

IMAGINARY HOMELANDS REVISITED IN THE NOVELS OF KAZUO ISHIGURO

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THIS study will analyze the fiction of the Japanese-born English novelist Kazuo Ishiguro as an illustration of the views Salman Rushdie propounds in "Imaginary Homelands," an essay which may be considered a paradigm of the discourse of writers in the between-world condition. In this piece, Rushdie describes and defines the situation of those writers who are, in the words of Michael Ondaatje's English patient, "born in one place and choosing to live elsewhere. Fighting to get back or to get away from our homelands all our lives" (1992: 176). More specifically, Rushdie analyzes the theme and the presentation of the homeland in the works of this type of writer, pointing out that the attempt to portray one's land of origin is inevitably coupled with the inability to be faithful to any objective reality. Although he speaks principally about Indian writers, his observation of the situation clearly applies to most writers who share the multicultural experience.

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But

if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge—which gives rise to profound uncertainties—that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (Rushdie 1992: 10)

Taking as his point of departure the writing of *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie dwells on the complexity of fictionally re-creating the land he had left more than twenty years before in the saga of a child and of a nation. Recognizing that the distances of time and space distort facts, he revisioned his novel in order not to fall into the trap of having to validate his remembered experiences with objective realities. He centered his efforts on making the novel "as imaginatively true as I could," knowing that "what I was actually doing was a novel of memory and about memory, so that my India was just that: 'my' India, a version and no more than just one of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions" (1992: 10).

Any writer who writes about his homeland from the outside, Rushdie claims, must necessarily "deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost" (1992: 11). Nonetheless, it is precisely the fragmentary nature of these memories, the incomplete truths they contain, the partial explanations they offer, that make them particularly evocative for the "transplanted" writer. For Rushdie, these "shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance because they were *remains*; fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities" (1992: 12).

The attempt to build a novel on the basis of memory has proven to be an attractive prospect for many exiled or immigrant writers, who may even feel that this is the only way to reconcile oneself to both one's past and present. This is the case with a great number of ethnic minority writers in the United States and Canada, as well as those in England. For instance, Sri-Lanka born Michael Ondaatje's fictionalized memoir, *Running in the Family*, is clearly the endeavour of a between-world writer to revision the history of his homeland and of his family. Rohinton Mistry's collection *Tales from Firozsha Baag* outlines the writer's process of introgression and assimilation into Western life and culture, as it shuttles back and forth from an Indian past to a Canadian present. This, perhaps, to prove Rushdie's claim that somehow, inescapably, "it's my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time" (1992: 9).

Kazuo Ishiguro conforms to and revitalizes the model of the between-world writer Rushdie refers to. His personal history is a vivid reflection of the particular development of the immigrant writer caught between two worlds. In 1960, when Ishiguro was six, his family moved from Nagasaki to England for a temporary stay related to his oceanographer father's job. The family believed for years they would return to Japan and, throughout his childhood, young Ishiguro could not forget Japan, principally because he had to prepare himself to return to it.

I grew up with a very strong image in my head of this other country, this very important other country to which I had a strong emotional tie... Of course, I didn't know Japan, because I didn't come here. But in England I was all the time building up this picture in my head of an imaginary Japan... [Later] I realized that this Japan, which was very precious to me, actually existed only in my own imagination, partly because the real Japan had changed greatly between 1960 and later on. I realized it was a place of my childhood and I could never return to that particular Japan. (Ishiguro 1991: 76)

