Re-evaluation of Nation in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*

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This paper will analyze Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989) as country-house novel in the context of nineteenth-century England. It would also attempt to examine the text as a postmodern hypertext. In order to investigate the relationship between this genre and the creation of the identity of an English national, Ishiguro imitates the revival of an atavistic genre. The argument would be that of the country-house novel being reconfigured in *The Remains of the Day* to raise issues regarding the dominant nativist ideologies and "Englishness" of Thatcher's time, when the book was released. With reference to this idea, before a thorough analysis of the novel, country houses will be discussed as social establishments. In addition to it, the focus would be on their function as metaphors, and their role in the construction of English national identity.

Hayden White recapitulates the perspectives of Bakhtin and Jameson when he states, "genre, genericization, and genre-fication are interpreted as crucial elements of ideology, providing imaginary matrices (Bakhtin's chronotopes) on which real social conflicts can be given possible resolution in ways conformable to class aspirations and ideals" (603). Moreover, Russian formalist Boris Tomashevsky too focuses on the connection between the development of genres in history and actual social conflicts: "high genres are pushed out by low ones. This too may be analogous to social evolution, whereby the 'upper' ruling classes are gradually squeezed out by the democratic 'lower' orders-the feudal lords by

the petty service nobility, the whole aristocracy by the bourgeoisie and so on" (53).

England's imperial authority is always apparent in the background of books set in country estates. For instance, though it isn't stated specifically, Sir Thomas's sugar plantations in Antigua, West Indies, are the source of his wealth (and, by extension, the wealth of England in general), according to *Mansfield Park*. He doesn't respond to Fanny's question regarding slaves employed on the plantations. For instance, in *Jane Eyre*, there are allusions to England's colonial rule abroad with reference to the Jamaican Creole, Bertha Mason who inherits her riches in the West Indies, and Mr. Rochester's son are married by arrangement made by Mr. Rochester's father. Due to her alleged craziness stemming from her mother, he imprisons her in the attic of Thornfield and amasses her money. Moreover, St. John Rivers' journey to India as a missionary to convert the natives to Christianity touches on England's so-called civilizing mission.

Ishiguro challenges genre tropes that over hundreds of years helped to establish the imperial British identity with these hypertexts. In this work, Bakhtin's chronotope is used to analyze *The Remains of the Day* critically.

The stately home environment and idyllic landscape are criticised in *The Remains of the Day* for serving as metaphors for Englishness and for helping to maintain the imperialist notion of the English nation. Country houses are also criticised for serving as a symbol of the English nation.

Gérard Genette clarifies regarding the primary forms of textual imitation and transformation in his theory of connection between texts in *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1997). In Genette's perspective, "the subject of poetics is transtextuality, or the textual transcendence of the text, which [he has] already described roughly as everything that establishes the text in a relationship, whether obvious or veiled with other texts is the basis of his study" (1). His discussion of "hypertextuality," which is defined as "any relationship uniting a text B (hypertext) to an earlier text A (hypotext), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary," is the main focus of his classification of

these "textual transcendence[s]" under various sub-headings (5). A text that is "derived from another pre-existing text" or "a text in the second degree" is what hypertext is, in other words (5). He provides two approaches to further clarify the definition: "Any text created from a preceding text either via straightforward change… or through indirect transformation, which [he] shall call imitation," is the definition of hypertext. (7). Genette categorizes the "genres" of imitation as caricature, pastiche, forgery and the "genres" of change as parody, travesty, and transposition (25). His main emphasis is on the idea that it is impossible to imitate a text and that one can only imitate a style or on a genre, whereas transformation is "distortion of a text" (25). It is impossible to mimic a text and that one can only imitate a style, or a genre, or, to put it another way, "one can parody only particular texts; one can imitate only a genre" (85). When a hypertext humorously alters a hypotext, it is referred to as parody; yet, when it humorously mimics the hypotext's style, it is referred to as pastiche.

