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Dismantling Englishness and Globalizing Space: Post-Imperialist Disillusionment in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*

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Abstract

The ambivalent position which Ishiguro holds in the history of world literature provides him a new perspective of transformative transaction with a historical past. His novel *The Remains of the Day* focuses on the retrospective interrogation of a mytho-poetic Britishness which exists in the minds of its people as disillusioned encounters with a melancholic memorialization. By exposing the insignificance of the English tradition, it subverts the grounds in the politicization of the spirit of Englishness in a multicultural society like England. The paper thus attempts to explore the diverse modalities and contours of Englishness as reflected in *The Remains of the Day* which serves as a national allegory of post imperialistic reconfiguration illustrating the debilitating decadence of the glorious British empire. It seeks to deconstruct the dominant metaphors of the legacy of Englishness which becomes an emphatic claim for a cosmopolitan inclusivity of fragmented loyalties and affiliations.

Keywords: Englishness, Post-Imperialism, Disillusionment, Memory, Dignity.

Introduction

Critics have praised over the decades, the masterful control and proportion of Kazuo Ishiguro's fictional projections which is inextricably bound up with blending private reminisces with collective memory to be used as a tool to subvert the stable and essentialist notion of Englishness. Ishiguro, self-proclaimed as an international writer infuses in his novels a unique sense of postcolonial perception to deconstruct the British society and the idea of Englishness, exquisitely rehearsing a dispersed transcultural experience permeated with a deeply-seated existential estrangement which drastically altered the inner space of cultural permeability. Studying Ishiguro's works in the discourse of diasporic dialectics evokes an extraordinary sense of post-imperial exoticising associations. Although Ishiguro appears to be evasive in his approach to imperialism and the decolonising polemics of rhetoricism, as coming from a former Empire instead of a colonized territory, he is often grouped with Naipaul, Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi and Timothy Mo as his novels are ceaseless experimentation in delineating inward alienation and isolative bereavement. Inverting the status of diasporic bewilderment, Ishiguro challenges the established notion of alien locality and ethnic identity for Ishiguro's characters, rather than operating as peripheral figures in adopted localities are duly balanced cultural forces on the home-front, but are inevitably bent by the waves of a transformative historical past which is linked up with their own version of reality. *The Remains of the Day* by Ishiguro, similarly, presents a colonial dialectics of the permanent divide between the Eastern and the Western, the Conqueror and the Conquered, subtly extrapolated into the life of the narrator from the transcultural sensibilities of the author. The entire novel through a metaphor of journey seeks to deconstruct the dominant legacy of the myth of Englishness so ostentatiously imposed on the Empire. Stevens, the protagonist of the novel is apprehensive of the twilight existence of its aggrandizing Englishness though he constantly silhouettes the travesty of the English essentialism resulting from highly multicultural non-nationalistic presentations. *The Remains of the Day*, in its elitist undercuts conditioned by Steven's wavering loyalty for his master towards the end of the novel seems to be an advocacy for a wider notion of Englishness which proffers

inclusion of many cultural and transcultural possibilities. Steven Connor, in this connection argues that:

> The purpose of the performance of national identity that is *The Remains of the Day* is therefore to let in what such a restricted imagining of identity relies on keeping out. It aims to enlarge the possibilities for narrating identity across and between cultures and their alleged essential characteristics and conditions by performing the impossibility of a more constrained, coherent imagination of Englishness (112).

Aim of the Study

The study attempts to highlight Ishiguro's preoccupation with the theme of Englishness in which he deliberately seeks to set his protagonist in a globalizing cosmopolitan space critiquing the exclusive model and the monocultural pattern of Englishness. The Asian diaspora living in Britain are stuck between two modes of culruralites which warrants an important step towards merging a global open society with a diverse localized form of attachment and belonging. The paper thus aims to explore this post-imperialist anxiety in Ishiguro's characters to reconfigure their notion of Englishness questioning its purity and essentiality which points out its proclivities toward multiple attachments and complex affiliations.