There is a conscious effort on the part of the author to write about Japan; his need and his wish to "re-create this Japan —put together all these memories and all these imaginary ideas I had about this landscape that I called Japan... to make it safe, preserve it in a book before it faded away from memory altogether" being "one of the real reasons why I turned to writing novels" (Ishiguro 1991: 76). The result is three exquisitely elaborated novels: *A Pale View of the Hills* (1982), *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) and *The Remains of the Day* (1989). In diverse ways, each of the novels projects a desire to come to terms with a past that is both personal and collective: Ishiguro's fiction will explore the Japanese character and history as a reflection of both his personal odyssey of displacement and his search for self. As an immigrant, "I had no obvious social role, because I wasn't a very English Englishman, and I wasn't a very Japanese Japanese either" (Ishiguro 1991: 82-83). This awareness of being what Bharati Mukherjee has called a "not-quite" made him consider himself a kind of homeless writer, as he had "no clear role, no society or country to speak for or write about. Nobody's history seemed to be my history" (Ishiguro 191: 83). Not to have a role in history is to be denied the very basis of identity; hence the author's need to retain his memories and to recreate their panorama through fiction. The narrative itself, therefore, is converted into the pursuit of that which is now possessed only in fragments.

The search for lost bits of memory, which in the immigrant writer is almost equivalent to meaning, is an essential characteristic of his narrative. Rushdie has compared memory to a "shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved; perhaps it is because our sense of what is the case is constructed from such inadequate materials that we defend it so fiercely, even to the death" (Rushdie 1992: 12). There appears to be an underlying assumption that once the memories are given palpable shape, articulated in literature, they will provide the link to one's past and, consequently, to one's self. Nonetheless, oftentimes, the mere process of remembrance is sufficient. For Ishiguro, fashioning a Japan in his novels appears to be of utmost importance, though it will always be exclusively a personal and imaginary homeland; the impulse to document facts is not as compelling. His aim is so clearly to record and preserve the Japan that exists in his mind that to turn to research to validate experience and recollections will necessarily deter from the original purpose.

As a writer, therefore, Ishiguro draws fundamentally on a compound of his early childhood recollections, his family upbringing, textbook facts and the Japanese films of the fifties. His acknowledged dearth of first-hand information about Japan has forced him into a position of relying principally on his imagination and, rejecting a realist purpose in writing, to give vent to both originality and self: "I just invent a Japan which serves my needs. And I put that Japan together out of little scraps, out of memories, out of speculation, out of imagination" (In Mason 1989: 341). His novels are then a demonstration of what happens when the act of trying to remember and the act of creating begin to overlap.

The presence of Japan and all things Japanese as inspiration, theme and symbol in Ishiguro's novels is constant, overwhelming and deliberate. Pico Iyer has pointed out how the atmosphere of all his books is set by the title of the first, *A Pale View of the Hills*, and all three novels have "that same ink-washed elusiveness, an ellipticism almost violent in its reticence; all three, moreover, are exquisitely fashioned miniatures, miracles of workmanship and tact that suggest everything through absence and retreat" (Iyer 1991: 588). Ishiguro's narrative technique captivates the reader with its austerity, both in style and storyline, recalling the extreme suggestiveness of Japanese poetry that never loses its clarity and definiteness in spite of its simplicity of form. The novels are often full of melancholy and irony, and yet clearly constructed with immense care. Their simplicity is quite deceptive, disguising rare sensitivity, artistic sobriety, and well-ordered craft in order to achieve the

Japanese perfection in miniature which one has been led to believe is the essence of Eastern art.

The physical image of Japan portrayed in his first two novels is painstakingly constructed. Because "the visual images of Japan have a great poignancy for me" (Ishiguro, in Mason 1989: 336), Ishiguro sketches in detail for his readers the setting of his novels giving an emotive charge to the landscape itself, another characteristic of Japanese poetry. Etsuko (in *A Pale View of the Hills*) spends many moments gazing out at the view from her apartment window:

"On clearer days, I could see far beyond the trees on the opposite bank of the river, a pale outline of hills against the clouds. It was not an unpleasant view, and on occasions it brought me a rare sense of relief from the emptiness of those long afternoons I spent in that apartment" (*PVH* 99).

