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Japan in the Novels of the British Writer Kazuo Ishiguro

Japonsko v románech britského spisovatele Kazua Ishigura

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že jsem diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně s využitím uvedených pramenů a literatury.

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1. INTRODUCTION

I think everyone who has read Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day* (1989) must have been surprised by the discrepancy between the author's name, which is so obviously Japanese, and the novel, which is so perfectly English. At first sight, there is no suggestion that it is a work of a Japanese-born writer. However, in case the reader is interested in the Japanese culture and can build upon a certain amount of knowledge in this field, he may notice that the themes, the character and the motives of the protagonist have more than little in common with the Japanese milieu. I intend to explore what lies beneath the English surface and try to reach the Japanese core of the novel. But this task could not bring successful results, if I didn't include the first two of Ishiguro's novels, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982) and *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), which are set in Japan and depict the life stories of Japanese protagonists. These three novels together form one whole and there are many thematic and formal similarities linking the novels. They are Ishiguro's earliest, which means that they are closest to his childhood in Japan and to the influence of the Japanese culture on the author. They are also the early literary outcomes of Ishiguro's effort to cope with the clash of two different cultures that he experienced after his family moved to England.

First, I shall discuss the width, the depth and the forms of impact that Japanese culture could have had and demonstrably had on him in order to see how much Japanese influence can be traced in his work. I shall also consult Ishiguro's own views on his Japanese origin, on his writing about Japan and also on his decision to abandon the Japanese setting in his novels. Then I intend to analyze the themes of the first two novels and discuss how Ishiguro works with cultural stereotype. I shall also focus on the style of narration with respect to the Japanese aesthetic concept of *mono no aware*, on the similarities with the

Japanese first-person narration, the so-called *watakushi shosetsu*, and I will also pay some attention to Ishiguro's use of grammar patterns specific to the Japanese language. In the second part of the thesis, I shall focus on the third novel, *The Remains of the Day*, and analyze expressions of the Japanese philosophical and cultural tradition, such as the feudal moral code of the samurai, called *bushido*, which derives directly from the philosophical concepts of Confucianism, and the theme of bantering, which is not dissimilar to *koans*, the nonsense questions used as a part of the meditation technique typical of Zen Buddhism. I shall also devote attention to the anthropological concept of Japan as a "shame culture" and discuss the leitmotif of the novel – dignity – in direct connection with this concept.

2. JAPANESE-ENGLISH ISHIGURO

It is beyond doubt that Kazuo Ishiguro is an English writer. Even though he was born in Nagasaki to his Japanese parents Shizuko and Shizuo, he had been living in Japan only for the first five years of his life, because in 1960 the family moved to England. There Ishiguro received "a typical English education"¹ starting from the elementary school and ending in a Bachelor's degree from the University of Kent at Canterbury, where he studied philosophy and English, and a Master's degree in creative writing from the University of East Anglia. With his parents he still speaks in Japanese, although he admits that his Japanese is full of English vocabulary and far from being grammatical.² He never succeeded to master the Japanese script; he writes in English without exception. He became a writer thanks to his teacher, the contemporary British writer Angela Carter, and he feels to be "very much of the Western tradition,"³ having grown up reading authors like Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Dickens and Charlotte Brontë, so it is beyond doubt that he *is* an English writer.

On the other hand, Hitoshi Oshima⁴ argues that Ishiguro had been under strong Japanese influence and that for several reasons. Firstly, it is not possible to overlook the fact that the first language that he remembers as his mother tongue is not English but Japanese. A mother tongue might be erased from one's memory, but hardly so from one's subconscious. The basic structure of the language can exist in his unconscious and have a permanent influence on his mind. Moreover, long as he might live in the UK, he was brought up in a Japanese family. His parents, who are pure Japanese, moved to the UK in an adult age and even if they had changed their communication language from Japanese to English (which did not happen), the everyday life in the household must have remained

¹ Kazuo Ishiguro and Gregory Mason, "An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro," *Contemporary Literature* 30.3 Fall 1989: 335-47. See also <<http://slim-oak.u-sacred-heart.ac.jp/galeliterature.html>>.

² Mason.

³ Mason.

⁴ Note: Throughout the text, Japanese personal names are given in the English order, that is, given name, family name.

typically Japanese in many aspects. (Ishiguro himself claims that his parents are a typical example of the traditional gender role distribution, where the father works and the mother does all the housework.⁵) Especially when the upbringing of children is concerned, it seems improbable that they would distance themselves completely from Japan. Cultural anthropologists often claim that the way of upbringing clearly reflects the basic cultural principles and it is not likely that the Ishiguro family would be an exception.⁶

It is obvious that the familial environment of Ishiguro's early childhood was Japanese and so were the relatives and acquaintances. But even after the relocation to the UK this Japanese culture could and did survive, because the stay was supposed to be only temporary and all the family were counting on their return to Japan. In an interview with Masayuki Ikeda, Ishiguro confessed that until the age of 15 or 16, he always thought they would one day return and for that reason, "so that I don't forget the Japanese language in the meantime, my mother kept sending for magazines and books from Japan. And so until today it happens to me that I subconsciously open books from the right side."⁷ Oshima concludes that little Kazuo first subconsciously absorbed the Japanese culture and only later, on the level of consciousness, his gradual Anglicization occurred.⁸

Hitoshi Oshima claims at the very beginning of his essay called "The Remains of Japan in Kazuo Ishiguro" that he has no intention to deny the fact that Ishiguro is an English writer and he neither tries to create an illusion of Ishiguro being "Japanese". He though stresses the fact that the influence of Japanese culture on Ishiguro is indisputable, that a certain specific Japan remained within him and that it has consequently a significant influence on his work.⁹

⁵ Kazuo Ishiguro and Masayuki Ikeda, "Nikkei igirisujin sakka no uchi naru nihon," *Igirisujin no nihonkan*, ed. Masayuki Ikeda (Seibunto, 1993) 140.

⁶ Hitoshi Oshima, "Kazuo Ishiguro ni okeru 'Nihon no nagori'," *Ikoku he no shokei to sokoku he no kaiki*, ed. Sukehiro Hirakawa (Tokyo: Meiji shoin, 2000) 243-245.

⁷ Ikeda, 138.

⁸ Oshima, 145.

⁹ Oshima, 145.

According to Cynthia F. Wong, leaving Nagasaki was one of the turning points in Ishiguro's life, which later affected some of the themes in his work. He remembers his childhood in Japan as a happy period, spent in a three-generational household. The departure thus severed some strong emotional ties, especially with his beloved grandfather,¹⁰ who acted as father-figure for the first four years of his life in Japan,¹¹ who remained for him an emblem of Japan and Japanese identity, and who died in Japan ten years after the separation. Wong notes that "not being present at this important death affected him deeply, although he was not to understand its significance until many years later."¹² Ishiguro explains: "For me, the creative process has never been about anger or violence, as it is with some people; it's more to do with regret or melancholy. I don't feel I've regretted not having grown up in Japan. [...] It's to do with the strong emotional relationships I had in Japan that were suddenly severed at a formative emotional age, particularly with my grandfather."¹³

Ishiguro's first two novels are set in Japan despite the fact that he returned there for a short visit for the first time since his childhood only after finishing his third novel, *The Remains of the Day*. A Japanese writer and a laureate of the Nobel Prize for literature Kenzaburo Oe stated in an interview with Ishiguro that he was deeply impressed by the "excellent descriptions of life in Japan, of Japanese buildings and landscapes" in the young writer's second novel.¹⁴ Ishiguro explained that a "personal, imaginary Japan" remained and developed in his mind: 'All the way through my childhood, I couldn't forget Japan, because I had to prepare myself for returning to it,' he says and continues that 'one of the real reasons why I turned to writing novels was because I wished to recreate this Japan – put together all

¹⁰ Cynthia F. Wong, *Kazuo Ishiguro*, (Devon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd., 2000) 1.

¹¹ Brian H. Finney, "Figuring the Real: Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans*," *Jouvert* 7.1 Autumn 2002, 26. June 2006 <<http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v7is1/ishigu.htm>>.

¹² Wong, 1.

¹³ Wong, 1.

¹⁴ Wong, 2.

these memories, and all these imaginary ideas I had about this landscape which I called Japan'.¹⁵

The sources that eventually created this imaginary Japan were several. In a rather limited degree it was Japanese literature; he claims having read several English translations of writers such as Soseki Natsume, Jun'ichiro Tanizaki or the Nobel-prize-winning Yasunari Kawabata. Much more influential, he says, were the old Japanese films, by directors like Yasujiro Ozu, which have a great poignancy for him:

At the name of Yasujiro Ozu I immediately recall the house in Nagasaki where I lived until the age of five. It was a very old Japanese house in which we all lived together - my parents, my grandparents and us children. To this day I remember room by room the disposition of [that] house. When I see a film, which reminds me of exactly this time, [...] I re-discover there the Japanese furnishings amid which I grew up. In those moments I become very nostalgic. That could be called my Japan: made up by imagination, memory and meditation. And this Japan appears in my work.¹⁶

The view of the house in Nagasaki until he was five and later the films of the 1950's by directors like Ozu and Mikio Naruse – these two essential elements became one harmonious body and created the Japan within himself. Ishiguro continues that "besides these, there are many different images included. The comic books that I regularly received from Japan when I was a child [...] or my parents' speech, especially the old Japanese legends that my mother used to tell me and my sisters. Therefore," he notes, "my Japan is not a contemporary one."¹⁷

¹⁵ Wong, 2.

¹⁶ Ikeda, 137.

¹⁷ Ikeda, 137.

Cynthia F. Wong, however, warns against the Japaneseness of Ishiguro's work being over-emphasized. She observes that his first two novels, set in Japan, are almost without exception described as having "quiet, peaceful, delicate, subtle qualities resonant with Japanese culture,"¹⁸ and Ishiguro adds that even though most of the critics are not familiar with Japanese literature, when they comment upon his particular narrative style, it seems impossible to find other comments than those mentioning "Japanese-like" or "Japanese peace and tranquillity."¹⁹ "While not necessarily pejorative," Wong explains, "these somewhat patronizing terms situate Ishiguro's Japanese ancestry as the main source of his writing and disregard the author's own claims that what he writes about Japan is largely invented or produced by his active imagination."²⁰ Moreover, Ishiguro himself admitted that he "became very resistant to a lot of people talking about my books in terms of their Japanese-ness, as though my books were only of relevance if you are interested in Japanese society."²¹ In an interview with Dylan Otto Krider, Ishiguro explains:

In the first two books, I very much wanted to appeal to the Japanese side of me. But by the time the second novel came out and I was starting to get known in Great Britain, I was very conscious that I was getting cast in this role as a kind of Japanese foreign correspondent in residence in London. Newspapers and magazines would call me up because there was a Japanese book to be reviewed or a Japanese issue that I could comment on, and I started to feel very uncomfortable because I knew very little about Japan.²²

¹⁸ Wong, 10.

¹⁹ Ikeda, 130.

²⁰ Wong, 10.

²¹ Kazuo Ishiguro and Cynthia F. Wong, "Interview," *Clio* 30.3 Spring 2001: 309-25.

See also <<http://slim-oak.u-sacred-heart.ac.jp/galeliterature.html>>.

²² Kazuo Ishiguro and Dylan Otto Krider, "Interview," *Kenyon Review* 20.2 Spring 1998: 146-54.

See also <<http://slim-oak.u-sacred-heart.ac.jp/galeliterature.html>>.

He continues that he, quite obviously, knew more about Japan than an average Englishman living in England, but that he "probably didn't know much more than someone who had just developed a keen interest in Japanese culture."²³ He, however, immediately amends the statement by saying that being brought up by Japanese parents, "I think I understood very deeply how a Japanese family works and about parent/child relationships, marriages, and so on. But I wasn't qualified to comment on the economic situation in Japan or what Japanese people did or didn't do in the '80s."²⁴ He explains that with *The Remains of the Day*, it was "a conscious decision not to write another book set in Japan,"²⁵ because the Japanese setting of the early novels "was to some extent limiting the response and slightly leading to a misreading of my intentions."²⁶ He felt that "the more universal things I wanted to say about people and life were getting rather obscured," and he admits feeling rather annoyed every time that, instead of saying, "Oh, yes, that's how I feel," people remarked, "Isn't that interesting how Japanese people feel."²⁷ This kind of response to his work was for him a source of "an overall sense of dissatisfaction that, more than I would like, people were reading my early Japanese novels for information, as though I could reveal interesting information in the way that an anthropologist or someone writing about Japanese culture in a non-fiction way might be able to do."²⁸ Consequently, his writing a book set entirely in England with no references to Japan "was clearly prompted by a large body of opinion that tended to see my work as attempts to illuminate certain historical or sociological ideas about Japanese society."²⁹

Moreover, he confesses to being inclined to think "that if I didn't have a Japanese name and if I hadn't written books [...] set in Japan, it would have taken me years longer to

²³ Krider.

²⁴ Krider.

²⁵ Krider.

²⁶ Wong, Interview.

²⁷ Wong, Interview.

²⁸ Wong, Interview.

²⁹ Wong Interview.

get the kind of attention and sales that I got in England with my first two books."³⁰ He explains that "the big milestone was the Booker Prize going to Salman Rushdie in 1981 for *Midnight's Children*. He had previously been a completely unknown writer. That was a really symbolic moment and then everyone was suddenly looking for other Rushdies."³¹ Therefore, he admits that "there was a part of me that wanted to find out if my acceptance was conditioned on the fact that I was acting as mediator to Japanese culture. I wanted to see if people could appreciate me purely as a novelist as opposed to a Japanese novelist."³²

³⁰ Kazuo Ishiguro, Allan Vorda and Kim Herzinger, "Interview," *Mississippi Review* 20.1-2 1991: 133. Quoted in Susie O'Brien, "Serving a New World Order: Postcolonial Politics in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*." 17 June 2006 <<http://slim-oak.u-sacred-heart.ac.jp/galeliterature.html>>.

