

## **Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* as the Post Modern Novel**

**Bhawna Singh**  
Research Scholar  
Dept. of English & MEL  
Lucknow University

Kazuo Ishiguro One of the most celebrated contemporary novelist of his time. Kazuo Ishiguro's 1988 novel *The Remains of the Day* subgenre of postmodern British fiction both thematically and formally. Ishiguro's main concern is psychology, inner mechanism of suppression of emotions, the idealization, self-deception, and the way in which people protect themselves from the truth about themselves, mostly through language. *The Remains of the Day*, like his other Ishiguro novels, openly centers on nostalgia. This novel depicts various elements that demonstrate post-modern intentions. Through Ishiguro's perceptible use of these key elements, it becomes quite obvious that Ishiguro's main intention was to create a novel that would successfully represent the post-modern movement. Ishiguro is most famous for his tragic character study in *The Remains of the Day* and the dystopian tragedy *Never Let Me Go*, the various genres of which demonstrate his broad range. Nevertheless, some of his most poignant works, those which make his writing so influential have to do with his Japanese legacy. Migrating at the age of five and not returning to Japan until many years later, he has declared in interview with Bomb Magazine that his relationship with Japanese culture is frequently loud – but nevertheless his early novels *A Pale View of the Hills* and *The Artist of the Floating World*

deal with Japanese identity after the Second World War with a honesty that could not be anticipated in a writer completely ignorant by this cultural background. This paper will attempt to analyze Ishiguro's *The Remains* in the presence of the critical theories of postmodern context and period.

Ishiguro is not postmodernist openly if we talk about the form, but his apprehension for the use of language for the purpose of building a life, makes him a post modernist writer. Shows how language is used by the character to fictionalize his own past; Steven the protagonist does the same. He is rephrasing his own past, rebuilding himself in a more positive light. According to Ishiguro, Language is not used to create reality. It does not create meaningful reality or truth; it only helps to create someone's version of reality. He is not like classic Postmodernist. Unlike other postmodernists, Ishiguro does not experiment with form, his novels do not contain intertextuality, hyper reality, pastiche etc. they are not Meta fictions, they do not discuss the nature of fiction, they are not concerned with the art of writing of fiction. On the contrary, he tries to hide the elements that could be experimental. Ishiguro is quite unlike postmodernists, but his themes are postmodernist

The most crucial post-modern elements revealed throughout the novel is that of the manipulation of realistic historical events, which are facts. The novel is overflowing with plenty of real historical events and content, and multiple examples in which these may be manipulated to thicken the plot. The post modern movement was affected by World War II, which was the most disastrous happening during this era. To understand post modernity we need to study World

War II, the biggest catastrophic event in human history. The representation of history is one of the major concerns of postmodernism.

*The Remains of the Day* include the relationship between the British ruling class and German Nazis during the 1930s, and the changing condition of England both internally and as a world power in the aftermath of the war. Critics of Ishiguro's work have often been tempted to read these novels regardless of their setting in Japan or England as distinctly Japanese due to elements of Ishiguro's style. The central theme deals with psychological methods of suppression of feelings. Stevens suppresses his feelings and uses psychological defense mechanisms to keep unpleasant memories away, to keep unacceptable desires at bay. Stevens represses knowledge about the past to protect himself from the painful memory of political flirtation of Lord Darlington with fascism and Nazism and the fact that he, Stevens accepted it passively. Silence is acceptance. He was a collaborator of Nazis indirectly. He never condemns Lord Darlington's behaviour. The fact that he does not defend Lord Darlington shows that he knows very well right from wrong. He poses here very unpleasant question of personal responsibility. Throughout history, many people resorted to this type of repression. He is very well aware of how wrong it was what Lord Darlington did. This aspect dealt with political repression.

In *The Remains of the Day*, Ishiguro presents historical events from a marginalized point of view. The focus is mainly on a marginalized figure from a British society searching for glimpses and pictures of ordinary men and women. The butler is a good symbol for the relationship of very ordinary people to power. *The Remains of the Day* employs the use of traditional concepts like the unreliable narrator and objectivity to serve the purpose of creating a postmodern narrative of history. Such methods are manipulated to create a postmodern view of history. *The*

*Remains of the Day* examines three different pictures of England that emerge from Stevens's narrative, and suggests that the transitions the novel depicts anticipate an emerging postmodern condition.

