of the offender.” (AFW, 140) Sasaki, however, finds himself accused of disloyalty when his artistic priorities diverge from that of Mori-san’s. The price the former protégé pays for this is exile from Moriyama’s villa, and Ono recalls Sasaki’s appeals to his fellow students when finally forced to leave during the night: “what has hurt me the most has been your refusal to give me even one word of comfort [...] won’t you even look at me now and wish me well?” (AFW, 143) This memory ends without comment from Ono, the questions met with a silence that we could call both intra- and extradiegetic, suggesting something particularly troublesome for him about this episode. Perhaps the words have become charged with significance for Ono now that he finds himself in a kind of exile in post-war Japan. Or has he once again displaced the words of another to fit this context, perhaps from his

own ignominious exit from the school, or even from his betrayal of Kuroda? Indeed, when he too is accused of betrayal, he says to Mori-san, “I have been unable to have a single conversation with any of [my fellow students] over these past few days. When I enter the room, people go silent or else leave the room altogether.” (*AFW*, 176) That Ono has no answers for the questions that Sasaki poses perhaps reflects an unconscious recognition of his own hypocrisy. How can he complain about being ostracized when he has clearly shown he subscribes to a dichotomy of subordination and treachery, and the use of exile as a punishment, which of course is a political tool for oppressive regimes such as the Japanese imperialists?

If Mori-san’s school represents a micro-society in which the real-world forces of subordination and submission are played out with less serious consequences, Ono’s adherence to these values acquires a more sinister hue in his recollections of the 1930s. Ono recalls that patrons at the Migi-Hidari bar who were seen as “incompatible” with the patriotic spirit “would be firmly encouraged to leave,” (*AFW*, 63) and that if his pupils “were imposed on by [...] someone with disagreeable views, they would be quick to squeeze him out.” (*AFW*, 74) Furthermore, his attempts to approach Kuroda to pre-empt any enquiries by a detective are met with bitter anger by one of his former protégé’s pupils. “Traitor. That’s what they called him. Traitor. Every minute of every day,” Enchi rails against Ono, “But now we know who the real traitors were.” (*AFW*, 113) Kuroda’s exile – his imprisonment and beatings – for disloyalty to the nation show the accusations of betrayal at Mr Moriyama’s school to be almost play-acting by comparison. Some post-colonial critics see exile and nationalism as “conflicting poles of feeling that correspond to more aesthetic conflicts: artistic iconoclasm and communal assent, the unique vision and the collective truth.” (Brennan 2002, 61) These “poles of feeling” are key tensions for Ono, who struggles to reconcile his views on obedience to the teacher and “going against the sway;” (*AFW*, 69) between self-determination and serving the nation; between iconoclasm and conformity; between loyalty and betrayal.

Ono’s sense of exile in the present of the novel is evident in his visits to Mrs Kawakami’s bar, where he and Shintaro are the only customers until they fall out, and the bar is later sold to developers. At one stage Shintaro recounts a story in which he is shunned by an old acquaintance:

‘... just the other day, I greeted someone in the street, thinking it was someone I knew. But the man obviously thought I was a madman. He just walked away without replying!’ (*AFW*, 75)

As we have seen, it is not clear if Shintaro is really a fool or just playing one, laughing loudly at his story while “Mrs Kawakami smiled, but did not join in.” (*AFW*, 75) Tellingly, Ono does not comment on the significance of Shintaro’s tale either, unable or unwilling to acknowledge his post-war loss of reputation. Later in the novel Ono cedes, “I rather suspect that Shintaro was never quite the unworldly sort he would have us believe,” accusing him of pretending “to be hopelessly lost.” (*AFW*, 125) Another of Ono’s displacements, the idea of pretending to be “hopelessly lost” instead reflects his own condition of exile, which he no longer has even Shintaro to share. The accusation “unworldly” is also significant, for its connotations of displacement as well as naiveté. As one critic puts it, Ono is “a character who was really no longer part of the present world in which he found himself.” (Wong 2005, 42)

Stevens too finds himself estranged in post-war England and among the ordinary people he “never knew existed,” (Lewis 2000, 6) experiencing the nation as if through the eyes of someone returning after years of incarceration. Indeed, when Mr Farraday proposes Stevens take a break, he asks him “how do you ever get to see this beautiful country” while “locked up in these big houses.” (*RD*, 4) Farraday’s use of the words “locked up,” echoed by Miss Kenton’s later remark that Stevens’s room “resembles a prison cell,” (*RD*, 174) implies that his deprivation is not just emotional, but physical and spatial as well. Stevens tells us of his precaution of hesitating outside doors as a matter of professional pride, but as a member of the service class he will always be excluded, required to knock before entering.

Stevens thus seems blind to the fact that the values of the elite which he holds dear are the very same ones that deny him full access to his own culture. This is most clearly thematized, as we have already discussed, in Stevens’s treatises on ‘dignity,’ which derive, tellingly, from a secretive, members-only society. The somewhat cryptic membership criterion for The Hayes Society, Seonjoo Park argues, reflects the fact that “the status of his membership in ‘Englishness’ is dubious. Stevens obviously belongs to Darlington Hall; however, at the same time, he is hopelessly excluded, segregated, exiled in a prison cell within the house. National discourse alienates marginal people like Stevens, particularly when they try to obtain entry into it.” (Park 2008, 52) Stevens, who speaks a language which is not entirely his own, and who is



“locked up” in Darlington Hall, has in effect been colonized by classist hierarchy. Even pretending to be a real gentleman in Moscombe, he observes “it was no easy task to suppress the instinct to add ‘sir,’” (RD, 201) when addressing Dr Carlisle.

Like Ono, Stevens plays his own role in maintaining this culture of subordination. At one stage he describes the tendency of employees to “marry one another and leave the profession” as “a serious threat to the order of the house.” (RD, 53) This sentiment and rhetoric are echoed when Stevens is obliged by Lord Darlington to reduce his father’s duties as he “represents an ever-present threat to the smooth running of this household.” (RD, 68) These passages seem to show that Stevens has been indoctrinated by Darlington in the belief that the household represents the nation, and any threats to its smooth functioning are a threat to “order.” Elsewhere he admonishes Miss Kenton for the “inappropriateness of someone such as yourself talking “down” to one such as my father” (RD, 56) – i.e., addressing him by his Christian name – and urges her to “conduct yourself in a manner befitting your position” (RD, 157) when she expresses concern over the sacking of two Jewish maids. That subordination and loyalty are recurrent themes again aligns the novels with the concerns of much postmodern fiction, which is “inextricably bound up with a critique of domination.” (Wellbery 1985, 84) If, as we have seen, *The Remains of the Day* parodies, among other things, the nineteenth century novel, then Darlington Hall recalls the county house setting of works by the likes of Jane Austen. As Edward Said observed of *Mansfield Park*, “More clearly than anywhere else in her fiction, Austen here synchronizes domestic with international authority, making it plain that the values associated with such higher things as ordination, law and propriety must be grounded firmly in actual rule over and possession of territory.” (Said 1993, 87) Stevens’s participation in a system of domestic subordination becomes synchronized, as we will see, with Britain’s domination over its colonies.

