AN ANALYSIS OF THE WORK OF KAZUO ISHIGURO, HIS BICULTURALISM AND HIS CONTRIBUTION TO NEW INTERNATIONALISM

by

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ABSTRACT

This study was prompted principally by two events: reading Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989), and encountering Pico Iyer's *Time* article “The Empire Writes Back” (1993). Iyer argues that the late twentieth century has been witness to an important event in the world of literature: the emergence of a new generation of writers writing in English, but not necessarily originating from British-colonial (or post-colonial) backgrounds. Among the writers Iyer mentions are Vikram Seth, Michael Ondaatje, Ben Okri and - most notably - Kazuo Ishiguro.

Ishiguro was born in Japan but emigrated with his parents to the United Kingdom at the age of six. This study focuses on his biculturalism and the impact that his mixed upbringing has had on his style and thematic concerns. This forms the principal focus of the first part of the study. The influence of Japanese writers, that of Japanese film and, finally, that of the European literary tradition are looked at in turn.

The core of this study is a comparative analysis of Ishiguro's first three novels: *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), and *The Remains of the Day* (1989). Here certain common preoccupations are identified and discussed - chiefly, Ishiguro's concern with memory, with constructions of the past, and his use of "unreliable" first-person narrators. It is argued that Ishiguro returns insistently to these thematic concerns in his first three novels, and that they can therefore be seen as constituting a three-part exploration of the notion of memory, of "reconstructing" the past.

A separate chapter briefly examines Ishiguro's most recent work, *The Unconsoled* (1995), in which these themes are once again present, although they are bodied forth in a strikingly different style. The purpose of examining this novel is
mainly to illustrate its formal and stylistic divergence from the first three (far more successful) novels - a divergence which in turn serves to throw into relief the thematic integrity of the first three novels.

The study concludes by drawing together the discussion of the first three novels before moving on to a consideration of Ishiguro's place in what has become known as "New Internationalism". Here it is argued that Ishiguro's work has important resemblances to that of other writers loosely grouped into this literary movement and that he deserves his place among this illustrious group of writers who are changing the face of world literature written in English.
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation, submitted for the Master of Arts degree to the Rand Afrikaans University is, apart from the help acknowledged, my own work and has not been submitted to another university for a degree.

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INTRODUCTION: SITUATING KAZUO ISHIGURO

There is something in my makeup, something in my past perhaps - there is some wound or something - that's never going to heal, that I can just caress at least. And I can only get to that wound by writing.

(Ishiguro, quoted in Iyer 1994: 58)

The principal aim of this dissertation is to provide a detailed discussion of the work of Kazuo Ishiguro with special reference to his novels *A Pale View of the Hills*, *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*. The significance of his latest novel *The Unconsoled* will also be alluded to in the course of the study.

Because of various critics' remarks on his cultural background and the setting of the first two novels, a discussion of the effect of his Japanese heritage is called for. To what extent did his Japaneseness influence his work? Are there similarities
between his style and that of Japanese writers like Soseki, Tanizaki and Kawabata? (All of these writers Ishiguro claims to have read.)

Although Ishiguro's first three novels are set in post-war Japan and the England of 1956, they cannot really be called historical novels. Historical incidents like the atomic bomb and other Second World War events form a faint backdrop to the more important personal experiences of the characters. Ishiguro uses no specific dates and creates imaginary places. In *An Artist of the Floating World*, for instance, the city has an imaginary name and in *The Remains of the Day*, Darlington Hall is a fictional estate. The marginal role of history in Ishiguro's writing is suggested in the following remark:

> I very much feel that as a writer of fiction I'm supposed to invent my own world, rather than copying things down from the surface of reality.

(Ishiguro 1991)¹

In a conversation with Kenzaburo Oe (the winner of the 1994 Nobel Prize for literature) Ishiguro had the following to say about the setting of *An Artist of the Floating World*: “I think the Japan that exists in that book is very much my own personal, imaginary Japan .... I wasn't terribly interested in researching history books ... I didn't really care if my fictional world didn't correspond to a historical reality” (Ishiguro & Oe 1991a: 110-111). He has basically the same to say about the setting of *The Remains of the Day*: it is, he says, “just a world I made up because it had a metaphorical purpose” (Iyer 1994: 58).

In examining the question as to what extent history and historical settings are correctly represented in Ishiguro's work, or not, it must be borne in mind that the writer
returned to Japan for the first time in 1989 after 30 years in England. As a child he always expected to return, because his parents thought their stay in England was only temporary, so they continued to educate him in Japanese customs and he received books and magazines from Japan. He never forgot the Japan he knew as a child and his grandparents' house there, and he continued to expand on the image of the Japan he could remember. Indeed, his novels form part of this 'remembering'.

Ishiguro claims in his interview with Sinclair that he is a realist novelist. Realism in literature, according to Ridout and Clark, "applies to the method used by writers of fiction who describe life in factual terms without glamorising it in any way" (1971: 299). Abrams defines realism as "fiction which will give the illusion that it reflects life as it seems" (Abrams 1957: 141). Broadly speaking, realism is thus the opposite of romantic literature which attempts to depict life in a more picturesque way than it really is. Historical novels, for their part, are closely linked to actual historical, political and geographical facts. The historical novel takes its "setting and some of its characters and events from history; the term is usually applied only if the historical milieu and events are fairly elaborately developed ... and important to the central narrative" (Abrams 1957: 113). (This, for example, is notable in the works of among others Salman Rushdie, Timothy Mo and V.S. Naipaul.) Ishiguro concentrates more on what the Japanese critic Kojin Karatani calls "inversion of consciousness" or the "discovery of landscape" (1993: 29). Karatani wrote the following about this technique: "Both the landscape and the 'ordinary people' ... that realism represents were not 'out there' from the start, but had to be discovered as landscapes from which we had become alienated" (1993: 29). He also observes that the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky proposed the view that defamiliarization was the essence of realism: "Realism should make us see that which, through force of habit, we have been unable
to see" (1993: 29). Already we can ask the question, with which I shall attempt to deal more fully later, about the influence Japanese customs and techniques have on Ishiguro's style and approach to realism.

It is of interest to know that it is Japanese custom never to use dates in fiction but instead to describe events in relation to the period or era in which they took place: for example, the Edo period (1600 - 1867), the Meiji period (1868 - 1912) and the Taisho period (1912 - 1925). As a consequence of the Westernization that occurred after the Meiji era, this custom started to change and modern writers like Kenzaburo Oe now use Western dates.

In A Pale View of Hills no dates are specified. We know from the setting and events that the novel is partly set in post-war Japan and partly in the United Kingdom some twenty years later. An Artist of the Floating World is written in a diary format, so dates are more important, and it is divided into three sections under three dates: namely, October 1948, April 1949 and November 1949. These dates, however, are of no great historical significance. The only person for whom they have any meaning is the main character Masuji Ono. And in The Remains of the Day Ishiguro deals with all the action in a short prologue and sections divided into six days. No specific dates are given to the days except in the case of the prologue, which is dated July 1956. Even apparently important historical events which Stevens recalls, like the meeting between the diplomats and the arrival and departure of the Jewish servants, are not dated. Ishiguro's concern is clearly with the inner struggles of the characters and not the historical events which form their background. The psychology of each character and his or her experiences of isolation and disillusionment are the important factors in his novels.
This study, then, deals with the important facets of Ishiguro's work, beginning with the question of influences. There are several Japanese writers whom Ishiguro claims to have read. These include Soseki, Junichiro Tanizaki and Yasunari Kawabata, and the next chapter considers the influence of each of these writers in turn. Another Japanese cultural influence is that of Japanese film and, indeed, Ishiguro mentions the impact of Japanese film on him. The next chapter therefore considers the works of several film-makers and the possible influence their films may have had on Ishiguro's work. The final aspect of influence concerns the European literary tradition, and this chapter concludes by briefly looking at this issue.

Chapter three turns to issues of Ishiguro's style and technique, and here the impact of the dual cultural influences discussed in chapter two is considered.

Chapter four, the centrepiece of this study, consists of a comparative analysis of Ishiguro's first three novels. Here certain commonalities in theme and style will be considered, and it will be argued that Ishiguro returns insistently to the notion of memory and what is entailed in the whole issue of how human subjects construct the past.

Ishiguro's latest novel *The Unconsoled* receives attention in chapter five, and here it will be argued that this novel is a departure in terms of style and, to a certain extent, theme. For this reason, *The Unconsoled* throws the thematic and stylistic integrity of the first three novels into relief.

The last chapter draws together the discussion of the long fourth chapter, before turning to the question of what has become known as "New Internationalism", and considering Ishiguro's place in this late-twentieth-century literary movement.
Notes

1. This remark is drawn from Clive Sinclair's interview with Kazuo Ishiguro in 1991 on video, in which Ishiguro's personal and literary background, and his first two novels *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World* formed the principal focus of discussion.

2. Referring to his first two novels in the interview with Gregory Mason, Ishiguro qualifies this by saying: "I am not essentially concerned with a realist purpose in writing. I just invent a Japan which serves my needs" (1989: 341). This is applicable to *The Remains of the Day* as well. *The Unconsoled* (as we shall see later) is such a departure from his style that it does not employ realism as a literary mode at all.

3. It is the Japanese tradition to put the family name first, but like most critics of Japanese literature I shall throughout this dissertation make use of the Western custom of placing forenames before surnames.

4. David Pollack offers a useful explanation of this convention: "Such 'reign-titles' (*nengo*) - a Chinese system used since the dawn of Japanese historiography - have been employed since the Taisho era to indicate the entire reign of a preceding emperor. Thus, after 1912 one speaks of 'the Meiji emperor,' meaning the emperor who reigned during the Meiji period. Before the Meiji period, however, an emperor might have used several reign-titles in succession" (1992: Preface).
INFLUENCES: ISHIGURO’S BICULTURALISM

My very lack of authority and lack of knowledge about Japan, I think, forced me into a position of using my imagination, and also of thinking of myself as a kind of homeless writer. I had no obvious social role, because I wasn’t a very English Englishman, and I wasn’t a very Japanese Japanese either.

(Ishiguro & Oe 1991a: 115)

One cannot discuss the work of Kazuo Ishiguro without spending some time on the question of influences. The first two novels, An Artist of the Floating World and A Pale View of Hills, are wholly or almost wholly set in Japan; The Remains of the Day is set entirely in England, yet the main themes of all three novels - self-discovery and disillusionment - recur. All three novels are contemplative and dwell insistently on the past.
Ihab Hassan asks this question about *The Remains of the Day*: is the novel “a Japanese vision of England or, more slyly, an English vision of Japan? Or is it both and neither?” (1989: 168). When we look at the butler Stevens’s pre-occupation with dignity and loyalty, we begin to see that he resembles the Japanese *ronin* (Thwaite 1990: 159). In classical times in Japan, the *ronin* was a free servant who chose to remain bonded to his master. Mason defines this class of person as “the displaced samurai ... clinging to an outmoded code of honour,” a person who evinces “a kind of existential dignity amid the breakdown of traditional values” (1989: 49).

In interviews like the one with Allan Vorda and Kim Herzinger, Ishiguro repeatedly states that he is not an expert on all things Japanese (Vorda & Herzinger 1991: 132). He also admits that he can only speak a very simple Japanese and that he “cannot [even] read a Japanese newspaper” (Iyer 1994: 58). He claims to have read a fair amount of Japanese literature, especially the twentieth-century novelists Soseki, Tanizaki and Kawabata, all in translation. There are certain characteristics that are present in these writers’ work - indirectness is a notable example - but to identify these as the main influences on Ishiguro would be inaccurate, as I shall attempt to illustrate.

Critics are divided on the issue of Ishiguro’s “Japaneseness”. Pico Iyer notes that Haruki Murakami, one of Japan’s leading novelists, said the following about *The Remains of the Day*: it “looks like a Japanese novel - in its mentality, its taste, its colour” (Iyer 1994: 58). However, another of Japan’s major literary figures, Kenzaburo Oe, remarks in his conversation with Ishiguro that the “double structure” in Ishiguro’s novels gave him a feeling that “with each of [Ishiguro’s] books, I also felt that this kind of strength was not very Japanese, that this person was, rather, from England” (Ishiguro & Oe 1991a: 115).
The Influence of Japanese writers

It is perhaps appropriate at this point to look at the style and techniques employed by Japanese authors like Soseki, Tanizaki and Kawabata (all of whom Ishiguro claimed to have read) and also to look briefly at a more contemporary writer like Kenzaburo Oe. Although we read the translations of the novels written by these authors, in this form Japanese literature is becoming more accessible and more widely read in the West, and it is in translation, of course, that Ishiguro himself has encountered the works of Japanese writers. (As previously stated, I shall make use of the Western custom when discussing Japanese authors, by writing their first names in front of their surnames. It is the Japanese tradition to do the opposite.)

What follows might seem to be a digression from the main concerns of this dissertation, but the details of the life and work of Soseki, Tanizaki and Kawabata are of importance in illustrating some elements of the culture that makes up Ishiguro's own background. This part of the discussion will also serve to shed light on his struggle with biculturalism.

Natsume Soseki (Natsume Kinnosuke), was born in 1867 and died in 1916. The last of eight children, his parents could not afford to bring him up, so Soseki went to live with the keeper of a local second-hand shop and was later adopted by friends of his biological family. At the age of nine his foster parents divorced and Soseki returned to his natural parents. He grew up to become one of Japan's most distinguished
writers. (An illustration of this is that, in 1984, the face of Natsume Soseki replaced that of Viscount Ito Hirobumi on the 1,000 yen bill (Gessel 1993: 11).)

He started writing under the pen-name Soseki for the first time in 1889. At first Soseki concentrated on Chinese fiction and poetry, refusing to learn English in spite of a new wave of enthusiasm for everything Western. This was a period after the Meiji period in which Western artifacts were for the first time openly welcomed in Japan. In 1883, at the age of sixteen, he realised his mistake and enrolled in a preparatory school to study English. Ten years later he completed his degree in English at Tokyo Imperial University, being only the second person ever to do so (Gessel 1993: 26). By this stage he had published various articles written in English on, amongst others, Walt Whitman, and an essay entitled “Nature as Viewed by the English Poets”. However, Soseki was frustrated and believed that he would never master the English language. He never considered himself a good teacher, but because of his financial situation he ended up teaching at various schools and colleges. In 1900 he was selected by the government to study in England on a grant for a pilot programme.

Gessel writes:

Soseki's earnest quest for an understanding of English literature impelled him to reject virtually every other activity .... The misery which Soseki endured for over two years in London was largely self-imposed. It is not hard to imagine someone with Soseki's intelligence, sensitivity, and fluency with language ... becoming something of a cultural phenomenon in London. (1993: 45-46)
This inferiority complex and the cleft between his Eastern background and the Western culture and English literature he was now encountering became a life-long dilemma for Soseki. (It is interesting to observe that Ishiguro had to deal with the same struggle, but from the other direction. He is a Japanese writing in English and is constantly reminded of his Japanese heritage although he sees himself as being English.)

It was during this self-imposed isolation that Soseki read broadly, moving from literature to science, philosophy, psychology and even other disciplines. At the same time he became more aware of how important it was for the Japanese nation to be proud of its heritage and not to follow Western customs blindly. Gessel is of the opinion that this dualism still exists in Japan, “the ambivalent effort to absorb foreign culture while yet rejecting it as the ultimate solution to native problems of definition” (1993: 51).

Soseki decided that his goal in life was to write novels, so he returned to Japan in 1902. Soseki’s literary life can be divided into three parts: the beginning, the ‘middle period’, and the ‘mature years’. In his first novels he used “the practice of shasei - of drawing objective pictures from life” (Gessel 1993: 54). From 1905 Soseki started writing ferociously, serialising on public request what started out as a short story Wagahai wa neko de aru (I Am a Cat) and writing two other novels, Botchan (the name of the main character) and Kusamakura (The Three-Cornered World). In 1907 Gubijiso (The Poppy) and Kofu (The Miner) followed. He then started working on a trilogy which shows the "gradual darkening of Soseki’s view of human relationships" (Gessel 1993: 56). It is the themes of these three novels that remind one of the most prominent theme in Ishiguro’s novels: the emotional disillusionment brought about by the characters’ inability to express what they feel and to live in
accordance with this. This is evident in Etsuko in *A Pale View of Hills*, Ono in *An Artist of the Floating World* and especially in Stevens in *The Remains of the Day*. This emotional disillusionment is brought about by the recollection of memories from the past, and by the characters’ incapacity to say what they really feel about the past. This leads to a lack of understanding of their present and, ultimately, to isolation and loneliness.

The reader gets the feeling that the main characters in the novels by Soseki and Ishiguro are hiding something. There is a lack of information, yet the feeling of disillusionment is always manifest. The following remark by Gessel apropos Soseki could apply just as well to Ishiguro and his characters (especially Etsuko):

Soseki and his fictional characters do not approach Western ideas and innovations superficially; they probe into the intellectual core of meaning that this bi-cultural encounter entails ... the distress they suffer as a result of the shifting dimensions of human relations comes through with stark clarity. (1993: 12)

Ono comes to deal with change in much the same way after the war, as does Stevens with the 'shift' he has to face in relation to values adopted from the past.

In between writing, Soseki devoted a great deal of time to fighting the Japanese tendency to imitate everything Western. He saw this as a real threat to Japanese values and morality and a diminution of the nation’s pride in all things Japanese. This issue lies behind the work of his ‘mature years’ - another trilogy which concluded with his highly acclaimed novel *Kokoro* (Heart), first published in 1912. The death of the Emperor Meiji in 1912 undoubtedly had an influence on this novel. It signalled the end of a very important era in Japan, something which is suggested by the death of
the main character Sensei. After the emperor’s death Japan rapidly adopted the values of the West, something that was previously inconceivable. Gessel explains that “the pattern which Soseki employs in the novel is the age-old Confucian model based upon filial piety: the relationship between lord and vassal; ... friend and friend” (1993: 63). This is also notable in the relationship between Ono and Matsuda (his friend from the past) in An Artist of the Floating World and Stevens and Lord Darlington in The Remains of the Day. Soseki also explores the concept of treachery. We understand Sensei’s suffering, which is brought about by the betrayal of friend by friend. Ishiguro also deals with betrayal in varying degrees in his first three novels: Etsuko’s betrayal of Keiko, Ono’s betrayal of Kuroda (his favourite pupil) to the secret police and Stevens’s betrayal of Lord Darlington when he refuses to acknowledge to the doctor whom he encounters when he stays overnight at a country inn that he was in Darlington’s employment during World War II.