Every literary text to some extent based on the manner it is read, evokes some other literary work; hence all works are hypertextual in that respect. Julia Kristeva, and her idea of intertextuality in the essay "Word, Dialogue, and Novel", had earlier made a similar claim. Kristeva asserts that "every text is created as a mosaic of quotes; any text is the absorption and alteration of another" in a thorough research on intertextuality (Desire in Language 66). In a more limited sense, Genette asserts that intertextuality is interlatedness between two or more texts. In other words it is typically eidetic, as one text is present within another, and therefore, acknowledges Kristeva. He emphasizes on a style that makes use of 'quoting', 'plagiarism', or 'allusion' (2).

In a sense, hypertextuality is a greater degree of textual transcendence, and more expansive than intertextuality because it discusses connections between texts rather in place of individual words. Merely quoting a work is an example of an intertextual practice.

The first chapter of *The Remains of the Day* (1989) is written in the first person by Mr. Stevens, an ageing but devoted English butler who works at the prestigious rural estate of Darlington Hall.

The novel takes place over the course of six days in July 1956, but flashbacks provide Darlington Hall's history and its residents in the aftermath of World War I. Ishiguro uses a double-coded narrative in *Remains* to contrast his worries about the English national identity Margaret Thatcher's (the former Prime Minister of United Kingdom) leadership with the political upheavals following World War I. Precisely, Postmodernism is "happy with doing two conflicting things at the same time or representing both sides of an argument at once," claims Linda Hutcheon in her description of the movement in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1996). Ishiguro in his novel ironically imitates the genre while reconstructing the country-house novel with an intention to focus on some particular issues in the making of and its affiliation to English national identity. It does this as a postmodernist text that "is intensively self-reflexive and parodic, yet it also attempts to root itself in that which both reflexivity and parody appear to short-circuit: the historical world" (Hutcheon Poetics). In fact, postmodernism consistently approaches this amalgation of the dialogical and the historical ideas with a peculiar "attendant sarcasm," hence, in the text Ishiguro "depends upon and takes its strength from that which it fights" (Hutcheon *Poetics* 120). Irony allows writers to remain active within certain discourses while successfully challenging them (Nicol 32). *The Remains of the Day* successfully challenges the subgenre of the country-house novel while navigating its discourse.

Unlike the category of nineteenth century country-house novel in which typically the third person narrator narrates the subject of the middle or upper middle classes, it is the first person narrator who is also a marginalized character in *The Remains of the Day*, is overtly unreliable and barely mentioned in conventional narratives. In the perspective of Beedham, Ishiguro "foregrounds the small private history, and in doing so, demonstrates how readily it is able to revise the traditional grand narratives" (70). Instead of adhering to the principles of the traditional narrative style and depicting the wealthy families' history, a butler recounts his own personal history. Stevens fits into Gérard Genette's category of "intradiegetic-homodiegetic" narrators (*Narrative Discourse* 248). In other words, these narrators are not superior or inferior to the

story but directly engage within the story, narrate their own stories as well. The reader is forced to follow the plot through his narration because he is the one who describes all the events and dialogues in the book. Phelan and Martin's analysis of *The Remains of the Day* reveals that classical narratology is insufficient to explain Stevens's unreliability. They propose a novel's reading strategy that will do justice both to Ishiguro and Stevens. They conclude from reading Stevens' conversations, particularly those with Miss Kenton, which he is 'deliberately misleading' and 'is seriously either underreporting or underreading'. It is important to note here that the ethical positioning of the reader should be superseding marker while approaching the narrative because homodiegesis makes it impossible to "clearly determine Ishiguro's relation to Stevens" (102). In their opinion, "Our own ethics play a crucial role in shaping our response to the scene," (103). Lately, Phelan in his article emphasizes on narrative style's inconsistency and distinguishes on the unreliable factor between "estranging" and "bonding"; the former "underlines or increases the distance between the narrator and the authorial audience", and the latter "reduces the distance between the narrator and the authorial audience". With his circumstances, Stevens is a prime example of an 'unreliable bond'. In the conclusion of the novel, Stevens says, "In bantering lies the key to human warmth," which shows Stevens' learning by the narrative's course. He has edged near the ethical belief system of Ishiguro with regards to human connections in contrast to his earlier despondent responses to the bantering of Mr. Faraday. The authorial audience likewise turns toward Stevens as he goes in this path, both affectively and in an ethical sense. There are various "verbal indicators of mental habits that contribute to unreliability [which] are located inside the discourse itself" with regards to the interactions between the authorial audience and the narrator (Wall 20). With phrases like "As I remember" (Ishiguro 54), "I recall my impression" (67), "But there is another memory" (75), "I have become somewhat lost in these old memories" (167), and "One memory in particular has preoccupied me all morning - or rather, a fragment of a memory, a moment that has for some reason remained with me vividly through the years," (222) Stevens'