An Artist of the Floating World, which reads like the diary of the protagonist, the retired Japanese painter Masuji Ono, opens with this description:

"If on a sunny day you climb the steep path leading up from the little wooden bridge still referred to around here as 'the Bridge of Hesitation', you will not have to walk far before the roof of my house becomes visible between the tops of two ginkgo trees" (*AFW* 7).

The descriptions of these scenes, important to the protagonists, underscore the pervading emotional temperature of the dramas that will be enacted in the narratives. Throughout the novel, Ishiguro stresses the physicality of the setting with meticulous descriptions and frequent allusions to them as reflection of inner states of being.

There are continual references to Japanese customs as well as descriptions that conform to the recognized Western idea of Japan. Etsuko and Ono's world is a traditional Japan, where the light is filtered through translucent paper screens, tea is served on the verandah overlooking the garden, marriages are arranged by go-betweens and women wear kimonos and cover their mouths when they laugh. Masuji Ono lives according to strict codes of etiquette and order, the ethos of actively and passively knowing one's place and adhering to protocol and precedent. He was formed by the practice of giving and receiving deference of the kind due to "masters," both in the aesthetic and imperial hierarchy. Etsuko's husband, Jiro, is a typical

Japanese businessman, married to his company, expecting absolute loyalty and service from his subservient wife. Ono's daughters address him as "Father" in formal and respectful tones and only venture to disagree with or question him in oblique phrases, a behavior identical to the way Etsuko treats her father-in-law. Ishiguro even explains several customs: the *miai*, a dinner arranged by a marriage broker to bring the families together for the first time, and the *kujibiki*, similar to the games of toss-and-win played at fairgrounds.

A principal part of the novels' strength is a remarkable quality of style in which dialogue and narration are unemphasized yet strangely powerful. Similar to the way the Japanese prefer the image and its implication to the statement and its commentary, Ishiguro's is a kind of writing that fashions images that are suggested rather than stated. His rare virtue—typical of the *haiku* poets—is the ability to prompt a creative response in the reader, to arouse reactions which must be quite individual, so that the books take on as many forms as there are readers. His works show extraordinary control of voice, a Japanese quality emanating from his perfectly pitched English prose. One is aware that the dialogue in *A Pale View of the Hills*, for example, is not perfect English. Etsuko speaks in a Japanese way because she is Japanese, and it is made clear that English is a second language for her. She speaks carefully, particularly when she reproduces Japanese dialogue in English, achieving in this manner a certain foreignness to her discourse. With Masuji Ono, Ishiguro was aware he had to convey fluency in Japanese that the reader would receive in English.

In a way the language has to be almost like a pseudotranslation, which means I can't be too fluent and I can't use too many Western colloquialisms. It has to be almost like subtitles, to suggest that behind the English language there's a foreign language going on. (Ishiguro, in Mason 1989: 345).

But it is in *The Remains of the Day* that the writer reveals his own Japanese subtlety as he revisions Japan in a novel that is not even set in Japan but has as its theme six unexceptional days in the life of that most English of characters, a butler. Himself a between-world critic, Pico Iyer considers this novel, among the many books that purport to explain Japan to the West, "the most revealing one so far" (Iyer 1991: 585). *The Remains of the Day* is, as its title suggests, written in that favourite Japanese form, the elegy for vanished rites; it is a vespers novel. Through the recollections of the protagonist's, Stevens's, years of service at Darlington Hall, Ishiguro will reveal essential aspects of the Japanese character.