Despite their prior adherence to a culture of domination, after the Second World War both Stevens and Ono find themselves exiled from their nation and thus their sense of home, a key concern to postcolonial literatures, in which “the division between exile and nationalism [...] presents itself as one not only between individual and group, but between loser and winner, between a mood of rejection and a mood of celebration.” (Brennan 2002, 61) Whilst the settings of the two novels set them apart from what might be considered traditional postcolonial concerns, Ishiguro’s writing reflects the “ambivalence and hybridity [that] have continued to be useful amongst

post-colonial critics because they provide a subtler and more nuanced view of colonial subjectivity and colonial relationships than the usual ‘us’ and ‘them’ distinctions.” (Ashcroft and Griffiths 2002, 206) This “ambivalence of the nation as a narrative strategy,” (Bhabha 2002, 292) is not just felt by those peoples from former colonies but all those “who have been forced by cultural displacement to accept the provisional nature of all truths.” (Rushdie 2010, 11–12) Ishiguro’s hybrid cultural experience drives a vision of the world in which social mores appear contrived, national truths provisional. As we have seen, the author feels that such mores are “artificial constructs that don’t carry over necessarily to a different culture,” (Wachtel 1996, 23) and his own sense of ambivalence about them – feeling “stuck on the margins” – is thematized by narrators who find themselves marginalized. Furthermore, as Barry Lewis observes, Ishiguro’s “hybrid upbringing probably also accounts for why his novels are often located in transitional moments of history, when one set of values is replaced by another,” (Lewis 2000, 144) and that Ono and Stevens’s “homeless minds make them perfect representatives of the century of displacement.” (Lewis 2000, 7) Cynthia Wong concurs, claiming that “Ishiguro is regarded by his critics in Britain and abroad as both insider and outsider, as well as reader and writer of the cultures he explores.” (Wong 2005, 20)

What is striking about Ono and Stevens is not their difference – the “usual ‘us’ and ‘them’ distinctions” that characterize thinking about the Japanese as ‘others’ in particular – but their similarity. As Ishiguro seeks universal themes that transcend notions of Englishness or Japaneseness, his works challenge the ‘Orientalist’ Western view of the world as defined and critiqued by Edward Said. As Said observed, “throughout the exchange between Europeans and their “others” that began systematically half a millennium ago, the one idea that has scarcely varied is that there is an ‘us’ and a ‘them,’” yet, “partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic.” (Said 1993, xxv)

*The Remains of the Day* is “frequently perceived as [...] attacking the imperial pretensions of a fading British Empire,” (Lewis 2000, 14) while Ishiguro has said that his writing was informed by the view that ““Britain is not the center of the universe.”” (Vorda 1993, 139) As we have seen though, Ishiguro prioritizes the universal over the local, and the two novels have many overlapping themes, despite their divergent cultural contexts. Ishiguro sees *An Artist of the Floating World* as being about “the

need to follow leaders and the need to exercise power over subordinates, as a sort of motor by which society operates,” but insists that readers “look at this not just as a Japanese phenomenon but as a human phenomenon.” (Mason 1989, 342) While Ishiguro is no apologist for the crimes committed in the name of Japanese and British imperial ambitions, one can imagine he concurs with Said’s view that “there is in all nationally defined cultures [...] an inspiration to sovereignty, to sway, to dominance.” (Said 1993, 15) Indeed, “following leaders and exercising power over subordinates” is of crucial importance to the later novel too, as it is to many nations and, particularly, empires.

Edward Said observed that while “the grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment mobilized people in the colonial world to rise up and throw off imperial subjection; in the process, many Europeans and Americans were also stirred by these stories and their protagonists, and they too fought for new narratives of equality and human community.” (Said 1993, xiii) Ishiguro’s novels certainly seem to fit this mould. Of particular interest to the author are issues relating to democracy and human freedom, and he claimed that the historical settings of the two novels came second. “I never started writing *The Remains of the Day* with the idea of writing about the 1930s,” the author said, but “the 1930s is associated with questions about democracy, so it’s better to do it there.” (Matthews 2009, 118)

Even if the themes came first, the novels’ settings have been carefully chosen, as “Ishiguro’s narrators are nonetheless situated at precise points of imperial crisis and collapse, whether in post-war Japan or in the country houses of Britain.” (Baillie and Matthews 2009, 46) Barry Lewis observes that *An Artist of the Floating World* coincides with the (unmentioned in the novel) war crimes trial of General Hideki Tojo, who masterminded the attack on Pearl Harbour, and whose “execution in December 1948 is the unspoken background of blame against which Ono’s shame and guilt is limned.” (Lewis 2000, 49) Furthermore, “the summer when Stevens undertakes his motoring trip” in *The Remains of the Day* was also “when the last British troops left the Suez Canal zone – an event marking the definitive decline of the Empire,” (Lewis 2000, 99) an event that also goes unmentioned in the narrative. When at one stage Lord Darlington says, ““Whatever your father was once, Mr Stevens, his powers are now greatly diminished,”” (*RD*, 62) he could also be identifying the signs of declining British imperial power in the 1930s, as also implied by the “trivial errors” of a “larger significance” (*RD*, 65) that haunt Stevens

throughout the novel. Both novels could be said to reflect this mood of cultural and political transition in the lives of those for whom the changes spelt a kind of defeat, one surely felt more keenly by members of their generation. The bittersweet melancholy that pervades the final passages of both novels seems to derive from the acknowledgement that the future does not belong to Ono and Stevens, that the new national narrative does not include a role for them.

While *An Artist of the Floating World* “raise[s] sensitive issues about the country’s militarism and nationalism in the 1930s and 40s [...] issues that even today remain politically and ethically sensitive topics in Japan,” (Shibata and Sugano, 24) Ishiguro’s approach is not didactic. “There are perhaps times when a nation *should* forget,” the author remarked, “and when you *can* cover things up, and leave things unresolved because it would stir up all kinds of trouble.” (Matthews 2009, 118–19) Despite Ono’s allusions to having served “on the arts committee of the State Department,” in the 1930s and thus having been “consulted frequently on matters of policy,” (*AFW*, 63) there are – as we have seen – plenty of reasons to believe that he is self-aggrandising. The implication is that the American authorities agree, and that despite Ono’s repressed guilt about betraying Kuroda, he has been allowed to hold on to his assets when another acquaintance has been stripped of his and reduced to “little more than a beggar.” (*AFW*, 92) If Ono wishes his downfall to be considered a “grand catastrophe,” (*AFW*, 159) it reflects his own desire to have contributed something of meaning to history, not – on the part of the author – the belief that the boundaries of culpability for Japanese war crimes should be further widened.

