

From Memory and Reality to Forgetfulness and Fantasy: Poststructuralist Perspective**Analysis of Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* and *The Buried Giant*****Dr. Pratap Kumar Dash**

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Abstract

*The tradition of writing narratives with different contexts and styles has been a well-knit trend of our time. The fiction writers not only render their unique imaginations but also experiment with ideologies, give colour to anecdotes, myths and historical contexts. In this context, the present paper focuses on the two famous novels of Kazuo Ishiguro namely *The Remains of the Day* and *The Buried Giant* on the basis of comparison in the two different spacio-temporal set-ups. Firstly, it focuses on the theme of both the novels in a reader-centric approach. This includes hermeneutic perspectives of the reflection on the memory and reality in one and forgetfulness and fantasy in the other. The reminiscences of the past and the visual narration of the present have been put forth as balanced chain of events. Secondly, it analyses both the novels on the basis of text-centric approach which includes some of the major components of the poststructuralist approach like the mechanism of narrative blend in story-space as well as in discourse-space, intertextuality, foregrounding, myth and history as constructs.*

Key words: narratives, spacio-temporal set-ups, reader-centric, text-centric, intertextuality**Introduction**

We have been in touch with a lot many memorable genres of factual as well as fictitious narratives for centuries together. Right from the four wheels of novel wane to the stream of consciousness novel and then to symbolism, myth or ethological fantasy; the realists or the orientalist; the magic realism or new-historicism— all are embedded with varieties of techniques befitting the narrative trends of novels. In this light, Kazuo Ishiguro (1954) stands as a torch bearer to carry forward the glory of narrativity in his novels with a new taste as Swedish Academy describes him in its citation as a writer "who, in novels of great emotional

force, has uncovered the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world". His writings have been published and read widely. Some of the most popular writings include *The Remains of the Day* (1989), *Never Let Me Go* (2005), *The Unconsoled* (1995), and *The Buried Giant* (2015). It seems that Ishiguro is a perfect experimentalist with both the known as well as unknown trends of narratives. In this light, this paper focuses on his two most famous novels focusing on the two most famous trends of narrative blending memory and reality as in *The Remains of the Day* and forgetfulness and fantasy in *The Buried Giant*. As regard to the analysis of both the novels, the poststructuralist perspectives have been included befitting to the contemporary trending pattern of analysis which is based on reader-centric as well as text-centric approaches; role of myth and history; society and culture as basic constructs. In addition, it refers to the interpretation leading to multi-layered meaning on the basis of defamiliarization, intertextuality and text-subversion, etc.

The Narrative of *The Remain of the Day*: An Autobiographical Account of a Butler

Says Ishiguro, "Indeed, the more one considers it, the more obvious it seems: association with a truly distinguished household is a prerequisite of 'greatness'. A 'great' butler can only be, surely, one who can point to his years of service and say that he has applied his talents to serving a great gentleman - and through the latter, to serving humanity." (86). With this note, he undertakes to demonstrate with beautiful clarity how high the human price can be for a person who has dedicated his life to a goal that becomes a commitment.

A reader-centric interpretation reveals that the novel is set in southern England in the summer of 1956 and goes in flashback. Stevens undertakes a six-day visit to the English West Country that takes him first to Salisbury, then Dorset, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall, before ending in Weymouth. The first-person narrator and protagonist is Stevens, a British ageing butler whose lifelong goal has been to serve Lord Darlington. After the death of the lord, his mansion, complete with its prime servant, have been taken over by an American named Farraday. Offered his first vacation, Stevens sets out on a motoring trip to the West Country including Cornwall to meet Mrs Alice Benn, who as Miss Kenton had worked with him in the heyday of Darlington Hall. Stevens receives a letter from Miss Kenton, and believes that her letter hints that her marriage is failing and that she might like to return to her post at Darlington as housekeeper. Stevens finds that ever since World War II has ended, it has been difficult to find enough people to staff large manor houses such as Darlington Hall but, Miss

Kenton's letter finally opens his eyes to the simple truth: that these small errors of recent months have derived from nothing more sinister than a faulty staff plan. Keeping this in mind, he plans his visit and in the pretext of his visit, he also reflects very much on his memories of his work as a butler during and just after World War II. This is a narrative account of six days which is very often disturbed by the memories of his past service to the late Lord Darlington, and most of all by the painful recollections of his friendship with the housekeeper, Miss Kenton.