³¹ Vorda and Herzinger, 134-5. Quoted in O'Brien.

³² Krider.

3. *A PALE VIEW OF HILLS*

Ishiguro's first published novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, is a tenebrous story narrated in the first person by an elderly Japanese woman, Etsuko, living in England in the story's present moment, the late 1970's. The occasion for the tale is Etsuko's effort to come to terms with the recent suicide of her oldest daughter, Keiko. In her memories Etsuko keeps returning to year 1949, to her life of a mother-to-be in the devastated post-war Nagasaki. Her recollections focus largely on her strange and enigmatic friendship with an eerie woman called Sachiko and her neglected ten-year-old daughter Mariko, whose actions seem to foretell the suicide of Keiko.³³

Sachiko's tale is, according to Jiří Hanuš, "an uncanny and alarming story with a touch of Japanese horror," in which Ishiguro "skilfully orchestrates the scenes only suggesting that beneath the surface something fearsome and greatly consequential is going on."³⁴ Little Mariko does not attend school; instead she repeatedly strays and gets lost. Her mother seems to be equally lost when she tries to seduce an American soldier, hoping that he will take her to America, to the same America that destroyed Japan. Her uncertainty and desolation are illustrated by her inability to take care of her own daughter, the representative of the new generation.³⁵ She tries to persuade herself of her moral tenets: "I'm a mother, and my daughter's interests come first."³⁶ Later, however, she asks sarcastically, "Do you think I imagine for one moment that I'm a good mother to her?" (171) Sachiko's story mysteriously resembles that of Etsuko who finally managed to move to England, but still could not save

³³ Cynthia F. Wong, "The Shame of Memory: Blanchot's Self-Dispossession in Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills*," *Clio* 24.2 Winter 1995: 127-45. See also <<http://slim-oak.u-sacred-heart.ac.jp/galeliterature.html>>.

³⁴ Jiří Hanuš, "Prolínání pomíjivých světů," Kazuo Ishiguro, *Soumrak dne*, trans. Zdena Pošvicová (Praha: Volvox Globator, 1997) 186.

³⁵ John Rothfork, "Zen Comedy in Commonwealth Literature: Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*," 3 Mar. 2006 <<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Sparta/6997/mosaic.html>>.

³⁶ Kazuo Ishiguro. *A Pale View of Hills* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005) 86. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number.

her daughter from suicide many years later. She now feels remorse that the emigration might have contributed to the tragic end of young Keiko.

What Wai-chew Sim finds worth mentioning is that in *A Pale View* [*A Pale View of Hills*], Ishiguro actually rewrites the story of Giacomo Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* (1904): Sachiko's lot resembles that of the lonesome Cho Cho San waiting for her lover, Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton, who leaves Japan with the promise to return later and bring her over to America. The novel also keeps the opera's marine associations – while Pinkerton is a naval officer, Sachiko's lover Frank is "entrusted with a job on a cargo ship" (169). Moreover, both the novel and the opera are set in Nagasaki, and "even the Inasa locality is suggestive, for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* tells us that a mansion located there was the home of a nineteenth-century British merchant reputed to be the inspiration for Puccini's fictional Pinkerton."³⁷ Ishiguro, however, slightly modifies the desertion plot, because while the opera ends in Cho Cho San's suicide, *A Pale View* focuses of the child, Keiko, and her tragic death "years after the accomplishment of that dream of an overseas move."³⁸ Sim thus concludes that through this modification Ishiguro voices "exilic and diasporic concerns" and explores "the hermeneutics of memory in tandem with the aesthetic possibilities opened up by unreliable narration."³⁹

For Chu-chueh Cheng, the focus of Ishiguro's modification of the story lies elsewhere, and that is in the fact that Ishiguro challenges "the myth of the self-sacrificing Japanese woman," sustained by the opera. She claims that the "ostensible parallel," which Ishiguro cultivates between his novel and *Madama Butterfly*, "veils the actual inversion of the observing Western male and the observed Oriental female. In [*A Pale View*], the Western males, merely heard of but never seen, function solely as the props of two interracial

³⁷ Wai-chew Sim, "Kazuo Ishiguro," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 25.1 Spring 2005: 80-115.

See also <<http://slim-oak.u-sacred-heart.ac.jp/galeliterature.html>>.

³⁸ Sim.

³⁹ Sim.

relationships Etsuko narrates."⁴⁰ Cheng explains that Sachiko "may at first sight resemble Madame Butterfly in carrying on a long-term relationship with an American soldier stationed in Nagasaki," but the difference is that Sachiko "is neither passionate nor devoted, and much less is the relationship predicated upon her naivety."⁴¹ Likewise, Etsuko does not recount how she met her English second husband Sheringham and how she settled with him in England, she just briefly mentions that he spend some time in Japan working as a journalist. Cheng thus concludes that "Sheringham serves more likely as an opportunity for Etsuko and her daughter Keiko to start anew in the West. The assertiveness and quiet ambition that prompt Etsuko to leave Japan by no means accords with Madame Butterfly's feminine acquiescence that so captivates the Western imagination."⁴²

The frame story for Etsuko's reminiscences is about a five-day visit of her second daughter Niki, Keiko's half-sister, who arrives after learning of Keiko's death. Wong notes that "most of Etsuko's tale is recounted in solitude," because there is a feeling of estrangement between mother and daughter and "Niki's visit only emphasizes Etsuko's privacy, especially when the narrative moves into past events" where Etsuko tries to work "through the meaning of her dead daughter's life."⁴³ Gregory Mason identifies Ishiguro's depiction of Etsuko's emotional state as "an expression of what the Japanese call *mono no aware*,"⁴⁴ which literally means "the pathos of things", but can be also translated as "an empathy toward things," or "the sadness of things." This term is used to describe "the awareness of [...] the transience of things and a bittersweet sadness at their passing," and it was originally an idea from literary criticism popularized by a scholar of the Tokugawa period (1603 – 1868), Norinaga Motoori, who in his study of the treasure of Japanese (and

⁴⁰ Chu-chueh Cheng, "Chic Clichés: the Reinvention of Myths and Stereotypes in Kazuo Ishiguro's Novels," 23 Apr. 2008 <http://arts.brunel.ac.uk/gate/entertext/5_3/ET53ChengEd2.doc>.

⁴¹ Cheng.

⁴² Cheng.

⁴³ Wong, *Shame of Memory*.

⁴⁴ Gregory Mason, "Inspiring Images: The Influence of Japanese Cinema on the Writings of Kazuo Ishiguro," *East-West Film Journal* 3/2 (1989) 47. Quoted in Wong, 29.

world) literature – *The Tale of Genji* – maintained that "*mono no aware* is the crucial emotion that moves readers."⁴⁵ Among the artists who are claimed to use *mono no aware*-style storytelling is the Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami or "the quintessentially 'Japanese' director Yasujiro Ozu" who "was well known for creating a sense of *mono no aware*," because his films are "frequently climaxing with a character saying a very understated 'ii tenki desu ne' (it is fine weather isn't it?), after both a familial and societal paradigm shift, such as daughter being married off."⁴⁶

Kazuo Ishiguro is considered to use this style particularly in *The Remains of the Day*,⁴⁷ but it can be found in his early novels as well. Mason claims that in Etsuko's case, "memory of the dead, for instance, is tied to an awareness of life's ephemeral or transient qualities. As an attribute of her narrative, *mono no aware* also describes Etsuko's awareness of what is real in terms of her feelings and what in relation to historical or objective reality." She is thus "compelled to mend her understanding of how events evolved," but even though she is "unable to fathom the truth of her daughter's suicide, she still desires to appease her need to know; sadly, she also understands that whatever she learns of Keiko's reasons for choosing death will not offer genuine solace."⁴⁸

Readers tend to see Ishiguro's non-Englishness often in his style of writing, but there is certain cultural influence found also in his themes.⁴⁹ It is, for instance, the clash between the old and the new values, principles and approaches to life, which appears in all three novels. It is seen in another plot line of *A Pale View*, namely in the story of Etsuko's father-in-law, Ogata-San. A retired teacher, he represents the old generation, which ascribes to the old values: "Discipline, loyalty, such things held Japan together once. That may sound fanciful, but it's true. People were bound by a sense of duty. Towards one's family, towards

⁴⁵ "Mono no aware." *Wikipedia*. 17 Apr. 2008 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mono_no_aware>.

⁴⁶ Mono no aware.

⁴⁷ Mono no aware.

⁴⁸ Mason, *Inspiring Images*. Quoted in Wong, 29.

⁴⁹ Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "Ishiguro's Floating Worlds," *ELH* 68.4 Winter 2001: 1049-76.

See also <<http://slim-oak.u-sacred-heart.ac.jp/galeliterature.html>>.

superiors, towards the country. But now instead there's all this talk of democracy. You hear it whenever people want to be selfish, whenever they want to forget obligations." (65) He grew up in a different world and he feels bitterness at seeing the post-war Japan: "Here was a system we'd nurtured and cherished for years. The Americans came and stripped it, tore it down without a thought." (66) He is thus shocked when he finds out that his own former pupil Shigeo Matsuda has written in a teacher's periodical that the profession was well rid of him and that he "should have been dismissed at the end of the war" (31), because through his teaching he contributed to the war tragedy: "In your day, children in Japan were taught terrible things. They were taught lies of the most damaging kind. Worst of all, they were taught not to see, not to question. And that's why the country was plunged into the most evil disaster in her entire history." (147)

Cynthia Wong observes that Etsuko's husband Jiro "covertly establishes a rift against his father, Ogata-San, and shows how young Japanese will use innuendo rather than speak directly in order to convey their hostile sentiments." Thus, "Jiro refuses to speak with his former classmate Matsuda about the article written explicitly against the policies of his father's generation. Ogata-San, in keeping with the Japanese tradition of biting back his tongue on any confrontation, is reduced to the shame of having to approach Matsuda himself. What might have remained a family matter turns into a public forum for confrontation."⁵⁰ Wong concludes that "destruction in Nagasaki was more than physical ruin; it also dismantled values long held sacred in the secular foundation of Japanese society, and it split the Japanese into generational factions."⁵¹

The first three Ishiguro's novels pursue a supposedly realist mode of narration and all are set in the historical period around the Second World War. However, he claims that he is "drawn to periods of history when the moral values in society have undergone a sudden

⁵⁰ Wong, *Shame of Memory*.

⁵¹ Wong, *Shame of Memory*.

change."⁵² Brian H. Finney explains that "what interests him is not history as such, but the way these critical periods of history expose the fault lines in human nature as instanced by his characters."⁵³ Ishiguro actually set the initial draft of *A Pale View of Hills* in the present-day England, but later found that he "could write more effectively if [he] changed the setting [to Japan] and put the whole thing at a greater distance."⁵⁴ And having found this strategy working well in favour of his artistic intention, he has pursued it in his later novels as well. Finney concludes that "both setting and period are for Ishiguro primarily narrative devices rather than objective elements in his fiction."⁵⁵

Ishiguro adds that if there is something that he really struggles with as a writer, it is the "whole question about how to make a particular setting actually take off into the realm of metaphor." He explains that if the setting is too concrete, people respond by saying, "Oh, that's what it was like in Japan at a certain time," or, "He's saying something about Britain in the 1930s." Consequently he is "trying to find some territory, somewhere between straight realism and that kind of out-and-out fabulism," where he can create "a world that isn't going to alienate or baffle readers," a world that is not understood as documentary or history or journalism. He appeals to the readers to "look at this world that I've created as a reflection of a world that all kinds of people live in."⁵⁶

⁵² Finney.

⁵³ Finney.

⁵⁴ Finney.

⁵⁵ Finney.

⁵⁶ Vorda and Herzinger, 16-17. Quoted in Sim.

4. CULTURE AND STEREOTYPE

Ishiguro is very much aware of his international audience and, according to his own words, his writing aims at being understandable to anybody, regardless of their nationality or their mother tongue. This means that he doesn't use local references to depict the nature of a character or his social position, and he doesn't write about themes that he finds specifically English and relevant only to the English audience. At the same time, he profits from the fact that contemporary writers don't have to describe a setting into detail, because most people already have certain notion of the place and recall many different images they've seen in the media. This is true for the novels set in Japan as well as for *The Remains*, which is, in his words, "a case of manipulating certain stereotypical images of a certain kind of classical England. Butlers and tea and scones: it's not really about describing a world that you know well and firsthand. It's about describing stereotypes that exist in people's heads all around the world and manipulating them engagingly."⁵⁷ A good example of stereotypical thinking is Stevens's ruminating over the issue of a "perfect butler" and coming to a conclusion that "continentals are unable to be butlers because they are as a breed incapable of the emotional restraint which only the English race is capable of."⁵⁸ Rebecca Walkowitz claims that cultural labelling is one of the primary topics in Ishiguro's work, and that this primacy is most clearly seen in the opening paragraph of his very first book,⁵⁹ which begins:

Niki, the name we finally gave my younger daughter, is not an abbreviation; it was a compromise I reached with her father. For paradoxically it was he who wanted to give her a Japanese name, and I – perhaps out of some selfish desire not to be

⁵⁷ Kazuo Ishiguro and Linda Richards, "Interview," *January Magazine*, 17 June 2006 <<http://www.januarymagazine.com/profiles/ishiguro.html>>.

⁵⁸ Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1990) 43. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number.