Similarly, in *The Remains of the Day* “the obsolescence of the myth of Britain as an imperialist power is exposed [...] through the collapse of the narrator’s confident organization of his world.” (Machinal 2009, 90) Stevens fears that the appearance of trivial errors in his work represents a decline in his powers as irreversible as that of his father’s: “they’re of the sort I would never have made before, and I know what they signify.” (*RD*, 255) His fears that he has wasted all his professional energy (“I gave it all to Lord Darlington,” *RD*, 255) could be said to reflect the sense of defeat undoubtedly felt by many of Britain’s citizens concerning the final retreat from its colonies. Yet, as Barry Lewis points out, “if *The Remains of the Day* is seen as an allegory of the decline of the British Empire, then it can be interpreted both pessimistically and optimistically. Steven’s failure is a fable in the

passing of a certain conception of Englishness; but it is a death many would not wish to mourn.” (Lewis 2000, 100)

The British Empire, and its imminent collapse, is mentioned in the novel, though rather obliquely. In *Noscombe*, Stevens’s calamitous impersonation of a member of the political class is exasperated further by the arrival of a genuine “gentleman” named Dr Carlisle. Harry Smith says to him, “I was hoping the gentleman would have something to say about your ideas on the Empire, Doctor,” before turning to Stevens to say, “our doctor here’s for all kinds of little countries going independent. I don’t have the learning to prove him wrong, though I know he is.” (*RD*, 202) By this stage, of course, Stevens is desperately trying to extricate himself from the situation and soon leaves, but the historical reference is an important one. Elsewhere, Stevens states the importance of serving a gentleman who “has made an undeniable contribution to the future well-being of the empire.” (*RD*, 120) We can assume from this that Stevens wishes to preserve Britain’s imperial interests, and his fear about his diminishing powers parallels that of his nation. Also, as Barry Lewis observes, “Darlington Hall’s decline after the Second World War is thus symptomatic of the weakening of British colonial rule. The reduction of staff [...] tells its own tale about the fall of the Empire. Small wonder that Stevens is eager to implement a new ‘staff plan.’” (Lewis 2000, 81)

Most significantly, Stevens and Lord Darlington’s conception of the Empire and “the English way” (*RD*, 79) of doing things is undermined by the story Stevens tells of his father serving a Boer War military commander. “The General” – a pseudonym given by Stevens to protect his identity – had led a “most un-British attack on civilian settlements,” in which Stevens’s elder brother died. Of the attack Stevens says, “it would not be proper of me to identify the manoeuvre any more precisely,” (*RD*, 41) so as to assure anonymity for “a portly, ugly man, [whose] manners were not refined,” and to whom his father had feelings of “utmost loathing.” (*RD*, 42) That Stevens praises his father’s emotional restraint in this story and that he feels duty-bound to protect the General’s identity reflects his own acquiescence to hierarchy, even to men he seems to view as unworthy of their position. Moreover, the Boer War was notorious for the fact that the British used concentration camps – one of the first examples of such by a major power – and a scorched earth policy against civilian targets. This runs counter to the British values of “fair play” (*RD*, 78) that Lord Darlington appeals to in his attempts to repeal the harsher terms, on the

Germans, of the Treaty of Versailles. Of Versailles, Darlington says it is “unbecoming to go on hating an enemy like this once a conflict is over,” (*RD*, 91) and that it represents a “complete break with the traditions of [the] country.” (*RD*, 74) Through the episode of the General, though, Ishiguro provides an example of the brutal lengths the British were prepared to go for the sake of their imperial interests, one which runs counter to Britain’s self-perception as a harbinger of “fair play.”

Darlington’s mission to undo the Treaty of Versailles is motivated in part by his long-term friendship with a German counterpart, Herr Bremann: ““He was my enemy,”” Darlington says of him ““but he always behaved like a gentleman. We treated each other decently over six months of shelling each other. He was a gentleman doing his job and I bore him no malice.”” (*RD*, 76) This conception of the gentleman is inseparable from class: if Darlington and Herr Bremann presumably entered the military at ranks which kept them far away from the front line, the notion of treating people “decently” does not take into account the indiscriminate slaughter of ordinary, mostly working-class people during the war. Ono is guilty of a similar hypocrisy when he observes his son-in-law Suichi’s “transformation from the polite, self-effacing young man” to someone harbouring a “hardness, almost a maliciousness” after the war, his experiences in which he can only vaguely take into account as being of a “terrible nature.” (*AFW*, 59) Ono can only appreciate in the abstract the plight of the young generation who went to war to fight the ideals espoused by their elders, and is bemused by their bitterness. If he were to truly acknowledge the senseless suffering of this generation, he would also have to contemplate his son’s, which he is not prepared to do lest he confront his own guilt about propagandizing for the war.

When placed in the context of one of history’s most barbarous chapters, Darlington’s appeals to gentlemanly “fair play” and behaving “decently” are heavily imbued with irony. “It is the function of irony in postmodern discourse,” Linda Hutcheon observes, “that prevents any possible critical urge to ignore or trivialize historical-political questions.” (Hutcheon 1989, 15) Darlington claims that he ““fought [the First World War] to preserve justice in this world,”” not to take part ““in a vendetta against the German race.”” (*RD*, 76) Yet the backdrop to the conflict was tensions over the colonial interests of a number of Empires including Britain and Germany, and which resulted in the Germans being stripped of theirs. As Edward Said notes, “By the beginning of World War One, Europe and America held most of

the earth's surface in some sort of colonial subjugation," (Said 1993, 221) yet the conflict "did nothing to lessen the western hold on [these] territories," (Said 1993, 197) despite German chastisement under the Treaty of Versailles. The "justice" to which Darlington alludes sounds more like maintaining the status quo of British Imperial dominance; it certainly doesn't refer to "all kinds of little countries going independent," (*RD*, 202) as Harry Smith puts it. *The Remains of the Day* is thus "not just [about] the potential damage caused by the stiff upper lip, but a questioning of the entire nature of Englishness and its values." (Lewis 2000, 74)

The spectre of war, and the consequences of the decision-making made by Darlington Hall's 'gentlemen' visitors, is rendered ironic by a slip of the tongue on the part of the French minister Dupont. "Some of you may say it is not good manners to be removing things from one's chest at the dinner table," he says, bringing "enthusiastic laughter" (*RD*, 104) from fellow diners at Lord Darlington's conference on the Treaty of Versailles. In his misappropriation of the idiom 'to get something off your chest,' he unwittingly evokes the visceral truth of war – of battlefield wounding – so distant from the fine-dining elite congregated at Darlington Hall. Here the link is made between gentlemanly propriety, to which his generation's politicians subscribed, and the realities of the conflicts their discussions give rise to. It is a contradiction that the American delegate Mr Lewis exposes when he ridicules the aims of the conference. Of Lord Darlington he says:

'What is he? He is a gentleman [...] A classic English gentleman. Decent, honest, well-meaning. But his lordship here is an *amateur* [...] All you decent, well-meaning gentlemen, let me ask you, have you any idea what sort of place the world is becoming around you? The days when you could act out your noble instincts are over [...] You here in Europe need professionals to come to run your affairs' (*RD*, 106)

Mr Lewis's allusion to the end of the era of "well-meaning gentlemen" acting out "noble instincts" is central to the novel's critique of the enlightenment. Many "see postmodernity as involving a critique of humanism and positivism," (Hutcheon 1989, 24) and the two World Wars did much to destabilize the enlightenment idea that humanity could progress through the application of rational thought. If the notion of the gentleman codifies this type of thinking, then *The Remains of the Day* "challenges the efficacy of these traits in a world that is in the hands of unscrupulous politicians [and] when the technology of modern warfare threatens mass destruction." (Lewis

2000, 91) Darlington can be said then to embody British Imperial decline between the wars, a loss of international dominance made stark by the need to appease the Nazis. Yet he is not just an amateur in this context but also hypocritical and naive. He counters Mr Lewis's notion of 'professionalism' with the rebuttal that it "means ordering one's priorities according to greed and advantage rather than the desire to see goodness and justice prevail in the world." (*RD*, 107) Yet many view the British Empire as exactly this ordering of priorities, an "act of accumulation and acquisition [...] supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination." (Said 1993, 9) Lord Darlington continues his retort to Mr Lewis by insisting, "What you describe as "amateurism," sir, is what I think most of us here still prefer to call "honour";" (*RD*, 107) adding another word to a list of gentlemanly characteristics ("good manners," "fair play," "justice," and the "English way") that are as empty – given what we now know about the context – as Ono's allusions to a "manly spirit" and getting drunk "with pride and dignity." (*AFW*, 73)