His first day travel is titled 'Day One-Evening at Salisbury' where he finds himself in a guest house at Salisbury. This provides him a fine feeling. Then, he ventures into that the landscape of the country alone in order to enjoy more of the beauty of it. Here, he remembers his father as he hides his feelings but so professionally he carries out his duties so that on his departure, his boss had complimented him on the excellence of his butler and had left an unusually large tip in appreciation which his father without hesitation asked his employer to donate to a charity.

The second day travel is titled 'Day-Two Morning, Salisbury' when he plans the journey to Salisbury with considerable care, avoiding almost entirely the major roads. This road takes him into a fair number of the sights recommended by Mrs J. Symons in her book, and he says he is well pleased with it. For much of the time, it takes him through farmland amidst the pleasant aroma of meadows, and often he finds himself slowing the Ford to a crawl to better appreciate a stream or a valley he was passing.

Here, he recollects the memory of Miss Kenton. He says that she is an intelligent woman and he cannot see why there is an option of her returning to Darlington. He also mentions the role of some Chinese employees working there and about the sickness of his father out of over-work. This consequently shows that his has imbibed the qualities of honesty and sincerity from his father.

He recollects the memory of the end of 1920 when Lord Darlington made the first of a number of trips to Berlin himself, and the profound effect it had on him. He notices that a heavy air of preoccupation hung over him for days after his return, in reply to his inquiry, Darlington told that, it was "Disturbing, Stevens. Deeply disturbing. It does us great discredit to treat a defeated foe like this. A complete break with the traditions of this country."(53). He

feels that his boss was deeply concerned about the politics and economy of Europe after World War II. He then finds in the following two years or so following Herr Bremann's death, Lord Darlington, together with Sir David Cardinal, became successful in gathering together a broad alliance of figures who shared the conviction that the situation in Germany should not be allowed to persist. He remembers one morning two ladies from Germany and an Italian gentleman arrived there to attend conference. The conference begins on a rainy morning during the last week of March 1923 in the somewhat unlikely setting. He recalls Lord Darlington opening the discussions by formally welcoming the guests, before going on to outline the strong moral case for a relaxing of various aspects of the Versailles treaty, emphasizing the great suffering he had himself witnessed in Germany. Then he concludes saying that, 'Treaties and boundaries and reparations and occupations. But Mother Nature just carries on her own sweet way. Funny to think of it likes that, don't you think?'(81)

The third chapter titled 'Day Two: Afternoon' reflects on the fact that having enjoyed a good morning's motoring in splendid weather, and having lunched well at a country inn, he crosses the border into Dorset. He became aware of a heated smell emanating from the car engine. He finds himself in a narrow lane, hemmed in on either side by foliage so that he could gain little idea of what was around him.

'On the Day Three: Morning,' he arrives at an inn named 'the Coach and Horses', a little way outside the town of Taunton, Somerset. This being a thatch-roofed cottage by the roadside, it looks a conspicuously attractive. He then comes across Mursden, Somerset where the firm of Giffen and Co is there supplying them candle. He remembers that for some time, Giffen's was undoubtedly the finest silver polish available, and it was only the appearance of new chemical substances on the market shortly before the war that caused demand for this impressive product to decline. He recalls watching Mr George Bernard Shaw, the renowned playwright, at dinner one evening, examining closely the dessert spoon before him, holding it up to the light and comparing its surface to that of a nearby platter, quite oblivious to the company around him.

'Day Three: Evening,' he walks down to the village which was accomplished in a half-hour or so and there he looks for accommodation and a can of petrol. He finds himself on a paved path going down into the village, and it was while descending this path that he met Mr Taylor, his kind host of the evening.

