

T.C.
İSTANBUL ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
BATI DİLLERİ VE EDEBİYATLARI ANABİLİM DALI
İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI BİLİM DALI

DOKTORA TEZİ

**WOMEN IN ISHIGURO NOVELS: AGENTS OF
CHANGE AND ACCOMPLICES OF
PATRIARCHAL IDEOLOGY**

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İSTANBUL, 2025

ABSTRACT

WOMEN IN ISHIGURO NOVELS: AGENTS OF CHANGE AND ACCOMPLICES OF PATRIARCHAL IDEOLOGY

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This thesis examines Kazuo Ishiguro's **An Artist of the Floating World** and **The Remains of the Day** through the lens of trauma theory, exploring how the postwar period serves as a critical context for understanding collective and individual psychological scars. The postwar period provides a powerful background for Ishiguro's portrayal of characters struggling with the lingering effects of war and the societal transformations that follow. Using trauma theory, this study searches how memory and identity are shaped by unresolved past traumas and how these traumas are transmitted across generations.

This analysis focuses on the argument of the vital role the women characters Setsuko, Noriko in **An Artist of the Floating World** and Miss Kenton in **The Remains of the Day** play as the redeemers of their societies. Although traditional gender roles and patriarchy impose limitations on characters' paths in their attempts to bring healing and self-discovery, women are portrayed as pivotal agents of change within these fractured societies. This thesis argues that women, despite being involved in patriarchal ideologies, act as mediators of peace and transformation, navigating the delicate balance between the burdens of the past and the demands of changing societies they belong to.

Keywords: women, postwar period, trauma theory, collective memory, patriarchal order, traditional gender roles, self-discovery, healing.

ÖZ

ISHIGURO ROMANLARINDAKİ KADINLAR: DEĞİŞİMİN ELÇİLERİ VE ATAERKİL İDEOLOJİNİN SUÇ ORTAKLARI

GÜLRAH MORAMOLLU

Bu tez, Kazuo Ishiguro'nun **Değişen Dünyada Bir Sanatçı** ve **Günden Geriye Kalanlar** eserlerini travma teorisi açısından inceleyerek, savaş sonrası dönemin kolektif ve bireysel psikolojik izlerini anlamak için nasıl kritik bir bağlam oluşturduğunu keşfetmektedir. Savaş sonrası dönem, Ishiguro'nun savaşın kalıcı etkileri ve sonrasındaki toplumsal dönüşümlerle mücadele eden karakterleri betimlemesi için güçlü bir arka plan sunmaktadır. Bu çalışma travma teorisi kullanarak, geçmişte çözümlenememiş travmaların hafıza ve kimlik üzerindeki şekillendirici etkilerini ve bu travmaların nesiller boyu nasıl aktarıldığını araştırmaktadır.

Bu analiz, **Değişen Dünyada Bir Sanatçı** eserindeki Setsuko ve Noriko ile **Günden Geriye Kalanlar** eserindeki Miss Kenton karakterlerinin toplumlarının kurtarıcıları olarak oynadığı hayati roller üzerine odaklanmaktadır. Geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri ve ataerkil ideoloji, karakterlerin iyileşme ve kendini keşfetme çabalarında yollarına engeller koysa da kadınlar bu parçalanmış toplumlar içinde değişimin önemli aktörleri olarak tasvir edilmektedir. Bu tez, ataerkil ideolojilere dahil olmalarına rağmen, kadınların geçmişin yükleri ile ait oldukları değişen toplumların talepleri arasında hassas bir denge kurarak barış ve dönüşümün aracısı olarak hareket ettiklerini savunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: kadınlar, savaş sonrası dönem, travma teorisi, kolektif travma, ataerkil ideoloji, geleneksel cinsiyet rolleri, kendini keşfetme, iyileşme.