The author imbues his description of Stevens's world with an exquisite Japanese sensibility. The butler's attention to detail and pride in his work is comparable to that of an *origami* maker. His insistence on ritual, his stoicism in performing his duties, especially in the face of adversity, his unswerving loyalty to his master—all these are prominent aspects of the Japanese collective psyche. There is, moreover, an element of *bushido* in Stevens's notions of honor and "dignity," which allow him to be dauntlessly unemotional in the face of even his father's death and the realization that he had lost the woman he loved. *Bushido*, the "way of the warrior," the ethical code of the *samurai*, resembled the code of the Knights in medieval Europe, demanding courage, honor, and loyalty to country and overlords. Once more, the novel is filled with descriptions of nature and when Stevens admires the English landscape for "the very lack of obvious drama or spectacle that sets the beauty of our land apart" or, while studying a travel book, ". . . the delights of Devon and Cornwall, complete with photographs and—to my mind even more evocative—a variety of artists's sketches of that region" (RD 11), he reflects the Japanese preference of subtlety and suggestion in art. The stilted and perfectly composed dialogue recalls the carefully elaborated "foreignness" of Ishiguro's earlier novels. Sometimes, when Stevens addresses his dying parent as "Father," never "you," or when Miss Kenton delivers sentences like "Is that so, Mr Stevens?" his narrative might almost be translated from the Japanese.

The simple yet suggestively complex dialogue, perhaps Ishiguro's main artistic triumph in his novels, is intimately linked with the three novels' principal theme: coming to terms with memories. In all three novels, we are presented with a character beyond middle age who is forced by circumstances to review, and, at times, almost relive, decisions made in the past in order to understand or cope with the demands of the present. This outline permits the author to examine under various lights what are to be the novels' recurring themes: dignity, self-deception, devalued ideals, repressed emotions and the high cost of displaced loyalty. The unadorned first-person narrations take place largely in the past but move freely and skilfully across time, capturing the ebb and flow of the old people's thoughts and their conflicting emotions.

The structure Ishiguro builds is rather like that of a murder mystery, in which fragments of crucial information are exposed gradually, piece by piece, often seemingly in passing, so that the reader collects clues and arrives at the truth by himself. And, in each of the books, the truth is revealed through the words of the narrators who are themselves, for the most part,

unaware of it. Ishiguro thus skilfully reveals each character's perceptions of the world at the same time he unveils, more importantly, how these perceptions blind them. *A Pale View of Hills* is the story of Etsuko trying to come to terms with the suicide of her eldest daughter Keiko. When a visit from her younger daughter prompts her to think about the events that led to this tragedy, Etsuko, unwilling and unprepared to confront harsh realities, decides to make a "sentimental journey" to her young adulthood and let another woman, her friend Sachiko, relive the turbulent experiences she witnessed and which later would be transposed to her own life. In this manner, Ishiguro very cleverly shows a person exploring the unhappiness of her own past by concentrating on the lives of other people. His narrative strategy in the book was to demonstrate "how someone ends up talking about things they cannot face directly through other people's stories. I was trying to explore that type of language, how people use the language of self-deception and self-protection" (Ishiguro, in Mason 1989: 339). Thus, Niki's visit and her references to her half-sister prompt Etsuko to remember the summer she bore Keiko —a fateful summer, for it was then, as she sees with hindsight, that the pattern of the future was set. Recounting Sachiko's story is Etsuko's manner of facing her own errors of the past, her oblique admission of how, out of a desire to fulfil her own emotional needs, she sacrificed her daughter's happiness.

Masuji Ono, in *An Artist of the Floating World*, faced with the investigation that forms part of the negotiations for his younger daughter's marriage, also looks back on the events that shaped his life. As a young man, he committed himself to a struggle that is no longer a cause for pride and he now attempts to resolve the conflict of his past with the reality of the present. This novel is thus the retrospective monologue of an elderly Japanese painter surveying his life and career from the perspective of defeated Japan: he tries to rationalize having used his talent in enthusiastic service of the cause of imperialism, and to avoid admitting the tragic consequences of his misplaced loyalty —the loss of his wife and son, the betrayal of his friends, the disintegration of the world as he knew it. Ishiguro uses the meanderings of memory to emphasize connections and reveal conflicts, as he unveils the real tension of the novel, where shameful incidents of Ono's past come back to threaten his daughter's future, his realization of how his dedication to the imperialist cause is no longer a matter for pride in post-war Japan.