Kokoro ends inconclusively, and this allows the reader to make of the ending what he or she wants. We are not supplied with an ultimate answer or solution to the dilemma. As Gessel remarks, “Soseki is ... compelling us to determine the consequences of our own acts of disloyalty” (1993: 64). It is of interest to note that A Pale View of Hills ends in the same inconclusive way. The notion of ‘disloyalty’ brings us to what Soseki said in his famous lecture, Watakushi no koin-shugi (My Individualism), to the students at Gakushuin University: “I simply believe that freedom without a sense of duty is not true freedom” (Gessel, 1993: 65); and he goes on to explain that true individuality will always be opposed by society and that individuality invariably brings loneliness. I shall elaborate fully on this aspect of the ‘sense of duty’ in Ishiguro’s novels in a later chapter. Suffice it to say here that Ogata deals with
exactly this dilemma in *A Pale View of Hills* and it is present in Ono and Stevens's characters.

Whereas Soseki was an author who spent his entire life in anguish about Japan's blind acceptance and imitation of the West, Junichiro Tanizaki (1886-1965) started out writing under an initial infatuation with the West. Gessel remarks that every American who has some interest in Japanese literature will know the name and at least one of the novels of Junichiro Tanizaki. Americans therefore normally make the mistake of mentioning Tanizaki as their favourite Japanese author when they have the opportunity to visit Japan. Unfortunately, most Japanese do not feel the same way about this controversial writer and see him as something of an embarrassment.

Indeed, in his earlier novels he touches on incest, fantasies of the mother and various other sexual and erotic extremes. Such themes have inevitably made him a controversial figure in decorous Japanese society. The question then arises as to what extent such a writer can be said to have influenced Ishiguro. Ishiguro never uses sex, violence or any other commercialised devices to popularise his works. In his own words, "popular best-sellers might employ sex and violence in a fairly cynical way. It gets books read, gets books sold" (Ishiguro & Bigsby 1990: 29). However, there are certain technical similarities in the works of the two writers, as I shall go on to show.

To explain Tanizaki's somewhat controversial novelistic preoccupation it is helpful to review his formative years. Unlike Soseki, Tanizaki was the eldest child of a merchant-class family. His rather inept father managed to lose everything Tanizaki's grandfather left him. His mother, Seki, was a very beautiful woman and was often taken for Junichiro's sister. Tanizaki idealised her and she became a
lifelong obsession. He was badly spoiled as a child and when his brother was born he was taken care of by a nurse who cuddled him to sleep every night and was his companion for many years, even escorting him to school where she would sit behind him in class. Gessel argues that this “confusion of ‘mothers’ is a significant feature of Tanizaki’s writing” (1993: 72). His parents often humoured him with game-playing and he regularly accompanied the women to Kabuki performances. These games and amusements, asobi, play a very important role in Tanizaki’s fiction. Although very indulged, Tanizaki became a promising student and started writing in his last year at primary school. He went on to publish regularly in the literary journal of his middle school at the age of seventeen.

Because of his father’s ineffectuality, Tanizaki’s childhood was often clouded with financial difficulties which threatened to terminate his education. Help arrived repeatedly in the form of the Sasanumas family whose son Gennosuke was Tanizaki’s best friend through his entire life. After many rejections, Tanizaki’s first story collection, Shisei (The Tattooer), was published in 1911 when he was just twenty-five. Already his reputation as a controversial writer was beginning to form. At this stage Tanizaki had a great affinity with the West, drawing inspiration from writers like Edgar Allan Poe and Oscar Wilde. He gathered with his friends in Western-style restaurants, where he frequently engaged in critical discussions of the Naturalist writers. Tanizaki tried to copy Western lifestyles in every possible way, and even briefly considered emigrating to the West. However, by 1926 subtle changes in Tanizaki’s attitude towards the West became discernible. He started travelling to cultural centres to study Japanese traditions. The narrative style in his novels gradually changed from a Western style with long dialogues to a more Japanese classical ‘disembodied’ and traditional style. Tanizaki wrote by way of explanation
that he found it more difficult to write long sections of dialogue and preferred to write in an essay-like, illustrative style. Gessel explains that this change in form was not as dramatic as may appear, but that “Tanizaki was able ... to achieve a unity between his aesthetic and personal tastes” (1993: 108). He combined tradition with erotica.

In 1927 Tanizaki became involved in a debate with Akutagawa Ryunosuke (a contemporary writer) on the nature of fiction. This dispute shows that although Tanizaki gradually became more traditional in his formal style, certain Western techniques remained. It is the Japanese tradition, for example, not to assign much value to a complicated plot and instead to give priority to the inner feelings and experiences of the characters. (This is also evident in Ishiguro's first two novels.) Even descriptive scenes are short and very focused, as is evident in Kawabata’s style. Tanizaki did not hold with this and wrote:

> Plot interest is ... the way in which a work is assembled, interest in structure, architectural beauty.
> It cannot be said that this is without artistic value ....
> To do away with plot interest is to throw away the special prerogatives of the form known as the novel.

(Gessel 1993: 110)

Although there is no outstanding characteristic of Tanizaki’s style that finds an echo in Ishiguro’s work, we can draw a comparison between the themes in Ishiguro's first three novels and the theme of Tanizaki’s 1944 novel *The Makioka Sisters* - namely, that of coping with changing times. Tanizaki experienced great difficulties in having this novel published. The war undoubtedly had an influence not only on the substance of the novel, but also on the way it was received. Like Nagai Kafu (his former mentor), he refused to co-operate with the military during the war and refrained
from writing work praising the heroism of the Japanese soldiers. *The Makioka Sisters* deals with a family's ability to maintain their unity during an international war. The various daily duties the sisters perform bind them together and help them to overcome different obstacles presented by the outside world, like proposals for marriage, dissident behaviour and of course the influence of the war. It is a 'novel of manners' in that it provides the reader with a representation of the close, devoted Japanese family (Gessel 1993: 126).

Ishiguro also deals with the themes of the passage of time, of social change and the effect this has on the individual, but in his novels the stability and unity of the family and of individual characters are greatly disrupted (Etsuko leaves her husband to live in England and Noriko's marriage negotiations are affected by Ono's past loyalties and betrayals) and do not have the continuity and durability evinced by the Makioka sisters.

The most interesting aspect of Tanizaki's writing is his initial obsession with the West and his eventual shift to affection for traditional Japan. Many modern Japanese (Yukio Mishima's work is a notable example) are still trying to come to terms with this inner conflict. Ishiguro deals with this issue in *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World*.

Yasunari Kawabata (1899-1972), who is the only Japanese writer apart from Kenzaburo Oe to have won the Nobel Prize for literature, is another writer who may be said to have influenced Ishiguro. The most outstanding characteristic of Kawabata's characters is their isolation, and this they share very conspicuously with the kind of characters in whom Ishiguro is interested. Kawabata's preoccupation with isolation can be explained by a look at his childhood and youth. Unlike the
flamboyant Tanizaki, Kawabata was a very quiet, reserved person who had a habit of staring into other people's faces without being aware of it (Gessel 1993: 137). He experienced two romantic disappointments in his youth, one homosexual and one with a fifteen-year-old girl. Kawabata had only an elder sister and his father died when he was just two years old. His mother died a year later and the two children were separated and brought up by different members of their family - Kawabata by his grandparents and his sister by an aunt and uncle. Tragically, the sister died like his parents (also of a lung-related disease) when she was only fourteen years of age. Gessel remarks that Kawabata's life was to be filled with an endless succession of funerals (he later acquired the sobriquet “master of funerals”). His misfortune did not end there: he and his wife had one child who died at birth and they thereafter remained childless.

Kawabata started publishing short stories and poetry at middle school and after First High School went to Tokyo Imperial University. By the age of twenty-one he had published several short stories. Unsurprisingly, death, alienation and fear of acceptance are notable themes in his work. Gessel writes: "... his subject matter became in essence the loss of human ties and the irretrievable beauty of the past" (1993: 135). This is especially evident in his novels The Sound of the Mountain (1954), Snow Country (1956) and his 1975 novel Beauty and Sadness. We read, for example, about Shimamura in Snow Country, who goes for his annual holiday to the mountains and his forbidden love (he is married) for the geisha as if we are reading about Kawabata himself. They (Shimamura and Kawabata) share the same longing to disappear into something without matter and to become one with nature. His descriptions of nature in relation to human emotions are powerful and moving. He writes in a terse but descriptive style with one-line dialogues following in quick
succession after condensed paragraphs, almost in the style of poetry. Gessel is of the opinion that his writing is more like “linked prose” than a novel, because the storyline is subordinate to the character’s perceptions of internal development in relation to the external world (1993: 184).

Plot is not of major importance in Kawabata’s work. It does not correspond to the development of plot in the Western sense. The outline of the plot is rapidly explained to the reader and the author then goes on to dwell on the emotions experienced by the characters rather than the action taking place. In his introductions to the 1985 edition of Snow Country, Ishiguro explains many aspects Kawabata emphasises. Regarding plot in Kawabata, Ishiguro writes the following: “it is as if he wishes to clear ‘plot’ to one side as rapidly as possible, as a kind of chore, so that he can place his emphasis elsewhere” (Ishiguro 1985: 2). Ishiguro argues that the meaning of “images and textures” (1985: 2) in Japanese writing differs greatly from Western perceptions with the relation it holds to plot development, especially because the Western reader usually has no frame of reference to visualise the descriptions. In Japanese literature “images and textures” are not only functional in creating mood, but often indicate the mental state of the characters (Ishiguro 1985: 2 - 3). Ishiguro suggests that some familiarisation on the part of the readers with Japanese films would help them achieve a better understanding.

Kawabata indeed describes things in such a way that you get the feeling that you can physically touch the images and emotions. Ishiguro explains that Kawabata “aspired to a ‘classical’ tradition of Japanese prose-writing pre-dating the influence of European realism - a tradition which placed value on lyricism, mood and reflection rather than on plot and character” (1985: 2). The influence of this style is evident in
A Pale View of Hills and An Artist of the Floating World in which the mood is created by reflections and the things that are unsaid rather than stated.

Where Tanizaki's work is filled with erotic sexuality, Kawabata very cleverly engages in story lines in which sexual relationships are prominent (Shimamura's relationship with the geisha in Snow Country and Shingo's fascination with his daughter-in-law in The Sound of the Mountain are examples) but in which descriptions of passionate or erotic entanglement are absent. Kawabata's characters are less in search of sexual fulfilment than an understanding of their own worth. One can readily see the connections here with Ishiguro's character Stevens and his relationship with Miss Kenton in The Remains of the Day.

During the 1920s, Kawabata and some friends established a literary magazine called the Bungei Jidai in which they published articles challenging earlier styles of writing. They were called 'The New Perception School' and aimed at adopting European techniques in order to move away from the bland autobiographical writings that dominated Japanese literature in the first two decades of the twentieth century. This was the beginning of a trend that would make Kawabata one of the most widely read Japanese writers in the West and that would create an international audience for Japanese literature. It was also a trend from which Ishiguro would later indirectly benefit.

Kawabata's passivity during the war was also evident. He never wrote propagandistic novels or, on the other hand, challenged the military government. He was concerned with the individual rather than external events. Similarly, Ishiguro's novels might reflect the effect of external events on the characters but he never spends much time on emphasising the events; he also focuses on individuals and their turmoil rather than on a nation or group. One cannot help but ponder one of the
remarks Kawabata made after the war, and what possible connection this has to Ishiguro's third novel:

I consider that my life after the war consists of "remaining years" and that these remaining years are not mine but a manifestation of the tradition of beauty in Japan. (Gessel 1993: 180)

This recalls Stevens's thoughts on the pier at the end of The Remains of the Day:

I should adopt a more positive outlook and try to make the best of what remains of my day. After all, what can we ever gain in forever looking back and blaming ourselves if our lives have not turned out quite as we might have wished?

(Ishiguro 1989: 244)

It would be preposterous to assume that Ishiguro sat down and decided to take a little of Soseki, some aspects of Tanizaki, and some elements of Kawabata to create a style, but when reading A Pale View of Hills and An Artist of the Floating World one has continually to remind oneself that one is reading Ishiguro and not one of the other Japanese writers. There is a certain controlled discipline which is present in the works of these authors which is present in Ishiguro’s novels as well. And, as I shall go on to argue later, it is the 'half-truths' and the feeling that Ishiguro’s characters are not revealing everything that creates this controlled style.

In an interview with Gregory Mason (1989: 336) Ishiguro says: "I am probably most influenced by Japanese movies"; yet he claims, "I feel I’m very much of the Western tradition". I shall now go on to demonstrate how Japanese films of the fifties have provided the visual influence for setting and style in Ishiguro's novels.
The influence of Japanese film

Cinema is the one area of Japanese 'culture' which I believe has had a direct effect on my writing.

(Ishiguro & Mason 1989: 39)

The main source for my argument in this section is an article by Gregory Mason entitled "Inspiring Images: The Influence of the Japanese Cinema on the Writings of Kazuo Ishiguro" (1989: 39-52). Mason also conducted an interview with Ishiguro which was published in Contemporary Literature in 1989. It is necessary to point out that both articles were published after the appearance of the first two novels A Pale View of Hills and An Artist of the Floating World and shortly before The Remains of the Day. Mason is therefore concentrating on the first two novels, which are either wholly or largely set in Japan. (The Remains of the Day and The Unconsoled are set entirely in Western Europe.)

Ishiguro's interest and involvement in film is apparent. He is affiliated to the British Film Institute and is also the author of two television film scripts: A Profile of Arthur J. Mason (broadcast in 1984), and The Gourmet (broadcast in 1986).

Gregory Mason is of the opinion that there is a strong Japanese influence on Ishiguro's work, and his argument is cogent when applied to the first two novels. Japanese films certainly provided Ishiguro with a visual setting for his first two novels.
and offered a model for the style in which they are written. Films capture the atmosphere and physical appearance of the place in which they are set and the films Ishiguro watched provided him with the images he needed. Ishiguro admits in interviews that he can remember very little of the Japan of his first six years, besides his grandparents’ house. One can therefore conclude that the Japan which filmmakers like Yasujiro Ozu and Akira Kurosawa portray in their films provided much of the visual information Ishiguro needed for the novels. Ishiguro remarks on his fascination with these films in his interview with Mason and the latter explains that the influence was dualistic in nature: it equipped Ishiguro with a number of visual images of Japan and also suggested other styles and narrative techniques not commonly found in Western literature.

Mason goes on to discuss the work of various directors, with particular emphasis on Yasujiro Ozu and Akira Kurosawa, and focuses on the domestic drama, or *shomin-geki* (1989: 45). Films like these, focused as they are on the life and predicament of the ordinary man, his small delights and sadnesses, provide an alternative to the larger, over-exposed Japanese issues like suicide and militarism which are about the only things the Westerner associates with Japan (besides, of course, cars and technology). But Ishiguro is not interested in the Japan of today. Both *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World* are set in post-war Japan, but they are not historical “post-bomb” books. This is the Japan Ishiguro can remember from his family’s description of it. And certain Japanese films set in this era kept Ishiguro’s memories and his mental image of Japan alive. The Japan of today provides no emotional stimulation for Ishiguro. As Mason remarks, “Ishiguro realises that, if he were to confront these altered conditions, he might destroy his muse” (1989: 40). Bryan Appleyard reflects that Ishiguro “had to realise that the new
Japan was encroaching upon, and ultimately destroying, the Japan of his infancy (1995: 24). Ishiguro explains that his interest in Japan was rekindled during his studies at East Anglia:

"At about that time I began to get very interested in Japan, I started to read all these books and I began to see Japanese films. I think it was down to the fact that this very precious place was actually fading in my head. It was a large part of my urge to write anything at all that I wanted it preserved".

(Appleyard 1995: 26)

As is often the case with the shomin-geki, Ishiguro deals with the conflict between parent and child. This is evident in the first two novels and also The Unconsoled. The children are raucous, often disorderly and even disrespectful - examples of this include Mariko in A Pale View of Hills, Ichiro in An Artist of the Floating World and Boris in The Unconsoled. There are no children of any significance in The Remains of the Day, except perhaps Mrs Benn's absent daughter. (One can hardly see Lord Darlington's nephew as a child.) Mason observes that the "affectionate relationship between the father, Ogata, and his daughter-in-law, Etsuko, in A Pale View of Hills directly parallels the situation in Ozu's Tokyo Story" (46). Mason also draws a parallel between Jiro's intoxicated colleagues, who pay a visit in A Pale View of Hills, and a scene from Early Spring. (Both films were directed by Ozu.)

Mason compares mood in the shomin-geki and that in Ishiguro's first two novels. Feelings of displacement and yearning are created by things like passing trains. Landscape images also play an important role in that they create a feeling of
continuity and comfort, but on the other hand they are deceptive. They include elements that appear to be everlasting, like the cherry blossoms, autumn leaves, etc., yet these are only transient. This sense of continuous change also affects the characters. Mason remarks: "Slipping into the isolation of old age, they are overcome with feelings of wistfulness and regret" (47). The characters in Ozu's films experience this and Etsuko in *A Pale View of Hills* and Ono in *An Artist of the Floating World* encounter this feeling of disillusionment. It is also evident in Stevens's recollections of the past. And Ryder, in *The Unconsoled*, is repeatedly confronted with memories of the past which prompt regret and anxiety. However, whereas Ozu sees the family set-up as most important in his films, Ishiguro takes a more critical stance. (I shall elaborate on this issue in the section on Western influences.)