⁵⁹ Walkowitz.

reminded of the past – insisted on an English one. He finally agreed to Niki, thinking it had some vague echo of the East about it. (9)

Walkowitz comments that the novel starts with an echo, because Niki is not "a Japanese name" but only sounds like one, it is a "vague" repetition of an abstracted place, "the East." The narrator Etsuko would like to forget the past and tries to avoid – not Japan, but her memories of Japan – to resonate in her child's name. Hermione Lee observes that "the Japanese-looking name is actually a mixed product of the narrator's desire to get away from Japan to England, and of her husband's romantic attraction [...] to 'an echo of the East'."⁶⁰ Thus, the novel "opens with an empty gesture of several sorts: the father does not speak Japanese, but he wants to give his daughter a Japanese name; the compromise name is English in origin but sounds Japanese, though only to an English father."⁶¹ The word "Japanese," as used by the Englishman, is in this case a label, only a word without content. Walkowitz observes that the echo in Ishiguro's novels represents a "structure of failed consolation, where what is missing is always out of reach, in the previous city, in the past, in a fantasy of transparent proper nouns."⁶²

And just like her husband thinks in stereotype, Etsuko does the same at the end of the novel, when she talks with her daughter Niki in the orchard of her house in an English village where she now lives: "I always think it's so truly like England out here." (182) She remembers her dreaming about England and reflecting on her arrival from Nagasaki, she continues: "When your father first brought me down here, Niki, I remember thinking how so truly like England everything looked. All these fields, and the house too. It was just the way I always imagined England would be and I was so pleased." (182) Walkowitz comments that Etsuko "refuses to recognize the difference between the imperfect England

⁶⁰ Hermione Lee, "Quiet Desolation," *New Republic*. 22 Jan. 1990: 36-9.

See also <<http://slim-oak.u-sacred-heart.ac.jp/galeliterature.html>>.

⁶¹ Walkowitz.

⁶² Walkowitz.

she experiences (where her daughter hanged herself) and the idealized England she conjured as an escape from postwar Nagasaki. In a single gesture," she continues, "this moment of repeated affirmation and infelicitous phrasing signals the unreliability of Etsuko's narrative, the exoticism of its rhetoric, and the foreignness of her perspective. The emphatic nostalgia of Etsuko's language records her failing effort to make England correspond to the place she allowed herself to imagine. For her, 'England' remains an optimistic fiction from a Japanese past."⁶³

Elsewhere in the novel, in a retrospective passage from Nagasaki, Etsuko applies stereotypical views on a woman in the park: "Although at that time I did not understand English, I guessed at once that the foreign woman was American. She was tall, with red wavy hair and glasses which pointed up at the corners. She was addressing Sachiko in a loud voice." (105) The American woman has a most minor role in the novel and her character could be defined by the sentence "The American woman produced a loud exclamation and clapped her hands." (117) She is described briefly, but very aptly: she is noisy, she speaks only English, several times she claps her hands theatrically out of excitement, she boldly addresses Sachiko and the only Japanese word she uses is "delicious", which symbolically expresses the distance of the American culture in the context of the well-known and psychologized Japanese characters.

The theme of cultural prejudice is more developed in *A Pale View* than in any other of Ishiguro's novels and it stands out from the very beginning. The fifth paragraph of the novel presents "a stereotype of Japanese suicide rendered clearly in the contrast between the narrator's report of her daughter's death and her description of an account written in an English newspaper."⁶⁴ Etsuko complains: "Keiko, unlike Niki, was pure Japanese, and more than one newspaper was quick to pick up on this fact. The English are fond of their idea that

⁶³ Walkowitz.

⁶⁴ Walkowitz.

our race has an instinct for suicide, as if further explanations are unnecessary; for that was all they reported, that she was Japanese and that she had hung herself in her room." (10) Chu-chueh Cheng observes that in her response to Britain's construct of Japan, Etsuko "undermines the reader's presumption that suicide stands as the paramount trope of Japanese culture and that to perform the ritual of death is to assert one's Japanese identity."⁶⁵ Grasping the issue on a slightly different level, Wai-chew Sim claims that the offer to provide "further explanations" introduces a strand in Ishiguro's writing that is concerned with the critique of essentialist assumptions: "Although Etsuko spends the rest of the novel circling around the incident, Keiko's death is never satisfactorily explained. Textual gaps abound over this issue. At the end, the novel suggests that she had found her new home alienating, and thus her death cannot be attributed to anything ethnically distinctive."⁶⁶ Sim continues that "Ishiguro lures readers by offering to affirm essentialist verities, but he never delivers. Instead, the textual gaps over this issue enjoin an examination of the stock beliefs elicited by the opening."⁶⁷

In the interview with Masayuki Ikeda, Ishiguro remembers a ritual suicide, which took place at the Tokyo headquarters of Japan's Self-Defence Forces, and which struck many people both in Japan and abroad: "When Yukio Mishima committed suicide by cutting his abdomen in 1970, I was 15, a secondary school student, and I remember feeling deeply shocked. I was often asked about Mishima as a "Japanese problem" or a "Japanese concern."⁶⁸ He continues that "the problem is that Mishima has become a symbol of Japan for the Westerners, an image of the Japanese as extremely aggressive. Thus he has contributed in part to this stereotypical image of Japan. His *seppuku* has made Japan even more difficult to understand for the Western world, more suspicious and obscure."⁶⁹ Ruth

⁶⁵ Cheng.

⁶⁶ Sim.

⁶⁷ Sim.

⁶⁸ Ikeda, 133.

⁶⁹ Ikeda, 134-5.

Benedict explains that according to the Japanese tenets, a properly done suicide will clear their name and reinstate their memory: "American condemnation of suicide makes self-destruction only a desperate submission to despair, but the Japanese respect for it allows it to be an honorable and purposeful act. In certain situations it is the most honorable course to take in [order to clear] one's name."⁷⁰ She continues that one thing is certain: "the Japanese love the theme. They play up suicide as Americans play up crime and they have the same vicarious enjoyment of it."⁷¹

Japanese indisputable interest in the theme of suicide is clearly shown in their language, which distinguishes 14 different words for suicide: *jikogisei*, *kenshin*, *migawari*, *jisatsu*, *jigai*, *jijin*, *jisai*, *jiketsu*, *shinju*, *joshi*, *seppuku*, *harakiri*, *gyokusai* and *kanshi*.⁷² Mishima called his act a *kanshi*, which means a suicide done in order to remonstrate against a person's behaviour, or to admonish a person for his conduct. He meant his suicide as a protest against modern Japanese decadence, but the Japanese public regarded it as a foolish act of nationalism and deplored it widely.⁷³ Ishiguro comments that "committing *seppuku*", suicide by cutting one's abdomen, is "as alien to most modern Japanese as it is to Western people. The Japanese are in love with these melodramatic stories where heroes commit suicide, but people in Japan don't go around killing themselves as easily as people in the West assume."⁷⁴

Cheng notes that "in addition to the ethnic propensity for suicide, Japan is associated with submissive women and self-sacrificing mothers."⁷⁵ In *A Pale View*, it is Niki, the "entirely Westernized daughter of an English father,"⁷⁶ whose talk reveals misconstructions of Japanese women. She assumes that Etsuko left Japan to escape from an

⁷⁰ Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 1989) 166.

⁷¹ Benedict, 167.

⁷² Dita Nymburská, "Dobrovolná smrt v japonské kultuře," Lecture, 26 Mar. 2008.

⁷³ Nymburská.

⁷⁴ Mason.

⁷⁵ Cheng.

⁷⁶ Lee.

insufferable marriage and she "praises her mother's determination to pursue happiness and freedom,"⁷⁷ saying: "It couldn't have been easy, what you did, Mother. You ought to be proud of what you did with your life." (90) She keeps on reassuring Etsuko that to leave Japan was a right decision: "You did exactly the right thing. You can't just watch your life wasting away." (176) Cheng claims that "in her admiration of Etsuko's courage in starting anew in England, Niki, like her father, conceives Etsuko as a victim of an 'oafish' husband and readily exalts her as an extraordinary figure worthy of poetic dedication. Deep-rooted in Niki's assumption (as well as her father's) is the fabled dichotomy of a constricting Japan that denies women their needs and a liberating Britain that empowers them to pursue happiness."⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Cheng.

⁷⁸ Cheng.

5. AN ARTIST OF THE FLOATING WORLD

Ishiguro's second novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, is narrated by a once acclaimed Japanese painter Masuji Ono. The present of the novel is set between years 1948 and 1950, but in his memories Ono returns to the pre-war period when he used his artistic talent to promote nationalist militarism. Jiří Hanuš observes that in the beginning of the novel, Ono is "living alone in a house slightly damaged by the bombing that killed his wife and son. His 'masterpieces' have been cleared out of sight, but his façade doesn't show the least sign of blemish."⁷⁹ However, due to Ono's contribution to the military propaganda, his daughter's happiness is at stake, because in the country of arranged marriages it is more than certain that the suitor's family will examine into detail the background of the Ono family. Thus Ono is forced to visit his former colleagues and beg them to keep his past a secret. He even ventures to go see his former pupil Kuroda, whom he had betrayed to the authorities for his lack of "progressive thinking" and who consequently languished in prison during the war.⁸⁰ Finally, during the crucial moment of *miai*, the meeting of the two families, he drops the mask and self-critically admits to everything.⁸¹ Pondering over the past, he says: "I am not too proud to see that I too was a man of some influence, who used that influence towards a disastrous end."⁸²

John Rothfork observes that there is a certain disturbing undertone in Ono's penitence, which weakens its credibility. He thinks that Ono is far too eager and willing to repudiate his loyalty to the war ideology:⁸³ "Indeed, I would be the first to admit that those same sentiments are perhaps worthy of condemnation." (169) The contrary opinion,

⁷⁹ Hanuš, 187.

⁸⁰ Sheng-mei Ma, "Kazuo Ishiguro's Persistent Dream for Postethnicity: Performance in Whiteface," 23 Apr. 2008 <http://liberalarts.udmercy.edu/pi/PI2.1/PI21_Ma.pdf>.

⁸¹ Hanuš, 187.

⁸² Kazuo Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986) 192. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number.

⁸³ Rothfork.

according to which Ono's behaviour is not as strange as it might seem, is supported by Ruth Benedict who describes the behaviour of Japanese war prisoners during the Second World War: "They knew no rules of life which applied in this new situation; they were dishonored and their life as Japanese was ended. [...] Some men asked to be killed, 'but if your customs do not permit this, I will be a model prisoner.' They were better than model prisoners. Old Army hands and long-time extreme nationalists located ammunition dumps, carefully explained the disposition of Japanese forces, wrote our [American] propaganda and flew with our bombing pilots to guide them to military targets."⁸⁴ It illustrates the Japanese attitude according to which, "having put everything they had into one line of conduct and failed at it, they naturally took up a different line."⁸⁵

In his retirement, Ono has to come to terms with the fact that the young generation perceives "the cause he championed in his career as misguided and irresponsible" and also "as being a perversion of his art."⁸⁶ Finney observes that similarly to Etsuko, "Ono has difficulty facing the truth about his own past. His memories don't always square with accounts of the same events offered by others. He conveniently forgets or misremembers things."⁸⁷ Ono's confession during *miai* is intended to save his daughter Noriko from a degrading rejection,⁸⁸ but interestingly, "his daughters and in-laws imply that he has an inflated sense of the importance of the role he played in pre-War Japan."⁸⁹ Brian Finney concludes that "once again Ishiguro refrains from offering the reader a definitive interpretation of events. That is one of the realist aspects of this technique - that, as in life, we are missing too much evidence to be sure which interpretation of the facts is correct."⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Benedict, 41.

⁸⁵ Benedict, 42.

⁸⁶ Finney.

⁸⁷ Finney.

⁸⁸ Hanus, 187.

⁸⁹ Finney.

⁹⁰ Finney.

Ono's artistic career started when he joined the art company of Master Takeda. There he was commissioned to paint "geishas, cherry trees, swimming carps [and] temples," while the "essential point [...] was that they look 'Japanese' to the foreigners to whom they were shipped out" (69). Ono then abandoned Takeda's "art-as-a-business for Mori-san's art-for-art's-sake, indulging himself in the ephemeral 'Pleasure District'."⁹¹ Mori-san is depicted as a true artist who was trying to develop a new art form and although he "specialized in portraying pleasure district women" (140) and used "traditional devices," his work was "full of European influences" (141). Wai-chew Sim claims that the descriptions of the communal life in Mori-san's establishment "suggest purposeful, unalienated labor, and in fact the whole place seems to be a refuge from the world of practical affairs and unrewarding toil."⁹² However, Ono became renowned only after he deserted his westernizing master and stopped "wasting time" painting courtesans, but instead got engaged in painting pictures of military propaganda. His masterpiece depicted "stern-faced soldiers; two of them held bayoneted rifles, flanking an officer who held out his sword, pointing the way forward, west towards Asia [...] and on the left-hand side, the message, 'No time for cowardly talking. Japan must go forward.'" (169) Paradoxically, this propagandist painting, called "Eyes to the Horizon," became famous and influential precisely because of its "powerful use of colour" (169), the European-initiated style, which he retained after leaving Mori-san.⁹³

The title of the novel adds an important connotation to Ono's career. Sim explains that the term "floating world" refers to "a tradition of Japanese art named *ukiyo-e* (literally 'floating-world pictures'). Popularized by the famous Tokugawa painter and printmaker Utamaro Kitagawa (1753-1806), the genre emphasizes the depiction of sad, transitory events, oftentimes the stylized world of the Japanese pleasure quarter and its demi-monde

⁹¹ Ma.

⁹² Sim.