On 'Day Four: Afternoon,' he finally arrives at Little Compton, and at this moment, he was sitting in the dining hall of the Rose Garden Hotel having recently finished lunch. Outside, the rain falls steadily. Here also he focuses on a butler of any quality must be seen to inhabit his role, utterly and fully. In addition, he mentions about Hitler. He says that if Hitler had had things his way, "...we'd just be slaves now. The whole world would be a few masters and millions upon millions of slaves. And I don't need to remind anyone here, there's no dignity to be had in being a slave. That's what we fought for and that's what we won." (135)

He stays at the Rose Garden Hotel, which is homely and comfortable, and says that one cannot begrudge the extra expense of accommodating oneself here. It is conveniently situated on one corner of the village square, a rather charming ivy-covered manor house capable of housing. 'Day Six: Evening' gives us an account of the seaside town which is a place he had thought of coming to for many years. He had heard various people talk of having spent a pleasant holiday here. The novel ends with Stevens focusing on the remains of the day that is his association with Mr. Farrady in the rest of his life.

The Narrative of *The Buried Giant*: An Experiment with Fantasy

In the reader-centric mode, we come to know in the beginning that "ogres were not so bad provided one did not provoke them." Sir Gawain, who once served under King Arthur, is one of the memorable characters. The novel talks about an elderly Briton couple Axl and Beatrice those who live in a fictional post-Arthurian England. They had a common feature of forgetfulness. But, they dimly recall that once upon a time, they had a son to whom they need to look for. Then, the couple decide to travel to a neighbouring village to seek him out. They head to a monastery to consult with Jonus, a wise monk, about a pain in Beatrice. Then, they meet the elderly Sir Gawain, nephew of King Arthur, who was given the task of slaying the she-dragon Querig decades ago, but who never succeeded. Wistan, a knight tells the fact that he once he was sent by the Saxon king to slay Querig out of worry that she would be used by Lord Brennus, king of the Britons, to kill Saxons. The travellers are treated with hospitality at the monastery, but are informed by Jonus that most of the monks are corrupt. Sir Gawain has spoken to the abbot, believing he will protect the four. But, the abbot informs Lord Brennus who sends soldiers to murder them. As an experienced warrior, Wistan feels it deeply that the monastery was originally built as a fort, and then he makes use of its structure to capture and kill the soldiers.

In the first event, Sir Gawain, riding on alone, recalls how, years earlier, King Arthur had ordered the extinction of many Saxon villages. The mass murder had been a breach of faith established for the peace-treaties brokered by Axl, who had at the time been Arthur's emissary. But, Axl has forgotten it. Arthur also ordered that Querig to be brought to the home where she now lives, and do a spell casting her breath into an oblivion inducing mist and causing the Saxons to forget about the evil act of massacres.

In the second event, Axl and Beatrice become separated from Wistan and Edwin. They travel all alone. They are persuaded by a girl to take a poisoned goat to Querig's home. Sir Gawain joins them and shows the way. Travelling with Wistan, Edwin hears a voice that he identifies as his lost mother, calling him to her. In the meantime, Wistan realises that Edwin's wound has been caused by a baby dragon and that Edwin can lead him to Querig. As they approach, Edwin becomes increasingly distraught and gets controlled.

In the third event, Sir Gawain reveals that his duty was not in fact to slay Querig, but to protect her in order to maintain the mist. Wistan challenges Gawain to a fight and kills him. He proceeds to slay Querig causing Edwin's madness to depart and the mist to disperse, reinstating the people's memories. He expresses regret that "the giant, once well buried, now stirs": his action will cause the old enmities between Saxon and Briton to return, leading to a new war.

Finally, Axl and Beatrice recall that their son had died many years ago of the plague. They meet a ferryman who offers to row the old couple over to an island where they can be close to him in eternity. He says that married couples have to dwell on the island separately and always apart, but in rare cases couples whose love is profound may live together. The ferryman tells Axl and Beatrice that they are fit for that. But as they are about to be rowed over the waves increase, he informs them that he can carry only one person at a time. Axl is apprehensive that the ferryman proposes to pretend them into separating forever. But Beatrice believes that the man to be truthful and asks Axl to wait on the shore while she is taken over. The novel ends without resolution, as Axl reluctantly agrees.