According to Mason, the influence of the director Akira Kurosawa on Ishiguro's work is noticeable in matters like the pre-occupation of characters with outmoded values like dignity and custom. Mason uses the example of the samurai in *The Seven Samurai* and Watanabe in *Ikiru*. Their defiant manner creates feelings of both melancholy and hopefulness which we find in Etsuko in *A Pale View of Hills* and Ono in *An Artist of the Floating World*. Stevens in *The Remains of the Day* is a striking example of an old servant obsessed with dignity and honour. He realises too late that these codes of honour have long since been outmoded and that he has lost other valuable things in the process of pursuing them. Gustav, the porter in *The Unconsoled*, is another example of a character fixating on dignity and the importance of service and loyalty. Gustav goes to extremes to explain how he and his friends gather to discuss the future of porters in the industry. This in itself, of course, recalls the discussions Stevens and the other butlers have in *The Remains of the Day*.
Ishiguro’s memory of his grandparents’ house in Nagasaki perhaps provided him with the image represented in Ono’s description of his house in An Artist of the Floating World:

... and when arriving at the top of the hill you stand and look at the fine cedar gateway, the large area bound by the garden wall, the roof with its elegant tiles and its stylishly carved ridgepole pointing out over the view, you may well wonder how I came to acquire such a property. (Ishiguro 1986: 7)

Mason quotes Ishiguro remarking on this memory of the house:

“The house, as I remember it, is a rather grand and beautiful thing, and if I went back, the reality would be rather shabby and horrible; and in a way, that is how I feel about that whole area of my life. It’s very powerful to me while it remains a land of speculation, imagination and memory. If I go back to Japan, it will probably cease to be that.”

(Ishiguro & Mason 1989: 40)

(This is an interesting remark because, as previously mentioned, Ishiguro returned to Japan for the first time in 1991. As I shall attempt to explain later, his return probably influenced The Unconsoled - an argument taken up in Bryan Appleyard’s article.)

So films are like memories in that, once they are made, they do not change with time. Ishiguro uses all the information available to him, like memories,
knowledge gained through reading, films and history, to construct the Japan of his novels; and, of course, he recasts all of this in his own imagination.

In his essay Mason goes on to compare characters from Japanese films to the characters in Ishiguro's novels. He remarks that the character Etsuko in *A Pale View of Hills* reminds one of heroines in films such as *When a Woman Ascends the Stairs* by Mikio Naruse, *The Heart* by Kon Ichikawa and *Ugetsu* by Kenji Mizogushi in that they all search for independence and dignity, experience guilt and have troubled relationships with their daughters. The fusion of past memories and current visions and dreams exists in both *A Pale View of Hills* and *Ugetsu*. Etsuko experiences all the above-mentioned emotions through recollections and dreams. One can make this point about the next two novels as well.

Mason perceives another similarity between Ishiguro's second novel *An Artist of the Floating World* and the films of Yasujiro Ozu: "...the first-person perspective allows Ishiguro to finesse the confines of a linear plot; and with this novel he moves towards a refinement of focus reminiscent of a filmmaker he greatly admires, the late Yasujiro Ozu" (1989: 42). Ozu was interested in creating a setting in his films where personal communication minimises the impact of plot. Like the Japanese authors discussed earlier, Ozu found too much action disagreeable. Mason quotes Ishiguro as saying: "I feel plot spoils a lot of books that are otherwise good" (Ishiguro & Mason 1989: 43). I shall elaborate on Ishiguro's use of plot in the chapter on style and techniques; suffice it to say at this point that he does not make use of a linear plot, but instead uses events (memories) which appear to be stacked vertically rather than horizontally. In other words, events happen as they are recalled; there is no strict chronology. The narrator's stream of consciousness shifts incessantly from the past to the present and back, and it is the work of the reader to put events in
chronological order. This shows that Ishiguro favours a synchronic approach to the events in a novel over a diachronic approach. Mason notes that the film critic Basil Wright calls this technique in Ozu's films the "continual process of revelation" (Mason 1989: 42).

As early as 1958, significant changes started taking place in Japanese cinema. Younger directors called for a departure from lyricism and sentimentality. This coincided with the new era of economic expansion and development in Japan. The films by the producers mentioned above nevertheless captured the historical period which exerted an influence on Ishiguro, namely the post-war period which contained elements of the old and evidence of the new (transformation). Mason remarks that, "fortified by the textural realism of the shomin-geki, and sharpened with Western irony, Ishiguro explores themes with a Japanese resonance but with a Western incisiveness" (50).

Western Influences

I'm using Japan as a sort of metaphor .... I'm inviting Western readers to look at this not as a Japanese phenomenon but as a human phenomenon.

(Ishiguro & Mason 1989: 342)

In the interview Clive Sinclair conducted with Kazuo Ishiguro for television in 1991, he asked Ishiguro what he considered to be the major Western literary influences on his writing. Ishiguro replied that he had read George Eliot, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and
others and that his background is the Western realistic traditional novel. In his interview with Ishiguro, Mason asks: "Do you feel you are writing in any particular tradition?" and Ishiguro replies: "I feel that I'm very much of the Western tradition .... I've grown up reading Western fiction: Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Charlotte Bronte, Dickens" (Ishiguro & Mason 1989: 336). (The question of Western influences is closely linked to style and technique and I shall therefore have occasion to return to it in the chapter which follows.)

In his article "Inspiring Images", Mason explains that the reader gets a limited view of Ono in *An Artist of the Floating World*, mainly because Ishiguro concentrates more on "irony than on identification" (1989: 48). Ono's character is never fully described, events are recalled to explain his current dilemma and not to tell the reader exactly what kind of person Ono really is. Ono comes across as hiding some truth. The reader is not very sure that Ono tells all in a precise way. Mason comments as follows: "With this ironic distancing, Ishiguro shows decisively his own detachment from the Japanese experience and his own stamp as a Western writer" (1989: 48). It is the distance between the past and the present, and the unspoken that lies between, which is evident throughout Ishiguro's novels.

Ishiguro also adopts a more contemplative and indecisive attitude than the Japanese authors discussed earlier in this chapter. His novels show that it is indeed necessary to come to terms with the past in spite of the fact that this can be a very trying and complex process. He not only concentrates on post-war changes, but focuses on a wider transition: he is in a position to investigate the psychological dilemmas of both Western and Japanese cultures, because he is familiar with both. Etsuko, Ono and Stevens are representative of all individuals who have to come to terms with their pasts:
Like Dostoevsky ... [he] probes deep psychological dissonances, the struggle between the urges to hide and to rebel, to temporise and to confess. Like Chekhov, Ishiguro portrays strong currents of emotion moving beneath a seemingly quiet surface, and an oblique forward movement of plot, to reveal and confront moral issues. Again like Chekhov, Ishiguro uses irony in a way that is both judgmental and humorous. (Mason 1989: 50)

In summary, then, it can be seen that the three principal sources of influences on Ishiguro's work - Japanese literature, Japanese films, and the European novel - are combined in his novels to create his own personal style. In his conversation with Oe, Ishiguro explains that he was forced to write in a more "international" way because of his lack of knowledge of Japan. Interestingly, Oe also says that when he first read Ishiguro's novels he was confused, because Ishiguro came across "as a very quiet and peaceful author, and, therefore, a very Japanese author" (Ishiguro & Oe 1991a: 115). On the other hand, however (as previously mentioned), his style according to Oe "always involves a double structure, with two or more intertwined elements .... I also felt that this kind of strength was not very Japanese, that this person was, rather, from England" (115). Oe explains in the interview that a true novelist should be international, and that Ishiguro is a genuine international writer, but also very English: "my conclusion is that, rather than being an English author or European author, you are an author who writes in English .... I felt that by thinking of you in this way, as a writer of English, I had got hold of something essential" (118). This is precisely the
point that will be taken up at various stages later in this study and specifically in the conclusion on writers that write in English but originate from non-English cultures.

Critics' opinions on Ishiguro range from 'an English writer with Japanese influences', after the first two novels, to a Japanese who writes in English in a style "more English than the English" (Patey 1991: 135). Perhaps, as I shall argue later, Ishiguro should be viewed as one of the "new internationalists" who bring to the English reader a world previously unknown (King 1991: 194).
Notes.

1. Soseki is an exception to the rule, since, as Pollack notes, "he wrote at a time when authors were still customarily identified by pen-name (Soseki) rather than by family name (Natsume)" (1992: unnumbered prefatory page).

2. Gessel writes that Tanizaki went "to see some of the most famous plays in the Kabuki repertoire performed by the most charismatic actors of the day. The vibrant mixture of color, music, dance, eroticism, and violence had a profound impact on the boy" (1993: 76). (Kabuki is a popular Japanese entertainment that blends music, dance and mime.)

3. Ishiguro's being appointed to write the introduction is certainly an indication of his interest in Kawabata's work and of his knowledge of Japanese literature and form.

4. Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day* was, of course, also made into a film. The film gives credit to Ishiguro for the novel it has been based on, but there is no indication that he was directly involved with the production or the script. The film rights were originally bought by Harold Pinter, but the film itself was finally made by Merchant-Ivory. In the interview with Mason (before the publication of *The Remains of the Day*) Ishiguro said: "I also write
television films ... we're trying to get a third off the ground, this time a cinema film" (1989: 346). It is not clear whether he is referring to The Remains of the Day.

5. In his article on Ishiguro Appleyard notes that Ishiguro was initially more interested in reading “rock'n'roll literature” by Jack Kerouac and Henry Miller (1995: 24). In various interviews Ishiguro claims that he wanted to be a musician rather than a writer, but that his MA studies changed this: “I didn’t come to writing fiction because of a huge love affair with literature. I just kind of slid into it” (Appleyard 1995: 26).
ISHIGURO’S STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

If you really want to write something, you shouldn’t bring things into your book lightly. It’s a bit like taking in lodgers. They’re going to be with you a long time. I think the most important thing I learned between writing the first and second novels is the element of thematic discipline. (Ishiguro & Mason 1989: 339).

Kazuo Ishiguro makes use of an unadorned style of writing. His prose is calm and understated and he concentrates on subtlety and delicacy rather than cluttering the text with elaborate language and detail. Unlike other contemporary writers of fiction in English (whom I shall briefly discuss in the conclusion), Ishiguro’s style reflects a certain tranquillity and is without the intricate stacking of adjectives. Geoff Dyer’s comment on Ishiguro’s style in A Pale View of Hills can be seen as descriptive of his style in all his novels. Ishiguro, says Dyer, uses a style which “coax[es] nuances out
of hinted ambiguities. His writing is clean, unhurried and airy; full of inflections and innuendo, it touches the reader as lightly as a gentle breeze" (1989: 156).

Ishiguro's first three novels evince the kind of differences in style which are to be expected among novels written several years apart, but there is also a discernible commonality. I shall compare the first three novels and discuss The Unconsoled separately, because Ishiguro employs a very different style in his last novel and this merits a separate discussion. In the interview conducted by Christopher Bigsby five years before the publication of The Unconsoled, Ishiguro remarked: "I do have ambitions to write a book .... but I am working myself up to writing an epic, global novel. I suppose a lot of people are working themselves up to writing an epic global novel" (1990: 29). I believe The Unconsoled to be this novel and intend developing my argument at greater length later.

The novels all make use of a first-person narrative. In the first novel A Pale View of Hills, Etsuko is a middle-aged Japanese woman who lives in England and after the suicide of her daughter, Keiko, she recalls a time spent in post-war Nagasaki just before the child was born. The narrator in An Artist of the Floating World is the ageing painter Masuji Ono who recalls his propagandist activities during World War II and tries to justify his actions. In The Remains of the Day, the first-person narrator is the elderly butler Stevens, who is on his six-day journey to the West Country. This physical journey also becomes a journey towards the understanding of the self.

Ishiguro's narrative style steers clear of what Genette in Terry Eagleton's Literary Theory calls the "recit - the actual order of events in the text" and the "histoire - the sequence in which those events 'actually' occurred" (Eagleton 1983: 105). A number of historical references are made, but Ishiguro does not concentrate on these historical facts or on factuality in general. The only function of the references is to put
the main characters' turmoil into perspective. Ishiguro diverges further from Genette's categories of typical narrative analysis in that the order of the narrative (referring to time) is almost devoid of "prolepsis (anticipation)" (1983: 105). In the first three novels the reader does not harbour a feeling of expectancy - what is going to happen next? Recollections happen over a fixed period of time, but no element of suspense is created and memories interrupt chronology. Ishiguro nevertheless uses "analepsis (flashback)" (105). This technique of using various stages of recollection results in unfixed accounts (series of recollections which do not follow chronologically in any way) which give a distinct flavour to the mood of the novels and remind one of Kawabata's style.

Genette divides 'mood' into categories of distance and perspective. With regard to distance, Ishiguro uses "diagesis" (recounting the story) and "mimesis" (narrative told from one character's focused point of view) (105). All of the novels deal with the introspection of one character. The narrators are in Genette's terms "homodiegetic" (105) and "autodiegetic" (105); they employ first-person narratives.

A Pale View of Hills and An Artist of the Floating World have a very distinct Japanese flavour. Ishiguro has explained in various interviews that this was solely for the purpose of creating a certain mood. Of A Pale View of Hills he said, "the main strategy was to leave a gap" (Ishiguro & Mason 1989: 337). This novel may therefore be an example of what Joseph Coates calls "doughnut novels" - novels which are "about people whose lives have a hole in the centre - lives whose meaning is defined by events that do not occur" (1989: 161-162). He manages to do this by having Etsuko recall everything about her life in Nagasaki, but refuse to confront the real reason that her daughter committed suicide - in other words, refuse to confront
the issue of her daughter's intense cultural/social alienation triggered by the family's migration to the West. Ishiguro goes on to remark that the whole narrative strategy of the book was about how someone ends up talking about things they cannot face directly through other people's stories. I was trying to explore that type of language, how people use the language of self-deception and self-protection. (Ishiguro & Mason 1989: 337)

The result is that we learn about Sachiko and her daughter through Etsuko's memories, but Etsuko is in fact talking obliquely about herself.

In the following quotation Sachiko explains that she is planning to emigrate to the United States with her American boyfriend, and Etsuko is concerned about the different lifestyle Sachiko will have to face: "I understand your concern, Etsuko. But really, I don't think there's much for me to worry about .... I really don't see there's any cause for me to be worrying. I know I'll manage" (Ishiguro 1981: 43). When Etsuko asks how the daughter Mariko will cope with the change, Sachiko replies: "Oh, she'll be fine. You know how children are. They find it so much easier to settle into new surroundings, don't they?" (44). Clearly, Etsuko recalls this to assuage her own guilt about bringing Keiko to England.

In the interview with Gregory Mason, Ishiguro explains that he was not quite satisfied with his technique in A Pale View of Hills. He is of the opinion that the sections recalling the past did not create "the same murkiness of someone trying to wade through their memories .... they don't have the texture of memory" (Ishiguro & Mason 1989: 337). Indeed, when one first reads the book one experiences a feeling that some important event did not take place or was not recalled, but on rereading it...
one realises that the importance of events lies deceptively in the emotional agitation of Etsuko's guilt.

In *An Artist of the Floating World* Ono's narration is somewhat indecisive in that he addresses the reader directly (for example, "If on a sunny day you climb the steep path..." (Ishiguro 1986: 1)) and then switches to a sort of public declaration and apology. This would appear to suggest that Ono lacked insight into the world of the time and was unable to move outside the values of the war. This limited point of view circumscribes Ono's humanity. Ishiguro elaborates: "... the book is largely about the inability of normal human beings to see beyond their immediate surroundings, and because of this, one is at the mercy of what this world immediately around one proclaims itself to be" (Ishiguro & Mason 1989: 341).

In *The Remains of the Day* Ishiguro makes use of what Caroline Patey terms a "classical narrative pattern" (1991: 136). The grandeur and style at Darlington Hall are suggestive of an orderly Augustan plot-structure and lie at the beginning of Stevens's journey and his past. Furthermore, the novel is classical in style in that the master/servant or employer/employee aspect is central to Stevens's life. In *An Artist of the Floating World* we find the same being expressed in the relationship theme between Ono and his pupil, Kuroda and Ono and his teacher Mori-san. Ishiguro remarked: "I'm pointing to the master-pupil thing recurring over and over again in the world" (Ishiguro & Mason 1989: 342). Clearly, the desire to have power over subordinates is therefore not an exclusively Japanese affair but a more general anthropological phenomenon.

Another traditional eighteenth-century literary feature of *The Remains of the Day* is the division of Stevens's journey into six days, each stage contributing to the understanding of his life and of life in general. This final understanding is not a
cheerful one, as is illustrated by his own desolate question at the end of the novel: “I can’t even say I made my own mistakes. Really - one has to ask oneself - what dignity is there in that?” (243).

Furthermore, the trip to the west coast is full of ordeals like mistaken identities. Stevens gets mistaken for a gentleman and for no apparent reason he avoids telling the truth until he gets found out by the servant of the army officer. According to Patey this constitutes a typical platform for coups de theatre; the butler in disguise bound to be discovered or recognised for who he really is. Patey concludes: “Many of the necessary ingredients of a successful mock-epic novel are thus found in The Remains of the Day, which follows the Aristotelian pattern of complication-reversal-catharsis” (1991: 138). Another aspect is that “the rural life gets compared with urban life” (138). The two contradict yet simultaneously support each other for effect. The moment Stevens leaves Darlington Hall and his known environment he starts thinking about the meaning of his life. Being physically removed from the familiar, mental metropolis (or own little country) where he saw and met some of the major figures of the era, the open spaces in the countryside become functional in his discovery. The ‘rural life’ outside the confined world of Darlington Hall literally opens the door to self-investigation. In Susie O’Brien’s words: “Stevens’s reading of ‘country’ is strikingly different from the image invoked by Farraday; while ‘country’, for Stevens, signifies a socio-political construction, held together by the ‘great ladies and gentlemen of the land,’ Farraday seems to see it as synonymous with nature” (1996: 794). He indeed calls it, “this beautiful country of yours” (1989: 4). In contrast, Stevens replies: “It has been my privilege to see the best of England over the years, sir, within these very walls” (4). They therefore see Stevens’s holiday in completely different ways: Farraday sees it in relation to the physical appearance of nature and
Stevens refers to the political and social appearance presented by the people of the land, especially those persons he came to deal with under Lord Darlington's employment. The trip becomes cathartic in that it forces Stevens to confront the past and his feelings.

The plots of *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World* are very Japanese in style. They recall the work of Kawabata in that, instead of foregrounding plot, the emphasis is on lyricism, mood and, in particular, reflection. As previously mentioned, Ishiguro said the following about Kawabata in his introduction to the latter's novel *The Snow Country*: "... it does indicate the low priority Kawabata gives to 'plot' in the Western sense; it is as if he wishes to clear 'plot' to one side as rapidly as possible ... so that he can place his emphasis elsewhere" (Ishiguro 1985: 3). The same can be said about Ishiguro. No particular suspense, conflict or surprise is present in his novels. The reader is not concerned about what is going to happen next. Instead, descriptions and settings play an important part in the characters' recollections.