⁹³ Sim.

denizens."⁹⁴ Moreover, Mori-san was also called "the modern Utamaro," because he was "consciously trying to 'modernize' the Utamaro tradition" in his paintings (140). Sim continues that "when Ono gazes at the pleasure quarter he had known and painted as a youth, the poignancy that arises from his acknowledgment of waste is therefore linked to a consideration of what he lost when he broke away from Mori-san."⁹⁵ In other words, the ending of the novel "invites a consideration of the differences between the bohemian lifestyle promoted by Mori-san and Ono's subsequent pursuit of militarist objectives through his art."⁹⁶ Wendy Brandmark claims that "the 'central irony' of the book is Ono's rejection of 'the art of the floating world'; he breaks away from the colony because he finds their work too 'ephemeral'; but what he discovers after the war is that the political ideals through which he sought intransigence "were indeed transitory."⁹⁷

An Artist of the Floating World is, according to Rebecca Walkowitz, very literal in creating a foreign atmosphere, because "its 'floating world' names a subject for art – "those pleasurable things that disappear with the morning light" (180) – and also intimates a country, a cultural style, a social milieu, a past."⁹⁸ The story of the artist is "elusive, gestural, and 'written in a kind of foreign tongue' in every sense, for Ono is a Japanese man speaking his native language, ostensibly Japanese, in formal English," notes Walkowitz and explains that "the difference between English discourse and Japanese setting, rather than calling attention to the English writing of the novel, helps to articulate a cultural estrangement that becomes, for some readers, simply a culture: Japan itself."⁹⁹ Walkowitz continues that the perceived authenticity of cultural description in *An Artist* [*An Artist of the Floating World*], is created by "an exoticism displaced elsewhere," which means that the narrative produces

⁹⁴ Sim.

⁹⁵ Sim.

⁹⁶ Sim.

⁹⁷ Wendy Brandmark, *Contemporary Writers: Kazuo Ishiguro* (London: British Council, 1988) 1. Quoted in Sim.

⁹⁸ Walkowitz.

⁹⁹ Walkowitz.

an impression of the nearness of Japan through the contrasting distance of other cultures: "What seems most Japanese in *An Artist*," she says, "is the fascination with and mistranslation of American culture."¹⁰⁰ It is clearly seen in a scene where Ichiro, Ono's grandson, imitates characters from American popular culture:

"Very impressive, Ichiro. But tell me, who were you pretending to be?"

"You guess, Oji."

"Hmm. Lord Yoshitsune perhaps? No? A samurai warrior, then?"

"Hmm. Or a ninja perhaps? The Ninja of the Wind."

"Oji's completely on the wrong scent."

"Then tell me. Who were you?"

"Lone Ranger!"

"What?"

"Lone Ranger! Hi yo Silver!"

"Lone Ranger? Is that a cowboy?"

"Hi yo Silver!" Ichiro began to gallop again, and this time made a neighing noise.

(30)

Ono is not able to identify the character his grandson imitates, because he simply doesn't know who Lone Ranger is, or that he is American. "Ultimately," concludes Walkowitz, "it is the reader's ability to recognize America, and Ono's failure to do so, which registers Japan as a place, if not itself foreign, surely foreign to us."¹⁰¹

Chu-chueh Cheng posits that Ono's conversations with little Ichiro demonstrate her proposition that while *A Pale View* "demystifies the submissiveness of Japanese womanhood, *An Artist* questions the fable of Japanese heroism."¹⁰² Set in the post-war years, *An Artist* depicts Japan in a situation when it loses its traditional values and gradually

¹⁰⁰ Walkowitz.

¹⁰¹ Walkowitz.

¹⁰² Cheng.

accommodates pervasive American influences. Cheng continues that "the myth of a notoriously bellicose and yet tightly hierarchical Japan manifests itself in the legends of samurai, which prize communal unity and fearless combat," and that the conversations between Ono and Ichiro betray the contention of this national myth.¹⁰³

While the artist reveres Japanese warriors Lord Yoshitsune or Miyamoto Musashi, his grandson admires American cultural icons Popeye the Sailor and the Lone Ranger. To Ono's great lament, a defeated nation inevitably emulates its conqueror. The collective solidarity the Japanese traditionally valorise gives way to the individualistic gallantry Americans glorify. Concurrent with Ono's narration is the era of Allied Occupation (1945-1952), during which the individualistic heroism that Popeye and the Lone Ranger epitomise supersedes the social harmony that Japanese samurai symbolise.¹⁰⁴

An Artist also raises the theme of suicide, but unlike the briefly mentioned "renowned composer whose songs advocated military aggression,"¹⁰⁵ Ono doesn't commit suicide to express an apology to "the families of those killed in the war" (55). Gregory Mason finds Ono's resolution of his conflict to be un-Japanese, in a sense, because the title of the novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, "necessarily conjures resonances" with the tradition of the floating world of urban Tokugawa Japan. In this world of "pleasure quarters and puppet plays," or at least in the art that originated in this floating world, "irreconcilable conflicts are often resolved by melodramatic suicides."¹⁰⁶ Yet Ishiguro offers "a gently ironic, comic solution" to his tale, which somewhat differs from "the more melodramatic, conventional expectations of the genre," Mason posits and continues to explain: "Life-affirming values prevail, rather than everything descending into a welter of despair or the

¹⁰³ Cheng.

¹⁰⁴ Cheng.

¹⁰⁵ Cheng.

¹⁰⁶ Mason.

cliché of suicide. The narrative does hint, at certain points, that Ono's family are worried about such a possibility. Instead, Ono owns up to his errors, makes his accommodation with the changing times, and still manages to cling to a measure of self-vindication."¹⁰⁷ Ishiguro replies that even if his book "may not have a traditional Japanese story ending in that sense," he doesn't "feel that it is un-Japanese," because, as he says, "Whenever I portray books that are set in Japan, even if it's not very accurately Japan," what is very important to him is "that people are seen to be just people. I ask myself the same questions about my Japanese characters that I would about English characters. [...] I don't see them as people who go around slashing their stomachs."¹⁰⁸ He concludes that if he borrows from any tradition, "it's probably from that tradition that tries to avoid anything that is overtly melodramatic or plotty," because he "tries basically to remain within the realms of everyday experience."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Mason.

¹⁰⁸ Mason.

¹⁰⁹ Mason.

6. FLOATING STYLE

Kazuo Ishiguro is now a much celebrated writer, he received several prominent literary prizes (apart from the prestigious Booker Prize for *The Remains of the Day*, he was awarded the Royal Society of Literature's Winifred Holtby Prize for *A Pale View of Hills* and he also received the most financially rewarding prize in Britain, the Whitbread Book of the Year Prize, for *An Artist of the Floating World*), he is an Officer of the Order of the British Empire, and he is a *Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*, among other honours.¹¹⁰ Still, as Hermione Lee notices, "people are always getting the titles of his books slightly wrong. Is it *A Pale View of the Hills*? *The Artist of the Floating World*, or *Artist of the Floating World*, or *The Artist of a Floating World*? *The Remains of the Day* sometimes loses its first definite article."¹¹¹ Two examples of a mistaken title "A Pale View of the Hills" appear in Charlotte Innes's essay "Dr. Faustus Faces the Music" published in *The Nation Magazine* and in the epilogue to the Slovak translation of *An Artist of the Floating World* by Viktor Krupa. Lee concludes that "like all slight but persistent mistakes – Ishiguro's characters are much given to them – these are symptomatic slips."¹¹² The evasive articles make Ishiguro's titles hover on the borders of allegory:

"An" artist [...] is open to amendment and uncertainty, and the floating world he portrays, and betrays, is "transient, illusory." It's not "the hills," but "hills" – some, where? – and it's not they that are pale, but the view of them, as if paleness were a quality of the haunted, ghostly viewer, who describes herself as having "spent many moments – as I was to do throughout succeeding years – gazing emptily at the view from my apartment window . . . a pale outline of hills . . . not an

¹¹⁰ Brooke Allen, "Leaving Behind Daydreams for Nightmares," *The Wall Street Journal*, 11 Oct. 1995: 12. See also <<http://slim-oak.u-sacred-heart.ac.jp/galeliterature.html>>.

¹¹¹ Lee.

¹¹² Lee.

unpleasant view." The "remains" are ambiguous, too: Are they waste, ruins, leftovers, or are they what is salvaged? Is this a metaphorical day, as in "our day is done," or is it "a day in the life"?¹¹³

This vagueness is far from being limited to the title, because Ishiguro uses ambiguity of expression for a purpose. Rebecca Walkowitz explains that the narrators in Ishiguro's novels always try to distance themselves from "the anxiety and disappointment they detail" and "Ishiguro registers this disavowal through the displacement or abstraction of pronouns. Floating worlds, unreliable and gestural, are thus articulated in and as floating words."¹¹⁴ Walkowitz continues that in *The Remains of the Day*, for example, "Stevens translates personal choices into universal rhetoric" to avoid direct confrontation. This is clearly seen when the housekeeper Miss Kenton accuses him of complacency in the case of two Jewish girls discharged in the heat of anti-Semitism, and Stevens denies indifference, rejoining: "Naturally, one disapproved of the dismissals. One would have thought that quite self-evident" (154).¹¹⁵ Walkowitz explains that Ishiguro "has the wit to notice that the choice of 'one' over 'I' unites an 'impersonal' grammar with the rhetoric of English impersonality. Stevens's language seems at once natural – what a butler sounds like – and yet tactical. 'One' negates the claim to personal feeling Stevens's statement would otherwise offer. [...] 'One' cannot be said to replace 'I' exactly, since 'one' leaves open the possibility that 'I' is implied."¹¹⁶ Stevens thus admits – or rather conceals – the guilt for letting himself be pushed into an act, which he didn't approve of and which turned out to be such a mistake. He tries to avoid Miss Kenton's criticism and hides behind the word "one", which distracts the attention from his person and from the fact that he ceded to manipulation. The evasive pronoun thus provides a means of protection against losing his face.

¹¹³ Lee.

¹¹⁴ Walkowitz.

¹¹⁵ Walkowitz.

¹¹⁶ Walkowitz.

As a narrative style, the understatement and vagueness present in Ishiguro's novels are not merely artistic devices decorating the story. The narrator of *The Remains* [*The Remains of the Day*] develops his equivocation to justify the guilt for the decisions he let other people do for him. In *A Pale View of Hills*, however, it is not out of tactical reasons that the narrator uses a misleading pronoun. On the contrary, it appears to be a slip of the tongue, but a most crucial one, because it reveals – or at least suggests – the truth about the story that is being narrated. The suggestion, which clearly offers itself, is that Etsuko might actually be disclosing facts from her own life when she seems to be narrating about Sachiko. Walkowitz notes that at the time the two women met, Sachiko "was planning to marry an American soldier stationed in Japan for the postwar occupation. Sachiko was hoping to leave Nagasaki with her future husband and her daughter, and this is not unlike the (not shown, little discussed) trajectory we know Etsuko follows, as she marries an Englishman and takes her daughter abroad."¹¹⁷ These two parallel plots suddenly converge into one, when in a scene described from memory, Etsuko strives to convince Sachiko's daughter, Mariko, that their awaited departure for America will "turn out well," but at the last moment she switches from "you" to "we", saying, "if you don't like it over there, we can always come back" (173). Walkowitz points out that "this is the text's first explicit signal that the girl Etsuko calls Mariko in her memories might be Keiko, Etsuko's daughter who hangs herself in England many years later, in the event that generates the narrator's story. The narrator shifts to 'we,' but – it should be noted – the girl is still called 'Mariko' as the chapter closes," and thus, as Walkowitz concludes, "it is hard to tell where Etsuko's past begins and Sachiko's narrative ends, or whether Sachiko is really there at all."¹¹⁸

Etsuko's unconscious substitution dramatically underlines the unreliability of her memory, one of the principal themes in Ishiguro's fiction.¹¹⁹ But it should be noted that

¹¹⁷ Walkowitz.

¹¹⁸ Walkowitz.

¹¹⁹ Finney.

Ishiguro has not returned to Japan until after publishing his third novel, which means that for writing both *A Pale View* and *An Artist*, he had to rely on his memories from his very early childhood, which are themselves inevitably unreliable. As Sheng-mei Ma notes, "images of homeland retained by a young child are bound to be vague and limited, yet Ishiguro finds a way to capitalize on what is presumably a weakness in fiction writing. By having his protagonists explore their shaky recall of the past, Ishiguro ingeniously justifies the fuzziness of Japan in his own creative mind."¹²⁰ As a result, "the hills near Nagasaki as well as the past associated with it, remembered by a guilt-ridden mother, become a "pale view" with indistinct outlines."¹²¹

Masayuki Ikeda observes that even though Ishiguro's novels don't depict samurai and sakura flowers, they convey nostalgia about old Japan, namely the old days' pathos of the life of ordinary people that faded a long time ago. He holds that Ishiguro might not have aimed at this effect consciously or deliberately, but his prose is evocative of the scenes of Japan depicted in the films of Yasujiro Ozu.¹²² Apart from Mikio Naruse, Ozu seems to be the only Japanese master to whom Ishiguro regularly pays tribute.¹²³ He had a very innovative approach to the narrative structure, and the typical feature of his films is the use of ellipses, in which many major events are left out, leaving only the space between them. In *An Autumn Afternoon*, for instance, a wedding is mentioned in one scene, and then in the next, a reference is made to the wedding that already occurred. The wedding, however, never occurs on screen.¹²⁴ Not dissimilarly to Ozu's technique, Ishiguro claims that the main narrative strategy in *A Pale View* was "to leave a big gap."¹²⁵ In the novel, Keiko's suicide has led Etsuko to ponder over their coming over to the West and the effect it had on her daughter. But it is an area of her life that is very painful to her and she has difficulties facing

¹²⁰ Ma.

¹²¹ Ma.

¹²² Ikeda, 136.

¹²³ Ma.

¹²⁴ "Yasujiro Ozu," *Wikipedia*, 17 Apr. 2008 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yasujiro_Ozu>.