At the center of the novel is Ono's pathetic struggle for self-affirmation in a society that measures worth with constantly shifting standards. He is forced to search his life for something to be proud of, revealing his ambition

to rise above the ordinary with his contribution through his art. The Japanese notion of honor and Ono's own desire to find something in his life to be proud of, compel him to seek that glory wherever it may be. Possessed of a great ability for admiration, and confident in his own success, he is capable of conceding honor even to those who have failed, subconsciously excusing what society now considers his own failures: "If one has failed where others have not had the courage or will to try, there is a consolation —indeed, a deep satisfaction— to be gained from this observation when looking back over one's life" (*AFW* 134).

Ono's need to rationalize is echoed by Stevens in *The Remains of the Day*. Stevens's journey, ostensibly to try and persuade Miss Kenton (now Mrs Benn), a former housekeeper, to return to Darlington Hall, sets in motion another journey —into the past, and the uncharted waters of his emotions. As he drives along, he begins to contemplate both the events he has lived through and the essence of his profession. But as the novel progresses, it becomes clear that Stevens is not merely contemplating the meaning of butlering: he is grappling with ways to justify his life, for once you take his professionalism, his dignity, out of the picture, not much is left. In proudly describing his service, he says that "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" (*RD* 117). But the reverence he shows towards his master is slowly revealed to be devoid of foundation as it turns out that Lord Darlington, with his old-fashioned ideas of chivalry, was active in the cause of Munich and the appeasement of Nazi Germany, and even of domestic British fascism. Stevens's apology for his master loses its validity fast, and his own life loses all traces of "greatness" as he reveals how, in seeking meaning only in self-subordination, he sacrificed his own growth as a human being.

Piece by piece, Ishiguro unravels the disintegration of Stevens's world, where the ideal of unquestioned loyalty and service reigned. Stevens's deepest conviction is that he is only as great as the man he serves, and he can best serve king and country by literally waiting upon history, keeping the silver polished on behalf of the ministers and ambassadors who visit his house to change the world. He permits himself neither opinions nor curiosity, emotions, or even self. His insistence on self-control, "a butler of any quality must be seen to *inhabit* his role, utterly and fully" (*RD* 169) prevents him from admitting into his life anything that might deter him from the fulfillment of his duties. It prohibits close personal relationships. He is so out of touch with his own feelings that he does not recognize love when it comes, so

obsessed with personal perfection that his only recollection of a visit by George Bernard Shaw is of the writer's being impressed by a well-polished spoon. As Miss Kenton cries, "Why, Mr Stevens, why, why, why do you always have to *pretend*?" (RD 154). But, in the end, it is these virtues that he so sought to cultivate that leave him weary and forlorn.

Ishiguro's characters are defined precisely by the words and emotions they stifle, and all his novels are shadowed by the silence of these absences. It is clear from the beginning that Stevens, as Etsuko and Ono before him, is the sort of narrator that exists principally to be seen through. He is unbending, humorless, incapable of understanding anything outside his own limited experience, and tenacious in defending the beliefs and the prejudices of an era whose time has passed. Even his verbal style is elaborately inexpressive, or intends to be: but the language of rationalization is immediately perceived, as well as the deliberate neutrality of someone taking great pains to avoid telling the truth. There is in the novel, as in the other two, an observable pattern of simultaneous admission and denial, revelation and concealment, that emerges as the defining feature of the butler's personality (Graver 1989: 3). Behind the words of Etsuko, Ono, and Stevens lie the realities about their lives, the moral compromises they made, and the recognition of the price they have to pay in striving for their ideals or their misguided dreams.