Indeed, as we have discussed, what defines any comparative study of the two novels is not any difference that might owe itself to their divergent cultural contexts, but their similarity. If we compare some of the statements made by characters in the two novels concerning the efficacy of democracy in the period following the Great Depression, we can read in them a more timeless universal warning about how cultures can regress into aggressive forms of nationalism. Furthermore, the novels show how colonial expansionism made a mockery of the claims of democratic governance made by Imperial powers controlling overseas territories. Matsuda says to Ono at one stage:

'In the Asian hemisphere, Japan stands like a giant among cripples and dwarfs. And yet we allow our people to grow more and more desperate, our little children to die malnutrition [...] We must use our strength to expand abroad. The time is now well due for Japan to take her rightful place amongst the world powers [...] We must rid ourselves of these businessmen and politicians. Then the military will be answerable only to his Imperial Majesty the Emperor.' (*AFW*, 173–74)

This speech is echoed by Lord Darlington when he says:

'Democracy is something for a bygone era. The world's far too complicated a place now for universal suffrage and such like [...] People are suffering.



Ordinary, decent working people are suffering terribly. Germany and Italy have set their houses in order by acting.’ (RD, 208)

As well as euphemism for the abandonment of democracy, ‘setting one’s house in order’ is the perfect idiom for a novel in which the Darlington Hall – as we have seen – could be said to represent British Imperial power. Stevens’s futile efforts to reclaim the glory days of the stately home with a new staff plan are mirrored by Ono’s attempts to repair the bomb damage on his house. The damage has effectively already been done, the pre-war culture of hierarchy and subordination considerably weakened. Ono no longer holds quite the same sway over his family, let alone pupils, and Stevens no longer has recourse to his own professional powers, not to speak of a large staff. While Ono and Stevens’s influence declines, so too must Japan and Britain content themselves being mere island nations once again.

As we have seen, the novels form the latter two parts of an informal trilogy, each novel most resembling the last in a manner that, as M.M. Bakhtin might have said, “dialogizes” them. In his recurrent address to issues of democracy, domination and exile, Ishiguro creates characters that are at once complicit in, and subject to, the historical forces which shaped events of the time in which the narratives are situated. Furthermore, it is perhaps a testimony to Ishiguro’s hybrid cultural experience that he sees such phenomena as timeless universal concerns, not just historically specific. As Salman Rushdie says, “the writer who is out-of-country [...] may enable him to speak properly and concretely on a subject of universal significance.” (Rushdie 2010, 12) In depicting human concerns common to both Britain and Japan before and after the war, Ishiguro does just that.

### **Nationalism and self-determination**

If *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* represent Ishiguro’s universal humanist concerns, then the readers’ compassion for Ono and Stevens is surely tested by their more nationalistic tendencies. That most critics believe the narrators sustain our pity despite these pronouncements invites us to analyze what the nation means to them, and what – according to the author – motivates their more unpleasant views.

First it may be useful to ask the questions ‘what is a nation?’ and ‘what is nationalism?’ British historian Elie Kedourie defined nationalist doctrine as the belief

that “humanity is naturally divided into nations, that nations are known by certain characteristics that can be ascertained, and that the only legitimate type of government is national self-government.” (Kedourie 1993, 1) Yet, “what now seems natural” Kedourie argues, “is really obscure and contrived, the outcome of circumstances now forgotten.” (Kedourie 1993, 1) He traces the history of the doctrine back to the Enlightenment, self-determination and, in particular, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and his disciples Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) and F.W. Schelling (1775–1854). Kedourie shows that the “demand which nationalism makes on the individual originates [...] in solicitude for his freedom,” arguing that “politics is a method of realizing this superhuman vision, of assuaging this metaphysical thirst.” (Kedourie 1993, 80) The Kantian conception of self-determination became the central notion in the moral and political theory of his successors such as Fichte, for whom the realization of the individual self finally required national self-determination. The “freedom of the individual” which, as envisaged by Kant, “is his self-realization,” thus became for his disciples “identifying himself with the whole, belonging to which endows him with reality.” (Kedourie 1993, 30)

Kedourie also draws upon French philosopher Ernst Renan’s influential 1882 lecture *What is a Nation?*, in which he “examined the different criteria which are used to distinguish nations, and having found them wanting, concluded that the will of the individual must ultimately indicate whether a nation exists or not [...] what remains is to fall back on the will of the individual who, in pursuit of self-determination, wills himself as the member of a nation.” (Kedourie 1993, 75) Renan described a nation as “a soul, a spiritual principle,” which, “like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion.” (Renan 2002, 17) These conceptions of the nation and nationalism are useful for understanding the contradictions at the heart of Ishiguro’s narrators, whose nationalism is intertwined with their quest for self-determination. Their continuing belief in membership to a collective will is, however, undermined by the fact that the object of that will has changed in the post-war period, a fact the narrators are slow to realize.

The paradoxical origins of nationalist doctrine manifest themselves in Ono and Stevens’s attempts to define themselves as individuals yet part of a sense-giving national whole. Ono, for example, is sincere in his claim that “I acted in good faith. I believed in all sincerity I was achieving good for my fellow countrymen,” (AFW, 124)

even if he is perhaps less sincere in his confessions of guilt. He sees his switch to propaganda as one “to work of real importance. Work that will make a significant contribution to the people of our nation.” (*AFW*, 163) Seeing the bitterness of the younger generation to their elders, Ono complains that “if your country is at war, you do all you can in support, there’s no shame in that [...] those who fought and worked loyally for our country during the war cannot be called war criminals.” (*AFW*, 55–56) He wants to have his contribution valued as loyal service, but cannot see how trite this sentiment seems against the greater sacrifices made in battle by the likes of his son.

Similarly, Stevens wants to see his service to Lord Darlington as his “small contribution to the creation of a better world [...] the surest means of doing so” being “to serve the great gentleman of our times in whose hands civilization had been entrusted.” (*RD*, 122) His professional pride takes on the aura of national importance when he remarks during an important political gathering that “if any guest were to find his stay at Darlington Hall less than comfortable, this might have repercussions of unimaginable largeness.” (*RD*, 80) As Seonjoo Park observes, the word *service* “resonates throughout the novel as a justification for his loyalty to the stratified hierarchy” and is “charged with the ambition” (Park 2008, 62) of making a contribution to history. Yet it is a hierarchy that Stevens seeks to reconfigure in his narrative, so that he can cast himself as less of a subordinate, closer to matters of national importance. He describes his father’s generation of butlers as adherents to a hierarchical worldview he defines as a “ladder,” while to his generation, by contrast, “the world was a wheel, revolving with these great houses at the hub, their mighty decisions emanating out to all else, rich and poor, who revolved around them.” (*RD*, 121–22) While the influence of the “great houses” was undoubtedly in rapid decline in the post war period from which Stevens is supposed to be writing, his delusion also shows him to be altering the world to make his place within it more meaningful, a delusory act of self-determination he struggles to sustain.