¹²⁵ Mason.

it. Thus instead of talking about this disturbing issues directly, she narrates a different tale of long ago and reveals her hidden remorse and tribulation through someone else's story. Ishiguro concludes that he was trying to explore this kind of language, the language people use to avoid direct confrontation with unpleasant reality, "the language of self-deception and self-protection."¹²⁶

Another parallel between Ozu's and Ishiguro's work is the fact that *A Pale View, An Artist* and *The Remains* all focus on the lives of ordinary (Japanese) people. Ishiguro expressed admiration for Ozu's films of *shomin-geki* (literally "drama of ordinary people," also translated as "domestic drama") and Gregory Mason claims that this cinematic genre about the everyday life of humble civilians offers Ishiguro "an alternative tradition to the discredited clichés of militarism and suicide" because his novels similarly explore the mundane yet rather sad existence of ordinary people.¹²⁷ Mason continues that the works of the Japanese films directors are "major sources of influence that help shape Ishiguro's portrayal of Japanese characters," and "while scenes of noodle-shop, bar, and drunken men in *Pale* and *Artist* are reminiscent of those in Ozu's films, Ishiguro's recurrent theme of nostalgia and regret echoes [Akira] Kurosawa's concern over the collapse of traditional values in postwar Japan."¹²⁸

Jiří Hanuš, in his epilogue to the Czech translation of *The Remains of the Day*, claims that Japanese and English history and literary tradition merge inseparably in Ishiguro's first three novels, as well as in the author's personality. He believes that Ishiguro's prose attracts audiences especially through "very specific style, in which a certain oriental austerity of expression and ability to suggest the unspoken through pauses," mingles with "the methods of the great modernists, above all the carefully structured plot with several levels (according to his own words he usually plans the structure of a novel to the utmost

¹²⁶ Mason.

¹²⁷ Mason, *Inspiring Images* 40. Quoted in Cheng.

¹²⁸ Mason, *Inspiring Images* 40. Quoted in Cheng.

detail for more than a year), through indirect characterization, symbolism and the complete absence of the author in the novel." Hanuš holds that "what results is an impressively focused literary work of art, leading to a clear utterance and this in particular distinguishes Ishiguro from his postmodern contemporaries."¹²⁹

He also states that the European reader might find useful some knowledge of Japanese literary history, especially the fact that a specific kind of autobiographical novel, in Japanese called *watakushi shosetsu*, rises and predominates on the Japanese literary scene of the first half of the twentieth century. He explains that "the typical feature of this genre, strongly influenced by Maupassant and Flaubert, is an intricate narration in the first person where the main character gradually unfolds the whole of his unflattering past. There is no avoiding the impression that Ishiguro brilliantly combined this technique with the European modernism and that it is exactly this unique synthesis, which brought him popularity with both readers and critics."¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Hanuš, 185-6.

¹³⁰ Hanuš, 185-6.

7. LANGUAGE

Writing for international audiences, Ishiguro wants his prose to be universally understandable not only in terms of thematic focus, but also linguistically. He claims that he is very careful to write in a way that minimizes the phenomenon of losing in translation: "There are a lot of things I don't write now, [...] because I think, for instance, that it wouldn't work once it's translated out of English. You can think of a line that's brilliant in English – with a pun or two [...] – but of course it becomes nonsense once translated into a different language, so I don't use it."¹³¹

According to Chantal Zabus, many contemporary British writers of non-British origin are "exiled in English" and often use writing "with an accent" as a means of expressing "their alienation within the Anglophone literary and cultural tradition."¹³² But while this "accent" in Rushdie, for instance, means rejection or hybridization of standard English, Ishiguro sticks to the perfect and polished literary style, but reaches the effect of estrangement by occasionally reproducing English "out of place,"¹³³ posits Walkowitz and illustrates this opinion on an example: "With *Artist*, there is rarely a break in the frame of English narration; typically, Ono's voice comes with all the fixings of polite and educated British expressions, and little sounds 'Japanese' about it. A meal one enjoys is 'very nice' (136); a routine matter is 'some such thing' (20). However," continues Walkowitz, "what seems 'standard' or beneath notice does become conspicuous at moments. The naturalized vernacular of the novel's English is strikingly ruptured in those moments when Ichiro, Ono's grandson, imitates characters from American popular culture." She explains that Ichiro's "Hi yo Silver!" (30) and, later, "Popeye Sailorman" (152) are "not quite right," in fact, "they are

¹³¹ Richards.

¹³² Chantal Zabus, "Language, Orality, and Literature," *New National and Post-Colonial Literatures*, ed. Bruce King (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996) 34. Quoted in Walkowitz.

¹³³ Walkowitz.

a long way from his other Anglophone pronouncements, which are usually rather precise, if somewhat imperative."¹³⁴ The effect that Ishiguro thus creates is the impression of distance of the American culture, which only furthers the sense of authenticity of the Japanese setting. The characters are perceived as speaking Japanese, a language which is miles away from the language used in America, and which they – paradoxically – actually use.

In "An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro," Gregory Mason praises the amount of "Japanese texture" that Ishiguro's prose achieves despite being written in English and he touches the problem of "projecting differentiated Japanese voices through the medium of the English language"¹³⁵. Ishiguro explains how he dealt with this issue in his first novel where the main character is Japanese, but speaking in English:

Because I am writing in the first person, even the prose has to conform to the characterization of the narrator. Etsuko, in *A Pale View of Hills*, speaks in a kind of Japanese way because she's a Japanese woman. When she sometimes speaks about Japanese things, explaining what a *kujibiki* stand is, for instance, it becomes clear that she's speaking English and that it's a second language for her. So it has to have that kind of carefulness, and, particularly when she's reproducing Japanese dialogue in English, it has to have a certain foreignness about it.¹³⁶

The foreignness is clearly seen, for instance, in Etsuko's mixing up English and Japanese titles. She uses the Japanese title "san," when she refers to people who are close to her, such as her sister-in-law, "Kikuko-San," and her father-in-law, "Ogata-San," or in emotional situations, especially when talking to children, she says "Mariko-San" or "Poor Kazuo-San." When she is more detached and speaks about people who are not close to her, she uses the English title, as in "Mrs. Fujiwara" or "Miss Michiko."

¹³⁴ Walkowitz.

¹³⁵ Mason.

¹³⁶ Mason.

With Ono, the narrator of *An Artist of the Floating World*, the situation is slightly different, because, unlike *A Pale View*, the novel is set entirely in Japan and the narrator is thus supposed to speak Japanese, only "the reader is getting it in English," says Ishiguro and he explains that "in a way the language has to be almost like a pseudotranslation, which means that 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."¹³⁷ Ishiguro calls it writing in "a certain kind of translationese". Much light on how exactly this translationese works can be cast by Minoru Watanabe, Professor Emeritus of Kyoto University and of Sophia University in Tokyo. In his book called *Nihongo gaisetsu* ("Japanese language: The Basic Concepts"), he explains the phenomenon of substitutability of personal pronouns, which is typical for the Japanese language: "Instead of a pronoun for the second person we [the Japanese] commonly use other nouns, which also show the profession or the social position of the addressee, or else our relation to this person. [...] Here some might object that in English, too, it is perfectly common to address father as "papa" and mother as "mama", but in English we use these words to call the person. As soon as the person turns his or her attention towards us and becomes a listener, "papa" or "mama" is displaced by the pronoun "you".¹³⁸ And same as in Japanese, this structure is used in *An Artist*, in a dialogue between Setsuko and her father:

[Father:] "It's possible I didn't pay enough attention to her at the time."

[Setsuko:] "I'm sure Father did all he could." (17)

Professor Watanabe continues that "it is not possible to use as a substitute a noun that doesn't contain the semantic element of respect and esteem towards the listener whom we are addressing. The substitutional pronouns thus belong among the expressions, which

¹³⁷ Mason.

¹³⁸ Minoru Watanabe, *O podstatě japonského jazyka*, trans. Zdenka Švarcová (Praha: Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2000) 104-5.

through connoting respect allow us to show to the addressee our appreciation."¹³⁹ Addressing one's father in the third person expresses the respect that children feel towards their parents, as well as the authority that parents have over their children.¹⁴⁰ This means that Ishiguro used a grammar structure, which sounds strange in English and which is a direct translation from Japanese, in order to support the authenticity of the Japanese setting, the setting by which Oe was so much impressed.

¹³⁹ Watanabe, 105.

¹⁴⁰ Benedict, 101-2.

8. *THE REMAINS OF THE DAY*

Stevens, the English protagonist of Ishiguro's third novel, is a perfect butler, who has pursued one goal in his life, that is, to embody the ideals of his profession: service, composure, dignity, and discretion.¹⁴¹ In the summer of 1956, he sets out for a journey to the West Country to visit Miss Kenton (now Mrs. Benn), the former housekeeper, in order to persuade her to return to Darlington Hall and by resuming her employment there help Stevens with the "faulty staff plan" (5). But Stevens's motoring trip is also an internal journey in which he reflects upon his life in service and upon his relationship with Miss Kenton before the Second World War, in the time when they both worked in the thriving and busy household of his previous employer, Lord Darlington.¹⁴² In those years, Lord Darlington did his best to further the links between Great Britain and Germany. As Merle Rubin puts it, "His gentlemanly, behind-the-scenes diplomacy began as a well-intentioned effort to temper the harsh terms of the Versailles Treaty. But it soon gave way to muddle-headed, but far less innocent, manoeuvrings on behalf of the Nazi regime. Ignorance, complacency, and upper-class smugness have combined to lead Darlington into a position that eventually tarnishes his name."¹⁴³ Lord Darlington is now deceased and Stevens's current employer, Mr. Farraday, is an American, whose "genial style is very different from Lord Darlington's hauteur"¹⁴⁴ and thus his "fondness for informality and banter puts Stevens at an uncharacteristic loss."¹⁴⁵

In 1993, the novel was adapted as a film by Merchant-Ivory Productions, starring Anthony Hopkins as Stevens and Emma Thompson as Miss Kenton, and it received eight

¹⁴¹ Merle Rubin, "A Review of *The Remains of the Day*," *Christian Science Monitor* 30 Nov. 1989: 13.

See also <<http://slim-oak.u-sacred-heart.ac.jp/galeliterature.html>>.

¹⁴² Andrew Teverson, "The Remains of the Day," *The Literary Encyclopedia*, 16 June 2003, 16 Apr. 2008 <<http://www.litencyc.com/php/sworks.php?rec=true&UID=7561>>.

¹⁴³ Rubin.

¹⁴⁴ Gabriele Annan, "On the High Wire," *The New York Review of Books* XXXVI.19 7 Dec. 1989: 3-4.

See also <<http://slim-oak.u-sacred-heart.ac.jp/galeliterature.html>>.

¹⁴⁵ Rubin.

Oscar nominations. The work on the screenplay was begun by Harold Pinter and completed by Ruth Praver Jhabvala and Andrew Teverson comments that "both names are suggestive – Pinter's because the similarities between his restrained, suggestive dialogue and Ishiguro's prose are revealing, and Jhabvala's because her analysis of Englishness in the context of cultural hybridisation is in some ways parallel with Ishiguro's own."¹⁴⁶

John Su observes that Ishiguro's interest in the grand country estate and its butler "bears little topical similarity to his previous explorations" of Japanese immigrants in England in *A Pale View of Hills* and the guilt experienced by a Japanese painter in *An Artist of the Floating World*. However, the books bear a good deal of thematic similarity, because the narrators in all three novels are elderly people looking back upon their life, "unable either to forget the past or to comfort their guilt for past actions."¹⁴⁷ The novels also share unreliable narration, an interest in memory and in the limits and difficulties of self-knowledge. Sim explains that Stevens's experience clearly parallels those of Ogata-San in *A Pale View* and Ono in *An Artist*: "All three men have to come to terms with the fact that they led self-deceiving lives; their private experiences also reflect and refract major historical events. But given these parallels, what needs to be emphasized is the continuity of theme between the three books," because when "read within the context of an extended corpus," *The Remains* "might be said to stress similarities, not differences."¹⁴⁸ Sim concludes that Ishiguro's "authorial development undercuts [...] those commentators who tend to read Ishiguro's early works as convenient exposés of Japanese sociality – and nothing else."¹⁴⁹ In similar terms, Cynthia Wong notes that with the publication of a novel that is no longer situated in Japan, Ishiguro "is able to direct readers' attention away from his Japanese

¹⁴⁶ Teverson.

¹⁴⁷ John J. Su, "Refiguring National Character: The Remains of the British Estate Novel," *Modern Fiction Studies* 48.3 Fall 2002: 552-80.

See also <<http://slim-oak.u-sacred-heart.ac.jp/galeliterature.html>>.

¹⁴⁸ Sim.

¹⁴⁹ Sim.

origins and focus on his artistic achievements."¹⁵⁰ Still, she observes, in many reviews and critical essays, "Ishiguro's eloquent and evocative style is a trait that critics identify as integral to his Japanese heritage" and even after the film was released, Ishiguro's ethnicity was regularly noted as "one of the defining features of the story's subtle explorations of human relationship against world history."¹⁵¹

The first two books indeed "drew praise for their delicate 'Japanese style',"¹⁵² and Stanley Kauffmann claims that "the 'Japanese' qualities" of the first two novels, namely "the taciturnity, the subtle brush strokes, the aim to evoke form rather than create it" persist in *The Remains*. But he admits that one "cannot be quite so accurately aware of these qualities without knowledge of the earlier books," which leads him to the conclusion that in that respect the third book "grows directly from the first two."¹⁵³

James Wood notes that in his early books, Ishiguro had proved himself "the reliable creator of a gently unreliable first-person narrator" and mastered "a kind of emotional seepage." *The Remains* is again written in this unique style in which "the narrator – calm, flat, hiding behind the foil of a pedantic English style – unwittingly reveals, here and there, his failures, and reveals that all is not calm or flat. Emotion is pressurized: the more it is inhibited, the more it longs to be released."¹⁵⁴ Claire Messud calls *The Remains* "a triumph of nuance and subtle unreliability" in which Stevens's "apparently mundane obsessions with the qualities of a great butler and the importance of the proper polishing of silver mask his inner torments."¹⁵⁵ Gabriele Annan, too, praises Ishiguro's perfect mastery of English, in the artistic sense, because she finds it "accurate, unhurried, fastidious, and

¹⁵⁰ Wong, 2.