The following quotations illustrate this point. The first is from Kawabata's *The Snow Country*:

There was indeed no reason for him to go on. His excitement fell away. He looked down at his feet and saw that they had come to a crossing .... The Milky Way came down just over there, to wrap the night earth in its naked embrace. There was a terrible voluptuousness about it .... Komako ran towards the
dark mountain on which the Milky Way was falling.

(108)

Shimamura, the character whose emotions are being described here, is aware that the relationship with the geisha Komako is drawing to an end; this is symbolised in his feet coming to "the crossing". The "voluptuousness" of the starry sky is indicative not only of the erotic relationship between them but also of the painful separation that is inevitable, the stars "falling" on the "dark mountain". Kawabata continues in a staccato fashion: "They ran on released", and then: "He blinked, and the Milky Way came to fill them. He tried to keep the ears from spilling over" (1985: 109).

The next extract is from A Pale View of Hills, just after Sachiko has explained to Etsuko that she is going to America with her child:

Sachiko glanced up, then shrugged. "Perhaps you’d best take the lantern with you," she said. "It is quite slippery along the bank."

I rose to my feet and took the lantern down from the beam. The shadows moved across the cottage as I walked with it towards the doorway. As I was leaving, I glanced back towards Sachiko. I could see only her silhouette, seated before the open partitions, the sky behind her turned almost to night.

(1982: 172)

This recollection is almost like an omen. In spite of the light Etsuko takes with her, she is unable to see. The "slippery bank" and the "shadows" foreshadow the move to the West and the tragedy to follow. The doorway becomes not only the gateway between the past and the present but the threshold between East and West. The
memories remain a “silhouette” against the past of the now and the ominous future to follow from this point. The scene reflects what I previously referred to and termed ‘inscape’ (Karatani) and introspection.

A similar use of imagery occurs in An Artist of the Floating World, when Ono recalls a conversation he had with his Sensei Mori-san:

Mori-san studied the pictures for a few moments, moving the lantern from one to the next. Then he shook his head and muttered to himself: “Fatally flawed. Fatally flawed by trivial concerns.” A few seconds later he added without turning from the pictures: “But one always feels affection for one’s early works. Perhaps you’ll feel the same one day for the work you’ve done here.” Then he shook his head again, saying: “But these are all fatally flawed, Ono.”

(1986: 149)

Again Ishiguro uses the lantern as a symbol of insight. And again the optical discovery is only a superficial explanation for the deeper mental insight. Ono is recalling the mistakes he made, choices that were the result of character flaws. Yet at the time he truly believed that what he was doing was morally right - just as he thought the paintings to be good when he painted them.

As we saw, in the interview with Mason, Ishiguro criticises himself for the fact that the recollections in A Pale View of Hills are “too clear”. He feels that the memories lack a certain kind of “murkiness” (Ishiguro & Mason 1989: 337). Yet he brings past and present together strikingly in the scene where Etsuko talks to Mariko on the bridge. The bridge is symbolic in itself, being the place where past and
present meet and the place where Etsuko and Sachiko become one and the same person. Ishiguro says: "I wanted to suggest that Etsuko had dropped her cover. It just slips out: she's now talking about herself. She's no longer bothering to put it in the third person" (1989: 337). The scene is exceptionally beautifully written:

"What is the matter with you?" I said. "Why are you sitting here like this?"

The insects were clustering around the lantern. I put it down in front of me, and the child's face became more sharply illuminated. After a long silence, she said: "I don't want to go away. I don't want to go away tomorrow." (1982: 172)

And then:

"In any case," I went on, "if you don't like it over there, we can always come back."

This time she looked up at me questioningly. "Yes, I promise." (173)

This is the moment of truth: Etsuko acknowledges the fact that she took Keiko away from Japan against the child's wishes and that she promised to bring her back if she did not like the new country, but never did. Etsuko and Sachiko become one in this revelatory moment.

The above quotation is also an example of Ishiguro's unsentimental style of writing. The beauty lies in the prose and the mood. He says in a few words what many other writers would say in pages. This 'sparseness' is very Kawabatan in style.

The Remains of the Day, however, departs to some extent from the style of the first two novels to become more Western in diction and descriptions. Settings and
scenes are not as sparsely furnished. It is almost like moving away from the traditional Japanese room with bare, mainly functional essentials to the elaborately decorated Darlington Halls of the West, flavoured with a hint of British pomposity. And yet the novel remains canny and largely unsentimental. Ruth Prawer Jhabvala adjusted the screenplay in favour of more sentimentality, especially in respect of the relationship between Stevens and Miss Kenton. The film creates an air of expectancy, a hope that the romance may be fulfilled, whereas Ishiguro effaces this element. Instead, the reader is sadly aware of Stevens's loss. Stanley Kauffmann sums this up neatly in his article “On Films: An Elegy”:

Ishiguro’s aim was to show a man so encapsulated in protocols that all the major events of his life, political and emotional, happen on the periphery of that life. We see, through his eyes, more clearly than he does what is happening around him .... The film fractures his intent. (1993: Internet)
Note

1. "Augustan" or "Augustanism" is often used to indicate the "overformal and emotionless" characteristics of a literary work (Wynne-Davies 1989: 331). The term is used in relation to the eighteenth century, the late nineteenth century and early-twentieth-century poetry (331).
I'm not particularly interested in themes about parental responsibility, or even about exile .... I'm not at all interested in the question of suicide .... But things like memory, how one uses memory for one's own purpose, one's own ends, those things interest me more deeply.  

(Ishiguro & Mason 1989: 346-347)

Upon first inspection the first two novels seem to be closely related and the third novel something completely new. However, upon closer scrutiny the similarities that emerge among all three are remarkable. The fact that *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World* are both set in Japan means that there is an obvious basis for comparison between the first two novels. However, all three share the prominent theme of the inner dilemma and disillusionment of the main characters.
To begin with I shall focus on an analysis of the first three novels and then continue to *The Unconsoled* in a separate chapter.

**A Pale View of Hills**

The main character in *A Pale View of Hills*, Etsuko, is also the narrator of the novel. She is a middle-aged Japanese woman who now lives in England and we come to share her mental retreat into the past. Her eldest daughter, Keiko, has committed suicide and Etsuko recalls a time in post-war Japan just before Keiko was born. Keiko was her daughter born from her first marriage to Jiro, a Japanese businessman. The memories in particular concern Sachiko, a widow of Etsuko's acquaintance in love with an American GI, and Sachiko's daughter Mariko. Etsuko and Sachiko both eventually leave Japan to live in the West, Sachiko with the American and Etsuko with an English journalist she marries. The memories of Sachiko are mainly from the time that Etsuko was pregnant with Keiko. During this period Ogata, Jiro's father, visits the young couple. Ogata brings light moments into the novel, but also reveals fundamental truths regarding ideologies, children, generational differences, dignity and what it was like in Japan before the war. In many respects Ogata is the predecessor of Ono in *An Artist of the Floating World* and Stevens in *The Remains of the Day* - specifically as regards his attitude towards loyalty and dignity.

Etsuko is a friend of Mrs Fujiwara, who owns the noodle shop where Sachiko goes to work. She is Ogata's contemporary. Together they share an understanding of what pre-war life in Japan was like and the difficulties confronting the older
generation in adapting to their changing environment. (Mrs Kawakami in An Artist of the Floating World is very much Mrs Fujiwara with a different shop.) Ogata shares with Mrs Fujiwara memories about a time when loyalty and pride in one's country and its customs were of the greatest importance. They also share the feelings of loss and disillusionment brought about by war. (Mrs Fujiwara's son was killed during the war.)

At the time of the recollections, Etsuko has her daughter Niki (from her second marriage) visiting her and this constitutes the novel's main focus. They experience problems talking about Keiko and the past. At moments one or the other tries to broach the subject, but it never really gets discussed. It gradually becomes clear to the reader that the reason for this is that Etsuko is guilt-ridden - "I feel only regret now for those attitudes I displayed towards Keiko" (Ishiguro 1982: 88) - and Niki is ignorant about the past.

The focus of the recollections is mainly Sachiko's troubled life, but in the course of these recollections the reader also comes to learn more about the narrator. A parallel story line is thus created. Ishiguro explains: "because it's really Etsuko talking about herself, and possibly that somebody else, Sachiko, existed or did not exist, the meanings that Etsuko imputes to the life of Sachiko are obviously the meanings that are relevant to her [Etsuko's] own life" (Ishiguro & Mason 1989: 337). What happens is that at the turning point in the novel Etsuko drops her cover - she changes her narrative style in that she stops talking about Sachiko - and becomes the first person in the direct dialogue, replacing Sachiko. It is no longer Sachiko confronting Mariko, but Etsuko talking to Keiko. The dilemma surrounding the emigration is now seen with Etsuko and Keiko as the main characters. It is at this point that the reader sees the truth. The scene in which Etsuko follows Mariko to the bridge, just after Sachiko has revealed her final decision to go to America, brings
everything together. The truth about Etsuko and Keiko is there as the former remarks: "'Yes, I promise,' I said. 'If you don't like it over there, we'll come straight back. But we have to try it and see if we like it there. I'm sure we will'" (173). It becomes clear that this is no longer Sachiko talking to Mariko, but Etsuko explaining the emigration to Keiko.

Ishiguro mentions "the gap" in his novels - between the then and the now and as previously mentioned, the action that does not take place. Etsuko is not of importance, but her emotional upheaval is - in as much as she represents humankind in situations like the one outlined above. It is between what is written and what is implied that the true meaning lies. The author is not saying directly what he intends to address and neither are the characters. The importance of the conflict is unstated in the same way that the character (Etsuko) finds it impossible to say directly what she feels.

Cynthia Wong remarks that whether Sachiko really existed or not is irrelevant; the female character's experience is of importance in that she represents all females affected by the war. In other words, Etsuko's experience is in all likelihood not unique and it does not matter therefore whether Sachiko and Etsuko are the same person or not:

To regard A Pale View of Hills as solely one woman's experiences - and a neurotic one at that - is to demolish the painful truth of human destruction, that is often unspeakable, except through the private events and tragedies which reflect a larger social situation. (Wong 1995: 137)
What, then, is the essence of this first novel? Ishiguro explores the feeling of displacement which results from emigration, and the alienation which arises from the cultural differences between East and West. At the same time he focuses on the individual's disillusionment that is a direct consequence of this estrangement. (We will see how he carries this theme through An Artist of the Floating World to reach a peak in The Remains of the Day.)

Edith Milton writes in The New York Times Book Review that the female characters in A Pale View of Hills move from the “strangling role of traditional Japanese housewife” to the West and “a freedom of [a] sort” (1988: 184). In spite of this new life with its supposed “freedom”, however, certain qualities like emotional depth in the new life, commitment and constancy are lacking. The sadness and irony of Etsuko's disillusionment are noticeable in her recollections of the apartment in Nagasaki: “...yet I remember an unmistakable air of transience there, as if we were all of us waiting for the day we could move to something better” (Ishiguro 1982: 12). Unfortunately for Etsuko, her new life in England did not really provide her with “something better”. Keiko commits suicide, we gather, because she felt rejected by her stepfather and because she felt alienated in the new country. As a form of self-justification Etsuko says the following about Jiro, Keiko's real father: “…for the seven years he knew his daughter, he was a good father to her. Whatever else I convinced myself of during those final days, I never pretended Keiko would not miss him” (90). Etsuko, too, remains a foreigner who never really fits into her new surroundings. Her customs and cultural make-up were clearly not understood by her Western husband. She remarks: “For, in truth, despite all the impressive articles he wrote about Japan, my husband never understood the ways of our culture, even less a man like Jiro” (90). Her second daughter, Niki, reminds her of her perpetual status as an emigrant. To
Niki’s friend this seems almost romantic - she wants to write a poem about Etsuko - but the older woman is only too aware of the pain of reality and the feeling of displacement she experiences.

That it is not only the two adult, female characters who are affected by the emigration but the children in particular is reflected in the fact that Etsuko’s recollections mainly concern Mariko and her emotional abuse by her mother. The larger significance here is that Etsuko’s recollections of Mariko also clarify her own daughter Keiko’s reaction to dislocation and her decision to commit suicide. Sachiko is shown to be culpably insensitive to her daughter’s feelings. Mariko wants to take her little kittens with them to America and her mother replies:

"Aren’t you old enough yet to see there are other things besides these filthy little animals? You’ll just have to grow up a little. You simply can’t have these sentimental attachments for ever. These are just ... just animals don’t you see? Don’t you understand that, child?" (165)

The question the novel implicitly raises is whether this inconsiderate approach is perhaps the same attitude Etsuko had when she moved to England with Keiko. She herself does not say, but very early in the novel, in a remark that smacks of self-justification, she muses to herself: “I never knew Sachiko well” (11).

In both cases the child’s displacement in the new country is the parent’s responsibility. In Etsuko’s case the result is grief and guilt. So the novel in the end comes to deal with these emotions in the narrator. During Niki’s visit to her mother Etsuko thinks:
She had come prepared to tell me things were no different now, that I should have no regrets for those choices I once made. In short, to reassure me I was not responsible for Keiko's death. I have no great wish to dwell on Keiko now, it brings me little comfort.

(11)

Etsuko recalls Ogata's visit to his son and daughter-in-law, during which he gives a warning to Etsuko: "Children becomes adults but they don't change much" (131). And on another occasion Sachiko says to Etsuko: "But a mother can't be blamed for considering the different options that arise for her child, can she?" (102). The question that this detail raises in the reader's mind is whether Etsuko is trying to justify her own decision by recalling Sachiko's remark.

The reader realises that Etsuko is fascinated by Sachiko and the recollected conversations between them gradually come to reveal more about Etsuko herself. In spite of differences in character their stories run parallel. Sachiko is a vagabond, and she appears to suffer no guilt; in fact she uses and abuses people as she pleases. Is this perhaps true of the younger Etsuko as well? We do not know and are never told, but it is certain that the Etsuko of then did not seem to have the boldness of character to do what she finally did by emigrating. In short, the further one reads, the more it becomes apparent that Etsuko should not be taken at face value.

Sachiko borrows money, forces Etsuko to organise employment for her, complains and leaves, but she is a survivor in her own way. It is obvious that despite her irregular behaviour, she comes from a good background with a high social standing. She remarks: "My father was a highly respected man .... Highly respected indeed .... He was abroad much of the time, in Europe and America" (109). Sachiko
also tells Etsuko about her rich uncle with whom she used to live. Etsuko recalls: "The uncle was wealthy, and since his house was an unusually large one ... there had been plenty of room for Sachiko and her little girl" (101). Yet Sachiko is sly and evasive. In her conversations she drops enough information to create an atmosphere of mystery and suspense, but she withholds details. The reader becomes aware of her painful experiences during the war, especially when she recalls how Mariko saw the blind woman drowning a baby. And her bitterness towards her family also becomes obvious.

One is not given much information about Etsuko during this time in Nagasaki. She reveals very little about herself, except the fact that she is married, pregnant and has her father-in-law visiting. She comes across as harmless, innocent and eager to be of assistance. But the more we reflect on Sachiko's circumstances the more we realise how little we know about the true Etsuko. It is as if Ishiguro's characters are begging the reader to discover them for what they really are through the meagre information they are providing.

What Ishiguro is doing in his own delicate way of writing is blending the historical events of war and the psychological effect these have on individuals. Paul Bailey calls this a "technique of inference" so that the novel becomes a study of "emotional turbulence" (Bailey 1988: 179). The characters' experiences emphasise the horrors of war and the effect war has on humankind. Edith Milton writes: "Sachiko and Etsuko become minor figures in a greater pattern of betrayal, infanticide and survival played out against the background of Nagasaki, itself the absolute emblem of our genius for destruction" (1988: 13). But at the end of the novel one realises that not all is negative; man has the ability to survive and the inborn desire to
continue to persist. It is in this same spirit that Etsuko carries on and even plans changes to her life as her remark to Niki that she might sell the house reveals.

What makes Ishiguro's style so unusual is the way he never directly recreates the horrors of the war; they are only hinted at in the mysterious killings of, for instance, Mrs Fujiwara's son and Etsuko's fiancé, and this makes them all the more horrifying. Sachiko mentions the woman who drowned her baby and remarks like the following are almost nonchalantly included:

Received with more urgency were the reports of the child murders that were alarming Nagasaki at the time. First a boy, then a small girl had been found battered to death. When a third victim, another little girl, had been found hanging from a tree there was near-panic amongst the mothers in the neighbourhood. (100)

Through details like these (and the drowning of the kittens and the mother drowning her own baby and other examples), Ishiguro is emphasising the brutality and, ultimately, the futility of humankind's actions. The destruction of the war and the bombs, and Keiko's suicide, which is an indirect consequence of this, provide further examples. Ishiguro's message seems to be that man's actions will form a cosmic karma of grief and guilt with which he will have to deal later - just as Etsuko has to.

James Campbell sees Ishiguro's lack of detail as a flaw and is of the opinion that the characters are "faceless" and the dialogue "vapid" (1988: 25). Campbell appears not to see that this sparseness is functional to the themes of the novel. The lack of detail enhances the emotional desolation which lies at the heart of the novel. It is also very Japanese in style and provides a certain compactness which is very
reminiscent of the way Kawabata writes. Ishiguro's method is to allow the reader to fill these gaps and to 'feel' events or emotions, rather than be overwhelmed by cluttered and elaborate descriptions. Penelope Lively summarises Ishiguro's understated style extremely aptly:

> It is the kind of writing in which one searches in frustration for the source of its effects; sparse, precise and plain, the language has a stealth that leaves you with images that are suggested rather than stated. Trying to pin this down, I turned back through the pages looking for the description of a certain room: it was not there, [it] was a product of my own imagination. (1988: 86)

Returning now to the parallel story of Sachiko and Etsuko, we notice that Sachiko is not the only survivor, but that Etsuko is also one in various ways. She comes through the war, a divorce, emigration and the death of her daughter. Yet like Sachiko she can be very destructive. Sachiko professes to want to go to America with her drinking soldier, but at times she expresses an entirely contrary desire: "I've no intention of accompanying some foreign drunkard to America" (87). This contradicts her earlier remark that "everything will turn out well ... I'll write to you when I reach America" (71). Sachiko's abuse of Mariko is also deeply disturbing and at times she seems almost deranged. At one point, for example, she says:

> "I've told you many times, what is of the utmost importance to me is my daughter's welfare ... finding herself in a land full of foreigners, a land full of Ame-
kos. And suddenly having an Ame-kos for a father,
imagine how confusing that would be for her.” (86)

And then, when she changes her mind again, she remarks: “America is a far better
place for a young girl to grow up .... Japan is no place for a girl. What can she look
forward to here?” (70). This irresolution and instability are clearly part of Etsuko’s
make-up as well.