Each of Ishiguro's novels intermittently focalizes a poignant plot of wartime reverberation artfully contrived with incisive observations to expose the complacency of the complicitous and rivalling categories in the re-presentment of a glorified past permeated with an ever-haunting imperial Englishness. Evolving his fictional characters, Ishiguro insightfully transmutes the challenging existence of the "Cultural amphibians" into an impressionistic style of intricate assimilation in a particular discursive ambience "characterized by their ability to comply with divergent codes without losing their intellectual and moral integrity" (Buendía 27). This chameleon -like permeability Buendía observes , "allows them to cross cultural boarders unnoticed" and "put different contexts in dialogue and- in doing so- transform them (27)." Thus, at the crossroads of two or multiple cultural forces, he seems to suspend his narrators eternally into a self-reflexive dissection of the catastrophic historicity with an immediate association to some ideological contention of the disillusioned past. A deep-rooted sense of cultural estrangement haunts the lacerated memories of the protagonists which is viewed more as a result of temporal disruption rather than a spatially informed transposition. However, instead of presenting his autobiographical speculation as an immigrant writer he blends personal dislocation and a sense of cultural bifurcation into his characters in a numerous transmutative psychological trajectories. For this reason Seng Mei Ma in *Immigrant Subjectivities* describes Ishiguro as a "Child of Asian Diaspora" who strives to delineate the representative fragmented sensibitites of his cultural identity in a deceptive strategy of an occluding narrativization suggestive of the writer's "split personality" and "buried self". (41)

Ishiguro does not seek to reflect upon the debilitating sediments of immigrant experiences like Kureishi, Rushdie and others but construes a capricious site for retrospective interrogation which enables the individual to link his/her personal losses and nostalgia with the post-war bewilderment which drastically reshuffled their personal and professional lives to expose the inherent frivolity and nuances of stable categories and phenomena like self/other, master/servent, colonizer/colonized etc. as Norman Pages observes: Stevens in Ishiguro's *The Remains of the day* resembles Etsuko and Ono in their discursive styles of self-relocation, for Ishiguro is skilful in "transferring to an English context a mode of communication and behaviour that resembles the Japanees in its use of highly formal surface to cover tensions, concealments and self-deception"(167).

Ishiguro's assertion of himself as a writer of international novels brings out the significance of his involvement in the reformative politics of post colonial reclamations and engagements which seeks to stigmatize the opposition between absolutist notions and categories and challenges the Eurocentric essentialism of the colonial discourses. Dominic Head traces a similar impulse in "the retrospective colonial fiction of the post war era" which carry out the dialectics of immigration outwardly, but inwardly is quite attentive to "the disappearing empire being of particular significance to the ongoing domestic reconstruction of Englishness"(125). Rather than confining himself with a fixed locality and temporal specificity Ishiguro traverses national boundaries and linguistic barriers to transmute the post-war trauma and the resulting sense of emotional alienation of a cultural disjunction skillfully into the lives of the protagonists demonstrating the essential inward defamiliarization of the supposed uniqueness of the idea of Englishness. As Sean Mathew and Sebastian Groes argue "Ishiguro never plays the 'identity card'... he acts increasingly as a contemporary everyman. In Ishiguro's fictions "otherness is not a function of identity but rooted in a deeply moral imagination. *The Remains of the Day* deals with British appeasement of the Nazis, but it is also a subtle indictment of the failures of the international community during the interwar period (2-3)." Ishiguro deliberately strands into his narrative a subtle thread of historical reflexivity to map the complexities and modalities of the wider collective or national responsibilities for these course of events which is infalliably mixed up with private memories and individual involvement under the corrosive impact of a crumbling Empire. Such associative reading of *The Remains of the Day* helps the readers to recover some of the inderminate elements of historical specificity which the author consciously conceals behind a formal, polished, unoppositional exterior to elucidate the degrees of the protagonist's self deception, the extent of temporal displacement in the process of self-relocation and ethical, emotional and political accountability as Ishiguro rightly points out " a novel isn't some sort of nonfiction, Novels are about emotional manipulation" (qtd. in Iyer 45).