unsure comments and dependency on his memory is foregrounded. He recalls memories from the past, puts them together in his head, and then tells the reader his story, which makes the reader doubt his reliability as a storyteller. In addition, Kathleen Wall unreliability in her thorough analysis of Stevens' unreliable narration, lists Stevens' language use, his professional skills, rhetorical twitch, discrepancies between his feeling and words, the narrative deflections, and examples of misremembering things which vividly underlines the factor (23-25). As the narrative voice, Stevens in several ways makes a departure from the country-house novel tradition. The reader is first made aware of the narration's limitations because the narrator is obviously unreliable. Second, a simple butler such as Stevens is elevated to the centre of the narrative. It is interesting to notice that he doesn't belong to the upper class without which characters are hardly addressed in traditional country-house novels. Instead of detailing every aspect of the lives of 'important' figures, he is narrating his own tale.

The atmosphere of the country house and everything they symbolize have also been called into question with this unorthodox narrator in a usually trustworthy location. The narrator challenges the audience to consider the veracity of any narration while casting doubt on the supposed greatness of the country estates by adopting the persona of a butler. Typically, a stately house in a remote rural estate serves as the backdrop for conventional country-house novels. The house is typically the focal point of the story; it serves as both the beginning and the end of the narration. The opening scene of the novel takes place at the magnificent Darlington Hall, the country estate named after the Darlington family, sold it to an American after owing it for more than 200 years before selling it. This mansion as Stevens repeatedly mentions is neither the novel's central location nor the point at which the narration comes to a close. The house, however, holds a significant symbolic value for Stevens. Stevens replies, "It has been my joy to witness the best of England over the years, sir, within these very walls," in response to Mr. Farraday's invitation to go on an adventure in his Ford automobile (Ishiguro 4). Indeed, Darlington Hall, which routinely hosts members of the feudal elite, serves as Stevens' idealized

representation of England. By using this metaphor, he suggests that outdated hierarchical structures were caught in a wave of change and that owners of grand houses like Lord Darlington—rather than just the aristocracy—were now the ones who made important decisions. Stevens opines, "debates are conducted, and crucial decisions are arrived at, in the privacy and calm of the great houses of this country" (Ishiguro 121). Stevens emphasizes on the idea that the elite classes of British society made decisions at Darlington Hall defending the territorial framework of imperialism and hegemony.

The Remains of the Day as Berberich states is "a direct condemnation of British participation with fascism" (128) and the oppressive (paternalistic) ideology prevalent since the Victorian era. Paternalists support a dictatorial and hierarchical society; "there is no doubt that paternalists believed in their own rights… they did not believe in equal rights for all or in rights based on natural law" (Roberts 4). A paternalist also "believes that society can be best managed and social evils best mitigated by men of authority, property, and rank performing their respective duties toward those in their community who are bound to them by personal ties (Roberts 8). Similar to Lord Darlington and his allies, who look down at people and do not believe in democracy, paternalists intended to maintain social hierarchies. Stevens is summoned into the space where Lord Darlington and a few of his friends are having a conversation about politics with reference to the year 1935. Mr. Spencer asks Stevens a series of political questions, including those regarding England's debt to America, the euro zone's currency crisis, and the actions of the French prime minister in North Africa. Stevens replies, "I'm very sorry, sir, but I am unable to be of assistance on this matter," to which the other gentlemen in the room laugh (205). He supports undemocratic forms of government like oligarchy or fascist regimes than allowing the average person the chance to participate in politics in their country.

