

Illusion, an identity: A Postcolonial reading of Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*.

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ABSTRACT

The Remains of the Day regarded as an international novel designed by Kazuo Ishiguro. This exceptional work by the Japanese descent enormously traverses the British society amalgamating the segments of tragedy, irony and imagination. According to the New York Times, this 1989 book by Ishiguro is “a dream book: a beguiling comedy of manners that evolves almost magically into profound and heart-rending study of personality, class and culture.” Ishiguro intricately weaves the innate emotions the protagonist undergoes when encountered with different arenas of his own life. The events whirling around the hub of social and political affairs of the British Empire, The Darlington House and the maintenance of the societal embellishment of the “dignity” determines Stevens, the protagonist as an individual. Englishness and English values were the foremost

themes that were featured throughout the novel. The bifurcation between the past memories kindred with the life in Darlington House and the present life accommodating his holidays unveils the self of the English butler. The alterations and transformations in the cultural and the socio-political facets have major implications on his personality as well. Initially Stevens is an embodiment of British culture and devotes his life unreservedly to the Lord Darlington thereby apparently in conserving his dignity. After a few years when the power of the English house gets into the hands of an American person, Mr. Farraday, Stevens tries to fit into the American ways by pleasing his new owner. Thus the pages of this book show how Stevens is enslaved by the authority without being able to assert himself. The paper aims to study the master –slave relations the protagonist encounters in his professional life and the way the ‘authority shift’ makes him a device of hybridity. The study is carried further reinforced by applying the theory of cultural hybridity of one the prominent postcolonial theorists, Homi K. Bhabha

Key Words: Illusion, Hybridity, Authority, Culture.

Kazuo Ishiguro was markedly appreciated for his novel *The Remains of the Day* (1989), which explores the story of an exceedingly self-controlled life lead by a head butler in an English country house. Ishiguro has diligently introduced the character who leads his life in a country that is a victim of the world war and also a world that undergoes enormous transformation in the culture he lives in. Thus Stevens, the head butler of the Darlington House, an English symbol is inflicted by the external transformations, especially the major shift from British dignity to American freedom.

Kazuo Ishiguro is often categorized as a postcolonial writer because of his oriental background. Traces from Asian Literature can be traced from the works of Ishiguro as his novels question the dominance of the superior nations. *The Remains of the Day* widely portrays the rise of America as a leading nation, the consequence of World War II on the British empire and the withering of British culture and tradition.

Stevens, the protagonist created by Ishiguro is an embodiment of selflessness. His dedication in the service of Lord Darlington in the epoch of World War II is a representation of his utmost professionalism. The Darlington Hall is the symbol of national identity and Englishness, and Steven’s mindset makes him believe that the surroundings revolve around the axis of Darlington House. The service shown in the novel fits in to the professionalism in terms of contemporary world, a world in which a person’s job and dignity defines his / her social status. Stevens ‘career is something that has ties with Darlington Hall, and his vision of position and dignity never goes beyond this noble relation he has. But, later when the imperial house is undertaken by the American owner, he in order to keep his professionalism high is bound to mould himself to the wishes of Mr. Farraday.

Darlington Hall and its employees can be comprehended in a complete sense when placed beyond the societal sphere that is in a globalised context. There is an intrusion by the American culture into the wide British Empire. Thus the novel both bifurcates the public and private sphere as well as it shows the association between them. While looking into the domestic level, it is the change of ownership that creates a cultural perplexity. The narrative in the novel connects his series of memories of the past (1920s and 1930s) and his present expedition of 1956. The mutations and evolutions of Britain had reversed the stability of the Darlington Hall, which he realizes throughout the journey. The major shift that takes place is the change in the ownership of the house, from Lord

Darlington, and Englishman to Mr. Farraday, an American. Furthermore there is an alteration in the position of Stevens in the professional domain. Placing Stevens in the postimperial web, we find a multitude of connections. Every societal, national and international factors influence his professional life as well his domestic one. Bhabha says, "The discriminatory effects of the discourse of cultural colonialism, for instance, do not simply or singly refer to a person ... or to a discrimination between mother culture and alien culture ... the reference of discrimination is always to a process of splitting as the condition of subjection: a discrimination between the mother and its bastard, the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something different – a mutation."

Stevens defines himself in terms of his aristocratic associations. Englishness and dignity are the key factors that shape his concept of professionalism and service. The degeneration of the Imperial houses and the decline of British aristocracy was a great blow to the butler. Mr. Farraday, unlike Lord Darlington, an ardent supporter of independence repeatedly directs him to loosen his rigidity and let himself free in every ways. The informal suggestions by the new owner left him perplexed as he has never before stepped out of the limits the Hayes Society set. 'Bantering' is something that Farraday loves, but Stevens finds it strenuous to adapt himself in such a situation where no norms and etiquettes are followed. At the end of the novel we find that Stevens says, "I have of course already devoted much time to developing my bantering skills, but it is possible I have never previously approached the task with the commitment I might have done. He decides to return to the Darlington house after his short holiday and practice the skill of bantering with a renewed effort. In the days of Lord Darlington, dignity subjugated Stevens and when the ownership is handed over to Mr. Farraday, he decides to learn the skill of squabbling for the new lord of the mansion. Here we find the head butler trying to cater to the likes of his owner. Homi.K Bhabha calls this very act as 'mimicry'. According to Bhabha mimicry is 'unintentionally subversive', which was something that he came at after being influenced by Jacques Derrida's deconstructive reading of the idea 'performative' by J.L. Austin where he states that mimicry is a "kind of performance that exposes the artificiality of all symbolic expressions of power." Another kind of is subversiveness when mimicry involves the copying of the say 'western' concepts of justice, law and freedom etc. Although few part of him has decided to mould himself as an America's informality, but unknowingly his tendency to incline himself to the master's wishes has not abandoned him.