Accordingly, Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* engages in a cogent explication of the deranged confluence of internal and external focalization of

voices, moods, vagaries of post war existence and challenges which is exquisitely balanced "between elegy and irony" (Rushdie 244). So, working with these insider/outsider polemics of structural representment, the novelist proposed an immutable and sustained relationship of memory with identity which effectuate the protagonist's self-conscious effort to reconstitute and reconfigure his presence from a dislocated past bound up essentially with the political history of England as an Empire in the recollective process of cultural formations. This impulse of nostalgic reconsideration can be described as an attitude towards "the emotions what idealism is to intellect and that "it is a way of longing for a better world" (Shaffer, 'An Interview' 2001: 166) in the process of post imperial reconfiguration.

Ishiguro in *The Remains of the Day* seeks to represent the cultural travesty of a collapsing Empire with the tactical intricacy of inverting the migrants' position of threatened cultural existence by a native's summative contentment by shaping his stories outside the framework of diasporic deterritorialization and resulting identity formation. Thus, we notice in the novel the entire story as it is being told by an English Butler, Stevens, "a genuine old fashioned old butler" (124) who constantly camouflages his sense of bewilderment by wearing the mask of an imperial Englishness and utmost professionalism which helps adjusting himself into a new cultural set up. Stevens' adjusting himself to his new master finds a parallel in England's accommodative strategy of imperial relocation which is grossly apprehensive of its flickering flame of colonial power. It is, therefore, highly suggestive that the grand Darlington Hall which is presented as a miniature version of England is consequently bought by an American symbolic of its strengthening hegemony over a densely hierarchical empire. Before submitting himself to his new master, Mr Farraday Stevens has served Lord Darlington for a long thirty five years. In these years he develops a strong domicile disposition with Darlington Hall- a genuinely grand old English House and when it is sold to a foreigner he finds his own identity threatened before a new domesticating front at once helps dawning in him a realization of his inability of bantering skills. We can only imagine how much it hurts:

> I've tried and tried, but whatever I do I find I am far from reaching the standards I once set myself. More and more errors are appearing in my work. Quite trivial in themselves- at least so far. But they're of the sort I would never made before, and I know what they signify. Goodness knows, I've tried and tried, but it's no use. I've given what I had to give. I gave it all to Lord Darlington. (225)

This is also no coincidence that the novel begins with the summer of 1956, the time of Suez crisis which witnesses the gradual declining of England as an Empire in the post imperialist imagination of Englishmen. Christine Berberich rightfully observes, "the British Empire had all but disappeared, and Britain was struggling for her place in the world hierarchy. Ishiguro's novel uses quintessentially English stereotypes, such as gentleman, the butler, and the trope of the country house, in order to reflect on national identity and crucially, a national consciousness (135)."

Stevens can aptly be called as a model of English Butlers, precisely inhabiting all the great qualities of butlership- discreet, utterly loyal and affecting a sense of superimposed dignity which has blown all out of proportion with the height of professionalism he cultivates: "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 by external events, however surprising, alarming or vexing. They wear their professionalism as a decent gentleman will wear his suit (42-43)".