Tragically, Stevens exemplifies his contribution by describing his finesse at polishing the silver, which he tells us was, for his generation of butlers, “of central importance [...] as a public index of a house’s standards.” (*RD*, 142) He recounts a story of how Lord Darlington complimented him on the silver and the positive effect it had on Lord Halifax during tense discussions, putting him “into a different frame of mind altogether.” (*RD*, 144) He rather over-emphasizes the clarity of his memory to illustrate the fact that “it is not simply [his] fantasy that the state of the silver had

made a small, but significant contribution.” (RD, 144) The desperation here to have done something of meaning is tempered by Stevens’s allusion to (and negation of) the “fantasy” of such a claim. Yet Ishiguro evokes pathos that Stevens could imagine through such an example to have “had the privilege of practising one’s profession at the very fulcrum of great affairs.” (RD, 147) It could also be argued that the evocation of polishing silver being moved to “central importance” reflects Britain’s stubborn and superficial maintenance of an Imperial self-image in the face of encroaching decline. The delusion of grandeur that Stevens feels in performing his duties is shared by a sense that, by the 1930s, British imperial power is also illusory, soon to be exposed by Nazi appeasement.

For all their sincerity in believing they acted in a spirit of furthering the interests of their nation, there are clear contradictions at the heart of Ono and Stevens’s quest for self-determination. Take, for example, Ono’s recollections of nights drinking with his students, in which he serves up some typically patriarchal advice: ““While it was right to look up to teachers, it was always important to question their authority,”” he recalls himself telling them, ““if there’s one thing I’ve tried to teach you all to do, it’s been to rise above the sway of things. To rise above the undesirable and decadent influences that have swamped us and have done so much to weaken the fabric of our nation.”” (AFW, 73) Going “against the sway” and rising above the “decadent” influences means, for Ono, joining the Imperial restoration movement, it means ceding to a new authority, despite his claim to having always considered ““carefully the direction in which [he] was being pushed.”” (AFW, 73) His nationalism seems to be founded upon Matsuda’s persuasive earlier suggestions that artists “are on the whole an astonishingly decadent crowd. Often with no more than a child’s knowledge of the affairs of the world.”” (AFW, 170) The decadence to which Matsuda and Ono refer remains as vague in *An Artist of the Floating World* as the ‘New Japan Spirit’ to which they subscribe, “a fictional political ideology promoting strong army control and imperial expansion to China which is nonetheless similar to the restoration movement of the 1930s.” (Shibata and Sugano 2009, 28) ““The grotesque and the frivolous have been prevalent all around us,”” Ono recalls announcing, ““but now at last a finer, more manly spirit is emerging in Japan.”” (AFW, 73–74) Both Mori-san and Sugimura, two figures of influence and inspiration to Ono, were excluded from this “spirit” apparently for introducing

“European influence” into their art and public projects, respectively, which (in the former case) had “come to be regarded as fundamentally unpatriotic.” (*AFW*, 203)

Despite these indications that Japan was in a process of rejecting outside influences to aggressively reassert its own identity, Ono does not elaborate on his beliefs about people of other nations, most significantly Europeans, Americans and Chinese. Neither does he repeat Matsuda’s expansionist rhetoric about forging “an empire as powerful and wealthy as those of the British and the French.” (*AFW*, 174) Given this reticence, there is a suggestion that Ono is both an opportunist and an unwitting functionary of this movement, without any strong views that he can call his own. His naiveté is indeed exposed by Matsuda with an impromptu test on his (apparently limited) knowledge of world affairs (*AFW*, 172).

Barry Lewis identifies a number of historical allusions in the novel, including the fact that the Okada-Singen Society “is the fictitious equivalent of the real-life Nika Society, a private group of painters who allied themselves with the government control of the arts from 1935” and that “the initiative was lead by the minister of education, Genji Matsuda, who is represented in the book by Chishu Matsuda.” (Lewis 2000, 59) Indeed, “debates about artists’ responsibility for war propaganda [...] were topical in the late 1940s and early 1950s,” (Shibata and Sugano, 29) before gradually dissipating. Tellingly, Ono refers to the disbanding of the Society as “one of the many such victims of the occupying forces.” (*AFW*, 88) Yet, if the word “victim” reflects his unease about the influence the Americans hold over his nation, Ono is nevertheless largely reticent on the subject of other nations and cultures.

As we have already seen, Ono could be compared to the Hirayama boy with “the mental age of a child [who] became a popular figure in the pleasure district with his war songs and mimicking of patriotic speeches,” (*AFW*, 60) but is beaten up for doing the same thing after the war. As Ono recalls, “people would say, ‘The Hirayama boy may not have it all there, but he’s got the right attitude. He’s Japanese.’” (*AFW*, 61) He also refers to a famous songwriter, Yukio Naguchi, who kills himself after the war in shame for having composed the patriotic songs that soldiers (like Ono’s son Kenji) sung “when they were marching or before a battle.” (*AFW*, 155) The appropriation, by ideologues, of popular cultural forms like music and painting shows how “culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state [and] differentiates “us” from “them,” almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather

combative one at that.” (Said 1993, xiii) Japan’s descent into militarism is manifest in the transformation of Ono’s painting ‘Complacency’ to ‘Eyes to the Horizon,’ a “series of matching representations [that] charts the regression of Ono’s views from humanitarian concern to hostile nationalism.” (Lewis 2000, 66) If Ono’s nationalism can be traced through his references to paintings and popular songs, it shows how culture can play a role in creating and even fabricating national identity. As Elie Kedourie observed, “in the modern world, with all its facilities for the diffusion of ideas and the indoctrination of the masses, it is very often truer to say that national identity is the creation of a nationalist doctrine than that nationalist doctrine is the emanation or expression of national identity.” (Kedourie 1993, 141)

Despite his allegiance to the Japanese restoration movement, we sense that Ono’s nationalism derives more from (misplaced) loyalty and desire for belonging. The vagueness of his conception of the ‘New Japan Spirit’ is typified by his former protégé Kuroda’s painting ‘The Patriotic Spirit,’ still in Ono’s possession. The painting features drinkers at the Migi-Hidari being served by a waitress in a kimono, and captures the “very accurately the [bar’s] boisterous, yet somehow proud and respectable atmosphere.” (AFW, 74) Again, there is little to distinguish in Ono’s mind the scene as represented in his painting and his recollections of the “the spirit that had pervaded the bantering” (AFW, 126) with his students. Moreover, the painting also features a number of patriotic banners and slogans, and we learn elsewhere that “there was that enormous illuminated banner” at the front of the bar “bearing the new name of the premises against a background of army boots marching in formation.” (AFW, 64) By contrast, he disabuses himself of such military imagery when he says that Kuroda’s painting had “a title that may lead you to expect a work depicting soldiers on the march or some such thing” but that “it was Kuroda’s very point that a patriotic spirit began somewhere further back, in the routine of our daily lives, in such things as where we drank and who we mixed with.” (AFW, 74) If Ono defines the spirit of the nation as that of that atmosphere at the Migi-Hidari, it is telling that he played a role in the bar’s establishment, one that was intended as “a celebration of the new patriotic spirit emerging in Japan.” (AFW, 63) Like Stevens at Darlington Hall, Ono associates his sense of nationhood with a specific place, and thus is able to cast his contribution to that place as service to something much larger: “it still brings me a certain satisfaction to recall that I [...] was able to do my small part in bringing such a place into being.” (AFW, 75) In associating his memories of the Migi-Hidari with

patriotic spirit, he is able to elevate his small role in the bar's creation to that of service to the nation.