It is the recollections of Sachiko and Mariko that allow Etsuko to interrogate
herself. She focuses elsewhere in order to refer to herself. Etsuko seems to be the
proverbial doormat when she allows Sachiko to order her around - for example, in
looking after Mariko, finding Sachiko employment and lending money to her. Etsuko
also seems to be dull and submissive in her relationship with Jiro and her father-in-
law. We learn that she used to play the violin; then she becomes the devoted wife
and mother-to-be. Later in the novel, she cannot even stand up to Niki, who seems to
provoke her repeatedly with statements about marriage, her father and Keiko. Niki
criticises her when she says: “So many women just get brainwashed. They think all
there is to life is getting married and having a load of kids” (180). And Etsuko replies:
“But in the end, Niki, there isn’t very much else” (180). Etsuko brings to mind
Shingo in Kawabata’s The Sound of the Mountain. Like Etsuko, this character is
never much developed or explained, and nor are events, but it is the underlying
tensions and emotions Shingo deals with that are subtly conveyed. In Wong’s words:
“the diminishing of personal facts corresponds with the narrative task of telling world,
not merely personal, history. Etsuko’s effacement is therefore necessary to this
construction if it is to emulate the pain of destruction” (1995: 137).

Perhaps Ishiguro is contrasting the shy and conventional wife in Japan with the
unconventional lifestyle and insolence of her counterpart in the West. Perhaps Niki is
representative of the new generation; the blending of the East and West. If Niki is the new, fused generation, is this coming together positive or negative? Certain characteristics are notable in her which we do not see in the other female characters. She is rather disorganised and free of prejudice and pressure in an offbeat, honest way. She wants a photo of Nagasaki, because a friend of hers wants to write a poem about Etsuko and her emigration. She reveals without reserve her feelings about marriage, the people in the village, her mother's lifestyle and the relationship between her father and Keiko: "I suppose Dad should have looked after her [Keiko] a bit more, shouldn't he? He ignored her most of the time. It wasn't fair really" (175). She comes across as being more straightforward and honest than her mother. On the other hand, Ishiguro might be showing us a new generation with a lack of loyalty to anything in particular, rather unenlightened and unattached.

As the above examples illustrate, Ishiguro leaves the reader with a lot of questions. Ultimately, although the recollections are revealing enough, the ending is not momentous. However, Etsuko's incrementally revealing recollections have already had an effect on the reader that does not call for some explosive climax or revelation. The ending, like the absence of a linear plot, can be seen as very Japanese in style when placed alongside the work of Kawabata and Tanizaki. The genius of the work lies not in the ending, but what precedes it. Nothing needs to be resolved; all has been said or has been insinuated.

Ishiguro is of the opinion that the ending of this first novel is not very successful, mainly because the "texture of the memories" is not thick enough and the conclusion too sudden. He blames this on a lack of "technical sophistication" on his part (Ishiguro & Mason 1989: 337-338) in the same way that he blames his lack of experience as a writer for not managing to develop the lighter moments between
Etsuko and Ogata to their full potential. I agree that the revelation with Etsuko and Mariko on the bridge does happen very suddenly and can be very confusing to the reader, but found the suddenness of the effect striking.

One can ask why Ishiguro wrote this novel from a female point of view. Is it due to the influence by Kenji Mizoguchi (whom he acknowledges) and his films like Ugetsu, which is about mothers and daughters (Mason 1989: 41)? Or is Kon Ichikawa's film The Heart an influence here because of its guilt-ridden heroine (Mason 1989: 41)?

One could argue that the choice is of a more personal nature, in that Ishiguro felt a need to rid himself of his own childhood memories about post-war Nagasaki or perhaps those that his parents had inflicted on him. In writing from a female point of view, he creates a distance between himself and Etsuko as narrator. Certainly some of the details, like the name of the novel, must have issued from either his own memories or those conveyed by his parents. Perhaps when viewed in this light the novel can be seen as cathartic. Ishiguro indeed remarks, “I wanted my Japan recreated and put down on paper” (Appleyard 1995: 26).

The title, A Pale View of Hills, suggests the faint link between the past and the present. In the words of Francis King, it is “Japan and England held together by a shimmering, all but invisible net of images linked to each other by filaments at once tenuous and immensely strong” (1988: 184). The title is also suggestive of a changing Japan where everything about the past becomes a ‘pale’ recollection and the new Japan seems almost colourless to people like Ogata - as Jonathan Spence puts it, “a Japanese world where one’s own dead children and their sufferings blur with the impact of other people’s dislocated lives” (1988: 204). The “hills” of the title are, as Etsuko explains, “the hills of Inasa I could see from my apartment window”
(Ishiguro 1982: 103). She goes on to recall a trip she took there with Sachiko and Mariko and muses that this was “one of the better memories I have from those times” (103). At the time of their visit, the hills also suggested the dream of a better future. During the visit to the hills Etsuko says:

“Today I’ve decided I’m going to be optimistic … Mrs Fujiwara always tells me how important it is to keep looking forward. And she’s right. If people didn’t do that, then all this” - I pointed again at the view - “all this would be rubble.” (111)

Interestingly, she later mentions to Niki a trip she took with Keiko and the hills feature again:

“The calendar I gave you this morning,” I said. “That is a view of the harbour in Nagasaki. This morning I was remembering the time we went there once, on a day-trip. Those hills over the harbour are very beautiful … there was nothing special about it … Keiko was happy that day … It’s just a happy memory, that’s all.” (182)

Did Keiko display the same kind of behaviour on the day of their trip to the hills as Mariko did when Etsuko accompanied Sachiko once? Etsuko recalls: “Mariko was quiet and - rather to my surprise - showed no signs of wishing to misbehave” (108). Perhaps Keiko, like Mariko, was aware of the impending trip abroad and was therefore pensive and afraid.

The new blocks of flats described in the novel and the economic and political changes are all indicative of the new Japan - a world in which the old morals and
values are of little importance; a Japan which is slowly being penetrated by Western standards. Jiro and his business associates stand directly opposite Ogata and his old teachings. Ogata warns them of this new point of view where the individual is more important than a national 'togetherness':

"I devoted my life to the teaching of the young. And then I watched the Americans tear it all down .... There was a spirit in Japan once, it bound us all together. Just imagine what it must be like being a young boy today. He's taught no values at school - except perhaps that he should selfishly demand whatever he wants out of life." (66)

The whole point is neatly symbolised in the chess game Ogata plays with Jiro. Ogata explains:

"Chess is all about strategies .... A game isn't won and lost at the point when the king is finally cornered. The game's sealed when a player gives up having any strategy at all. When his soldiers are all scattered, they have no common cause, and they move one piece at a time, that's when you've lost." (129)

This reflects not only on national consciousness but also on global consciousness and ties in with the theme of dislocated individuals (like Etsuko) in a changing world. The novel seems to prompt the question, is Westernization a positive thing? And if it is, for whom? Is progress according to Western values a good thing when ancient customs and traditions have to suffer?
The world is rapidly becoming smaller and cross-culturation is taking place on a global scale. In the midst of this stands the individual who has to adapt. One of Ishiguro's principal concerns is the inner turmoil these individuals experience, a turmoil which is exacerbated by the falling away of the support systems of their own society. One consequence of this unravelling is that a great deal of respect towards the elderly is lost. Ogata is upset because Shigeo Matsuda - a former pupil - regards all his hard work of the past as "old teachings". This specific theme is the main focus of the next novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*. As previously mentioned, Ogata is in a sense the predecessor of Ono and even Stevens with specific regard to the theme of loss of traditional values and specific codes of honour. And this illustrates the thematic continuity of the three novels. We also see a major theme of *The Remains of the Day* prefigured in Ogata's pronouncement on dignity:

"Discipline, loyalty, such things held Japan together once .... People were bound by a sense of duty. Towards one's family, towards 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)

Of course, in *The Remains of the Day* Stevens's sense of duty is later perceived as a negative force in his life whereas Ogata sees it as something positive and essential in the making of the Japanese people. Characteristically, Ishiguro is not judgmental; his concern is to investigate the effect that external factors have on individuals. It is the psychology of change and its effect on human beings that is of importance in the novels. This is what Wong remarks upon in her article: Etsuko is merely the...
mouthpiece for hundreds of other victims of the war, "her narrative task is to show the effects of the war, rather than to make manifest polemical assertions" (1995: 137).

An Artist of the Floating World

To a large extent, the reason for Ono's downfall was that he lacked a perspective to see beyond his own environment and to stand outside the actual values of his time.

(Ishiguro & Mason 1989: 341)

As has been remarked, there are many similarities between Ishiguro's first two novels. Both deal with the disintegration of the Japanese empire after the war, the individual's disillusionment, the struggle to accept the change and the physical loss and emotional estrangement from friends and family. Both novels are set in Japan after the war and history provides a backdrop for the more personal experiences of the main characters. Etsuko's and Ono's recollections suggest an emotional turning point in their lives and both want to justify their actions and beliefs, but eventually come to realise that the decisions they made were not necessarily the best ones. Their children play a significant role in their present situation and often influenced the past. The effect Etsuko's emigration to the West had on Keiko (alienation and finally suicide) and her marriage to a Westerner led to her current regrets and feelings of guilt. As a result she finds it impossible to communicate with Niki, her second daughter. Noriko's marriage negotiations act as the trigger for Ono's self-investigation
and his gradual realisation that the times have changed dramatically and the values of
the past are gone forever. The war was a factor in the directions their lives took:
circumstances forced them to make decisions which had a momentous effect on their
futures.

Upon closer inspection certain differences between the novels become
apparent. *An Artist of the Floating World* gives more attention to the influences of
Westernisation on Japanese cultural values, although this is not the main focus of the
novel. *An Artist of the Floating World* has a better resolution, and this suggests that
the themes are better integrated. Ishiguro explained that inexperienced writers often
find it difficult to control and integrate the themes of their first novels (Ishiguro &
Mason 1989: 339). And in an interview with Appleyard he elaborates on a self-
acknowledged shortcoming in *A Pale View of Hills*:

> I found it quite difficult to keep control over the themes. You do get overexcited by the possibilities that occur to you and you digress. I wasn’t quite sure what I wanted to write about. And what I was really interested in was relegated to the role of subplot.

(1995: 26)

For example, the development of Ogata’s character traits becomes the main focus in
Ono (and later even more so in Stevens); all of these characters are preoccupied with
old values and honour. The issue of dignity develops from humble pride in Ogata to
vanity in Stevens. In *A Pale View of Hills*, Ogata’s values are relegated to sub-plot, in
*An Artist of the Floating World* they become more centralised and in *The Remains of
the Day* they constitute the main focus. All three characters embark on a
psychological journey of retrieval in an attempt to justify their values and feelings of honour. In Stevens's case this coincides with a physical journey.

*An Artist of the Floating World*, like the first novel, is set in post-war Japan, only this time in an imaginary city. Masuji Ono, the main character, is a retired painter who lives with his daughter Noriko. The novel centres around the marriage negotiations for Noriko and in the process reveals Ono's pre-war sympathies with imperialism. We learn that he originally received training as, in Patrick Parrinder's words, "a decadent artist, an illustrator of the night-time 'floating world' of geishas and courtesans" (1989: 158), but broke away to paint more patriotic paintings. However, as Parrinder observes: "In his declining years ... Ono relapsed into the decadence of the barfly and the maudlin old-timer" (158). In his middle years, then, he decides to turn away from the group of bohemian artists with whom he trained, to become a propagandist for Japanese imperialism - a decision that he later comes to regret. Matsuda (his friend and fellow artist) confronts him and accuses him of being naive in his beliefs:

"There's a certain kind of artist these day," he went on, "whose greatest talent lies in hiding away from the real world. Unfortunately, such artists appear to be in dominance at present, and you, Ono, have come under the sway of one of them. Don't look so angry, it's true. Your knowledge of the world is like a child's. I doubt, for instance, if you could even tell me who Karl Marx was." (Ishiguro 1986:171)

In spite of Matsuda's warning and reprimand, Ono continues his activities and betrays Kuroda, his pupil, to the police.
At the beginning of the novel we learn that Ono's eldest daughter Setsuko is visiting with her small son, Ichiro. Setsuko is very concerned about the possibility of a failure in the marriage negotiations. It becomes clear that a previous engagement fell through and the main reason for this was Ono's past. During the course of the novel he is reluctantly forced to recall events and reveal his guilty secrets. (As I shall go on to discuss more fully later, this is the main interest of the novel.) Ono initially refuses to see his contribution to the failure of the engagement arrangements and is convinced that the Miyakes family realised their lesser social status and therefore withdrew proposals. He often pretends that he does not see himself as having a higher social standing, but it is precisely his opinion about the Miyakes' refusal to have their son marry Noriko and various other remarks which indicate his subconscious belief that he is actually 'better' than other people. He often contradicts himself and in so doing reveals his pride in his achievements: "I have never at any point ... been aware of my social standing..." and "...the high esteem in which I am held" (Ishiguro 1986: 19). We come to realise that this perceived position has to do with the past and has no real bearing on the present and that Ono is actually currently seen as a right-wing propagandist with no status.

Very little happens in the novel as far as action is concerned and emotions and convictions are often hinted at rather than explained. The reader meets characters who are functional to Ono's inner struggle: Mori-san, Ono's teacher, Kuroda, his pupil whom he betrayed, and Matsuda, who was also a nationalist. Then there is Mrs Kawakami, the owner of a bar in the old pleasure district where Ono and his contemporaries used to go, who strongly brings to mind Mrs Fujiwara in A Pale View of Hills.²
In *A Pale View of Hills*, Etsuko's mental retreat is triggered by Keiko's suicide and Niki's visit, with no specific time or duration given, but Ono's recollections and realisations take place over a period of almost two years (dated in the novel October 1948, April 1949, November 1949 and June 1950). In spite of the chronology of the dates, the recollections are not at all linear.

The novel is peripherally very Japanese as regards the customs, the names, the setting and the fact that Japanese words are used, like *miai* (marriage negotiations), but Ono's dilemma and disillusionment is a very universal human, and, ultimately, global issue. Like *A Pale View of Hills*, *An Artist of the Floating World* is a book about history (post-war changes), but not a historical novel; the names of people and places are veritable, but not factual, and merely provide a backdrop for more important concerns. Kathryn Morton elaborates:

> Often with Japanese novels the Western reader may suspect he is missing the point and feel that important references may be getting by him. That is not a problem here .... He writes in English and does not require that the reader know the Orient to understand the book. (1989: 160)

Although Ishiguro omits details and his style is very sardonic - and the reader's comprehension is therefore tested - one never fails ultimately to understand the underlying intentions. The style, especially the use of indirectness, is very much the style Kawabata employs in novels like *The Sound of the Mountain* (1954), *The Snow Country* (1956) and *Thousand Cranes* (1959). Ono reminds one of Ogata Shingo in *The Sound of the Mountain* as far as his reminiscence on the past is concerned. The sexual undertones of Kawabata's novel are not present, but the feeling of lost and
wasted years is. Shingo is aware that his death is near and his daughter-in-law becomes his only source of joy in his last days. Because she cares for him he starts to harbour sexual fantasies about her which emphasise the lost moments and mistakes of his life. The general atmosphere of An Artist of the Floating World is similar to Kawabata's with the descriptions in both novels being sparse and functional.

In the opening scene of the novel, Ono explains to the reader how he bought his house. We come to realise that he was an important man. In Ono's words: “That I should buy such a house seemed absurd, and I put the suggestion down to the exaggerated respect my pupils always had for me” (Ishiguro 1986: 8). The house itself is significant: Ono is interrogated by members of the family about the state of the house after the war, just as he will be interrogated by society about his activities before the war. He remarks: “How so much more honourable is such a contest, in which one’s moral conduct and achievement are brought as witnesses rather than the size of one’s purse” (10). It is precisely this 'honourableness' of Ono's character which is later questioned and brought to 'trial'. There is sadness in his remark that “the house had received its share of the war damage” (11), because so has he. His political sympathies before the war are the cause of the current distrust in Ono's respectability. Cynthia Wong makes the following remark in this regard: “Ono's tale is less a reflection of his glory days as an artist in Imperial Japan than a rationalising account of his own participation in world affairs” (1995: 143).

Ono's dilemma is gradually revealed. His reminiscence, which is the substance of the novel, is prompted by his renunciation of his sympathies with the ruling party and his nationalism before the war. (We learn that he was an adviser to the Committee of Unpatriotic Activities.) Nigel Hunt (1989: 160) is of the opinion that the novel has two main themes: the way the present changes the perception of the
past (what seemed right then is not necessarily right now) and the influence and responsibility of the artist in society.

As regards the first theme, Ono is forced to recall and face his past. All this takes place in direct relationship to the marriage negotiations for his daughter, Noriko. In the process it slowly dawns on Ono that he is now seen as a reactionary, a supporter of the old regime. In spite of what he tells us, there is an uncomfortable feeling that we are not really sure what Ono was like before he became a political painter and not even what he was really like during his political period. (It is exactly the same feeling as one gets about Etsuko in *A Pale View of Hills.*) During this process of self-investigation Ono comes to realise that he will also have to cope with the current tendency towards Westernisation in his society and that life is in a continuous process of transformation - capitalism, for example, is now favoured in the place of imperialism. Ishiguro explains that

> the book is largely about the inability of normal human beings to see beyond their immediate surroundings, and because of this, one is at the mercy of what this world immediately around one proclaims itself to be.

(Ishiguro & Mason 1989: 341)

The impact of Westernisation is more apparent in the world of this novel than in *A Pale View of Hills*. Some examples of this are the changed drinking district where Mrs Kawakami’s bar was and which is now completely surrounded by modern buildings, the American movies being shown - which influence Ichiro to the point of his trying to walk like Humphrey Bogart (79) - and his fascination with the *Lone Ranger*. In Patrick Parrinder’s words, “the youngster is more exercised by cowboys, monster
movies and Popeye the Sailorman” (1989: 159) and this frustrates Ono because he would rather teach his grandson about “the male mysteries of sake-drinking and samurai warriors” (159).