Stevens' obsessive preoccupation with maintaining professional dignity to the utmost in serving Darlington Hall effectuates a kind of self-erasure on his part, a commodification of the emotional propensities in the face of a colossal hegimonizing power to which he must contribute and work in the process of his own subordination. His frequent references to the 'acting' and 'clothing' tropes bring out the inherent drama as Meera Tamaya remarks, "of rigorous submission of the private self to the demand of the public persona" (48). A similar situational irony can be attended upon the conversation of Mr. Stevens and Miss Kenton regarding the dislocated position of the Chinaman when Miss Kenton warns Stevens against these trivial errors which may have larger significance, to the casual disregard of the minor neglection of the later. Certainly, the positioning and repositioning of the Chinaman has broader implications and ramifications in the differential politics of cultural dissection. Stevens, in a moment of celebratory exhibition of professional dignity expresses his firm belief upon the inevitable Englishness of butlers faintly referring to a dialectics of permanent divide between the East and the West:

> It is sometimes said that butlers only truly exist in England. Other countries, whatever title is actually used, have only manservants. […] Continentals are unable to be butlers because they are as a breed incapable of the emotional restraint which only the English race are capable of. […] In a word, 'dignity'is beyond such persons. We English have an important advantage over foreigners in this respect and it is for this reason that when you think of a great butler, he is bound, almost by definition, to be an Englishman (43).

Steven Connor in *English Novel in History* identifies a similar Oriental/ Occidental antithesis, subtly nourished throughout *The Remains of the Day* and is suspended obliquely to the private and public domain of an Empire:

> The fact that the contrast between orderliness and disorderliness is posed in terms of the contrast between the English and the Oriental gently registers the link between domestic space and the global space of Empire. (110)

Ishiguro in *The Remains of the Day* subverts the stereotyping assumptions and attitude related to the idea of English butlership and English gentleman

to demonstrate the hollowness of these fixed categories and how they fall an easy prey to the misguided ideal of their respective lives which are indelibly coloured by their individual experience of the national history.

Stevens seems to inherit his conception of high dignity from his father whose sense of honour consists in affecting a sensibility of elemental Englishness in his butlership : "It is my firm conviction that at the peak of his career at Loughborough House, my father was indeed the embodiment of dignity"(34). The overarching theme of dignity with a tinge of quint-essential Englishness in it provides a solid ground for the narrator-protagonist to dismantle the hollowness of the empty display of British essentiality. Stevens in his quest for identity must create a shadowed hedge before him behind which he can use the costume of indirectness, unreliability, obliquity and ambiguity to achieve internal dramatization of external deterritorialization and fragmentation. Ishiguro in *The Remains of the Day* provides a dislocated catalogue of historical events through the disfigured chain of personal memory and transformed those deformed items in a broken consciousness of post war nostalgic manipulation. Stevens' frequent repressions of his emotional engagement is symptomatic of the internal turbulence and suppressive reflexivity of cold war situation at one level, at other, it points out a similar configuration of the novelist's life in the globalising dialectics of summative acculturation: "There is something in my make up... something in my past perhaps- there is some wound or something that's never going to heal, that I can just caress at least. And I can only get to that wound by writing" (qtd. in Shaffer 112). This displaced transposition and the matrix of regressive deference supply him a stimulus to dismantle the myth of Englishness projected exquisitely into the catastrophic discomfiture of both the servant and the master obsessive of their shallow exhibition of imperial Englishness.

Darlington Hall symbolises Englishness, tradition and aristocratic propensities. Stevens' nostalgic memorialization of a lost grandeur can be compared with the present status of the estate which is handed over to some Mr. Farraday is suggestive of the growing American influence much to the dissatisfaction of the protagonist and the diminishing magnificence of Darlington Hall which appears to be under renovation as the large part of the house is now "under wraps" (6). Later in the novel Mr. Farraday refers to the mansion as a prison curtailing the freedom of the inmates and stifling their emotions.