The word spirit, like lantern light, is a recurrent motif in Ono's narrative which suggests a sense of 'home' to him but also sounds unwittingly like something elusive or ethereal. 'Spirit' could be what Ernst Renan referred to as the "national essence," for which "race, geography, tradition, language, size, or some combination of these seem finally insufficient [...] and yet people die for nations, fight for them, and write fictions on their behalf." (Renan 2002, 49) The spirit of the nation, like the floating world, becomes something that artists like Ono attempt but ultimately fail to render in paint or words, abandoning the project to capture its fragile beauty for crude political sloganeering. The word 'spirit' also evokes loss, reminding us of Salman Rushdie's feeling "that the past is a country from which we have all emigrated." (Rushdie 2010, 12) It is no coincidence that Dr Saito chooses to use the same word when he describes the post-war mood among young people: "the underlying spirit – that people feel the need to express their views openly and strongly – now that's a healthy thing." (AFW, 120)

In the recurrent use of the word in these opposing contexts we understand the 'spirit' of the nation to be something intangible and subtler than Ono's recollections or paintings can hope to capture. As Timothy Brennan argued, the nation is "both historically determined and general. As a term it refers both to the modern nation-state and to something more ancient and nebulous – the '*natio*' – a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging." (Brennan 2002, 45) The word 'spirit' also evokes what Homi K. Bhabha calls "the ambivalent figure of the nation," the "conceptual indeterminacy" of which he defines as "a problem of its transitional history." (Bhabha 2002, 2) He goes on to ask what "effect does this [ambivalence] have on narratives and discourses that signify a sense of 'nationness': the *heimlich* pleasures of the hearth, the *unheimlich* terror of the space or race of the Other; the comfort of social belonging?" (Bhabha 2002, 2) Ono and Stevens find themselves seeking a sense of home or social belonging in a nation whose transient spirit is even more elusive now that the collective will seems to have shifted direction. Furthermore, their memories reveal the nation of their past to be a less *heimlich* place than they had previously supposed.

While Ono alludes to national 'spirit' Stevens finds himself similarly unequal to the task of capturing national identity when he refers to 'dignity.' As Barry Lewis

points out, dignity has a number of different meanings, including: ““The quality of being worthy or honourable; worthiness, worth, nobleness, excellence.”” (Lewis 2000, 82) Stevens feels that he must be worthy of Englishness, yet he barely recognizes the nation he encounters on his motoring trip. Ironically, despite Ono’s allegiance to the ‘New Japan Spirit,’ it is Stevens who makes the most nationalistic statements of the two narrators. When marveling at the countryside at a local beauty spot he claims of it “a quality that will mark out the English landscape to any objective observer as the most deeply satisfying in the world, and this quality is probably best summed up by the term ‘greatness.’” (RD, 28) As Barry Lewis observes, the “objective” viewer “appealed to here is anything but: he is English, white, associated with the upper class, a nationalist and imperialist prone to bouts of self-glorifying hyperbole – in short, he is Stevens himself.” (Lewis 2000, 80) Certainly, Stevens’s ruminations on the greatness of the English landscape take on a more jingoistic edge when he claims that, “we call this land of ours *Great Britain*, and there may be those who believe this is a somewhat immodest practise.” (RD, 29) As Edward Said says, such “Defensive, reactive, and even paranoid nationalism is, alas, frequently woven into the very fabric of education, where children as well as older students are taught to venerate and celebrate the uniqueness of *their* tradition (usually and invidiously at the expense of others).” (Said 1993, xxvi) Said is not just talking, of course, about Britain, but about cultures more broadly, yet Stevens’s insistence on venerating Britishness is certainly more than simply “immodest” but rather – in his attempts to dismiss other landscapes as inferior – “defensive and reactive.” However, Stevens’s need to ascribe inherent greatness to the nation has its roots in his struggle for self-determination, as echoed by his discourse on great butlers. Without, for the sake of propriety, naming himself as a candidate for this accolade, he infers it by saying, “It is with such men as it is with the English landscape [...] when one encounters them, one simply *knows* one is in the presence of greatness.” (RD, 45) As with Ono’s evocation of the patriotic ‘spirit,’ Stevens’s sense of the greatness of his nation is vague exactly because he is unconsciously seeking to determine his own self, trying to map his self-worth onto the more “ambivalent figure of the nation.” (Bhabha 2002, 2)

Moreover, when Stevens refers to the notion that “Continentalers are unable to be butlers because they are as a breed incapable of the emotional restraint which only the English race is capable of,” (RD, 44) he is defining Englishness in altogether more specific terms. As Elie Kedourie explained, “Patriotism, affection for one’s country



[...] is a sentiment known among all kinds of men; so is xenophobia, which is dislike of the stranger [...] Neither sentiment depends on a particular anthropology [...] nationalism does.” (Kedourie 1993, 68) When Stevens evokes an “English race” apart from the continental “breed,” he is indeed making a nationalistic distinction that “depends on a particular anthropology.” It is no coincidence then that Stevens’s unquestioning loyalty to Lord Darlington takes on a more sinister significance when his master is accused of anti-Semitism and collusion with the Nazis. In this episode the author explores the boundaries of culpability and duty which mirror the situation for many German soldiers and civilians who collaborated with the Nazis either through fear or their own volition.

Despite Stevens’s claim that “there were many Jewish persons on my staff” but that “they were never treated in any way differently on account of their race,” (*RD*, 153) it quickly becomes apparent that the opposite was true. Stevens is instructed by Lord Darlington to dismiss two Jewish maids, a duty about which he hints at having “personal doubts,” yet “one that demanded to be carried out with dignity.” (*RD*, 156) Miss Kenton is appalled, but Stevens responds to all her protestations by reasserting his belief that “our professional duty is not to our own foibles and sentiments, but to the wishes of our employer.” (*RD*, 157) Her persistence is finally met with a remark that seems, once again, to parrot the beliefs of Lord Darlington:

‘The fact is, the world of today is a very complicated and treacherous place. There are many things you and I are simply not in a position to understand concerning, say, the nature of Jewry.’ (*RD*, 157–58)

Stevens subjugates all “personal doubts” in the name of duty to his master, refusing to share his private concerns with Miss Kenton. When Stevens teases her about the fact she reneged on her threat to resign over the matter, she replies: “‘It was cowardice, Mr Stevens. Simple cowardice [...] I feel so ashamed of myself.’” (*RD*, 161) Fear of the consequences of disobeying orders and facing exile from the house – “‘going out there and finding nobody who knew or cared about me’” (*RD*, 161) – keep Miss Kenton at Darlington Hall in spite of her principles. Stevens does not speculate on the consequences of leaving the house or disobeying orders as he would never countenance such a thing. Moreover, the episode serves to illustrate not just the failures of appeasement but also the questions of guilt and corroboration at the heart of much historical discourse following the Final Solution in Nazi Germany. Such a

reading of *The Remains of the Day* concerns itself with “the nature of the wider collective or national responsibility for the course of events.” (Matthews and Groes, 3) Yet the notion of culpability in *The Remains of the Day* is two-fold, as Stevens’s guilt about his blind faith to Lord Darlington is intertwined with that of his own failure as a son and potential husband to Miss Kenton. As Cynthia Wong puts it, “*The Remains of the Day* raises a question about character that is an ethical one: is Stevens a conspirator of the failures now present in his life, or has he been an innocent victim of the exaggerated ideals of his profession?” (Wong 2005, 54)