Ichiro, the grandchild, is like Niki: he is representative of the new generation. However, like Keiko, he will have to deal with the struggle of West versus East. Ichiro strives for all things American, like the Lone Ranger and monsters instead of national heroes like “Lord Yoshitsune” (30) whom Ono sees as one of the great heroes of the past together with samurai warriors and ninjas. Setsuko summarises the child’s situation thus:

“Suichi [the child’s father] believes it’s better he likes cowboys than that he idolise people like Miyamoto Musashi. Suichi thinks the American heroes are the better models for children now.” (36)

The mood of the novel suggests that Ishiguro intended to touch on the issue of the threat Westernisation holds for the customs of the Orient. He remarked on the significance of capitalistic influences on the East after his visit in 1991 and in particular in his interview with Allan Vorda and Kim Herzinger. Late-twentieth-century Japan faces the complex issue of multi-culturalism, and is concerned about losing its traditions. In Ishiguro’s words: “They now have to start thinking about what it means to be Japanese and what sort of country Japan might be” (Vorda & Herzinger 1991: 132). This is particularly the point with which Ogata (in A Pale View of Hills) and Ono are concerned. But Setsuko, her husband and child and Noriko only see the excitement these new influences hold; they do not realise the long-term effect on the nation.
As I have previously explained, in many ways Etsuko's father-in-law (Ogata) is the predecessor of Ono with regard to their opinions of the old teachings and traditions. Ono's journey into the past is an uncomfortable one and one which elicits our sympathy. He knows that if he confesses he will have to endure shame and his honour will be affected. The question of suicide arises, but never to the point where the reader feels great discomfort. In neither of the first two novels is suicide a main concern. In *A Pale View of Hills* Keiko's suicide never becomes a major point of focus. Suicide is merely a way of escaping from unbearable situations, or in Ono's case, only a contemplation. It is never portrayed as the honourable and perhaps slightly romanticised deed the West perceives *hara-kiri* or *seppuku* to be. Responding to Mason's question as to whether Ono's decision not to commit suicide is perhaps "untraditional", Ishiguro replied,

> my book may not have a traditional Japanese story ending in that sense, but a lot of the great Japanese movies of the fifties would not dream of having an ending like that. And if I borrow from any tradition, it's probably from that tradition that tries to avoid anything that is overtly melodramatic or plotly, that tries basically to remain within the realms of everyday experience.  

(Ishiguro & Mason 1989: 343)

Opposite suicide lies life and its realities, facing problems head-on. Ono is aware of what the latter will entail, and he is afraid and hesitant, uncertain about which decision to make. Moreover, Ono, we come to realise, is actually a liar, or at the very least a self-deceiver. This becomes apparent in what he says about the "Bridge of Hesitation":

...
...if sometimes I am to be seen up on that bridge, leaning thoughtfully against the rail, it is not that I am hesitating ... [I am] surveying my surroundings and the changes taking place around me. (99)

Ono has to shift his values. He is hesitating; he has to move from pride to humility and it is not an easy transition to undertake. Chaudhuri summarises his dilemma:

Ishiguro developed ... what have turned out to be some of the central concerns of his other books: old age and the human capacity to survive disappointment and humiliation. (1995: 30)

Stevens goes through exactly the same turmoil in The Remains of the Day. Katherine Wall remarks that Stevens's narrative “is largely unconscious, meant as a defence of his life and the values that have shaped it” (1994: 24). The same can be said about Ono, but he gradually arrives at a realisation that he will have to acknowledge mistakes made or face rejection. He almost gleefully accepts his mistakes in the end. As is the case with Etsuko and Stevens, Ono comes to concede in later life that he has made mistakes and that he should therefore confront these in order to achieve some self-understanding.

Turning now to Hunt’s second theme - the role of the artist - we see that Ono moved in his earlier life from being a painter of decadent night-life (an artist of the floating world) to being a proselytiser painter for the government. He realises too late that what he thought was the right decision has actually caused him to be considered a pariah. The reader sympathises because it is apparent that at the time Ono truly believed that it was the right thing to do and that he would make a difference. His
disillusionment arises from the realisation that he is ordinary, just like other men. It is this predicament that connects Ono with Stevens. The former’s desire to stand out is apparent in his reminiscence on Sugimura (the man whose house Ono has bought):

...a man who aspires to rise above the mediocre, to be something more than ordinary, surely deserves admiration, even if in the end he fails and loses .... If one has failed only where others have not had the courage or will to try, there is a consolation - indeed, a deep satisfaction - to be gained from observation when looking back over one’s life. (134)

(We will see how Ishiguro touches on the same notion in The Remains of the Day, but from a somewhat different perspective.) Ono was not content to be an ordinary painter of daily life; he wanted to be different, to stand out, as he explains in his contemplation at the end: “For their kind do not know what it is to risk everything in the endeavour to rise above the mediocre” (204). Ono goes to some trouble to relate certain events regarding his fellow students, pupils and teachers, but his recollections are more concerned with politics than with art. What is an artist to do in times of war? Is he to remain impartial or is he to take sides for whatever cause he believes in?

Ono describes people like Sasaki (a fellow student in his young days), who chose to be called “the traitor” (143) in order to follow his own ideas, and then teachers like Mori-san who seemed to have kept the best of both worlds - who in other words retained the influences of the West and the East in his own artistic formula, but who chose to continue painting the world of the pleasure districts. Mori-san, Ono remarks, made extensive use of the traditional device of expressing emotion through the textiles which the
woman holds or wears ... But at the same time, his work was full of European influences ... he had, for instance, long abandoned the use of dark outline to define his shapes, preferring instead the Western use of blocks of colour. (141)

This is an indication that there was a tendency towards the West even before the war and that some artists preferred to follow old customs and other artists like Mori-san tried to incorporate new ideas, but stuck to old topics. Ono on the other hand decides to break away from the style his fellow artists employed and explains his decision to his teacher, Mori-san:

"Sensei, it is my belief that in such troubled times as these, artists must learn to value something more tangible than those pleasurable things that disappear with the morning light. It is not necessary that artists always occupy a decadent and enclosed world. My conscience, Sensei, tells me I cannot remain forever an artist of the floating world." (180)

At this stage Ono has already painted his most propagandistic work called "Complacency", with the message, "No time for cowardly talking, Japan must go forward" (169). When he later acknowledges his mistakes, he replies:

I am fully aware ... [that it is] a painting whose sentiments are now outdated. Indeed, I would be the first to admit that those same sentiments are perhaps worthy of condemnation. I am not one of those who
are afraid to admit to the shortcomings of past achievements. (169)

Ono's betrayal of his pupil recalls the warning the priest issued to his parents after his birth: "Masuji's limbs were healthy, he told us, but he had been born with a flaw in his nature. A weak streak that would give him a tendency towards slothfulness and deceit" (45). But, in the end, Ono's act of acceptance of past misjudgements and betrayal is a brave and painful thing to do and suggests that he does at least partially redeem himself.

The two daughters in the novel, Setsuko and Noriko, appear to represent traditional Eastern values and the emergent Western ones respectively. Noriko is the more liberal of the two in her attitude and approach to her father and the wedding negotiations. Setsuko, on the other hand, always speaks to her father in the tone of respect expected of children in the old Japan. However, she is intrigued by the changes taking place. Ono observes at one point after he has heard Ichiro make his own words while he is playing: "My daughter raised a hand to cover her laugh. 'He [Ichiro] must have been playing cowboys. When he plays cowboys, he tries to speak English'" (35). But she is often described as being 'uncomfortable' with Noriko's harsh replies and obvious irritation at Ono. For example:

"I'm relieved you've come at last, Setsuko. You'll take Father off my hands a little."

"Noriko, really ..." Her elder sister shifted uncomfortably on her cushion. (13)

In *A Pale View of Hills* there was the mother and her daughters and in *An Artist of the Floating World* there is the father and his daughters. Again the films of Ozu (which I suggested earlier may have had an influence on Ishiguro's style) spring to mind:
Chaudhuri remarks that in *Autumn Afternoon* an old father and widower lives with one of his daughters and is "imbued with the sense of a war that has been lost, and of a family and a country in mourning and transition" (1995: 30). The above description also fits the father-in-law Ogata in *A Pale View of Hills*. He repeatedly expresses his sense of loss wrought by the changes after the war. Ono, like Ogata and Etsuko, does not verbalise his pain: Ishiguro skilfully suggests his agonies by things unsaid. Stevens does the same in *The Remains of the Day*. Wong aptly summarises this:

...the narrators speak easily and calmly at first, with the difficulties of telling everything veiled by the very eloquence which masks their pain. Rather than actually deflect this pain, however, their efforts to locate and name the source and site of their experiences thrust them into the torment that both challenges and validates their silences. (1995: 144)

Etsuko’s recollections take place in the few days that Niki visits her, and are divided into ten chapters; Ono’s story starts in October 1948 and ends in June 1950, but is grouped under four different months; and we shall see that Stevens’s trip lasts six days. This is the only form of chronology in the novels. The headings are merely indicators of a specific time-span, but each section contains non-linear recollections of events which progressively reveal the true origins of the main characters’ turmoil: Etsuko’s emigration and post-war experiences, and Ono’s pre-war loyalties. This narrative structure is very Japanese in style. The true meaning of the novels lies not in the gradual development of a linear plot but in the emotions created by memories of the past. The essence of the novel is revealed throughout with plot being secondary to feelings as is the case with Tanizaki and Kawabata.\(^6\) The ending of *An
*Artist of the Floating World* is very much like that of *The Remains of the Days*. We observe a pensive Ono on a bench watching young men coming out of their offices. However, unlike *An Artist of the Floating World*, there is a positive mood in the ending. Words like “laughter”, “sunshine” and “cheerful” are used to prescribe what Ono sees and feels. He concludes:

> things have recovered so rapidly over these years, [it] fills me with genuine gladness. Our nation, it seems, whatever mistakes it may have made in the past, has now another chance to make a better go of things.

One can only wish these young people well. (206)

Ono has managed to work successfully through his turmoil to reach an almost tranquil tone of acceptance, an acceptance of the fact that he had tried to be different, to follow his own beliefs, but also an acceptance of the things he cannot change, like the political environment he finds himself in and the penetration of Western influences. In the end, he is brave enough to acknowledge his misjudgements of the past.

**The Remains of the Day**

What happened with my first three books is that I was actually trying to refine what I did over and over again and with *The Remains of the Day* I feel I came to the end of that process.

(Ishiguro & Mason 1994: 150)
In the third novel, Ishiguro introduces the reader to Stevens, an elderly butler currently in the employ of an American, Mr Farraday. The novel has two story lines in two different time frames, but in the end we see that they are closely related. Stevens was in Lord Darlington’s service during and just after the Second World War. Mr Farraday is the current owner of Darlington Hall. It is apparent that the glorious days of the past are forever gone: only four servants remain of the twenty-eight previously employed and areas in the mansion are dust-sheeted. Stevens is of the opinion that an extra member of staff is needed and he puts his suggestion to Mr Farraday who sends him on vacation in the old Ford. The purpose of the holiday is dual in that Stevens hopes to convince a previous employee, Mrs Benn, to return to Darlington Hall and Mr Farraday is of the opinion that Stevens should in the process spend some time enjoying “this beautiful country of yours” (Ishiguro 1989: 4).

The novel stretches over a period of six days and revolves around this journey to the West country to visit Mrs Benn. Mrs Benn (or Miss Kenton, as Stevens calls her) was the housekeeper on the estate. It is during this journey that the second story line unfolds and the reader discovers a Darlington Hall of glamour in the midst of various political events.

Stevens’s vacation, if one can call it such, takes place under the pretext that he is going to ask Mrs Benn to be re-employed to work for Mr Farraday, but as the novel unfolds we learn that Stevens was actually infatuated with Miss Kenton. Up to this point he has denied it, however, but now wishes to be together with her again and naively (or sub-consciously) hopes that a reunion will resolve missed opportunities or wrong impressions from the past and that by returning she will somehow redeem the past. What these situations or events were is slowly revealed in the course of the journey. In the process, Stevens’s self-deception is also exposed. His obsession with
dignity, duty and devotion emerges; however, his current situation shows that his previous convictions were of no significance and that his life has actually been wasted.

The journey thus becomes one of self-discovery, a process activated by various events: the breaking down of the car, Stevens's stay in the guest house, the servant of the army officer he meets and, finally, his encounter with Mrs Benn. At the end his dilemma is ultimately revealed in his conversations with another butler he encounters on the pier at Weymouth. He eventually returns home to Darlington Hall, determined to change, but, sadly, we discover that this will merely take the form of once again pleasing his new employer - this time in the art of bantering.

In various interviews (with Mason, Vorda and Herzinger, and Appleyard) Ishiguro has indicated that the similarities in the themes of the first three novels are multiple, and this provides the focus for my discussion. In the epigraph to this chapter Ishiguro remarks that *The Remains of the Day* is the final product of what he originally set out to accomplish in the first novel and what was then developed and refined in the second novel. The elements of recollection, disillusionment and self-analysis of the main characters are notable in all three books. In his blind following of Lord Darlington Stevens is like Ono, "who misjudged his loyalties in pre-war Japan, and who finds that history will not forgive him" (Thwaite 1990: 159). Although *The Remains of the Day* is set in Britain, the basic issues remain the same; indeed, they receive a more extended treatment.

As with the first two novels, historical events play an important role in the background of *The Remains of the Day*. We learn that Lord Darlington hosted various under-cover meetings between politicians and was motivated in this mainly by
his sympathies with Germany. In the process he is undermined by Von Ribbentrop, and fails to notice the underlying intent of the Nazis - namely, to get a strong foothold in Britain to further their war effort. We can see that, again, memories are cast against the events of World War II, but history is not the focal point. As Wong argues, the narrators in all three novels do “not undertake a ‘revision’ in the usual sense of simply re-seeing the events again. Rather, the first person narrators reposition themselves in the new contexts and assess their own roles in contributing to both private and historical events” (1995: 131). Wong goes on to explain that the process therefore indicates two “inversions” - namely, those “between private and public and the other between narrative past and future” (131).

What Wall terms “unreliable narration” is present in Ishiguro’s first three novels (18). The main characters in the novels all experience a stream of recollections, sometimes brought on by events in the present. They try to justify their behaviour or decisions by merely presenting the reader with a series of memories without actually relating their anguish. The information is presented in such a way that an initial questioning of values is absent, but gradually the reader becomes aware of the fact that half-truths are being conveyed. In Herzinger’s words,

*The Remains of the Day* and *An Artist of the Floating World* both seem to be about men who have an extraordinary capacity to lie to themselves, while at the same time presenting themselves as very precise and cautious truthtellers.

(Vorda & Herzinger 1991: 150)

Wall gives examples of this in *The Remains of the Day* and explains that we come to the realisation that the central character is unreliable “through our perception of a
conflict between the scenes he [Stevens] narrates and the interpretations that he gives to those scenes" (25). This again recalls Wong's comment on the inability of the main characters to say what they feel and she quotes Maurice Blanchot's phrase "torment of language" (Wong 1995: 127) and his notion of "the primacy of an individual's consciousness ... to cover up by revealing" (129). In other words, we find Stevens recalling certain events from the past like his father's death and Miss Kenton's engagement, incidents to which ordinary people would have reacted with some form of emotion and which he merely interprets as being in the line of duty. He systematically works through these memories and gives an explanation for his reaction to each. He desperately wants to justify his behaviour by explaining that he had to maintain his dignity. Someone in his position, he implies, was never allowed to break down and betray his master's idea of dignity, which he himself has so readily accepted for the truth. These recollections are stated as mere events, but the reader suspects the deeper meaning of what Stevens is trying to work through. Stevens's attitude is a consequence of what he perceives dignity, loyalty and truth to be. His torment comes about when he realises that these values are not enough to provide the basis for a meaningful life. There is always the feeling in Ishiguro's novels that the narrators want to get away from the true implications of their memories, but the recollections are returning involuntarily despite their attempts to suppress them. In Wong's words, "they remember in order to forget; they reconstruct the past in an effort to obliterate it" (1995: 128).

During Stevens's physical journey he also journeys into the past and tries to distinguish between what Patey terms the "essential and the trimmings" of his life (1991: 144). His misfortune is that he is never able ultimately to discern and act upon such a distinction. For example, he reflects repeatedly on what makes someone a
great butler, and Patey remarks that the “truth is therefore constantly evoked, mentioned, looked for, alluded to and somehow never obtained, it invades the text as a constant though unattained and undefined object” (144-145). Stevens goes into elaborate detail to explain his views, but skims over important emotional events like the death of his father, Miss Kenton’s engagement, the discontinuation of the Jewish servants’ employment and political events that took place at Darlington Hall. There are numerous examples of Stevens’s blind acceptance of what a servant in his position is expected to be. One occurs when he reminisces about the visit Miss Kenton pays to his quarters and tries to see what book he is reading:

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)

(Ironically enough, this is exactly what Stevens ends up being: alone and lonely.) The presentation of the above incident in Jhabvala’s screenplay of *The Remains of the Day* and that of the scene where Miss Kenton brings Stevens flowers in his quarters invites some commentary. Although Kauffmann criticises the film for inserting scenes that were not in the novel, this particular moment in the book is masterfully rendered in the film: it skilfully reveals the tender moment where Miss Kenton tries to take the book from Stevens to see what he is reading and the palpable second where he almost breaks through his facade to touch her. In the novel he merely remarks that in
he realised that in this encounter they are on “an inappropriate footing” (169). In the film Stevens’s ‘unburdened’ self is masterfully revealed and his vulnerability exposed. This is an extremely sensitive moment in the novel and the director of the film, James Ivory, clearly sensed its importance. Stevens tries desperately to regain his habitual composure: “I must ask you to respect my privacy” (166). Miss Kenton disregards this request and actually invades not only Stevens’s private room, but his physical and psychic space. Despite himself, he is forced to acknowledge the effect her intrusion has on his psyche:

Then she was standing before me, and suddenly the atmosphere underwent a peculiar change - almost as though the two of us had been suddenly thrust on some other plane of being altogether .... All I can say is that everything around us suddenly became very still. (167)

When she gently takes the book from his hands Stevens is so aware of her presence that he “twist[s his] head away at a somewhat unnatural angle” (167). The intensity of the moment is brilliantly captured by Anthony Hopkins’s superb acting in the film. This is exactly what Stevens becomes to the reader for a moment - ‘unnatural’ in relation to the dignified and controlled butler of Lord Darlington that he understands himself to be. What Stevens does not realise is that dignity “becomes a condition from which one cannot escape” (Strawson 1990: 160). For a moment emotion breaks through the controlled facade of the sober butler, and this is a threat to Stevens’s dignity.