The intricately suggestive nature of the novels implies that Ishiguro will disclose truths larger than the personal tragedies being recounted. Just as emotional dimension is added to Japanese poetry by the symbolic meaning that is attached to geographic sites and historic events, there are experiences hidden in the novels that add to the complexity of the discourse. Meena Tamaya has pointed out how historical events, elliptically alluded to but never directly mentioned, are the powerful absences which shape the characters and the narratives of all three of Ishiguro's novels (1992: 45). Crucial to the tone and texture of both novels, therefore, is the memory of imperialism and war. Both *A Pale View of the Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World* begin after the bombing of Nagasaki, the event that lies at their emotional center. Barely touched upon, mentioned only by innuendo, the destruction of Nagasaki appears as a vacuum defined only by the fragmented lives and the disjointed modes of survival which derive from it (Yoshioka 1988: 73). In contrast to the simplicity of style and storyline, the plot of both narratives is overshadowed by the more elaborate settings of social and historical scope, which comprise World War II, the Atomic Bomb, the Korean War and the strenuous efforts of reconstruction in postwar Japan.

In *The Remains of the Day*, it is the dismantling of Britain's colonial empire, mentioned only as the date on which the narrative begins, that provides the determining historical context of the character's attitudes and aspirations. The destruction of Stevens's world of proud butlers and stately English manor houses coincides with the final curtain of Britain as the world's foremost imperial power. His reminiscences which are, in essence, a slow, reluctant slide downward to an end of the day realization that his scrupulous life has been entirely wasted, embody the denouement of his country's former omnipotence.

The historical allusions made by Ishiguro manifest on a larger scale the theme of dealing with a past rejected by a present; a subject which is, interestingly enough, among the principal concerns of immigrant writers. Temporal and spatial separation imply the need for a constant struggle to find a home and assert one's identity. On different scales, the novels are exercises in defining that identity for each of the protagonists. Etsuko must come to terms with the tragic consequences of the decisions she made years ago in another country. Her father-in-law, Ogata-san, a retired teacher who seems to be the epitome of bygone elegance and integrity, an educated and gentle man, has fought to imbue his students with imperialistic values and spur them on to die in a patriotic war, the ideals that Ono devoted his art to. Ono, as he gradually emerges from his reminiscences and encounters, is a former partisan and propagandist for Hirohito. With these two characters Ishiguro suggests that the honor of the past was itself more than a little tarnished. In postwar Japan, these ideas are discredited. Both old men are attacked by former pupils and witness the devaluation of their life's work just as Stevens will comprehend the pathetic end of his misguided years of service.

But the immigrant writer is further urged by his complex situation to go beyond external perceptions of differences and changes, to underlying similarities and motives. Rushdie believes that the consequences of the between-world experience permit, and even encourage, deeper insight into the nature of literature. The writer's discontinuity, his out-of-country and even out-of-language experience, is often the force that enables him to speak properly and concretely on a subject of universal significance and appeal (1992: 12). The loss of a past and a nation compel the writer to seek that necessarily self-made identity precisely in the gap between his past and his present, between where he used to be and where he now is. Rushdie asserts that

our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles. (1992: 15)

The principal effect of this temporal and spatial discontinuity is that the authenticity of Ishiguro's narrative springs from the validity of his voice, that of the expatriate, the exiled voice that is both marginal and central, clear and unequivocal in its commitment to struggle with undelineated identities. He has, according to Rushdie, access to a second tradition apart from his racial history: "the culture and political group of the phenomenon of migration, displacement, life in a minority group" (Rushdie 1992: 20). In *A Pale View of the Hills*, Ishiguro also treats, albeit obliquely, the occasionally tragic effects of displacement. The novel has a double structure of time and place. It moves back and forth, through surrealistic channels of reminiscence, daydream and fantasy, between the present and the past and also between England and Nagasaki (Yoshioka 1988: 75). Etsuko was born in Nagasaki and moved to England when she married for a second time, taking along her Japanese daughter. The lingering question of Keiko's suicide hovers over the whole tale, and the implication is that it is cultural displacement, resulting from Etsuko's search for happiness, that was at the root of her eldest daughter's misery. The future appears to belong to Etsuko's second daughter, Niki, from her very name a hybrid of East and West, loyal to nothing, attached to no one, ignorant and disorganized; she is also, however, honest and devoid of prejudices.