Ironically the spectre of the Nazis returns in Noscombe, where Stevens finds himself misapprehended for a gentleman by working class locals and manoeuvred into an uncomfortable debate on the nature of dignity. Harry Smith, a local activist, sees dignity as “something every man and woman in this country can strive for and get,” and that, “If Hitler had had things his way, we’d just be slaves now.” (*RD*, 195–96) Despite privately dismissing his ideas, Harry Smith’s words – “you can’t have dignity if you’re a slave” (*RD*, 196) – have a vital significance for Stevens’s sense of self. Unquestioning loyalty, he sees later, “is undignified if it is not nourished by vigilant self-examination and self-respect.” (Lewis 2000, 98)

Having tried to reconfigure his service to Lord Darlington “as practising one’s profession at the very fulcrum of great affairs,” (*RD*, 147) Stevens comes to realize that he is ashamed of the association with his disgraced master. In seeking to distance himself from Darlington’s stigma, he struggles to retain his own sense of his life’s worth. “A butler’s duty is to provide good service,” he reminds us, “not to meddle in the great affairs of the nation.” (*RD*, 209) As Cynthia Wong notes, Stevens “positions himself as having directly influenced world history; but, when he discovers that the influence was profoundly negative, he casts himself in an extradiegetic mode, where he can extricate himself from responsibility.” (Wong 2005, 55) Stevens’s struggle thus seems to be one of reconciling a sense of duty to the nation and his own self-determination. He wants the reader to believe that his loyalty was “*intelligently* bestowed,” (*RD*, 211) yet many episodes in the narrative show this not to be the case, not least his repeated denials (to Mr Cardigan) that he is aware that Lord Darlington has been manipulated by the Nazis. Yet Stevens, to a greater extent than Ono, comes to acknowledge the contradiction of his loyalty at the end of the novel, unburdening himself to the butler-stranger on the pier:

‘... at least [Lord Darlington] had the privilege of being able to say at the end of his life that he made his own mistakes [...] You see, I *trusted*. I trusted his lordship’s wisdom. All those years I trusted I was doing something worthwhile. I can’t even say I made my own mistakes. Really – one has to ask oneself – what dignity is there in that?’ (*RD*, 255–56)

Stevens thus “realizes that dignity is not just a matter of knowing one’s place, but of feeling congruent with the self in whatever place one happens to be.” (Lewis 2000, 99) By contrast, Ono seems blind to other people’s perception of his more marginal role in the affairs of the nation, and continues to repackage his failure as one of grand importance, right until the end of the novel. Recognizing this, his daughter Setsuko tells him:

‘Father painted some splendid pictures, and was no doubt most influential amongst other such painters. But Father’s work had hardly to do with these larger matters of which we are speaking. Father was simply a painter. He must stop believing he has done some great wrong.’ (*AFW*, 193)

Ono’s old friend Matsuda goes even further, saying, “we turned out to be ordinary men. Ordinary men with no special gifts of insight. It was simply our misfortune to have been ordinary men during such times [...] our contribution has always been marginal. No one cares now.” (*AFW*, 200–01) Matsuda subsequently dies, but Ono somehow identifies something in his words that “suggest he was anything but a disillusioned man [...] surely he would have recognized also those aspects he could feel proud of.” (*AFW*, 201) Indeed, this is what Ono chooses to do, despite his clear delusion about Matsuda’s sense of self-worth at the end of his life. As the author says, Ono “is very much part of that society and generation, and to a certain extent that *is* his tragedy, that he wasn’t remarkable enough to stand outside of that generation and moment, during the war. He’s just being swept along with the tide.” (Matthews 2009, 115)

Can we blame Ono for his attempts to view his life as a success? Stevens, despite his realization that he didn’t even make his own mistakes, finally takes heart in the continued pursuit of professional duty, even if his aim to “look at this whole matter of bantering more enthusiastically” (*RD*, 258) seems likely to prove futile. Cynthia Wong observes that, “rather than pass judgement on Ono, Ishiguro acknowledges that people’s very limitations are at times determined by their historical situations and the fact that they cannot know what the future will bring.” (Wong 2005,

42) The author confirms this in his claim that he is “interested in people who do have a certain amount of talent [...] this urge to contribute something larger,” (Vorda 1993, 151–52) but are, like most people, ultimately unable to see beyond the large social forces to which they are subjected. As Barry Lewis notes, “Ono and Stevens are ordinary men [...] It is their fate to live long enough to see all their hopes and ambitions vanish in the wind. All they have left is the floating world of what-might-have-been.” (Lewis 2000, 55) Yet somehow, as we have seen, the narrators manage a bittersweet optimism in the face of this recognition. At the end of *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ono strikes a sincerer note when he says, “Our nation, it seems, whatever mistakes it may have made in the past, has now another chance to make a better go of things. One can only wish these young people well.” (AFW, 206) Perhaps here, Ono takes comfort in the idea of a nation, as Ernst Renan describes it, as “a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one had made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future.” (Renan 2002, 17)

Ono and Stevens embody the paradox of nationalism as examples of an “individual who, in pursuit of self-determination, wills himself as the member of a nation.” (Kedourie 1993, 75) They struggle to reconcile their contradictory beliefs about subordination to hierarchy with a desire to see themselves as free agents of their own destiny, shapers of history rather than just victims of its forces. To slightly different degrees, however, they are forced to acknowledge that their contribution to the course of history was marginal; despite their talents they didn’t turn out to be extraordinary enough to see beyond their time and place and secure their own self-determination. For all their tendencies towards aggressive nationalism and jingoism, their situation deserves pity because the vast majority of people – Ishiguro suggests – are equally powerless.



## *Conclusion*

*An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* are full of overlapping themes which, despite their divergent cultural contexts, make them useful novels for the purposes of comparison. They form, with *A Pale View of Hills* (1982) – which is also partly set in Japan after the war – part of “an informal trilogy,” (Lewis 2000, 133) each novel most closely resembling the last. Yet what makes studying these two novels together particularly interesting is how they show Kazuo Ishiguro’s concerns to be universal, not just culturally specific. The novels share a similar time-frame and their representations of Japanese and British identity are defined not by their difference but by their similarity. If both Ono and Stevens are affected by a kind of blindness which is cultural and ideological, it is a narrowing of viewpoint experienced by many people of all nations. As a kind of homeless or hybrid writer – neither “a very English Englishman” nor “a very Japanese Japanese” (Oe and Ishiguro 1991, 82–83) – Ishiguro is particularly sensitive to the more parochial assumptions behind cultures and their representations. He depicts characters who are both products of their time and place but who then find themselves on the outside looking in, historically constituted and yet in exile. This recurrent address to notions of belonging is ideally situated in the post-war period of cultural transition, when the values of one generation were being replaced by that of another. How do individuals cope, Ishiguro asks us, when society has moved on without them, damning their values to obsolescence; when society has judged them to have misspent their loyalty and talent?