¹⁵¹ Wong, 2-3.

¹⁵² Charlotte Innes, "Dr. Faustus Faces the Music," *The Nation* 261.15 6 Nov. 1995: 546-48.
See also <<http://slim-oak.u-sacred-heart.ac.jp/galeliterature.html>>.

¹⁵³ Stanley Kauffmann, "The Floating World," *The New Republic* 213.19 6 Nov. 1995: 42-5.
See also <<http://slim-oak.u-sacred-heart.ac.jp/galeliterature.html>>.

¹⁵⁴ James Wood, "The Unconsoled," *New Republic* 223.16 16 Oct. 2000: 43-9.
See also <<http://slim-oak.u-sacred-heart.ac.jp/galeliterature.html>>.

¹⁵⁵ Claire Messud, "Love's Body," *Nation* 280.19 6 May 2005: 28-31.
See also <<http://slim-oak.u-sacred-heart.ac.jp/galeliterature.html>>.

noiseless," and over it a hush seems to lie, she says, "compounded of mystery and discretion," but she concludes that "the elegant bareness inevitably reminds one of Japanese painting."¹⁵⁶

While Sheng-mei Ma states that *The Remains* "appears almost Conradian in its being more English than the English,"¹⁵⁷ Wai-chew Sim expresses disagreement with the many reviewers that have "an idée fixe on the Japaneseness of Ishiguro's early fiction" and carry it over to *The Remains* as well. Resulting, he claims, is their persuasion that the novel's examination of the life in a mansion house is only "a dissimulation of Ishiguro's continuing interest in the question of Japanese identity."¹⁵⁸ And so, in spite of the lack of a single reference to things Japanese (the only Asian reference is the porcelain Chinaman decorating the staircase at Darlington Hall¹⁵⁹) Pico Iyer identifies *The Remains* as "the most revealing" among the genre of books "purporting to explain Japan to the West"¹⁶⁰ while to Gabriele Annan, Ishiguro's first three novels are "explanations, even indictments, of Japanese-ness," since he writes "about guilt and shame incurred in the service of duty, loyalty, and tradition," and his characters "who place too high 'too Japanese' a price on these values are punished for it."¹⁶¹ Sim is especially annoyed by Rocio Davis's praise for Ishiguro's "Japanese subtlety," which Davis (non)supports by saying that Ishiguro "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."¹⁶²

But among these subjective and rather problematic reviews, Sim also places a reasonable one by David Gurewich who claims that Stevens's "insistence on ritual; his

¹⁵⁶ Annan.

¹⁵⁷ Ma.

¹⁵⁸ Sim.

¹⁵⁹ Ma.

¹⁶⁰ Pico Iyer, "Waiting upon History," Rev. of *The Remains of the Day*, by Kazuo Ishiguro, *Partisan Review* 58.3 1991: 585. Quoted in Sim.

¹⁶¹ Annan.

¹⁶² Rocio G. Davis, "Imaginary Homelands Revisited in the Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro," *Miscelanea* 15 1994: 144. Quoted in Sim.

stoicism in performing his duties, especially in the face of adversity; his loyalty to his master that conflicts with his humanity" are all "prominent aspects of the Japanese collective psyche." But Gurewich also admits that even though Ishiguro "imbues his description of Stevens's world with a fine Japanese sensibility," if he had chosen to publish the novel under an English-sounding pseudonym, "one would never suspect," and that is, for Gurewich, the proof of Ishiguro's mastery.¹⁶³ Hermione Lee claims that despite its typically English setting, *The Remains of the Day* replays the themes of *An Artist* and, "it is only 'pretending' to be an English novel. Really it's a Japanese one in disguise, and our formal, archaic butler is standing in for the classic Japanese figure of the *ronin*, the faithful servant left without a master."¹⁶⁴ She also notices that "in all three novels there is an un-English insistence on the link between paternal inheritance and honor."¹⁶⁵ In an interview with Cynthia Wong, Ishiguro himself claimed that *The Remains of the Day* is "a rewrite of a rewrite of *A Pale View of Hills*".¹⁶⁶

According to Hitoshi Oshima, a professor in the Faculty of Humanities at Fukuoka University, *The Remains of the Day* is reminiscent of Japan in two aspects. Firstly, it deals with the shift of values in the period before and after the Second World War and the questions it raises are superposable with those that Japan had to ask itself after the war. It deals with the problem of facing emptiness and solitude caused by the fact that the old values disintegrated overnight and became worthless. At the same time it contends with the moral problem of how to live on and maintain one's dignity in the new conditions without the risk of betraying one's own self.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ David Gurewich, "Upstairs, downstairs?" *The New Criterion* Dec. 1989: 80. Quoted in Bernard Gilbert, "Call Me Ish: East meets West, a comparison of Kazuo Ishiguro and Christopher Isherwood." 16 Apr. 2006 <<http://ebc.chez-alice.fr/ebc47.html>>.

¹⁶⁴ Lee.

¹⁶⁵ Lee.

¹⁶⁶ Wong, Interview.

¹⁶⁷ Oshima, 266.

The second Japan-evoking aspect concerns the situation, the nature, the way of thinking and the way of life of the main character. Before the war Stevens was a loyal servant of Lord Darlington and now he serves a wealthy American who has purchased the Hall after Lord Darlington's death. Oshima observes that this change is not dissimilar to the situation of Japanese men and women, who had served their country before the war and who, after the war, became dependent on the victorious America. Considering his nature, his way of thinking and his way of life, the main character is not only an exemplary representation of a member of a vertically structured society, but he is also a workaholic, devoted to his work to the utmost level. He doesn't show emotions, his work comes before everything else and in this way his personality resembles Japanese. From beginning to end, he is industrious and has an outstanding sense of duty and of identification with his workplace. These character features together with his absolute devotion to his master are reminiscent of a Japanese of "the old days."¹⁶⁸ Oshima continues that features like dependent way of life and complete lack of ability to judge political or social problems were often ascribed to many Japanese people before and to some extent also after the Second World War. Some might rightfully object that there are not so many Japanese left who would have Stevens's devotion and sense of duty. "However," argues Oshima, "when it comes to the tendency of losing sight of one's self in the midst of the system, of being weak in acting on one's own responsibility and of being unable to suffer the consequences of one's actions, it seems that the main character is an archetypal Japanese rather than an Englishman."¹⁶⁹

Oshima concludes his exploration of the Japaneseness hidden in *The Remains of the Day* by presenting the viewpoint of those readers who are well acquainted with Japanese literature. They apparently classify Ishiguro among contemporary Japanese writers. The

¹⁶⁸ Oshima, 267.

¹⁶⁹ Oshima, 268.

reason is that the theme of his work is the question, "How to live on in the age of great change when we feel emptiness due to the loss of old values?" and this issue preoccupied modern Japanese writers from Ogai Mori to Yukio Mishima.¹⁷⁰ A very different opinion on this issue was expressed by Prof. Yuki Yamada from The University of the Sacred Heart in Tokyo who specializes in English literature of the twentieth century and who gave a two-semester seminar on Kazuo Ishiguro's work. She stated that she read *The Remains* as a purely English novel and didn't perceive any major Japanese influences in it.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Oshima, 269.

¹⁷¹ Yuki Yamada, Professor, University of the Sacred Heart, Tokyo, Personal interview, 4 July 2006.

9. GIRI AND BUSHIDO

Discipline, loyalty, strong sense of duty – these are the notions that strike any reader who is prompted to think of the novel in terms of its supposed "Japaneseness". Stanley Kauffmann claims that Darlington Hall "has its own intricate grid of protocols" and that "they have some analogies with Japanese social behavior, but it would be gross to call the two sets similar."¹⁷² Indeed, were they isolated, these analogies would have been poor evidence of Japanese cultural influence. They would hardly weigh more than a stereotypical judgement about a nation. But isolated they are not, neither are they unfounded historically and culturally.

John Rothfork in his extensive essay called "Zen Comedy in Commonwealth Literature: Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*" analyses the manifestations of traditional Japanese philosophical principles and maps the relationship between Buddhism and Confucianism in the novel. He notes, for example, that "sentiment, if not morality, dictates that Stevens should be chagrined to have neglected his father on his deathbed to arrange for a physician to treat the blistered feet of a French diplomat."¹⁷³ Surprisingly, Stevens feels pride and satisfaction for having accomplished all his duties that evening: "Indeed, why should I deny it? For all its sad associations, whenever I recall that evening today, I find I do so with a large sense of triumph" (110). The clue to a better understanding of this apparent lack of emotionality could be found if considered from a Japanese perspective, as suggested by Ryunosuke Akutagawa, a Japanese writer of the first half of the twentieth century, who in his short-story called "The Handkerchief" psychologizes one of the characters: "The Professor marvelled that the death of the Sovereign of a country should bring so much grief to children. It prompted him to consider problems beyond those

¹⁷² Kauffmann.

¹⁷³ Rothfork.

associated with the Palace and its people. Since coming to the West, he had many times been distressed by the impulsive Westerners' emotional outbursts which, as at this time, had been a source of astonishment to him who, being Japanese, was a believer in bushido."¹⁷⁴

Rothfork continues that "even more to the point, we expect Stevens to echo Miss Kenton's judgment – "What a terrible mistake I've made with my life" (239) – about both his failed romance with her and his support of Lord Darlington's Nazi sympathies. Instead Stevens talks about trying "to make the best of what remains of my day" (244)."¹⁷⁵ Rothfork claims that this might seem to be mere denial and evasion, but in reality there is a deeper reason to it.¹⁷⁶

Towards the end of the novel, Stevens concludes the story of his life in service by saying, "I gave my best to Lord Darlington" (242). He has always been supremely careful and serious about his work, and his absolute dedication to duty occasionally bore fruit, which assured him that his effort had meaning:

Lord Darlington remarked to me: 'By the way, Stevens, Lord Halifax was jolly impressed with the silver the other night. Put him into a quite different frame of mind altogether.' These were [...] his lordship's actual words and so it is not simply my fantasy that the state of the silver had made a small, but significant contribution towards the easing of relations between Lord Halifax and Herr Ribbentrop that evening. (135-6)

He believes that in his life he made a "small contribution to the creation of a better world" through serving "the great gentlemen of our times in whose hands civilization had been entrusted." (116) John Rothfork identifies this as *bushido*, a term usually translated into English as "the way of the samurai," which "required the samurai specifically to serve

¹⁷⁴ Ryunosuke Akutagawa, "The Handkerchief," 13 Mar. 2008
<<http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/wyrick/debclass/hanke.htm>>.

¹⁷⁵ Rothfork.

¹⁷⁶ Rothfork .

his lord with the utmost loyalty and in general to put devotion to moral principle (righteousness) ahead of personal gain. The achievement of this high ideal involved a life of austerity, temperance, constant self-discipline [which are] qualities long honored in the Japanese feudal tradition."¹⁷⁷ In the seventeenth century, these qualities were given a systematic form of rules of conduct and behaviour for the samurai in a body of ethical norms named *bushido*, which derived directly from the Confucian ethical philosophy.¹⁷⁸ Confucianism became the basis for the ideology of the samurai social class, because the principle of domination and subordination with the categorical imperative of vassal loyalty befitted best the status of the samurai, who were existentially bound to the feudal lords, and on the other hand it ensured their dominance over other social classes.¹⁷⁹ Confucian philosophy is thus the backbone of Japanese thought and it seems necessary to briefly explain the background of the Japanese notion of "duty".

In Japanese understanding, all men are wearers of a passively incurred obligation, a debt of gratitude, which is called *on*. This *on* is received from the Emperor in the form of law and culture, from one's parents in the form of their daily care and trouble, from one's lord, from one's teacher, and from all the persons involved in any benefaction one receives in his daily encounter with life. And since *on* is a debt, it must be repaid and the repayments fall into two groups. One is called *gimu* and it is the duty to the Emperor and to one's parents, and these obligations one can never fully repay. The other kind of obligations is called *giri* and "these debts are regarded as having to be repaid with mathematical equivalence to the favor received"¹⁸⁰ and within a certain time limit. Benedict continues that *giri* has "two quite distinct divisions."¹⁸¹ One she calls "*giri* to the world" and it includes the duty to one's lord, to one's affinal family and to all non-related benefactors. The other, "*giri*

¹⁷⁷ Rothfork.

¹⁷⁸ Zdeňka Vasiljevová, *Dějiny Japonska* (Praha: Nakladatelství Svoboda, 1986) 282.

¹⁷⁹ Vasiljevová, 282.

¹⁸⁰ Benedict, 116.

¹⁸¹ Benedict, 134.

to one's name", includes "the duty of keeping one's name and reputation unspotted by any imputation"¹⁸², the duty "to admit no (professional) failure or ignorance"¹⁸³ and the duty "to fulfill the Japanese proprieties, e.g., observing all respect behavior, not living above one's station in life, curbing all displays of emotion on inappropriate occasions, etc."¹⁸⁴

Benedict has objections to the term *bushido*, and she argues that "modern Japanese writers and publicists have made a selection from among the obligations of *giri* and presented them to Westerners as the cult of *bushido*," which "has been misleading for several reasons. *Bushido* is a modern official term which has not the deep folk-feeling behind it that 'cornered with giri,' 'merely for giri,' 'working strongly for giri' have in Japan. Nor does it cover the complexities and the ambivalences of giri."¹⁸⁵ Moreover, she stresses the fact that "the identification of *bushido* with the Samurai was also a source of misunderstanding. *Giri* is a virtue common to all classes. Like all other obligations and disciplines in Japan *giri* is 'heavier' as one goes up the social scale but it is required at all levels of society."¹⁸⁶ This would mean that Stevens need not be a samurai in livery, but simply an archetypal example of a common Japanese person.