Poststructuralist Perspective Analysis of the Narratives

This part includes the text-centric interpretation. To begin with quoting Chatman's perspective of narrative discourse, a narrative has necessarily a "story-space contains

exists” (Chatman: 96) which refers to character and setting. Then, this kind of narrative stylistic tendency is more perceptible in the formation of “discourse-space” which refers to a close narrative attention paid to a certain dimension of a narrative world as a foregrounded part of it. In this light, when we study such narratives, we study how meaning is created. It is created by the author and it is relocated, re-signified by the audience. Whole idea of the narrative can be understood only when we relate the narrative to the processes by which it comes in existence, to the author who becomes the agency, to the reader or audience who recreates the meaning. It is like semiotic inquiry, the narrative analysis analyzes the relationship between the signifier and the story-world in order to reveal the deeper system of cultural associations and other multitudes of things that are expressed through the narrative.

In this light in *The Remains of the Day* is embedded with thoughts, character-reflections and most importantly the movement between the past and the present. If one observes minutely, the novel very well weaves back and forth drawing connections between the present scenes and the time gone by and finally left with a hint of the resolution to take up in the remains of life.

The story of the narrative is unfolded through the meandering thoughts of the prominence of the first-person narrator. We soon discover that these central voices are rather unreliable in their accounts of past reactions to crises. For each, there loiters in the past an experience that may overturn the narrator’s expected sense of self and destroy the remnants of the individual’s human dignity. What exactly it is that hovers in the dark as each novel opens is a mystery that unravels only slowly, and the process keeps the reader on suspense until the climax. Some central mystery remains left to the reader to put together.

The novel grows out of several traditions within English literature. In some ways, critics say it to be kind of novel of manners, resonant with writers like Jane Austen. In other important ways it is an historical novel, weaving personal and world histories in a manner similar to Graham Swift's *Waterland*. In very different lines, the novel resembles "butler literature," popularized P. G. Wodehouse. The novel's style of narration is reminiscent of the tradition of the dramatic monologue. That means, the narrating voice in the novel is not only in the first person, but addresses an implied narratee whose ‘active absence’ structures a motivating tension that requires self-explanation and examination, moving the speaking character to some moment of revelation or self-discovery.”

In the novel, Stevens very often provides details of various events and experiences he goes through step by step. In different parts of the story, Stevens would explain the reasoning behind the decisions he makes and, more importantly, describes his emotional state, albeit sometimes being unaccountable.

In this context, *The Buried Giant* is presented with fantasy at the core of the novel. Like *The Remains of the Day*, *The Buried Giant* is a love story. In a critical and moral consideration, even though the main characters Axl and his wife Beatrice are not typical still then, they are an elderly couple who have spent their entire life together, and now lead a simple existence on the outskirts of a village where they are rather ill-treated and are forbidden by the town's council to have candles in their chamber due to their old age as the author says, "But God will know the slow tread of an old couple's love for each other, and understand how black shadows make part of its whole." (68). Night together, they sit in the engulfing darkness. Symbolically, Axl and Beatrice are helplessly deprived of both. Not only this, as it happens to their community, there is also a mysterious, infectious, and ubiquitous mist of forgetfulness. Beatrice comments infuriatedly, "It's queer the way the world's forgetting people and things from only yesterday and the day before that. Like a sickness come over us all." (70).

History often forms as a potential ground in both the narratives. In the first, it is realistic reminiscences whereas in the second, it is fantasizing history. *The Remains of the Day* continuously foregrounds the British Politics after War II. From the beginning, Stevens acknowledges that the reputation of Lord Darlington referring to World War II. It slowly becomes clear that Lord Darlington spent much of the 1930s attempting to promote cooperation and good feeling between England and Germany under the Nazis. From Stevens's account, this attempt was entirely benign, evidence of Lord Darlington's character as a gentleman who truly believed that polite conversation over dinner could solve any disagreement. Yet Lord Darlington's assurances that Nazi atrocities were a "misunderstanding" are at best naïve and harmful. Stevens even refers to a context that persistence that Lord Darlington was never anti-Semitic. He is so faithful to Lord Darlington that Stevens himself contributes to this norm by firing two Jewish maids under his employer's orders.

There are parallel events between the personal and the political that is constructed throughout the novel. Stevens ends up blaming himself, not necessarily for helping Darlington choose a right path but for failing to make his own decisions and his own mistakes.