Melancholy and regret pervade both novels, despite the best efforts of the narrators to remain cheerily dignified in the face of difficult self-realizations. As we have seen, Ishiguro drew heavily upon Freudian psychoanalytical theory to portray men who unconsciously evade, confuse and deny aspects of their past to maintain their dignity in the present. In seeking consolation in the past from an *unheimlich* post-war world, the narrators are confronted with discomfiting realizations about their past actions that require a number of impulses to suppress. Words have been misattributed to one person when belonging to another, injurious self-perceptions have been projected onto other individuals, and memories in some cases have been either entirely distorted or fabricated to suit the needs of the protagonists’ egos. That they are blind to these manipulations forces the reader to ask himself “why?” – to

assemble the story behind the obfuscations and cryptic clues of unreliable first person narration.

In complicating the reader's role by having Ono and Stevens address a fictional narratee ("you"), Ishiguro draws attention to our interpretative faculties, our need to decode the story the narrators didn't want to tell, but were unable to suppress. The diary-style format of the novels may momentarily fool the reader as a place of candid self-analysis, but we quickly become aware of the artifice behind these representations in a way that has the dual function of foregrounding the author's technique. As both tellers and participants in their own stories, there is a tension in the two novels between the 'real story' and the one that Ono and Stevens want to tell, and the reader is constantly called upon to mediate between the two. To what extent, Ishiguro asks, do "we all dignify our failures," (Ishiguro 2008, 117) by constructing narratives of our lives, making our regrets "more palatable in the very act of telling?" (Wong 2005, 38) As Peter Brooks has suggested, "we live immersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meaning of our past actions," (Brooks 1984, 3) and this unconscious – or 'blind' – desire to shape our stories to our advantage is a universal human trait. The author's repeated address to the notion of storytelling renders the novels not metafictional simply in the sense that they are "books about the nature of fiction," (Matthews 2009, 117) but in the sense that they ask why societies and nations also tell themselves stories to cope with their past.

Despite the narrators' psychological reflexes owing much to Freud's view of the mind, *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* are not intended as straight realism. The elements of parody and allusions to problems of representation serve both to destabilize our faith in the reliability of the narrator, and open up a wider discourse on how we represent our cultures to ourselves and other people, and how these depictions can affect our interaction with the world. Ono and Stevens place their faith in social myths (e.g., the gentleman, the sensei, the butler, the samurai) that have already been consigned to history yet continue to exist only as ideologically codified distillations of a particular cultural identity. Indeed, the author subtly challenges the notion of cultural authenticity that nations use to assert their own identity by exposing the constructedness of the myths that give lie to it. Nevertheless, Ono and Stevens's stories maintain the power to move us: despite the unreliability of the perspective offered us we rarely cease to experience their world with compassion. As Linda Hutcheon observed, this apparent contradiction between

“the worldly and the reflexive” can, however, “co-exist in an uneasy and problematizing tension that provokes the questions of how we make meaning in culture [and] how we ‘de-doxify’ the systems of meaning (and representation) by which we know our culture and ourselves.” (Hutcheon 1989, 29) Within this definition of postmodernism, Ishiguro’s address to “how we make meaning in culture” is very much framed as a humanistic concern, how we come to “know ourselves.” Ishiguro’s narrators may not be the autonomous authors of their own life stories that they think they are, but – he suggests – people never really are: we are all heirs to a language and culture that we don’t choose and are subject to the ideological abstractions that these inheritances bring to our world. As Sean Matthews and Sebastien Groes argue, a “key tension present in Ishiguro’s work” is that “we as individuals are not proper, rounded subjects but merely ghostly actors and performers inhabiting roles that are allocated to us randomly by the context in which we find ourselves.” (Matthews and Groes 2009, 8) The words we speak, the thoughts we think and the social roles we perform are far less our own than we imagine.

If we are blind to the fact that our social mores are – as Ishiguro says – “artificial constructs that don’t carry over necessarily to a different culture,” (Wachtel 1996, 23) one thing nations such as Britain and Japan had in common was a stratified elitism and a culture of domination and subservience that is heavily critiqued in the two novels. The author has drawn upon his hybrid cultural experience to show that, while this tendency expresses itself in different ways from one country to another, many nations (particularly in the pre-war period) demand of their citizens a loyalty which ultimately serves the interests of the powerful. Ono and Stevens believe, and actively participate, in a culture of subservience that they blindly attribute to national belonging. The novels express the tension that exists between servility to the nation and the desire to contribute something of meaning: at the heart of their loyalty, unwittingly to them, is a desire for self-determination.

I began this study asking if the narrators’ blindness was defined by dignity (a passive impulse to maintain the social values of their culture) or denial (an active complicity in the culture of domination that fuels conflict itself, and which the narrators refuse to accept responsibility for). The answer leans in favour of the former but this analysis has, I believe, shown the two poles not to be mutually exclusive. Unquestioning belief in one’s own social mores often demands a conviction in the distinctiveness and authenticity of your national identity at the expense of others. Yet



most of us are “ordinary men with no special gifts of insight,” (*AFW*, 200) in the sense that we don’t have the vision to see outside the narrow precepts of our culture. Rather, most of us are just – as the author said – “swept along with the tide” (Matthews 2009, 115) of history.

## **Blindness in the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro: dignity or denial?**

### **Abbreviations**

*AFW* *An Artist of the Floating World* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005)

*RD* *The Remains of the Day* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005)

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**MOTS-CLÉS :** déni, nation, loyauté, postmodernisme, représentation

### **RÉSUMÉ**

Les narrateurs des romans de Kazuo Ishiguro *Un artiste du monde flottant* et *Les vestiges du jour* sont aveugles aux valeurs sociales en mutation de l'après-guerre, et sont dans le déni par rapport à des erreurs qu'ils ont comises avant le conflit. Dans cette étude, la question est posée de savoir si les protagonistes sont des victimes de mœurs sociales passées de mode, ou s'ils sont moteurs de leurs propres illusions, complices dans les problèmes culturels qui forment le contexte de la guerre en elle-même. Certes, Ishiguro emprunte à la théorie de la psychanalyse de Freud. Pourtant, les romans sont moins réalistes qu'il n'y paraissent, et explorent comment les individus s'inventent des histoires au sujet du passé, d'une façon qui vient au premier plan du procédé narratif. S'inspirant de ses origines culturelles hybrides, ces romans questionnent de façon postmoderne comment la culture (britannique et japonaise) est représentée, et donnent un avertissement sur les dangers de la loyauté inconditionnelle à la nation. Cette étude montre comment les narrateurs d'Ishiguro ne sont pas maîtres de leurs destin, tel qu'ils aimeraient le croire, mais sont simplement figurants dans une histoire qu'ils ne peuvent contrôler.

**KEYWORDS:** denial, nation, loyalty, postmodernism, representation

### **ABSTRACT**

Kazuo Ishiguro's novels *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* feature narrators who are blind to the changing social values post-WWII and in denial about mistakes they made before the conflict. This study asks if the protagonists are victims of outmoded social mores or if they are active agents in their own delusion, complicit in the cultural problems that form the context for war itself. Despite Ishiguro borrowing heavily from Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the novels are less realist than many assume, exploring the ways in which individuals tell themselves stories about the past in a manner that foregrounds narrative technique. Drawing upon his hybrid cultural background, the novels comprise a postmodern questioning of the way we represent culture (British and Japanese), as well as a warning about the dangers of unquestioning loyalty to the nation. This study will show how Ishiguro's narrators are not the masters of their own destiny they believe themselves to be, but playing minor roles in a (hi)story they are powerless to control.





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