PREFACE

This study delves into the transformative power of women as critics and potential revisionists within the postwar societies portrayed in Kazuo Ishiguro's **An Artist of the Floating World** and **The Remains of the Day**. While the narratives ostensibly revolve around the memories and struggles of the male protagonists, Masuji Ono and Stevens, the true agents of change emerge as the female protagonists: Setsuko, Noriko, and Miss Kenton. Through their critiques of patriarchal and imperialist systems, they embody resilience and the possibility of cultural renewal amidst the ruins of postwar Japan and England.

In **An Artist of the Floating World**, Setsuko and Noriko confront their father, Masuji Ono, with his complicity in Japan's fascist militarism, while simultaneously navigating the new challenges posed by U.S. imperialism. Their steadfastness, informed by their deep connection to cultural traditions such as the art of Ikebana, positions them as both inheritors and reformers of their society. Similarly, in **The Remains of the Day**, Miss Kenton's moral clarity and human empathy challenge Stevens to confront his emotional and ethical failures, revealing the oppressive hierarchies that shaped their lives at Darlington Hall. Despite her own struggles and compromises, Miss Kenton emerges as a voice of resistance against the lingering imperialist ideologies of postwar England.

These female characters' journeys, while marked by trauma and loss, are also pathways to empowerment. Grounded in pluralistic trauma theory, this study examines how Setsuko, Noriko, and Miss Kenton negotiate their individual and collective traumas, drawing strength from cultural traditions and communal bonds. They resist becoming mere victims or agents of oppressive systems, instead embodying a constructive pragmatism that contrasts sharply with the self-deceptive nostalgia of their male counterparts.

Ultimately, this exploration highlights the profound role of women as redeemers of their fractured societies. By challenging oppressive systems and finding meaning in kinship and mutual trust, they redefine the terms of survival and healing in the

aftermath of war. As Chinua Achebe aptly observed, humanity's greatest strength lies in our ability to face adversity without being defined by it—an insight that resonates deeply within Ishiguro's narratives and this study's broader framework.

I am extremely grateful to all the members of the supervising committee, and especially to my supervisor Prof Dr. Esra Melikoğlu, for her constant encouragement, her kindness, and her meticulous reading of my writing, her valuable time, and her belief in me, without her this study would have been never possible. Besides my advisor, I would like to thank the rest of my thesis committee, first of all to Prof Dr. Metin Toprak for his kind interest, constructive and helpful suggestions, support, and his valuable time, then to Associate Professor Dr. Ferah Yazıcı for her critical remarks, meticulous reading of my writing, and encouragement, my thanks also go to Associate Prof Dr. Berna Köseoğlu for her kindness, continual support, encouragement and friendship, and to Associate Professor Dr. Canan Şavkay for her constructive criticism. I would also like to thank my husband Feza for his constant support and understanding. My thanks also go to my son Kanat who supports me all the time in my efforts and who is studying Economy at the university at the moment, and last of all to my mother who has been a great support to my education for a long time and who deserves my love and respect.

Gülrah Moramollu,

İSTANBUL, 2025

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ABBREVIATIONS

Ed. by. : Edited by (Editör/ yayına hazırlayan)

Ibid. : Ibidem (Aynı Eser)

op. cit. : Opere citato (Adı geçen eser)

p. : page (sayfa)

pp. : pages (sayfalar)



INTRODUCTION

This study analyses the role of women as critics and potential revisionists of the societies they belong to in two of Kazuo Ishiguro's novels: *An Artist of The Floating World* and *The Remains of The Day*, both of which are situated in the aftermath of the Second World War. While the memories of the two male protagonists seem to be the primary focus of these novels, it is in fact Setsuko, Noriko and Miss Kenton who criticize an oppressive patriarchal society, Japanese and English, respectively, and demonstrate the power of resilience in the face of the traumas brought about by the dramatic changes Japan and England went through in the postwar period. While they also subtly embody the possibility of cultural change, they are in danger of being taken in by another oppressive system, U.S. imperialism, which appears to promise to bring freedom and democracy. While these women experience the constraints of their societies, they emerge as participants in and critics of systems of oppression and potential agents of change.