In a different scale, *The Buried Giant* is a fantasy novel by Ishiguro. It is set in a mythologized fifth-century Britain in which pixies, dragons, and ogres used to live along with human beings. Ishiguro's inspiration for the novel came from the Dark Ages in Britain. Memory plays an important role in the first novel whereas in the second, it is forgetfulness. One important recurring theme has been the role that memory plays in shaping characters' understanding of themselves. Ishiguro also establishes tenacious worry with power and the effects of rigid ideologies. The novel is a deeply personal account of Stevens' life that is staged alongside the histories of Great Britain and Europe in the years preceding and following World War II. As it happens, the inmost theme of Ishiguro's novel encompasses the fight between Stevens' duties and his personal desires which in his mind are in profound conflict. One of the more compelling aspects of Stevens' philosophy involves his definition of dignity. According to Stevens, a butler has dignity if he is able to maintain his professionalism no matter what the circumstances. Finally, he loses his self-esteem by distinguishing his feelings and discovering that he indeed had followed the wrong definition all along. Stevens is extremely demanding about the formality of his interactions. We sense that he learned this from his father, who treats his son with the utmost formality. Even close to death, Stevens' father is concerned with his duties - only able to acknowledge his relationship with his son as he takes his last breaths.

In the novel, mist stands as a symbol of forgetfulness. The thick mist covers not only the ground but also the mind of people. As a result, they forget things they once knew or events which have happened recently. We come to know this as Axl mentions that "...it's queer the way they the world's forgetting people and things from only yesterday and the day before that."(123).

Culture happens to be one of the most influential features of both the narratives. As it is evident in these novels, they cannot be understood and judged without locating it within the culture it is born into. Culture itself is nothing but a web of subjective truths handed over and narrated in various ways. In a way we can say that culture comes into being through storytelling. Culture is every individual's and place's unique creation. Within a culture these

narratives are not only in symbolic representations but also in everyday activities of life like social practices and political ideas and many more things that concern life.

Love is yet another featured undercurrent in both the novels. In *The Remains of the Day*, most of all, though, it is a book about love. Stevens is forced to let go of his illusions about Lord Darlington, his filial pride, his cherished “dignity”, until all that remains is Miss Kenton and what might have been. The story reaches climax in the quiet surroundings of a Cornish tea-room. By the end of the novel, we find ourselves with characters choosing between seeking to fulfil their dreams and settling for what's most readily available. In the case of Miss Kenton, for instance, she always loved Stevens and fully gave him the chance to intervene in her marriage before she accepted her husband's proposal. When he doesn't, however, Miss Kenton makes the choice to marry a man she doesn't necessarily love. But at the end of a twenty-year journey, when Stevens finally finds her again, we discover that Miss Kenton never did come to terms with her settling - but only recently has accepted that she will never find the passionate love to which she aspired. Stevens ultimately makes the same decision when faced with Miss Kenton's story of the last twenty years. Instead of confessing his love for Miss Kenton at this pivotal moment, then, he agrees with her and tells her to go back to her husband. He heads back to Darlington Hall, settling for his duty and renouncing love.

In *The Buried Giant*, it is apparently noticed that the mysterious island the characters of the novel talk very much about is an allegory of afterlife. Just as they say, “wish to cross to the island”, should be questioned by the boatman. Lonely shadows move around the island till the end of the world but sometimes couples are permitted to cross to the island together if they are “bonded by love”. Those, who cross to the island, cannot come back.

Conclusion

Both *The Remains of the Day* and *The Buried Giant* carry forward the narrative tradition of fiction in the way that some others have already adopted earlier. For example, nostalgic reminiscences as well as biographical and historical backgrounds form the base of many writings. Fantasising myth and history is not new too. But as it seems, the story-space as well as the discourse space of the novels of Ishiguro have much of ideological and comprehensive details which make it more of realistic and meaningful. He seems to bring out the styles of Charles Dickens and Salman Rushdie and make it more convincing and balanced for the

readers to understand and evaluate them in the light of the contemporary socio-cultural and social constructs. The untold stories of the aftermath of World War II and the literary colour of the legends of King Arthur have been presented skilfully which is more perceptible for readers.

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