He analyses the term 'mutation' as the interdependence and the mutual construction of their subjectivities in the relationship of the colonized and the colonizer. In the novel, as the typical English servant, the butler is also dependent on the Lord of the house to maintain the decorum of the English lord's culture. This can be evidenced in the fact that the butler's illusory world of utter dominance changes with the lord. Bhabha says that all kinds of cultural statements and systems are made or are constructed in a space that he calls the "Third Space of enunciation" (Bhabha 1994:37). He says, "It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory... May open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the criticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity." (Bhabha 1994:38)

Mimicry is also another concept that can be applied to the butler's choices to certain extent. On mimicry he says, "the effect of mimicry on the authority of colonial discourse is profound and disturbing." Mimicry is a concept taken from Homi Bhabha's essay "Of Mimicry and Man". Both Homi K. Bhabha's terminology of 'mimicry' and 'hybridity' were greatly influenced and derived from Freud and French thinkers like Lacan and Derrida. Be it in the context of colonialism or immigration, this is an extremely opportunistic behavior where one tries to copy from the person or people in power so as to try and obtain more power for themselves.

Dignity is introduced in the novel in various levels and through various sources. The initial reference in the novel is to the butler's memories that are associated to his profession as a butler. He repeatedly touches the question, 'what is a great butler?' He himself answers the question by keeping the Hayes Society as the measuring criteria. Hayes society in the novel is a fictional organization representing the upper class butler's society in the 1920s and the 1930s. This very category of society expounds a great butler as one who attains dignity. This societal force drives him to chase after the concept of dignity, and looks to attain it. The American owner Farraday wishes the butler to be an integral part of the British culture. There is a kind of struggle between maintaining the Englishness and moving with the American mentality which is a great task for him to accomplish. Stevens has been a permanent employee at Darlington Hall and he claims "the world was wheel, revolving with these great houses at the hub, their mighty decisions emanating out to all else, rich and poor, who revolved around them." (122)

Stevens embarks, "It has been my privilege to see the best of England over the years, sir, within these very walls", which shows his satisfaction. However Mr. Farraday who believes in individualism and freedom puts forth his views and says, "You fellows, you're always locked up in these big houses helping out, how do you ever get to see around this beautiful country of yours?"... "It is wrong that a man can't get to see around his own country. Take my advice, get out of the house for a few days." (4) These views of the master and the servant show the different views of an Englishman and an American. Earlier Stevens's professional life was more or less confined to that of the Darlington House, whereas the new authority considers England as an open landscape which every citizen must explore. His views of England are confined to the sights he witnesses in the house and Stevens as a reply to Farraday's frequently raised question says, "although we did not see a great deal of the country in the sense of touring the countryside and visiting picturesque sites, did actually 'see' more of England than most, placed as we were in the houses where the greatest ladies and gentleman gathered." The notion of Darlington House as the power house of relations transcends to a broader sense of the British Empire as a whole. However, such hubs play a vital role in bridging the domestic sphere and international zone.

The Remains of the Day have two major traces when studied in the context of PostImperial politics. The one situated around the Victorian values-formality, repression, and self effacement termed as a whole as dignity, and the other related to the American idea, that has expanded as a "New World"- freedom, nature and individualism. This socio-political change has also several implications on the cultural aspect. Dignity for Stevens is a typical English quality and he posits, "dignity has to do crucially with the butler's ability not to abandon the professional being he inhabits" (43). "Dignity" is further poured into Steven's mind through an anecdote which his father was very fond of – the

story of a butler who failed to panic on discovering a tiger under the dining table; it was because he knew instinctively that somewhere in this story lay the kernel of what true 'dignity' is' Stevens also emphasizes that great butlers belong only to England, and foreign countries have man servants. Another dark instance was the death of Senior Steven's elder son in Boer war while Senior Stevens performed his duty concealing his emotions. Thus "Dignity" is predicated on denying natural human feeling, surrendering completely to authority and societal rigidity.

The same obedience he showers on his next owner, Mr. Farraday. Stevens goes for an expedition according to the suggestion offered by his new owner. The world he encounters outside the borders of the Darlington Hall is a very different one. In the days of his exploration of the country sides of England he experiences freedom, although he doesn't feel like abandoning his pride and dignity. This itself shows how both the cultures has influenced him. During his tour we can find Stevens reminiscing the memories associated with the Darlington Hall, his relation with his father which lacked emotions and also his unromantic relation with Miss Kenton, the maid of Darlington Hall. Even in maintaining the relationship with Miss Kenton he keeps in mind that he cannot break the class hierarchy. The Moscombe village which he comes across in his journey gives him an image of freedom. People of this village believe in individualism and not obedience. Moscombe thus is a visual representation of Mr. Farraday's notion of flexibility and freedom. Stevens finds himself as a misfit in this varied lifestyle of the countryside. The intrusion of the foreign culture gradually creeps into the inbuilt notions of the butler.

There can be parallel drawn between the movement of British Empire to a globalised web and the reorientation of the English house to a home for a rich American. Stevens is bound to show his professional inclination towards his new authority. Mr. Farraday reassures his Englishness and his rootedness in British culture .Stevens here is a representation of English brand, a symbol of old English culture. The Darlington House itself is rebranded as it has lost its power as a national identity. The fixed identity of Stevens as portrayed in the initial chapters of the novel and the intrusion of American concept of freedom and individualism has created a clash of culture causing hybridity in Stevens. Stevens inhabits a world that is not perpetual, but mutable. His identity is defined by the culture that shields his world. The end of the familiar culture that once dominated his self is now a combination of the hues of British rigidity and American flexibility.

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