In *An Artist of The Floating World* as Japan tries to be born out of its ashes, Setsuko and Noriko, the daughters of a very well-known and once respected painter Masuji Ono are faced with the difficult task of making their father confront with his guilt in terms of his war efforts to propagate the rightness of the path pursued by the fascist militarist Japanese government, and making sure that the old patriarch achieve insight into the nature of damage he causes for his family and nation. Yet Setsuko and Noriko must also contemplate a Japan which is under the occupation of another oppressive power, U. S. imperialism. Japan is in the position of a country colonized by white men who, under the pretext of bringing civilization and democracy to a supposedly intellectually and morally inferior country, establish their oppressive rule over Japan. They are oppressive in terms of people's expressing their griefs over the destruction and losses they suffered in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in terms of people's right to criticize the American occupation, or the rights of the workers to go on strikes under the Unions they belong to. In history, both patriarchal, fascist, imperialist Japan and the American occupation forces saw Japanese women as agents who would

disseminate their seemingly different but overlapping discourses about women's place in the home and society. Yet it becomes the bounden duty of Setsuko and Noriko to fight against Japan and America's oppressive patriarchal and imperialist ideology and the spread of yet another oppressive system, American capitalism, all over Japan. While they are, to some extent, taken in by America's false promise of bringing freedom and democracy to their society, by their endorsement of the subtle age-old customs and traditions of Japanese culture, by practising, and respecting Zen - Shintoism related art of Ikebana, which is closely related with their national identity, they become, to some extent, the regenerative agents of their society.

Similarly, in *The Remains of the Day*, Miss Kenton had a crucial role in confronting Stevens with his moral and emotional failures by her sincerity, truthfulness, and humanity. Her narratives, reactions and sound moral judgements help him to understand the cost of his complicity with unjust social hierarchies, the emptiness of all titles and hierarchies which are cultural artefacts created by the ruling power and its sovereign culture. Miss Kenton attempts to show him the utmost importance of genuine human communication and building emotional bonds against the cruelty of the upper middle classes which deny the humanity of their servants. However, despite her efforts, Miss Kenton herself experiences a profound failure—her inability to break free from societal expectations and her many efforts to break the wall Stevens built around himself proved futile. She criticises the oppressive, patriarchal, imperialist, colonialist war-like system of England at the transition period in which the English still has some claims to their old imperialist politics and sovereign rights. Unlike Stevens, she grounds herself on human kindness and truthfulness. Stevens's failure to function as a candid human being is connected with the political failure of England whose leadership as an imperialist country is taken over by the new world leader America, brought about a painful reappraisal of their position in the world which is reflected into the novel by Darlington Hall's being bought by an American businessman, Mr Farraday after two centuries of Darlington family.

In this context Setsuko and Noriko as well as Miss Kenton's experience, retrieval, and negotiation with trauma will be discussed in the light of literary trauma theory. I will mainly use the one pioneered by Cathy Caruth and the Yale School which applies

a post structuralist approach claiming the irrepresentability of trauma in language, and its challenging extension the pluralistic trauma theory pioneered by Michelle Balaev and some other critics like Irene Visser who argue “the interrelatedness of trauma, power and recovery in postcolonial literature, indicating that social activism and political protest may be integral to the aftermath of the trauma of colonization and decolonization.”¹ They offer a useful framework to analyse the narrative techniques adapted by the aforementioned traumatized characters to process and cope with loss. Ljubica Matek explains the power of Ishiguro’s narrative technique as “mimicking the narrative strategies used by trauma survivors”, claiming that “the novel’s narrative strategies mimic the actual coping mechanisms of displaced people.”² In fact, the sense of loss or something gone missing, a sense of incompleteness is reflected in Ishiguro’s characters’ behaviours or narratives. This sense of loss and incompleteness shape the lives of not only his male narrators but also the women who inhabit these narratives. While the narrators of both these novels Ono and Stevens have been unable to confine their feelings of loss in the past and remain burdened by its legacy, the women-Setsuko and Noriko in *An Artist of the Floating World* and Miss Kenton in *The Remains of the Day*-are not entirely free from the suppression of their societal roles or the traumas and losses of the past. Although they are more grounded and pragmatic, their responses to trauma reveal some compromise as well.