This novel is based upon the memories of Stevens, the butler of Darlington hall. Once the family seat of Lord Darlington, the hall is now in the possession of an American, Mr. Faraday. Stevens' narrative records a motoring journey he takes to the south west of England in July 1956. On his journey he remembers his years of service to Lord Darlington before the Second World War and affords an opportunity to measure the extent to which the England of 1956 has changed from that of the 1920s and 1930s. The butler, Stevens, the central character of *The Remains* and Ishiguro's narrator, serves with extreme loyalty Lord Darlington who arranged unofficial meetings between British government officials and representatives of the German Nazi government. Much of Stevens' narration vindicates his blind submission to Lord Darlington even when the latter asks him to dismiss the two Jewish servants before the visit of The Nazi dignitaries he himself is not totally convinced of his master's decision, blames Miss Kenton, the housekeeper, when she refutes Lord Darlington's decision and threatens to resign. Stevens addresses her:

'Miss Kenton, let me suggest to you that you are hardly well placed to be passing judgments of such a high and mighty nature. 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. Whereas his lordship, I might venture, is somewhat better place to judge what is for the best.'

(pp. 157-158).

Throughout the novel, Stevens struggles to reconcile his own private memories of Lord Darlington and what seemed to Stevens Darlington's noble and virtuous intentions. He offers his private accounts of the international dealings taking place in Lord Darlington's home during the interwar years. Stevens masks his repression as professionalism, which is his excuse for everything. He is obsessed with professional dignity, with being a perfect butler, is an excuse for himself for being politically and sexually disengaged. He avoids every kind of responsibility. He is furious about the decision of the housekeeper and the under butler to get married and leave profession. The reason he is upset is that they dared to do what he does not. He masks his disappointment with Miss Kenton's seeing someone as a purely professional disappointment. He says her marriage would be a professional loss. When she surprises him in the pantry, revealing her interest in him, he tries to reassert their 'professional relation in a more proper manner'. So the language he uses, very formal, stiff and artificial, is a reflection of himself.

He exempts him from political responsibility claiming that as a butler, it was not his job to think. He believed he needed to agree with views of his master. There are very disturbing conclusions here that make us seriously question democracy. In the early 30s Stevens has to fire two Jewish maids, under the excuse of just following orders. There is even a suggestion of homoerotic connection between Brehman, German aristocrat and Lord Darlington.

This is Ishiguro's very subtle criticism of stiffness and conventionality of British and also of Japanese societies. As a result, these societies produced characters much like Stevens is, cowards who are easy targets of authoritarian manipulators.

Unintentionally and ironically, his words reveal just the things he is trying to hide. He only accomplishes to speak of himself through what he says of others. He says Lord Darlington's life was a 'sad waste' and that the life of Miss Kenton was pervaded by the 'sense of waste', which suggests it is Stevens's life that was wasted. This is the strategy most of us resort to. When he speaks of Miss Kenton's nostalgia about the past, it is his nostalgia. He also suggests that Miss Kenton regrets the decision she made in the past, and it turns out he regrets his own decision.

Ishiguro claims that this novel reworks certain stereotypes and myths about England. He uses a lot of clichés that people usually have about the English. Whether he reinforces or subverts them is difficult to decide. Stevens' politeness is only politeness on the surface and it masks destructive political passivity. The myth of merry old England is harmless nostalgia for the times that have never been, so Ishiguro subverts them.

Historical personages appear in the novel, which are at the same level with Stevens and other character, so again there is a postmodernist element in the novel which is not exactly true postmodernist work. *The Remains of the Day* is not only a postmodern novel, but postmodernist, the term reserved for the novels that are meant to be self-aware and metafictional; that the author knows about the period and set out to make a novel embodying this ethos.

## Work Cited

- Hutcheon, L. *A poetics of postmodernism: History, theory, fiction*. London: Routledge. 1988. Print.
- Ishiguro, Kazuo. Interview shorts: Kazuo Ishiguro. By Graham Swift. *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*, pp. 35-41. 1989. Print.
- Ishiguro, Kazuo. An interview with Kazuo Ishiguro. By Gregory Mason. *Contemporary Literature*, pp. 335-347. 1989. Print.
- Ishiguro, Kazuo. *The Remains of the Day*. Great Britain: Faber & Faber. 1989. Print.
- Ishiguro, Kazuo. An interview with Kazuo Ishiguro. By Allan Vorda & Kim Herzinger. *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*, pp. 66-88. 1990. Print.
- Ishiguro, Kazuo. Don Swaim interviews Kazuo Ishiguro. By Don Swaim. *Conversations with Ishiguro*, pp. 89-109. 1990. Print.