> You fellows you are always locked up here in this house all the time I'm away. Why don't you take the car and drive off somewhere for a few days? You look like you could make good use of a break. (4)

Stevens is blessedly content delimiting his engagement within the confinement of Darlington Hall which he confidently identifies as the best model of the picturesque England upholding the bright examples of Englishness. He is boastful of acquainted with his own native country- its landscapes and its dignitaries, only through a displaced sense of realizing Darlington Hall and its way of life. He seeks to substitute his sense of alienation and aloofness from the outer world with a feeling of self-conceived greatness which is strongly derived from his supposed contribution to the great affairs of the state: "those of our profession, although we didn't see a great deal of the country in the sense of touring the countryside and visiting picturesque sites, did actually see more of England than most, placed as we were in the houses where the greater ladies and gentlemen of the land gathered (5)." Stevens' cartographies of England primarily involve the aristocratic upper circle of life which represents the essentialist rigidity of English consciousness and notion of 'dignity'.

There are emphatic suggestions in the novel as to how the unruffled elements of the initial situations give way to a nightmarish messiness of centrifugal dispersion later in the narrative with the popping up of graver issues like anti-semitism, crypto-facism and a developing mistrust in the butler's loyal service to his master in the course of his mnemonic revival of a so-called glorious past.

Also, Stevens' patronizing inclination is manifested in his sudden realization of the unique pictuesqueness of the English landscape which draws its force primarily from a pertinent property of delicate restraint which he promptly connect with his sense of dignity eulogizing on the examplery demonstrativeness of the English butlers:

> What is pertinent is the calmness of that beauty, its sense of restraint. It is as though the land knows of its own beauty, of its own greatness, and feels no need to shout it. In comparision, the sort of sights offered in such places as Africa and America, through undoubtly very exciting, would, I am sure, strike the objective viewer as inferior on account of their unseemly demonstrativeness. (30)

Stevens was awfully misled into an unsavory illegal involvement by blindly supporting his master in his clandestine affairs of Nazi appeasement having identified himself with only one purpose, one desire-serving his lord unquestionably, forming a false consciousness in himself as seeking his own contentment in fulfilling his master's ambitions. He deliberately displaces his own desires and defences substituting them with Lord Darlington's aspirations in an ever-naturalising process of self-actualization as he allows himself to verbalize his transmigratory sensibilities at crucial moment of his emotional devolution, "the day his lordship's work is complete, the day he is able to rest on his laurels, content in the knowledge that he has done all anyone could ever reasonably ask of him, only on that day, Miss Kenton, will I be able to call myself, as you put it, a well content man" (173).

Stevens in his impressionistic observation and engagement develops a paternalistic model of imperialist Englishness which reflects the post-war melancholia of a decadent nation in ruin. Throughout his motoring journey Stevens attempts to uphold and re-establish the older order of aristocratic paternalism in his representative enactment of the spirit of Englishness in all its forms and hierarches howsoever much meager that contribution may be. A sense of utter transience of old essentializing values attached to the idea of Englishness emerges in the narrative of Stevens which he consciously masquerades beneath

a subtle reintroduction of aristocratic values as is internalized in the person of Stevens from Lord Darlington's presupposition: " there is, after all, a real limit to how much ordinary people can learn and know, and to demand that each and every one of them contribute 'strong opinions' to the great debates of the nation, cannot, surely, be wise"(194). However, the new England he chances to discover poses a great threat to these values and renders his naturalizing task of defending Lord Darlington's affairs almost hollow within.

In subscribing to the views of Lord Darlington who is quite convinced of the complicity of the hierarchical systematization and strong leadership, "if your house is on fire, you don't call the household to the drawing room and debate the various options for escape for an hour, do you? It may have all very well once, but the world's a complicated place now"(200), Stevens seems to legitimatize the patronizing attitude of a bygone era and adds unscrupulously to the Empire's disintegration which is still proud of its demeaning dignity he has so circumspectly tried to uphold. Steven's preoccupation with dignity indicates a wider diplomatic manouvering in the world politics in which Britain had to continuously struggle to re-actuate its lost magnificence and its chief claim to be the most civilized nation entrusted with the responsibility to instill the spirit of democracy in others. The value system Stevens espouses finds a parallel in Lord Darlington's well-intentioned defense of the paternalistic model of aristocracy. The master and the servant purportedly merge into one as both are victimized by their false consciousness of re-enacting a form of Englishness which is grossly inappropriate to the occasion. They are equally misled into the servile reworking of the myth of Englishness in their emphatic restatement of the 'idea of dignity' which is conceptualized differently in different contexts of the novel. This version of aristocratic Englishness displayed by Stevens falls into sharp contrast with that of the Harry Smith's which appears to be more democratic in its classless representation of an all-inclusive Englishness:

> ...Dignity isn't just something gentlemen have. Dignity is something every man and woman in this country can strive for and get...there is no dignity to be had in being a slave. That' what we fought the war for and that's what we won...no matter if you're rich or poor, you're born free so that you can express your opinion freely, and vote in your member of parliament or vote him out. That's what dignity's really about, if you'll excuse me sir. (185-186)

Steven's reworking of the myth of Englishness drastically fails because the assumption he carries in defense of his master no longer holds ground in the politicization of the spirit of Englishness in the post-war era. Steven's deliberate fashioning and refashioning of himself as an English gentleman and the prototypes of English butler dramatically crumbles into insignificance at a crucial moment when the ownership of Darlington Hall is transferred to the American Mr. Farraday which makes him question his own position in relation to the old certainties he seeks to re-establish rather than identifying himself as confirming to these views. Steven's problem reflects a still deeper post-war disillusionment because of the lack of alternative models which should compensate the loss of initial appeal of the new form of life emerged. With the change of ownership Steven's life too, undergoes a similar transformation which is readily noticed in his reluctance to disclose to the guests his previous engagement with Lord Darlington and his estate to the much irritation of Mr. Farrady:"I mean to say, Stevens, this is a genuine grand old English home, 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. You're the real thing, aren't you? That's what I paid for, Isn't that what I have?"(124) Farraday's insistence on 'the real thing' designates his desire to possess and exhibit a lost tradition relicing the glorious past. His words bring out the insignificance of the English tradition which has been commodified as an image of the past having market value in the process of its preservation.

The novel's open ended inconclusiveness points out to the incomplete, fragmented, traditional image of Englishness in which Stevens has to meditate the real meaning of his life questioning his past services and loyalities restructuring his old ideals and sensibilities when he discovers 'evening' as the best part of the day: "I should adopt a more positive outlook and try to make the best of what remains of my day" (257). In that epiphanic moment of self-realization Stevens reconnects his own 'remains'- the twilight years of his existence with that of the Empire which is in utter dissolution, fast replacing the old order and attitude with new and redemptive ones, yet nostalgic of its lost magnitude of imperial Englishness. Stevens' epiphany becomes an impeccable claim for the reconstruction and reconstitution of a wider cultural perspective which can be built best upon the very remnant of the Empire's past, an all-inclusive Englishness which should ever-contextualising itself in "an open framework, continually in the making" seeking to "accommodate other worlds, other vocabularies, other memory" (Chambers 47-50) in a densely globalizing world. Stevens' entire life has thus been reduced to this few moment of truly personal meditation in which he is allowed a glimpse of the real meaning of human life when he asserts, "in bantering lies the key to human warmth" (259) which at once transforms him from an analyst to an enthusiast.

Conclusion

With regard to the cultural situatedness of the novel *The Remains of the Day* Lawrence Graver writes "it is remarkable too, that as we read along in this strikingly original novel, we continue to think not only about the old butler, but about his country, its politics and culture"("What The Butler Saw"). Ishiguro's ambivalent position in this "stuck on the margins" (Vorda 12) problematics renders Stevens's homeless mind as Barry Lewis suggests a "perfect representative of the century's displacement" (7) and locates the novel "in the transitional moments of history, when one set of values is replaced by another" (144). Ishiguro seems to work on more universal themes which may project a greater view of cultural inclusivity in contrast to the narrow reductionist view of an essentialist Englishness, because "all cultures are involved in one another;

none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated and monolithic" (Said xxv).

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