It is during his meeting with Mrs Benn at the end of the novel that he comes to acknowledge the affect that his idea of dignity (adopted largely to please Lord
Darlington) has had on his life. His master’s failures foreshadow his own. He now realises that he should have listened to Miss Kenton years ago when she remarked: “Why, Mr Stevens, why, why, why do you always have to pretend?” (154). This is why at the end of the novel there is such painful self-realisation:

“You see, I trusted. I trusted in his lordship’s wisdom. 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)

This is the closest Stevens will get to acknowledging his misconceptions, yet he is still lying to himself. He indeed made his own mistakes, like putting his concept of dignity and loyalty ahead of his responsibility to his father, not reacting positively to Miss Kenton’s friendliness and keeping quiet when he should have spoken out in favour of the Jewish servants. Wong remarks: “…to the very end he maintains the onerous lie of his lordship’s indirect encouragement of genocide” (1995: 144). Nobody forced him to feel and act the way he did.

Stevens comes to realise that his main error was lack of judgement. He served Lord Darlington almost blindly, and, unfortunately, it appears that he will do the same with his new American employer. Griffiths argues that “Ishiguro shows, in the limitations of this renewal, that the old dynamics of power continue, with new inflections” (1993: 494). He will now try to learn the art of bantering; he will follow a new master according to what he perceives this person’s rules to be. Stevens therefore would appear to have no values of his own; he lives according to the class and values of the person who employs him. He also has a snobbish misconception that in doing so he belongs to a select class, that of the English butler:
It is sometime said that butlers only truly exist in England .... I tend to believe this is true. Continentals are unable to be butlers because they are a breed incapable of the emotional restraint which only the English race are capable of .... they are like a man who will, at the slightest provocation, tear off his suit and his shirt and run about screaming. In a word, "dignity" is beyond such persons. We English have an important advantage over foreigners in this respect and it is for this reason that when you think of a great butler, he is bound, almost by definition, to be an Englishman. (43)

It is ironic that a local, Mr Harry Smith, remarks to Stevens in Devon: “there’s no dignity to be had in being a slave” (186). Someone from the same class as Stevens is unconsciously issuing a warning to him. Smith is under the illusion that Stevens is also a gentleman, but with different values. His remark refers to a local gentleman, a Mr Lindsey, who was well-disposed towards the Germans during the war. Lindsey is seen as having been a slave to the German’s ideology; by implication, Stevens was a slave to Lord Darlington’s values.

This leads us to a central question in the novel: why choose a butler as the main character? In the first two novels we have Etsuko, a female narrator who is a violin player, and Ono, a painter. Wong is of the opinion that it is neither the sex nor the occupation of the character that is of importance, but the degree to which they represent other individuals who experience the same turmoil (1995: 144). I agree that Ishiguro is more concerned with the individual’s realisation that his life might have
been a mistake than with a particular sex or class of person. Patey, on the other hand, sees the casting of a butler as the main character as one of the eighteenth-century features in the novel. According to her the use of a butler as a main character creates grounds for mistaken identity. This certainly ties in with the setting: beneath the calm exterior of the typical English servant lies the hidden emotions the guests do not see. Indeed, Stevens plays this part to perfection. He becomes so good at it that he forgets (or appears to forget) his own feelings and desires. It is not that he is an unintelligent man, but he becomes so involved in the ideal of his vocation (devotion to duty) that he effaces his own emotional life.

Wong remarks that in their effort to "reconstruct the past" Etsuko, Ono and Stevens also show their "reluctance to either fully remember or reveal" the truth (1995: 129). In the interview with Vorda and Herzinger Ishiguro explains that the difference between Etsuko and Ono, on the one hand, and Stevens, on the other, lies in the desire of the first two to be more than ordinary people and to contribute to something greater, whereas Stevens believes that he can only achieve this by serving someone great, and not through himself (Vorda & Herzinger 1991: 152). In Stevens's own words:

A 'great' butler can only be, surely, one who can point to his years of service and say that he has applied his talents to serving a great gentleman - and through the latter, to serving humanity. (117)

In the same interview, Ishiguro explains that The Remains of the Day is not a novel about the great England of the past. (In fact, he claims that this mythical, serene England never existed.) Indeed, Griffiths is of the opinion that "the impulse to return fictionally to the country house ... arises from sources other than a simple nostalgia
for the past and more from what could be seen as a desire to locate an individual's sense of dislocation" (1993: 489). Setting this novel on a great estate and mansion is functional in that the latter represents certain codes of values from a bygone age. The Victorian or Edwardian era becomes, in this novel, what imperialism and the old Japan was in *An Artist of the Floating World*: representative of old codes of honour. With *The Remains of the Day*, Ishiguro is moving away from realism and into what he himself called "not out-and-out fantasy", but "a slightly more fabulous world" (Vorda & Herzinger 1991: 138). He is concerned with the myth of the grand days of the past, with their large estates with beautiful houses, impressive lords and ladies, wealth and devoted servants. Ishiguro explains Stevens's character according to this:

He thinks beauty and greatness lie in being able to be this kind of cold, frozen, butler who isn't demonstrative and who hides emotions in much the way he's saying that the British landscape does with its surface calm: the ability to actually keep down turmoil and emotion. He thinks this is what gives both butlers and the British landscape beauty and dignity. (Vorda & Herzinger 1991: 141-142)

This clarifies earlier statements about the understated style Ishiguro employs, which represents both the British 'stiff upper lip' attitude and Japanese stoicism. Aesthetics is quite restrained and understated in both cultures. Stevens's suppression of emotion relates to the hidden emotions under the calm exterior of the characters in the previous two novels.

Significantly, Stevens's recollections and self-investigation start the moment he leaves Darlington Hall. It is as if he needs to be physically distanced from his...
surroundings to gain insight. The six-day journey then becomes more than just a holiday. It becomes what Griffiths calls a six-day "confidential internal monologue" (1993: 491). It is only when he leaves the familiar environment of the Hall that he places himself under closer inspection. The scene in which Stevens runs out of fuel in Devon at the end of day three is ominous in that it anticipates the self-realisation that occurs on the pier at the end of the novel. He remarks that "it was not a happy feeling to be up there on the lonely hill" (162) seeing the "lights coming on" and "the daylight all but faded" (162). In the next paragraph he reflects on the "remaining minutes of daylight" (162) and uses a bicycle lamp to go "in search of a path .... but no such path offered itself" (162). The end of the day is suggestive of the end of Stevens's life, or what 'remains' of it. And his physical descent from the road to the village suggests a descent from illusion to the reality of his situation, the shattering of inflated ideas about himself. He searches for direction, but no direction is found and he finally decides "to return as far as the gate .... regardless of whether or not there was a proper path" (162). This is exactly what Stevens does in the end: he decides to participate in Farraday's 'bantering' to ensure his survival in his dislocated world. Like the physical path he tries to search out here, the spiritual path he later pursues will also be dim and ill-defined.

Away from Darlington Hall, Stevens's 'identity' is more liable to be found out, and this is precisely what occurs with the batman whom he meets in the country when the car overheats. The batman is currently the chauffeur of an old army colonel, the owner of the house Stevens goes to for help. At home in Darlington Hall he can be the proper head butler, with the manners he learned from his master, but outside his domain someone is bound to discover that his manners are adopted. After some period of evident bemusement the batman finally remarks:
“Now I got it. I couldn’t make you out for a while, but now I got it. You’re one of them top-notch butlers. From one of them big posh houses.” (119)

He then adds:

“I thoughts at first, here’s a really posh geezer. And so you are, guv. Really posh, I mean. I never learnt any of that myself, you see. I’m just a plain old batman gone civvy.” (119)

Ironically, Stevens denies knowing Lord Darlington when questioned by the batman about him. When he finds himself in a situation in which he is called upon to protect his master, he denies knowing him and only admits that he is working for Mr Farraday. This a very revealing failing: he cannot even stand up for the man he followed blindly for so many years. The reader can only echo Stevens’s own question, “what dignity is there in that?” (243). At this point the batman tells Stevens to visit the local pond called ‘Mortimer’s Pond’ (120). The pond, significantly, is symbolic of betrayal and is, incidentally, the title of the chapter, namely “Day Two - Afternoon, Mortimer’s Pond Dorset’. Roger Mortimer, “a great Marsher lord” (Fraser 1975: 73) was after all the man who betrayed Edward II (1307-1327) and instigated Queen Isabella’s revolt against her own husband. In the same way Stevens now betrays Lord Darlington. And by betraying his master, the servant or ronin (Mason 1989: 49) betrays the code of honour and himself. According to Wong, it is this sense of “shame” and “pain” which is concealed under the apparently uneventful recollections and “eloquent” language of the narrators of the first three novels which
“thrust them [the narrators] into the torment that both challenges and validates their silence” (1995: 144).

In Salman Rushdie’s words, “the real story here is that of a man destroyed by the idea upon which he has built his life” (1990: 161). Stevens wants to be a remarkable butler, who is seen as someone great. Like Ono he wanted to live a life which is not ordinary, but he sadly acknowledges what a failure his life has been. The realisation is finally brought about by Mrs Benn’s refusal to return to Darlington Hall and we see Stevens breaking down in front of a complete stranger on the pier at Weymouth. What makes the novel so moving in this final scene is the fact that Stevens is aware that his life has been wasted and he now faces only the few, empty remaining years. The awareness has dawned on Stevens, as was the case with Ono, that he did not have the insight to know that that which he believed in would turn out to be fruitless.
Notes.

1. Shingo is an old man who hears the rumble of the nearby mountain and sees in this a premonition of his approaching death: “Shingo felt autumn come over him” (Kawabata 1970: 52). Connected with the muffled rumbling are the hidden emotions he experiences towards his family, especially his daughter-in-law. Nothing ever gets said straight out, as is suggested in this remark: “And the blank left by his failure to speak of so small a thing as the falling chestnut probably stayed on in their marriage” (60). He sees everything in his past as a disappointment and his disillusionment resembles that of Ishiguro's characters: “Had it become a question not of vigor but of decay?” (Kawabata 1970: 137).

2. There is not much detail given on these two characters. They both belong to the past. Mrs Fujiwara in *A Pale View of Hills* is Ogata’s contemporary. She runs a noodle shop and employs Sachiko on Etsuko’s request. Mrs Kawakami is the owner of the bar where Ono and his fellow artists and students go regularly. In the end her bar is demolished and a modern building built in its place. These two characters do not say much, but they are silent observers and good listeners with their own longing for the past as Mrs Kawakami remarks to Ono in October 1948, “you find all the old people again and tell them to come back” and “that way we could start rebuilding the old days” (76).

3. The similarity in the names used by Kawabata and Ishiguro is striking. There is Ogata Shingo in *The Sound of the Mountain* and Ogata in *A Pale View of Hills*. Both contemplate the past and time wasted by wrong
decisions. There is no evidence, however, that these similarities are part of a conscious piece of intertextuality.

4. It is of interest to recall Ishiguro's anecdote of how the *Lone Ranger* was the only familiar thing he found when his family emigrated to England (Sinclair 1991).

5. Minamoto no Yoshitsune (1159-1189) was a military leader who lived during the Kamakuro period. He was a great warrior who was forced to commit suicide (Iwao 1992: 121-122).

6. By contrast, other native writers in English (and contemporaries of Ishiguro) like Graham Swift (*Last Orders*) and Roddy Doyle (*Paddy Clarke ha ha ha*) also recollect past events but these recollections are chronological with some form of revelation at the end.

7. How deliberate this reference might be is not entirely clear, but the fact that Stevens ponders his betrayal while sitting at the pond might suggest the connection, particularly because he recalls a previous incident of denying his employment during Lord Darlington’s ownership. This happened a few months earlier when a visitor to the mansion, a Mrs Wakefield, asked him if he had worked for Darlington during the war and he replied: “I didn’t, madam, no” (123). Mr Farraday later confronts Stevens about this: “Those people have now got me down for a braggart and a liar” (124). And Stevens lies again in his explanation: “I’m very sorry, sir. But it is to do with the ways of this
country" (125). By doing this he creates the impression that all Englishmen are mendacious.

8. The ending of the Merchant-Ivory film is completely different from the novel's ending, in that in the former Stevens sits on the pier with Mrs Benn. The finality of losing her and the opportunity to rectify some mistakes of the past are suggested in the pulling-away of the bus on which she departs. The touching of their hands is very moving, but the ending is sadly sentimentalised and undermines the true significance of the novel in that it emphasises only the lost romance between Stevens and Miss Kenton and not the self-insight Stevens achieves.
The significance of this novel to the concerns of this dissertation lies in the extent to which it is a departure from the previous three novels in content, style, and technique - not to mention sheer volume! As with the first three novels, isolation and dislocation are present as themes; however, here they are not presented in a realistic form.

Mr Ryder, a pianist, arrives in an unnamed town to give a performance and checks into a local hotel. The moment he enters the hotel things change drastically. In quick succession various other characters are introduced who in the course of the novel all ask a favour of Ryder. There is Gustav the porter who later turns out to be Sophie's father. Sophie, we learn, is in turn the mother of Boris, Ryder's son. We meet Hoffman the hotel manager and his son Stephan. It becomes clear that Ryder's performance is awaited with great expectation and will herald a new beginning for the town. Hoffman is organising the event and for all involved the recital will provide an opportunity to prove themselves to some degree. For Stephan, it could be an opportunity to show his parents how he has mastered the piano and Brodsky (also
once a famous pianist) could stop drinking and prove himself worthy to his former lover, Miss Collins.

Events do not follow chronologically, but instead jump back and forth between the present and past, with absurd interruptions breaking the narrative. Ryder might travel on buses and trams and in cars, but as soon as he starts walking around in a building, he finds that he is just in a different part of the same hotel. Time is achronologically arranged: at the end of a day Ryder often finds himself at the beginning of the same day. The reader is as confused as Ryder is and receives more confusing information with every discovery he makes.

Remarkably thicker in content and obviously different in style, this novel does not emotionally do for the reader what any of the previous novels did. Initial curiosity on the reader's part soon gives way to a feeling of boredom and a never-ending nightmare of being trapped in a labyrinth (as the cover illustration suggests). It would appear, then, that Ishiguro has managed to write the 'global novel' he previously mentioned. Set in an unnamed international city with some characters with German names and others from his youth in England (appearing out of the blue), this novel becomes a marsh of events leading nowhere. Nothing is specifically named and only superficial references to the Old Town, the North and South Roads, the kidney-shaped lake, etc. exist. In Chaudhuri's words,

...it is a strangely ahistorical book, and in spite of the social decorum that both the prose and the characters obsessively attempt to maintain, it is a novel without any discernible cultural, social or historical determinants (surely fatal to any novel).

(1995: 30)
One gets the uncomfortable feeling that with *The Unconsoled* Ishiguro deliberately set out to answer his critics: with this novel he could no longer be labelled as a writer with a Japanese style, or as a historical writer or one with an "understated or clipped style" (Vorda & Herzinger 1991: 142). The elegant prose of the previous novels is absent, and at no particular point does one feel touched by any sublimity. And one cannot but agree with James Wood that the novel is "seasick dreaming" (1996: 5). The hotel in which Mr Ryder stays becomes in fact very much like the Kafkaesque castle, "a place to get lost in" (Chaudhuri 1995: 30). The characters of Ryder, the porter and Hoffman are effigies of Kafka's doorman. Chaudhuri writes: "But Kafka's doorman also represents the face of European bureaucracy, part stunningly ordinary, part terrifying, part human; we're not sure what the strange behaviour of Ishiguro's porter represents" (30).

Expectation is the most outstanding emotion created in the novel. One supposes that it is there to build tension, but with all that happens in between, the feeling of anticipation is never really rewarded. As in the previous novels there is no linear plot, but here the underlying emotions of the memories are thinly strung together in comparison to the previous three novels.

The setting is sterile: there are no 'hills' or 'paintings' or beautiful 'west country'. If Ishiguro intended to create a cold and barren setting, he succeeded. Even the attempts at more colourful surroundings like the hotel, the party for Brodsky and the walks in the fields do not manage to create atmosphere. There is no hint of Kawabata's emotionally laden sparseness here. The only thing that recalls anything Japanese in style is the eagerness to address people correctly and properly and Ryder's reference to "Father and Mother" in the honoured way that the Japanese use.
The impersonal and cold setting creates an atmosphere usually encountered in science fiction. This is strangely noticeable where Ryder and Boris try to find their apartment and get lost. However, fantasy and reality mingle un成功地. In this, Ishiguro appears unsuccessfully to imitate a writer like Kafka who manages to maintain a sense of reality even when something fantastical is described. Chaudhuri alludes to Kafka's description of a human being turning into an insect where precisely this is achieved: the "dome-like brown belly divided into stiff arched segments on top of which the bed-quilt could hardly keep in position" (1995: 31). Not a single scene filled with detail like this is present in Ishiguro's novel. Chaudhuri mentions that cars, trams, fountains, restaurants and so forth are the only general things that enter the "dreamscape" Ishiguro has invented (31). When we look at the stories of Ingmar Bergman, whose style is also Kafkaesque, there are many examples of fantasy with specific detail. The following are extracts from his *The Hour of the Wolf*:

Johan turns around. The baron has walked up the wall to the ceiling and is standing like a fly, head downward, apparently without the slightest inconvenience. He takes a few steps but stops at the crystal chandelier, fingering its lusters, which tinkle faintly. (1976: 123)

Or:

Then I catch sight of him again. He is standing in the middle of the glade. His white shirt and light-colored pants are stained and torn. He stands with his head bent and arms hanging. A large human-looking bird like a pheasant goes up and pecks at his neck. A
black stream of blood wells up; he lifts his broken hands to staunch the flow but lets them fall. (127)

Bergman never wrote a script for his films, but wrote short stories instead, which he then gave to the actors to improvise as they felt appropriate. Perhaps this is where *The Unconsoled* takes on greater significance. Ishiguro’s interest in cinema prompts the thought that possibly the camera could do more for the novel than a straightforward reading of it allows. He certainly uses devices that would come into their own with careful and artistic photography and sound - for example, the use of music will create more of an atmosphere. (We do not get to ‘hear’ Ryder play, until the last chapter of the book; in fact, his performance is delayed so many times that the reader starts wondering if he is able to play at all. He certainly shows little interest when Hoffman’s son Stephan plays.)