John Rothfork states that "the contrast between Eastern and Western attitudes in regard to social roles provides a door into Kazuo Ishiguro's world."¹⁸⁷ He claims that from the Western point of view, Stevens is a failure because "his obsession with duty has arrested the development of adult autonomy: [...] he follows a social role instead of becoming his own person."¹⁸⁸ When Miss Kenton is indignant about the dismissal of two Jewish maids, Stevens is surprised by her reaction and reminds her that "our professional duty is not to our own foibles and sentiments, but to the wishes of our employer." (149) Later, when she

¹⁸² Benedict, 134.

¹⁸³ Benedict, 116.

¹⁸⁴ Benedict, 116.

¹⁸⁵ Benedict, 175.

¹⁸⁶ Benedict, 175-6.

¹⁸⁷ Rothfork.

¹⁸⁸ Rothfork.

realizes that Stevens refused to drop the role of butler and didn't share with her his "great concern" about the dismissal when it would have helped her so much, Miss Kenton asks in exasperation, "Why, Mr Stevens, why, why, why do you always have to pretend?" (153-4) Rothfork claims that in the Western view, "Stevens remains pathetically defensive"¹⁸⁹ until he tragically concedes, "All those years I served him, I trusted I was doing something worthwhile. I can't even say I made my own mistakes. Really – one has to ask oneself – what dignity is there in that?" (243) Rothfork notes that "Stevens poses this as a rhetorical question because every Westerner knows the answer: that one's deepest obligation is to develop a unique individuality. Christianity demands this."¹⁹⁰

Rothfork continues that "nothing like this analysis can be made from a Confucian outlook. In Japan filial loyalty [*ko*] – which is ultimately offered to the person of the Emperor (symbolized in this case by Lord Darlington) – provides the vocabulary for self-worth. Without this loyalty, which derives from a sense of gratitude and obligation [*gimu* and *giri*], one is no better than a monkey or a sociopath."¹⁹¹ Benedict illustrates this point by saying that "the hero we [Westerners] sympathize with because he is in love or cherishes some personal ambition," the Japanese "condemn as weak because he has allowed these feelings" to erode his moral worth: "Westerners are likely to feel it is a sign of strength to rebel against conventions. [...] But the strong, according to Japanese verdict, are those who disregard personal happiness and fulfill their obligations. Strength of character, they think, is shown in conforming not in rebelling."¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Rothfork.

¹⁹⁰ Rothfork.

¹⁹¹ Rothfork.

¹⁹² Benedict, 207.

10. SHAME AND DIGNITY

Dignity is the leitmotif of *The Remains of the Day* and at the same time it represents one of the most consistent expressions of Japanese culture in the novel. Heidie Joo thinks that Stevens's "constant exaltation of dignity" is somehow suspicious. She argues that "if England already epitomizes this virtue, then why dwell on it?" Moreover, Stevens keeps trying to define the meaning of the word dignity. He quotes different examples, but he fails to say exactly what dignity is. According to Heidie Joo, beneath the mask of dignity hides a fear of shame.¹⁹³ In her essay she compares the story-telling in Rushdie's *Shame* and Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* and she claims that both writers "focus on the concept and consequence of shame," but while Rushdie is explicit about it, in Ishiguro, "the issue of shame remains unspoken."¹⁹⁴

Dignity is the opposite of shame and the level of attained dignity is thus complementary with the extent of shame that is felt and, as Ruth Benedict remarks, "shame, *haji*, is [...] a thing bitterly felt in Japan."¹⁹⁵ The reason is that Japan is, in anthropological terms, a shame culture. It is a type of culture, which relies heavily on shame, in contrast to a so-called guilt culture, found, for instance, in Christian countries:

A society that inculcates absolute standards of morality and relies on men's developing a conscience is a guilt culture by definition, but a man in such a society may [...] suffer in addition from shame when he accuses himself of gaucheries which are in no way sins. He may be exceedingly chagrined about not dressing appropriately for the occasion or about a slip of the tongue. In a culture where shame is a major sanction, people are chagrined about acts which we expect

¹⁹³ Heidie Joo, "Rushdie, Ishiguro and the Art of Story-Telling," 28 Feb 2006
<<http://www.hewett.norfolk.sch.uk/CURRIC/english/resource/ishiguro/rodstory.htm>>.

¹⁹⁴ Joo.

¹⁹⁵ Benedict, 106.

people to feel guilty about. This chagrin can be very intense and it cannot be relieved, as guilt can be, by confession and atonement.¹⁹⁶

Benedict continues that shame cultures rely on external coercion of good behaviour, while guilt cultures count upon "an internalized conviction of sin." This means that guilt requires audience, either real or imaginary: "Shame is a reaction to other people's criticism. A man is shamed either by being openly ridiculed and rejected or by fantasizing to himself that he has been made ridiculous."¹⁹⁷ As a consequence, if a member of a shame culture – in this case a member of Japanese community – keeps his bad behaviour an absolute secret, he doesn't have to worry and "confession appears to him merely a way of courting trouble."¹⁹⁸ With this context of cultural difference in mind, it is easier to understand Stevens's grasp of dignity: "A butler of any quality must be seen to *inhabit* his role, utterly and fully; he cannot be seen casting it aside one moment simply to don it again the next as though it were nothing more than a pantomime costume. There is one situation and one situation only in which a butler who cares about his dignity may feel free to unburden himself of his role; that is to say, when he is entirely alone." (169)

Stevens's father is another example of a dignified butler. He is now in his seventies and at the end of a life of distinguished service, and Rothfork holds that he has always been "a paragon of *bushido*, of samurai discipline and loyalty."¹⁹⁹ Stevens views him as the perfect butler and it is obvious that he feels the greatest respect for him. "It is my firm conviction," he says, "that at the peak of his career [...] my father was indeed the embodiment of 'dignity'." (34) Jack Slay notes that "like his son, Stevens's father demonstrates in his day-to-day life an almost inhuman restraint of emotions, in keeping,

¹⁹⁶ Benedict, 222-3.

¹⁹⁷ Benedict, 223.

¹⁹⁸ Benedict, 223.

¹⁹⁹ Rothfork.

they both believe, with the dignity inherent in service."²⁰⁰ Stevens narrates how his father had to serve the general whose incompetence was responsible for the death of Stevens's elder brother Leonard in the Anglo-Boer War during "a most un-British attack on civilian Boer settlements" (40).²⁰¹ Stevens Senior denied his personal feelings of "utmost loathing" (41) towards the general and attended to him with utter professionalism and emotionlessness, and this performance Stevens later considers "the personification itself of [...] 'dignity in keeping with his position'." (42)²⁰²

What Susie O'Brien reads in this tale is a suggestion that dignity "is predicated on surrendering the dictates of individual conscience and "natural" human feeling to the authority of a rigidly (if arbitrarily) stratified social hierarchy."²⁰³ However, it might not be so much a question of surrender to the authority, than of 'keeping with one's position,' that is, a question of fulfilling one's duties towards one's master, towards one's work and towards one's name. As Ruth Benedict explains, "The stoicism, the self-control that is required of a self-respecting Japanese is part of his *giri* to his name,"²⁰⁴ and she continues that "*giri* to one's name also requires that one live according to one's station in life. If a man fails in this *giri* he has no right to respect himself."²⁰⁵

"Years later," as Jack Slay observes, "Stevens acts with remarkably similar dignity, performing service duties while his father lies dying in an upstairs bedroom. Stevens later considers this to be the epitome of his service, regarding it 'as a turning point in my life [...] as the moment in my career when I truly came of age as a butler' (70)."²⁰⁶ Slay notes that "as his father dies, Stevens continues his duties, serving drinks, maintaining proper order,

²⁰⁰ Jack Slay Jr., "Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*," *Explicator* 55.3 Spring 1997: 180-82.

See also <<http://slim-oak.u-sacred-heart.ac.jp/galeliterature.html>>.

²⁰¹ O'Brien.

²⁰² Slay.

²⁰³ O'Brien.

²⁰⁴ Benedict, 148.

²⁰⁵ Benedict, 149.

²⁰⁶ Slay.

retrieving bandages for the deplorable M. Dupont."²⁰⁷ However, one of the guests notices that there is something wrong with Stevens and inquires repeatedly whether he is all right. He always replies, "Yes, sir. Perfectly," but Lord Darlington remarks, "You look as though you're crying." (105) This demonstrates that Stevens is not a fiend without any feelings. On the contrary, he *is* chagrined, but suppresses the emotion, outwardly, at least, and manages to proceed with his duties, because, as he says, "I know my father would have wished me to carry on just now. [...] To do otherwise, I feel, would be to let him down." (106) Slay concludes that "the act establishes him as the quintessential butler and, more important, as proper heir to his father's name; further, it is through this act of quelled emotion and staunch repression that Stevens indeed earns his father's name."²⁰⁸ And that's way he can state the following:

Let me make clear that when I say the conference of 1923, and that night in particular, constituted a turning point in my professional development, I am speaking very much in terms of my own more humble standards. Even so, if you consider the pressures contingent on me that night, you may not think I delude myself unduly if I go so far as to suggest that I did perhaps display, in the face of everything, at least in some modest degree a 'dignity' worthy of someone like Mr Marshall – or come to that, my father. (110)

For Stevens, his father is the essence of a true butler and "a figure of unusual distinction" (54), and he is thus shocked at the realization that Miss Kenton, a new employee of the estate, doesn't recognize his greatness and "sees in the old man nothing more than an under-butler."²⁰⁹ Stevens replies: "He is of course in title the under-butler, as you say. But I am surprised your powers of observation have not already made it clear to

²⁰⁷ Slay.

²⁰⁸ Slay.

²⁰⁹ Rothfork.

you that he is in reality more than that. A great deal more" (53). Much about the character of this old man is revealed in a telling scene, when Stevens climbs "up to his small attic room at the top of the servants' wing early one morning" (64). Stevens is struck by its "smallness and starkness" and has the impression of stepping "into a prison cell" (64). Rothfork remarks that this looks like a "portrait of an old monk living [...] at the summit of a mountain,"²¹⁰ and continues that although it is still dark, the old man is "sitting, shaved and in full uniform" waiting for the dawn like a clear model of monastic discipline.²¹¹ The harshness of the room echoes in his tone, when he speaks to his son: "'I've been up for the past three hours,' he said, looking me up and down rather coldly." (64) Stevens notices that "the oil lamp beside his bed had been extinguished" and he sees his father "glance disapprovingly at the lamp I had brought to guide me up the rickety staircase" (64).

The remark "I've been up for the past three hours" gains a different dimension, if set in the context of the role that sleep has in Japanese culture: Sleep, for the Japanese, is a "favourite indulgence," says Benedict. They don't understand it as an activity, which should prepare us for the following day and provide energy necessary for the fulfilment of our everyday duties. The Japanese sleep, because they like to sleep. And for this very reason they are able to give up sleeping ruthlessly. For them, it is nothing more than an indulgence and as such it has a clearly defined place in the area of pleasures and it must not interfere with the serious affairs of life. The Japanese cherish the pleasures of flesh only to sacrifice them later on the altar of obligation.²¹²

²¹⁰ Rothfork.

²¹¹ Rothfork.

²¹² Benedict, 177-181.

11. KOANS AND BANTERING

The last scene of *The Remains* is very similar to that of *An Artist*, where Ono looks at "all those people gathered beneath the lamps, laughing" good-heartedly (206). The final image shows Stevens sitting on a bench and pondering about the throngs of people awaiting the switching on of the pier lights:

As I watch them now, they are laughing together merrily. It is curious how people can build such warmth among themselves so swiftly. It is possible these particular persons are simply united by the anticipation of the evening ahead. But, then, I rather fancy it has more to do with this skill of bantering. Listening to them now, I can hear them exchanging one bantering remark after another. (245)

The theme of bantering epitomizes the shift in values which, according to Susie O'Brien, "affects Stevens quite tangibly," when Darlington Hall is bought by genial Mr. Farraday, who "introduces some – to Stevens, quite alarming – changes in the running of the house. Where dignity was the hallmark of his relationship with Lord Darlington, Stevens is now expected, much to his discomfiture, to respond to his employer's friendly bantering."²¹³ With some uneasiness, Stevens explains that "this business of bantering is not a duty I feel I can ever discharge with enthusiasm. It is all very well, in these changing times, to adapt one's work to take in duties not traditionally within one's realm; but bantering is of another dimension altogether." (16) Stevens is at a loss, because, as O'Brien explains, "the code of honor which had seemed essential to the successful running of Darlington Hall [...] gives way to a new professionalist ethic in which, as Stevens is bewildered to discover, the value of knowing one's place loses currency in a new emphasis on social [...] freedom."²¹⁴

²¹³ O'Brien.

²¹⁴ O'Brien.

