

Lecture Notes Kazuo Ishiguro's *Remains of the Day*

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Hello Students,

Hope you are staying safe.

- I guess at least some of you have finished reading the novel *Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro.
- I have already shared three articles/critical analyses of the novel with you. I intend you to go through them all, in particular the 'The Unreliable Narrator' by David Lodge, excerpted from his book *Art of Fiction*.
- I like you to focus on the unreliability of Steven's narrative and how Ishiguro crafts this unreliability into a unique narrative experience. One of these strategies is Steven's defence of his loyalty to his former master Lord Darlington, and his public denial of the fact that he has served Darlington Hall before it went to Mr Farraday, the new American owner.
- You may go through the section in the novel titled 'Mortimer's Pond', a site that becomes the setting for Steven's confusing and often paradoxical reflections. As
- David Lodge puts it:

The point of using an unreliable narrator is indeed to reveal in an interesting way the gap between appearance and reality, and to show how human beings distort or conceal the latter. This need not be a conscious, or mischievous, intention on their part. The narrator of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel is not an evil man, but his life has been based on the suppression and evasion of the truth, about himself and about others. His narrative is a kind of confession,

but

it is riddled with devious self-justification and special pleading, and only at the very end does he arrive at an understanding of himself- too late to profit by it. (*Art of Fiction*)

- So the psychology that accompanies the narrator's unreliability and sometimes the instability is a complicated one. Ishiguro in one of his interviews commented:

[Stevens] ends up saying the sorts of things he does because somewhere deep down he knows which things he has to avoid. . . . Why he says certain things, why he brings up certain topics at certain moments, is not random. It's controlled by the things that he doesn't say. That's what motivates the narrative. He is in this painful condition where at some level he does know what's happening, but he hasn't quite brought it to the front. (Graham Swift, "Kazuo Ishiguro," *Bomb*)

- I would like to go through Steven's presentation of his father, in the context of discourse about the ideal butler, the circumstances of his reappointment in Darlington Hall, his frail health and his death during the Conference of 1923.
- Also go through Stevens's idea of human relationship, especially in the context of his relationship with Miss Kenton, which in a way provides the fulcrum of Steven's narrative. Here I may draw your attention to several episodes:
 1. The discord between Steven's and Miss Kenton over Stevens's father
 2. The dismissal of the two Jewish girls from the staff of Darlington Hall
 3. Steven's final meeting with Miss Kenton and her departure

- Go through the end of the narrative, the lighting of the pier lights as Stevens rests on a bench, beside an old man, Stevens's reflection on what the old man says: 'The evening's the best part of the day'.
- Consider also Stevens's final decision to go back serving at the Darlington Hall and Mr Farraday, while practicing and perfecting his bantering skills. It seems Stevens's becomes aware of Mr Farraday's cravings for a Jeeves-like smartness from a perfect English butler, and he goes on to satisfy that illusory Wodehousian ideal. For Ishiguro this idealism of an ideal England with ideal English butlers had always been a myth, a myth he consciously sets out to critique, to undermine in the novel

The kind of England that I create in *The Remains of the Day* is not an England

that I believe ever existed. . . . What I'm trying to do there . . . is to actually

rework a particular myth about a certain kind of mythical England. . . . an England with sleepy, beautiful villages with very polite people and butlers . . . taking tea on the lawn. . . . The mythical landscape of this sort of England, to a large degree, is harmless nostalgia for a time that didn't exist. The other side of this, however, is that it is used as a political tool. . . . It's used as a way of bashing anybody who tries to spoil this "Garden of Eden." (Allan Vorda and Kim Herzinger, "An interview with Kazuo Ishiguro," *Mississippi Review* 20 (1991))

- As Salman Rushdie puts it: the novel is "a brilliant subversion of the fictional modes from which it at first seems to descend"; put differently, the novel both "perfects and subverts" its own literary

tradition.

Feel free to talk to me in case of doubts.