Ishiguro's perception of both Japan and England and the relations between the two is thus made profound and complex because it entails examining the past with what Rushdie has called "stereoscopic vision . . . a kind of double perspective: because they, we, are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society" (1992: 19). This distinctive vision allows him to view impassively both countries separately and, more importantly, reveals how each sheds light on the other.

This dimension of Ishiguro's art is manifested in his short story "The Family Supper." The writer is aware of how certain events in national and literary history have helped shape the western vision of the East, as, for example, how the manner of novelist Yukio Mishima's death confirmed a specific attitude towards Japan.

The whole image of Mishima in the West hasn't helped people there from an intelligent approach to Japanese culture and Japanese people. He fits certain characteristics . . . committing *seppuku* is one of the clichés. It has always helped people to remain locked in certain prejudices and very superficial, stereotypical images of what Japanese people are like. (Ishiguro 1991: 80)

In this story, he creates a tension that plays precisely on the stereotypical belief described by Etsuko in *A Pale View of the Hills* as the "idea that our race has an instinct for suicide, as if further explanations are unnecessary" (PVH 10). As the narrative develops, Ishiguro plays on the Western reader's expectations that the Japanese characters must, and will, ultimately kill themselves. The story's end is almost anticlimactic, as the expected tragedy does not occur, as it was never meant to. The ability to understand both sides of the drama and unite them into a single tale is the territory of the between-world writer.

The true value of Ishiguro's discourse, then, lies not in what he tells us about Japan, but in what he tells us about England and, by extension, the rest of the world, through his portrayal of Japan. His stereoscopic vision, which focuses from different angles to create a unified image, merges the two realities and adds the dimension of depth. Ishiguro continually relates East and West, finding parallels in their history, their customs and rituals and unveiling their not-so-different-after-all personalities and perceptions of one another. In this manner, he makes the East seem less foreign, and more accessible to Western comprehension. England and Japan, both island nations, have an ingrained, antique response to caste, class and station. Moreover, both are former imperial powers who held dominion over populations that far outnumbered them. Ishiguro perceives and demonstrates

how one island of shopkeepers, bound by a rigid sense of class and an unbending sense of nationalism, can shed light on another; how one monarchy, bent on keeping up appearances, in part by polishing nuances, is not so different from another; and, in fact, how the staff of an English country house, with its stiff-backed sense of self-training, its precisely stratified hierarchy, its uniforms and rites and stress on self-negation, might almost belong to Sony or Toshiba. (Iyer 1991: 586)

In the Eastern hemisphere, Ono and Ogata-san have to deal with the ironies of Japan's recent history which condemn their own earlier, sincere convictions. In England, Stevens has to accept Harry Smith's declaration that "dignity's something every man and woman in this country can strive for and get... you can't have dignity if you're a slave" (*RD* 186). Ishiguro uses specific historical periods to point out another striking similarity. The first two novels are set in the aftermath of World War II and *The Remains of the Day* in July, 1956. These dates mark the epoch when each former empire came to accept the American dispensation: during occupation in the first instance and just after the nationalization of the Suez canal in the second. In all three novels, we see formerly imperialist countries adapting to post-war American "occupation," a time of great social and cultural change. Sachiko imitates her countrymen's rejection of their history in favor of the American dream of progress and sells herself to a pathetic illusion of the good life in the form of Frank the American. Ono finds the American style deposing the old Japanese tradition wherever he turns to look; even his young grandson admires and imitates the Lone Ranger and Popeye. Stevens, apart from being forced to adjust to his new American master's form of bantering, will take his memorable trip through the English countryside in Mr Farraday's vintage Ford.