John Rothfork comes with a fascinating conception of the issue of bantering and he claims that this topic provides an opportunity of reconsidering the novel. He points out that "at the beginning of the novel, the banter of Mr. Farraday seemed a nuisance to Stevens and seemed perhaps to provide a source of humor to readers. In either case it did not seem especially significant. How astonishing, then," he observes, "to discover the centrality of bantering in Zen Buddhism and accordingly to recognize that it functions in the novel as a kind of Zen practice which liberates Stevens from his samurai role."²¹⁵

He continues that "in a less intense way, the bantering in *The Remains of the Day* produces an effect similar to *koan* study in *zazen* [seated meditation]."²¹⁶ Marco Aldinger explains that *koan* is a paradoxical riddle, which activates the brain, puts it into confusion, ridicules it, exhausts it and finally breaks it down. The content of a *koan* is often anecdotic, legendary or biographical event, disputation or statement of a great Zen Master. The riddle is given to a disciple to be solved and it often happens that he succeeds only after several years of daily effort. At that moment he reaches the experience of enlightenment, in Japanese Buddhism called *satori*, which is the only aim and purpose of Zen.²¹⁷ *Koan* can have the form of a simple question, like the very famous one, which asks about the sound of one clapping hand, or it can be made into a story like the following one, which can – with surprising smartness – often clarify even complicated processes and illustratively expound paradoxical connectedness:

A Master, who engaged in ink-painting, was asked by his friend to paint a bamboo grove. He painted it as usual, with brush and ink, only that the ink was red. His friend grumbled.

"Well, what colour would you prefer?" asked the painter.

"Black, of course," replied the friend.

²¹⁵ Rothfork.

²¹⁶ Rothfork.

²¹⁷ Marco Aldinger, *Moudrosti a příběhy zenu*, trans. Monika Žárská (Praha: Portál, 2000) 8-11.

"And who on earth has ever seen a black bamboo grove?" rejoined the painter.²¹⁸

Like *koans*, bantering "will accept neither habitual nor convention response. In laughing at the proffered response, it forces one to consider how one has acted – from a point of view without rules."²¹⁹ On this point Faure says that "there may be a type of sudden awakening that, like humor, totally subverts all [...] categories (and as such is not itself a category)."²²⁰ In this context, we might observe that very early in the novel Stevens confesses that "bantering on my new employer's part has characterized much of our relationship over these months" (14). Like a "Zen monk challenged to respond to a *koan* assigned to him by his master,"²²¹ Stevens tells us he "would smile in the correct manner whenever I detected the bantering tone in his voice. Nevertheless, I could never be sure exactly what was required of me on these occasions." (15) Consequently, Stevens felt forced to devote "some time and effort [...] to improving my skill in this very area", which means that he has been "endeavouring to add this skill to my professional armoury so as to fulfil with confidence all Mr. Farraday's expectations with respect to bantering." (130) With this object in mind, he has devised a simple exercise which he tries "to perform at least once a day; whenever an odd moment presents itself, I attempt to formulate three witticisms based on my immediate surroundings at that moment." (131) Through his insistence on seeing bantering as a "duty" instead of a natural mode of conversation, Stevens risks to end up like the diligent but foolish Zen-Buddhist disciple from the following anecdote:

One particularly industrious novice practised zazen meditation day and night, hardly slept and ate very little. Master sent for him and advised him to reduce his effort and to be more careful about his health.

²¹⁸ Aldinger, 129.

²¹⁹ Rothfork.

²²⁰ Faure, Bernard. *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991) 46. Quoted in Rothfork.

²²¹ Rothfork.

"But I seek deliverance and I don't want to waste time," explained the novice.

"And how do you know," asked the Master, "that deliverance is running ahead of you and that you have to run after it? Perhaps it is behind you, hurrying after you, and only cannot catch you at your pace."²²²

Rothfork finds that Stevens is very similar to such a Zen monk when he puzzles, "how would one know for sure that at any given moment a response of the bantering sort is truly what is expected?" (16) Stevens's anxiety about proper behaviour makes things even worse: "One need hardly dwell on the catastrophic possibility of uttering a bantering remark only to discover it wholly inappropriate." (16) He experiments with timid and studied witticisms, but admits, "I cannot escape the feeling that Mr. Farraday is not satisfied with my responses to his various banterings." (17) Stevens's rather comical worrying over the issue of bantering in order to please his American master becomes more comprehensible when seen from the Japanese perspective. Ruth Benedict explains that the Japanese "are most vulnerable when they attempt to export their virtues into foreign lands where their own formal signposts of good behavior do not hold."²²³

She then continues that many Japanese have a tendency to choose security and they deeply fear every spontaneous and unexpected encounter with life.²²⁴ Zen Buddhism provides an alternative, says Rothfork. "It is a crazy 'system' [...] dedicated to destroying, or at least suspending, the mediating system of Confucian ethics, which Zen Buddhism claims alienates one from direct experience."²²⁵ Zen works against the system of social obligations of *gimu* and *giri*, because its "ideal is to act spontaneously in the situation without first objectifying it in order to define one's role."²²⁶ Even though Stevens's decision to improve

²²² Aldinger, 125.

²²³ Benedict, 224-5.

²²⁴ Benedict, 291.

²²⁵ Rothfork.

²²⁶ T. P. Kasulis, *Zen Action / Zen Person* (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1981). Quoted in Rothfork.

his bantering skills is definitely a promising start, his effort to learn how to banter through listening to the wireless and "studying" a programme containing "humorous comments on a variety of topics" (130-1), however, might not be really in accordance with the teachings of Zen. Japanese philosopher D. T. Suzuki claims that Zen "upholds [...] the direct experience of Reality" and consequently "abhors [...] concepts, and reasoning based on them".²²⁷ In other words, studying philosophical texts – or radio programmes – is, in itself, pointless, because thinking can only lead us away from reaching enlightenment, that is, a spontaneous understanding of truth.²²⁸

Kasulis explains that "in contrast to Confucian ethics, Zen Buddhism hopes to liberate a person from all (Confucian) social situations, which are inherently worrisome."²²⁹ Thus, in Zen Buddhism, one attains enlightenment when he "discard[s] all artificial assumptions, doubt[s] whatever can be doubted"²³⁰ and "lets go of pre-conceived notions of the self."²³¹ In other words, "the 'message' of Zen is simply to live instead of first studying how to live as specified by Confucian texts."²³² Rothfork thus concludes that "against this Japanese Confucian/Buddhist tension, *The Remains of the Day* can be seen as a Buddhist critique of Confucianism. Mr Stevens's life is stunted by the Confucian *bushido* code that he relies on to render identity and self-worth. The remedy is to develop a Zen Buddhist outlook," because Zen bantering provides the means of escaping "the sterility of mere discipline" through laughing.²³³

²²⁷ D. T. Suzuki, "Zen Buddhism," *Understanding Non-Western Philosophy: Introductory Readings*, ed. Daniel Bonevac and Stephen Phillips (Mountain View: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1993) 329.

²²⁸ Daniel Bonevac and Stephen Phillips, eds. *Understanding Non-Western Philosophy: Introductory Readings* (Mountain View: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1993) 323.

²²⁹ Kasulis. Quoted in Rothfork.

²³⁰ Kitaro Nishida, "An Inquiry into the Good," trans. Masao Abe and Christopher Ives, *Understanding Non-Western Philosophy: Introductory Readings*, ed. Daniel Bonevac and Stephen Phillips (Mountain View: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1993) 321.

²³¹ Kasulis. Quoted in Rothfork.

²³² Rothfork.

²³³ Rothfork.

12. HAPPY ENDING

It is arguable whether *The Remains* has a happy ending. John Rothfork claims that "although it might appear that the end of the novel leaves Stevens a wreck, regretfully cynical of his misplaced trust, this is not the case," because Stevens talks about his intention "to make the best of what remains of my day," (244) and his tone is certainly not gloomy.²³⁴ Indeed, in the conclusive lines, Stevens seems full of hope when he decides to approach the task of bantering with new enthusiasm: "When I return to Darlington Hall tomorrow [...] I will begin practising with renewed effort. I should hope, then, that by the time of my employer's return, I shall be in a position to pleasantly surprise him." (245)

Many critics, however, tend to read the gist of the novel in the realization of a wasted life. For Charlotte Innes, all the three novels convey "the same bleak messages," namely: "Our self-deceptions are intolerable. Denial is a hedge against madness. Life is one long search for consolation."²³⁵ Sheng-mei Ma, in similar terms, claims that "the fundamental human emotions" explored in all three novels are those of "an inconsolable guilt and emptiness" and she holds that "despite Etsuko's whitewashing of her past, despite Ono's courage and good will toward the new Japan, despite Stevens's bracing for the remains of his days, [...] their lives are revealed to be irrevocably void of human warmth."²³⁶ Bruce Robbins observes that "the mild pun on 'remains' as both 'time remaining in' and the 'corpse of' the day would seem to underline the waste of the butler's life, a life evaded and distorted by means of professional rationalization and overwork."²³⁷ However, he continues that "if a novelist as deep as Ishiguro seems to be saying something as superficial and uninteresting as 'don't work too hard' or 'overwork is bad for the family,' perhaps the

²³⁴ Rothfork.

²³⁵ Innes.

²³⁶ Ma.

²³⁷ Bruce Robbins, "Very Busy Just Now: Globalization and Harriedness in Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*," *Comparative Literature* 53.4 Fall 2001: 426-41.

See also <<http://slim-oak.u-sacred-heart.ac.jp/galeliterature.html>>.

dullness is more in our reading than in his writing." He asserts that "we need not take at face value those easy, tried-and-true moral counters that Ishiguro seems to favor, like showing proper respect at the death of a parent and proper disrespect for Nazis, neither one of them a very controversial position. Perhaps this extreme moral obviousness is the sign of a mystery, an interpretive invitation."²³⁸ And this mystery might be clarified through the Japanese perspective:

The Japanese [...] define the supreme task of life as fulfilling one's obligations. They fully accept the fact that repaying *on* means sacrificing one's personal desires and pleasures. The idea that the pursuit of happiness is a serious goal of life is to them an amazing and immoral doctrine. [...] The fact that a man often suffers intensely in living up to his obligations of [...] *ko* and *giri* is no more than they expect. It makes life hard but they are prepared for that. They constantly give up pleasures which they consider in no way evil. That requires strength of will. But such strength is the most admired virtue in Japan.²³⁹

And this perspective may provide enough satisfaction for Stevens to utter the last words of his story with genuine optimism.

²³⁸ Robbins.

²³⁹ Benedict, 192.

13. CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the fact that Japanese culture plays an important role in all three of Ishiguro's early novels appears to be virtually incontestable. In the first two novels, Japan is present not only on the obvious level of setting and characters. Ishiguro employs and simultaneously subverts the Western stereotypes about Japan, like the notion of obedient Japanese women, or the myth about the Japanese propensity to suicide. The novels also share a controlled and almost minimalist style of narration, which shows distinct traces of the Japanese cinema of the 1950's and of the Japanese aesthetic concept of *mono no aware*. Moreover, Ishiguro cleverly manipulates the speech of his characters and makes the Japanese language filter through the perfect English diction.

As for *The Remains of the Day*, a critical perspective, which views this novel as purely English without any relation to the Oriental culture, provides enough means to cover the novel to a satisfying degree. However, if the reader has a chance to take into account the Japanese background of the author and the context of Japanese culture, he may discover Oriental elements at the very heart of butler Stevens: in his motives, in his conduct, in his understanding of his vocation and in his view of his position in the context of humanity. Such a reader can thus immerse himself one layer deeper into the novel and discover meanings, which the "English" perspective can never fully reveal.

REZUMÉ

Myslím, že každého, kto prečítal *Súmrak dňa* (The Remains of the Day, 1989) od Kazua Ishigura, musel zaraziť rozpor medzi autorovým menom, ktoré je tak evidentne japonské, a románom, ktorý je tak dokonale anglický. Na prvý pohľad v ňom nie je nič, čo by naznačovalo, že je dielom autora japonského pôvodu. Ak však má čitateľ záujem o japonskú kultúru a môže sa v tomto smere oprieť o určitú mieru znalostí, môže si všimnúť, že téma, charakter aj motívy konania hlavného hrdinu majú s japonskou kultúrou viac než len málo spoločného.

Chcela som preto v tejto práci nahliadnuť pod anglický povrch a dostať sa k japonskému jadrú tohto románu. Chcela som poodhaliť, kam až v Ishigurovej tvorbe siaha vplyv japonskej kultúry, a preto som do tohto skúmania zahrnula aj prvé dva Ishigurove romány, ktoré sa odohrávajú v Japonsku, *Bledý výhľad na hory* (A Pale View of Hills, 1982) a *Umelec miznúceho sveta* (An Artist of the Floating World, 1986). Tieto tri romány dohromady tvoria uzavretý celok, pretože sú časovo najbližšie Ishigurovemu detstvu v Japonsku a tým aj vplyvu japonskej kultúry na autora. Zároveň sú to prvé výsledky autorovej snahy vyrovnáť sa s minulosťou a "vypísať" sa z konfliktu stretu dvoch odlišných kultúr potom, čo sa rodina presťahovala do Veľkej Británie. Najvýraznejšie sa táto snaha prejavuje v prvom románe, ktorý využíva a zároveň spochybňuje kultúrne stereotypy o Japonsku, ako napríklad mýtus o japonskom sklone k samovražde, či predstavu o poslušných japonských ženách. Romány majú spoločný zdržanlivý až minimalistický štýl narácie, na ktorom je zreteľný vplyv japonského filmu 50-tych rokov. Zaujímavé je aj Ishigurovo použitie japonských gramatických prvkov, vďaka ktorým vytvára dojem, že postavy v prvých dvoch románoch rozprávajú japonsky.

Druhú časť práce som venovala románu *Súmrak dňa* a analyzovala som prejavy japonskej filozofie a kultúrnej tradície, ako etický samurajský kódex bušidó, ktorý sa vyvinul z filozofických princípov konfucianizmu, a tému žartovania, ktoré nie je nepodobné kóanom, paradoxným otázkam používaným ako súčasť meditačnej techniky v zenovom buddhizme. Sústredila som sa tiež na antropologický koncept Japonska ako "kultúry hanby" a na leitmotív románu – dôstojnosť – v priamej súvislosti s týmto konceptom.

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