The joviality around the food table at the end of the novel, is presumably evidence of Ryder’s feeling of achievement. The point is that he has actually achieved nothing. Kafka on the other hand uses “the parody of food as a social code” (Chaudhuri 1995: 31) when describing Gregor’s preferences as a man who turns into an insect.

Ishiguro maintains the same themes he introduced in the first three novels. Sadly, however, the themes are now over-exposed and the style and dialogue of *The Unconsoled* does not match the poetic diction of *The Remains of the Day* or the previous two novels. Ishiguro should have left it at that. Chaudhuri explains: “...the themes of guilt and fear of humiliation persist, as do the means of negotiating them: excessive, insincere flattery, elisions, voluntary or involuntary amnesia” (30). Examples of annoying amnesia are Ryder’s not remembering that Boris is his child or
that the porter is Sophie's father. Furthermore, there are the memories of a childhood in England (prompted by a rug) popping up unexpectedly right in the beginning of the novel:

...the sense of recognition growing stronger by the second. The room I was now in, I realised, was the very room that had served as my bedroom during the two years my parents and I had lived at my aunt’s house on the borders of England and Wales. (16)

The aspect of politeness is ever-present. Ryder acts like Stevens, always aware of his obligations to help other people - often at the cost of more important duties. He simply cannot say ‘no’. This politeness is almost self-destructive and is taken to the point where the reader experiences great frustration. The requests for Ryder's help or intervention are always pressing, but without exception they turn out to be absurdly trivial. Even the other characters like Miss Collins, Brodsky and the very irritating Hoffman seem to have made this their most outstanding characteristic. Hoffman, especially, is a master flatterer and to a lesser degree the other characters follow suit. Needless to say, Ryder thrives on it, but never without a certain amount of guilt. But there is also no doubt as to the underlying intentions when often something cordial is said and it implies the opposite. As Ryder states: "Ishiguro, perhaps because he is (like Pinter, in his way) a foreigner to the rites of the English middle class, has a wicked way with nuances, seeing the menace in 'You will come won't you' and hearing how 'Very understandable' can often mean 'Absolutely unforgivable’" (Ryder 1995: 22). He continues:

The book is in large part about assumptions and presumptions, about being put out and put upon -
and about putting on a face of obliging acquiescence.

(22)

Iyer (who interviewed Ishiguro just after he was awarded the Booker Prize for *The Remains of the Day*) remarks that Ishiguro "has written a book that passes on the bewilderment it seeks to portray" and "everything is so without context that one does not know whether to laugh or to weep" (1995: 22). However, Iyer is more positive about *The Unconsoled* than Chaudhuri. He argues that the book is indeed something strange and new and of value when the previous novels have not been read and the themes not yet known. There is a certain amount of dignity present in Ryder and rare moments when true emotions or thoughts break through his facade. Ryder, like Stevens, is a victim of his desire to please someone else instead of living his life according to his own needs and desires. At the end of the novel, Iyer concludes, he is "forced to acknowledge that, in his very readiness to be manipulated, [Ryder] had cheated himself out of a life" (1995: 22). Ryder suffers from an inability to remember and be on time. Sophie reprimands him when again he fails to keep a promise to Boris:

"Leave us. You were always on the outside of our love. Now look at you. On the outside of our grief too. Leave us. Go away" (532).

and later: "I realised I was sobbing" (532). Ryder is aware that these two very important people are prepared to continue without him - however momentous the revealing of emotions - but this realisation of loss does not last for long, because he still believes that he makes a difference to many people's lives:

Things had not, after all, gone so badly. Whatever disappointments this city had brought, there was no
doubting that my presence had been greatly
appreciated - just as it had been everywhere else I
had ever gone. (534)

Ryder's realisation of loss has no importance, because his arrogant view of his
importance persists.

As in the previous novels, obsession with the past pervades the text: Ryder's
childhood in England, his parents and family, the people he knew before like Geoffrey
Saunders (an old school acquaintance) and others, all surface at the strangest
moments. Iyer sees the novel as "an abstract Alice" with unexpected events and
situations arising at the most unsuitable moments and he sees this as "nightmarishly
funny" (22). An example Iyer cites is when Ryder and Sophie go to the cinema and
Brodsky talks about his dead dog at the function held to restore Brodsky's previous
honour. Iyer's comments notwithstanding, there are no humorous moments to relieve
the drabness of events; equally, there are no moments of great agony or pain as was
the case in the previous novels. It is as if every nuance has been flattened out and as
if all the characters speak without inflection and emotion. This, despite the frequent
mention of tears being cried and of laughter and mirth.

Finally, Iyer is of the opinion that "The Unconsoled is a humane and grieving
book, as well as one of the strangest novels in memory" (22) whilst Chaudhuri claims:

The novel is a failure, and that itself is a brave and
old-world thing to be in a time when the idea of
artistic success and failure no longer really applies ...
it is a failure, and failure usually implies the presence
of artistic vision and talent. (31)
The novel fits into the concerns of this dissertation because similar themes are present; at the same time, however, the difference in style allows for consideration of the contrast between this novel and its predecessors. The struggle to gain and maintain dignity is present, but in Appleyard's opinion “the act of retrieval of Ogata, Ono and Stevens has finally been acknowledged as a failure, and chaos intervenes” (1995: 29).³
Notes.

1. The cover illustration was done by Andrzej Klimowski, and depicts the trunk of a faceless man, clad in a jacket and tie. In front of this man is a gallery of people who look like persons from history, behind a brick maize in red with a green foundation. The entire background of the cover is black.

2. In the interview with Christopher Bigsby, Ishiguro says: “I do have a great urge to write a global novel, a novel that addresses things at the widest level, that is not in any sense parochial .... I am working myself up to writing an epic, global novel” (Ishiguro & Bigsby 1990: 29).

3. Appleyard is of the opinion that the novel represents Ishiguro’s own struggle for order during his last visit to Japan in 1989. He relates Ishiguro’s attempt to retrace his route from nursery school to his house (which had changed), but he was side-tracked so many times by the people accompanying him that the desire to recall memories was unsuccessful. In Appleyard’s words, “as he [Ishiguro] tells the story it begins to sound exactly like a scene from The Unconsoled” (1995: 29).
CONCLUSION: ISHIGURO AS A NEW INTERNATIONALIST

Thus far this study has explored the works of Kazuo Ishiguro, beginning with 'situating' him as a writer, then moving on to looking at influences on his work and at his distinctive style and technique, before subjecting his novels to a close comparative analysis. I wish to conclude by drawing together key elements in the discussion of previous chapters and then considering briefly Ishiguro's position as a "new internationalist".

It was argued that Ishiguro's novels (particularly the first three) share common concerns - concerns that develop as his oeuvre unfolds. The novels are all centrally concerned with the idea of what it is for human subjects to remember, to recollect, to impose certain constructions on events of the past. Hence the main protagonists of A Pale View of Hills, An Artist of the Floating World, and The Remains of the Day all dwell insistently on the past and, through placing certain interpretations on crucial events, seek to redeem themselves - at least partially - from a past that threatens to convict them.
For Etsuko in *A Pale View of Hills*, the past threatens to convict her of culpable neglect, of disregarding her daughter Keiko’s debilitating sense of cultural and psychic dislocation. She promised to return to Japan (we learn this through her guiltily displaced recollections of Sachiko) should Keiko have wished to do so. She does not keep this promise, and has to live with the continual reminder of this breach of faith in Keiko’s tragic death. For her, we come to realise at the novel’s conclusion, there can be no unequivocal redemption from the mistakes of the past.

Ishiguro returns to the theme of memory - of interpretation, or re-interpretation, of the past - in *An Artist of the Floating World* by revealing the troubled consciousness of the artist Ono, and his attempts to make peace with the past. Where Etsuko’s crisis is an intensely personal one (albeit one in which the historical background of post-war Japan looms banefully behind her), Ono’s crisis is more directly implicated in the politics of war-time Japan. His decision to forgo artistic freedom for the sake of a larger political cause (Japan’s imperialistic ambitions) comes back to haunt him. Again, it is the children - the next generation - that will not allow their forebears to forget: in the negotiations for Noriko’s marriage, Ono finds himself subtly called to account for mistakes of the past. After initial attempts to place more pleasing - and evasive - constructions on past events, he comes to confront his errors and his honesty allows him partial redemption. As we saw, however, he is not able ultimately to be completely honest, and his release from the past will therefore never be an entirely unqualified one.

In *The Remains of the Day* - deservedly regarded as Ishiguro’s major work to date - we once again encounter a protagonist with a troubled past. Again, although historical events provide an illustrative background against which the events of the novel are set, Ishiguro seems to be insistent that Stevens’s failings are intensely
personal ones. Other people in similar situations may have responded entirely differently to the key events of their lives - to the prospect of engaging in fulfilling love relationships, to the death of their father, to the unacceptable actions of their master. Stevens acted as he did with full personal volition, and must now bear the consequences. Again, his confession - like those of his predecessors - is not an unequivocal one, and his redemption will likewise never be complete.

The common threads in the first three novels - a Second World War background, the insistent, tortured dwelling on the past, a crisis-point being reached in the lives of the protagonists - have all been discussed in earlier chapters. I wish now to consider another area of commonality: the use of a first-person narrator in all three novels.

Clearly, the deployment of a first-person narrator in novels that deal with painful personal recollections of the past is a device crucial to the success of such works. This device allows us intimate access to the innermost, darkest secrets of the protagonist's life; simultaneously, these broodings on the past are also imbued with an authenticity that only an 'I-narrator' can convey.

Ishiguro is too subtle and intelligent a writer to take his characters at face value, however, and he gives deft signals to the reader that he or she should not do so either. Indeed, the very notion of 'authenticity' is held up - we come to realise - to ironic scrutiny in all of his first three novels. Despite the 'confessions' that he wrings slowly and painfully from his reluctant protagonists, we realise that they will never be entirely honest - that their 'confessions' will never be complete and candid. Etsuko wants to move house in order to efface the past; Ono will cling - in the end - to some sense of his own status, to the "exaggerated respect" his students once had for him;
Stevens, for his part, will learn the art of "banter". All three first-person narrators are ultimately therefore 'unreliable'.

The point of all this, I would argue, is not that Ishiguro is inviting us to condemn Etsuko, Ono and Stevens (they are too finely drawn as characters, too human and vulnerable). Is Ishiguro not perhaps suggesting something about all human beings, about the mendacious and equivocating nature of all human memory? And, indeed, he seems to be saying, is this not necessarily so? We all have to live with past errors, with a myriad inept and unconscionable actions, and we can only continue facing the future if we come to some sort of peace with the past - even if it is only a partial peace, gaining us only a partial redemption.

This, in the end, is what we come away from the first three novels with; a sense of the fragility and vulnerability of the human consciousness - especially, it seems, when it comes to questions of self-esteem, of our understanding of ourselves, of our ability to live with ourselves. Making peace with the past - Ishiguro seems to be implying through his deeply sympathetic portrayal of Etsuko, Ono and Stevens - is never a simple matter. To whom does one confess? To one's daughter, the half-sister of a suicide, itself a constant reminder of one's own failure? To one's peers - fellow artists and butlers - when one sees the slender remains of one's days looming at the end of the pier? Or to oneself - that most shifting and unreliable confessee of all? It is rich testimony to Ishiguro's power as a writer that we ask such fundamental and moving questions in response to his works.

Having 'situated' Ishiguro as a writer and considered his works at some length, I wish to conclude this study by offering some understanding of his global 'situatedness', of his place in world literature in English.
Ever since Salman Rushdie was awarded the Booker Prize for *Midnight's Children* in 1982, a host of new writers have entered the English literary scene, bringing with them a freshness spiced with foreign flavours and first-hand information on hitherto unknown worlds. In the words of Vikram Seth (quoted by Pico Iyer): “The English language has been taken over, or taken to heart, or taken to tongue, by people whose original language it was not” (Iyer 1993: 58). These writers have introduced metropolitan readers to the distinctive cultures from which they originate, and often engage in their fiction with themes of the pain and dislocation of living in a new country ignorant or uninformed about their customs and cultures.

According to Iyer, these writers mainly grew up after the war and represent an international post-war ‘culture’ rather than a distinctive group originating in a ‘colonial’ past. This, he says, enables them to “address an audience as mixed up and eclectic and uprooted as themselves” (1993: 60). He adds:

> The centres of this new frontierless kind of writing are the growing capitals of multicultural life, such as London, Toronto, and to a lesser extent, New York ... these places are witnessing a transformation of the very canon of English literature. (58)

Iyer’s article, entitled (unoriginally) “The Empire Writes Back”, appeared in *Time* in February 1993, and was written in response to the phenomenon of a wave of new, non-British writers winning illustrious literary prizes. Writers like Ishiguro and Rushdie, Iyer remarks, “lie at the centre of the new movement of ‘World Fiction’” (58). Other writers he discusses include Keri Hulme, Ben Okri, Michael Ondaatje, Vikram Seth, Timothy Mo and Hanif Kureishi. These writers Iyer classifies according to the following criteria:
All are writers not of Anglo-Saxon ancestry, born more or less after the war, and choosing to write in English. All are situated at a crossroad from which they can reflect, and reflect on, the new form and Mississippi masalas of our increasingly small, increasingly mobile global village. (60)

It is in the context that Iyer sketches that one has, in the first place, to place the work of Ishiguro, and secondly, to assess it. Why is it, in other words, that Ishiguro has had such an impact on the English literary world, and what is it that he shares with writers like the ones Iyer cites above that makes them so successful as international writers?

Iyer’s answer to such questions is that these writers bring “an outsider’s freshness into the closed and almost airless rooms of English literature” (61). They are all, he says, “rootless souls [who] belong to a common place whose name is dislocation” (61). Ishiguro’s affinities with such an ethos will be examined shortly. For the moment it is worth briefly reflecting on various critical attempts to understand — indeed, to name — the new phenomenon.

Iyer, as we saw, understood these writers as belonging to a ‘new movement of World Fiction’” (58). In their now somewhat canonical work The Empire Writes Back (1989), Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin review critical attempts to find a name for the new international writers of English, starting with Joseph Jones’s non-starter, “terranglia” (1989: 23). This was followed by the term “Commonwealth literature”, which had greater purchase for a while, but had, Ashcroft et al. aver, “geographical and political limitations” (23). In the 1980s terms like “Third World Literature”, “post-colonial literature” and “new literatures in English” followed (23).
Bruce King's term "New Internationalism", which he uses to describe writers like V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Buchi Emecheta, Timothy Mo and Ishiguro, has the advantage of removing the restriction of colonialism. These new writers, King remarks, were born in countries other than Britain and "know the idioms and assumptions of British life, but their past leads them outside the confines of British society for their subject matter and themes" (1991: 194). He adds that "they write about their native lands or the immigrant experience from within the mainstream of British literature", unlike Wole Soyinka, Taban Lo Liyong and Epeli Hau'ofa, who "have remained within the Third World" (193). King's argument is that these writers must not be confused with 'post-colonial' writers, because they hail from across the globe and not only from ex-colonies.

What is it about the works of these writers, however, that makes them so appealing to such a diverse readership? Salman Rushdie is of the opinion that universal changes have contributed to the phenomenon of "new internationalism":

Might it not simply be that a new novel is emerging, a post-colonial novel, a decentred, trans-national, interlingual, cross-cultural novel; and that in this new word order, or disorder, we find a better explanation of the contemporary novel's health? (1996: 2)

Rushdie is concerned to show that, pace the pronouncements of critics for decades, the novel is not dead - that it has been given new, invigorating life by the new generation of international writers in English, and that this indicates that the novel is an obdurate art form, capable of bodying itself forth in almost infinite number of forms.

For our purpose here, however, it is sufficient to remark that the new writers in English - Ishiguro conspicuous among them - have clearly offered the world a
revitalised, regenerated art form. This new novel has, precisely, engaged with the new world (dis)order, has taken a cross-cultural, multi-lingual form, and is, moreover, imbricated with the highly topical themes of social and cultural dislocation.

Ashcroft et al. note the following in this regard:

beyond their historical and cultural differences, place,
displacement, and a pervasive concern with the myths of identity and authenticity are a feature common to all post-colonial literatures in English.

(1989: 9)

We saw in Ishiguro's first three novels precisely these themes being addressed. In A Pale View of Hills and An Artist of the Floating World, the issue of displacement and dislocation is particularly conspicuous: Etsuko (like her acquaintance - alter ego? - Sachiko) emigrates to Britain, where she herself feels alienated, but where her daughter Keiko pays the full price; and Ono is lost in post-war, post-imperial Japan, where the old values like loyalty and subordinating oneself to the ambitions of the nation as a whole are scorned and derided. Less obviously, but no less trenchantly, the theme of dislocation is also present in The Remains of the Day. Stevens has to endure the more subtle, but equally painful, dislocation of being uprooted from his determinate social position as butler in the larger English country-gentry tradition and forced to evaluate his past actions and his 'place in the world'.

So Ishiguro undoubtedly engages with the themes of social change, deracination and dislocation that permeate the works of his fellow "new internationalists".

In the end, however, an author's cultural point of origin will not in itself guarantee widespread acceptance and success. Indeed, too much interpolation of
highly specific cultural details will only serve to discourage readers not familiar with this culture. It is to achieve a critical balance between the familiar and the unfamiliar that is the particular challenge facing the “new international” writer.

Returning finally to Iyer, we note that he succinctly expresses the appeal of Ishiguro’s work, and argues that it lies in the latter’s cultural dualism:

Ishiguro, though not from a former colony, is a paradigm of the polycultural order, never once explicitly examining this new cross-cultural mix but incarnating in his every sentence the effects of his mixed upbringing in England and Japan. (1993: 58)
BIBLIOGRAPHY