Ishiguro, who wrote a book set in the 1950s, alludes to concerns he has with his current political climate in general and with the exaltation of British imperial national identity in particular by drawing parallels between the 1980s and the historical and

chronological chronotopes. By simultaneously engaging the past and the present, it might be argued that Ishiguro uses a technique Bhabha refers to as a "double-timed" narrative of the country. In Renan's opinion, nation is a soul, a spiritual concept, which is in harmony with what Ishiguro accomplishes. This spiritual component, or soul, is made up of two things. One is a present-day deception; the other is a past-time lie. Ishiguro combines the chronotopes of the postmodern and the country house fiction from the 19th century to expose the artificial nature of the English national identity. By changing the setting of the genre, he imitates the country-house novel in a postmodern setting, helping to shatter the illusion that the English are the world's greatest nationality. The genre's imitation which was used to strengthen the English imperial national identity undermines the myth by making the great house, which represents great Englishness, its emptiness, portraying the landlord as a failure in both his personal and political life, and leaving the butler figure disappointed.

Through butler Stevens' characterization and narration, the double-timed nature of the nation draws comparisons between the chronotope of real historical events and the chronotope of the book. It also draws comparisons between the English nation as a whole and the English national identity as a construct. The fact that Stevens has mostly learned about his country and nation from narrative novels demonstrates how, like any other nation, the idea of the English nation is a composite of multiple narratives. Stevens learns that he knows very little about his country and that everything he knows has come from books when he decides to travel to the West. The idea of Britain's greatness has been ingrained in Stevens, like many other citizens, by many narratives. Because of this, he declares the English landscape to be the best one, despite the fact that he hasn't seen any other landscapes.

Even his experience of being "in the midst of greatness" (29) is fabricated with the aid of national narratives that are identical to those that create and reinforce the notion of a great nation. This contrast of the United States and the United Kingdom mirrors their post-war rivalry. Stevens also draws hurried and partial judgments about the countries and contrasts Mr. Farraday with Lord

Darlington. The personality features of the two employers are poles apart. The fact that Stevens was also purchased as a "part of the package" like a commodity (Ishiguro 255) suggests that Mr. Farraday wanted to purchase not only the estate with all of its parts but also everything it represents, which is why he casts doubt on the authenticity of the home and Stevens, who is a living testament to that authenticity.

Stevens compares the 'greatness' of England and Englishness to the formerly magnificent country estate Darlington Hall, 'honourable' Lord Darlington, and the dignity and profession of butlership, all of which crumble and demonstrate the hollowness of the English national identity. Following the sale of Darlington Hall to an American, a lot of changes take place: the staff is drastically reduced, the majority of the rooms are dust-sheeted, the banquet hall is rarely used, and the house is abandoned for the first time ever. The house is currently in a stage of decline rather than being in an outstanding shape. Although Stevens initially denied Lord Darlington's affiliation with Nazi leaders, he later said, "It is hardly my fault if his lordship's life and work have turned out to look, at best, a sad waste - and it is quite illogical that I should feel any regret or shame on my own account" (211). Stevens realizes that he needs to move past his disappointment and focus on the future. He says, "But perhaps one should not be looking back to the past so much," as a consolation for his wasted years. After all, I still have a lot of years of service I must provide ahead of me." Therefore, it's crucial to maintain one's attentiveness to the current moment in order to prevent self-satisfaction from setting in because of the accomplishment that one would have possibly had in the former times (147-48). Despite his reluctance, he now understands that looking forward is inevitable rather than fondly reliving the "good old days."

Instead of concluding at the 'grand' country house of Darlington Hall, the book ends near Weymouth Pier. As per the opinion of Su, transition from the estate to the pier "suggests an attempt on Ishiguro's side to relocate the English ethos and to question the estate's prominence as its representation" (568). In fact, this kind of conclusion acknowledges the necessity for "an

inevitability of a shift in, representative national places" (571). In comparison to the country home, a pier is less durable since it is placed at the fringe of a waterbody, thereby being a construction allowing the passage water underneath it. Therefore, as opposed to the country house's well-established and rooted sense of national identity, the "pier" conveys a weak, drifting and an unsettled idea of national identity without any roots. Parallel to the deteriorating country estate and its lord's tarnished honour, Stevens' firm belief in a robust and an unadulterated national identity of being English is shaken. The atmosphere of the country house and the efforts of the Thatcherite government to revive the glories of the Victorian era are compared, and both are shown to be futile. Stevens' beliefs and disillusionments expose the Thatcherite government's futile attempts to instill nationalist sentiments and make people aspire for the good old days.