The novels also underscore the closeness of temperament between the British and the Japanese —the suppressed emotions, the unwillingness to be explicit, the almost ritualistic politeness, and, at least where servants are concerned, the high personal and emotional cost of unstinting loyalty to one's employer. The adherence to the master that we see admired as a fundamental Japanese virtue in *An Artist of the Floating World* is again taken up in *The Remains of the Day*. Ono's blind subservience to his master is mirrored by Stevens's absolute trust in Lord Darlington. Ishiguro shows how the old Japanese virtue of veneration for the *sensei* (the teacher), or loyalty to the group, could be distorted and exploited. In this regard, he consciously uses Japan as "a sort of metaphor. I'm trying to suggest that this isn't something particular to Japan, the need to follow leaders and the need to exercise over subordinates, as a sort of motor by which society operates. I'm inviting Western readers to look at this not as a Japanese phenomenon but as a human phenomenon" (Ishiguro, in Mason 1989: 342). Stevens is another version of Matsuji Ono, who misjudged his loyalties in pre-war Japan and who finds that history will not forgive him. Ono, without knowing it, allowed himself to be made use of; Stevens, seduced into reverence for Lord Darlington, allowed himself to be blind to the direction in which history was going.

There are other, more external, parallels that can be drawn in the novels. For instance, Ono and Stevens have lost members of their family in the pursuit of military and national grandeur, in efforts that are now regarded ambiguously. Once again, the author points to how tragedies on one side of the globe can be simultaneously lived on another. In *An Artist of the Floating World*, this is made explicit in a dialogue between Ono and his son-in-law:

"There seems to be no end of courageous deaths," he said, eventually,
 "Half of my high school graduation year have died courageous deaths.
 They were all for stupid causes, though they never were to know that.
 Do you know, Father, what really makes me angry?"
 "What is that, Suichi?"
 "Those who sent the likes of Kenji out there to die those brave deaths,
 where are they today? They're carrying on with their lives, much the
 same as ever." (AFW 58)

Stevens has suffered the same tragedy:

I should explain here that I am one of two brothers —and that my
 eldest brother, Leonard, was killed during the Southern African War
 while I was still a boy. Naturally my father would have felt this loss
 keenly; but to make matters worse, the usual comfort of a father in
 these situations— that is, the notion that his son gave his life
 gloriously for king and country— was sullied by the fact that my
 brother has perished in a particularly infamous manoeuvre . . . so that
 the men who had died —my brother among them— had died quite
 needlessly At the close of the Southern African Conflict, [his]
 general had been discreetly retired, and he had then entered business,
 dealing shipments from Southern Africa. (RD 40-41).

Ultimately, both Ono and Stevens must come to terms with the lives they see they have wasted on the wrong course and the wrong cause. Their respective conclusions to their lives stress the underlying similarity between the two cultures, and the fact that, Japanese or English, the characters are simply two old men looking forward peacefully to what remains of their days. Ono claims that "however one may come in later years to reassess one's achievement, it is always a consolation to know that one's life has contained a moment or two of real satisfaction such as I experienced that day up on that high mountain path" (AFW 204). Stevens, sitting alone on the pier at Weymouth, concludes:

What is the point of worrying oneself too much about what one could or could not have done to control the course one's life took? Surely it is enough that the likes of you and I at least *try* to make our small contribution count for something true and worthy. And if some of us are prepared to sacrifice much in life in order to pursue such aspirations, surely that is in itself, whatever the outcome, cause for pride and consolation. (RD 244)

To perceive parallels and articulate similarities in differences is perhaps the specific territory of the between-world writer. Kazuo Ishiguro's principal commitment in his novels is to observe the interaction of past and present, of East and West, and capture the evocative texture of memory. This, perhaps, in response to Rushdie's belief that one of the many possible strategies of the inescapably international writers is to protest, ultimately, against the limits of experience and, doing so, to cry "open the universe a little more!" (1992: 21).

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