During a political assembly in the Darlington Hall, an invitee says, "We're really so slow in this country to recognize when a thing's outmoded. Other great nations know full well that to meet the challenges of each new age means discarding old, sometimes well-loved methods. Not so here in Britain" (Ishiguro 207). This claim is similar to a small-scale request to stop clinging to the past in vain and to stop being nostalgic. Yet, on a larger scale these opinions are dismissive of the ancient stereotypical understanding of nation and national identity. Further, they ought to be discarded in order to harbor certain unsaid ideas. As an example, Lord Darlington has given his efforts to alleviate the suffering of the German people after the war by setting up meetings, making arrangements for the diplomats, and serving prime ministers. In spite of all these, he is accused of pacifying the Nazi, his reputation tarnished; as a result he sorrowfully passes away.

Given that "it harbours a whole range of patriotic sentiments in the public psyche," as Agyeman (336) puts it, the decision of the country-house novel on the part of Ishiguro is very significative. He subtly employs the standards of the country-house novel to depict how socially fabricated is the English national identity, and bringing back the "good old days" through political efforts is futile. Ishiguro chooses to apply the country-house novel

genre to debunk the persistent notion that 'Englishness' is the greatest nationality, in contrast to the country-house which an invented conventional implementation, the purpose of holding up England's image of imperialism is served. By making a historical comparison between current concerns about English national identity and the revival of native through efforts of the Prime Minister, he overturns the whole idea of "Englishness" into an empty signifier. The Thatcherite era saw a decline in nostalgia for the British Empire's glory, but people still have a tendency to yearn for simpler times because the Victorian era's height had passed along with the country estates. The construction of a hypertext becomes forms the crux of Ishiguro's investigation whether English national identity until now is legitimate by emulating the artistic elements of a country-house novel. In order to achieve this, he reworks a number of the genre's conventions: first, infraction of the conventional backdrop i.e 'a country house'. It hardly stands as an ideologically dismantled mansion. Moreover, the interesting fact is that the narrative has not ended there. Second, the traditional characters of the country-house novel have neither being hired nor receive a different treatment; for example, so far as inheriting the property is concerned, the mansion doesn't have any mistress or children for it; generalization of the servants rather than being treated as individuals. Third, the butler character, who is the narrator has typically been ignored or neglected in such books having placed particularly in the center of the story. Additionally, from the butler's perspective, the degeneration of the Great Britain understood from the perspective of the Darlington Hall's decline. Fourth, the strength of the English imperial power has tailed off both in the domestic sphere and abroad. To put it another way, the reputation of Britain is challenged. The statement Stevens that "there is no value at all in clinging to tradition as some do purely for its own sake" perfectly captures the essence of the book in terms of English nativism (Ishiguro 7). The paternalist worldview is undercut by the similarities amid debilitated forms of government (authoritarianism and totalitarianism), and Lord Darlington. So fasr as the making of the nationalist myths id concerened, there is an active participation on the part of Butler Stevens as a 'first-class'

butler plays the part of an English citizen as a pawn. In the opinion of Bhabha, the glorious mansion of Lord Darlington could be referred to as the epicenter for uniting people and cultures. As a result, the country-house novel serves as an academic object, and the elderly butler Stevens makes the narrative performance in the present. Since both are performative acts, both Englishness and the genres that support it, could be replicated.

Ishiguro challenges readers' perceptions of "Englishness" by reimagining the traditional country-house narrative. The novel is "a superb perversion of the fictional modes from which it at first seems to emerge," in the words of Salman Rushdie (244). Ishiguro challenges the tenets of the country-house fiction reinforcing English national identity by using a chronotope of the past in the present. It, therefore, leads to the fictions cultural embededness. With reference to Bhabha's dual narrative of the nation, Ishiguro writes a postmodern book and he simultaneously discusses the after-effects of World War I & II; furthermore, his own period of time in history. Ishiguro humorously undercuts the traditional goal of the country-house fiction of establishing the "imagined" imperial English nationality in his double-coded language. *The Remains of the Day* is a double-voiced postmodern fiction that entails a re-evaluation of the manner in which nation is discussed and thought of, since any alterations in the chronotope of the nation directly causes alterations in the chronotope of the fiction.

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