When we read the first three novels of Ishiguro in sequence, we get the feeling that there is one main idea in all of them, although the settings, cultures and backgrounds seem to be quite different on a superficial level. The fascist military rule in Japan and the strict codes and manners of “Englishness” of Darlington Hall share much more in common than we might think. In fact, Ishiguro himself stated this idea in one of his interviews: “I needed to portray this world where a leader figure held this incredible psychological sway over his subordinates. And for subordinates to break free, they had

¹ Irene Visser, “Trauma and Power in Postcolonial Literary Studies,” **Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory**, Ed.by. Michelle Balaev, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2014, pp.107-108.

² Ljubica Matek, “Narrating Migration and Trauma in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *A Pale View of Hills*”, 2018, (Online) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330848535>, 19 May 2022, p.130.

to display a remarkable amount of determination.”³ Hence, foregrounding the reactions of female characters’ response to these systems of power reveals their challenge. In contrast to the male characters’ discourses of defeatism, rather than succumbing to feelings of guilt and adapting self-deceptive language, women characters meet life with a constructive pragmatism and resistance. Although they are traumatized by the deaths of their beloved ones, unlike their father who loses himself in a delusional nostalgia of the past, Setsuko, and Noriko in *An Artist of The Floating World* focus on rebuilding their lives from the scratch. Similarly, Miss Kenton in *The Remains of the Day* reclaims her identity by leaving Darlington Hall after she witnesses the morally unacceptable failures of Lord Darlington in terms of his affinity with the Nazis.

Yet the “resistance and resilience” these female characters display “are to be seen not merely as responses of individuals but more importantly, as part of a communal process of living and working through trauma.”⁴ This view of trauma finds its meaning with Chinua Achebe’s remark in a recent essay, in which he argues “while colonialism was essentially a denial of human worth and dignity”⁵ it is important to understand that “the great thing about being human is our ability to face adversity down by refusing to be defined by it, refusing to be no more than its agent or its victim.”⁶

In this context Setsuko and Noriko and Miss Kenton emerge as crucial voices in challenging and resisting the impacts of trauma and historical narratives and the legacy of guilt brought upon them by the male characters who enjoy positions of power in the past and trying to get rid of this painful acknowledgement of their responsibility in active involvement into those power-structures which destroy their societies. In this context, trauma theory would be used to analyse how individuals experience a collective traumatic event, and how they defend themselves against it through the empowerment of deep cultural traditions which would be used as repositories of wisdom by the women characters in the respective novels.

³ Kazuo Ishiguro qtd in Gregory Mason, “An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro,” **Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro**, Ed.by Brian W Shaffer and Cynthia Wong, London, MacMillan International and Red Globe Press, 2008, p.8.

⁴ Irene Visser, op. cit., p.108.

⁵ Ibid., p.108.

⁶ Ibid., p.108.

CHAPTER 1

A SHORT BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION TO JAPANESE CULTURE AND HISTORY IN POST-WAR PERIOD

Although in many of the interviews Ishiguro claims that he is not very well acquainted with his native culture leaving his home country Japan at a very young age and being brought up in England, in fact a close analysis of his work shows that this is not the case. Reading his works show that he is using his native country's culture in very subtle ways and despite his being an expatriate, he is very well acquainted with its traditional arts, its movies, the way Japanese people conduct their daily life, their values and how they cope with the dramatic changes triggered by the loss of the Second World War and their subsequent exposition to the imperialist agenda of the Occupation army which conceived them as a potential ally in the developing Cold War politics. Since in both of these novels *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* there are thematic similarities in terms of the repressive class systems, the gender roles which are produced and reproduced by the imperialist policies they are ruled by, and despite its seeming difference, the way these countries go under the influence of American imperialism, and the efforts of the relevant characters' to adapt to these changing circumstances in the post-war period coupled with Ishiguro's own claim as to the effect of *The Remains of the Day* is "a rewrite of a rewrite of *A Pale View of Hills*."¹ (*An Artist of the Floating World* being the second novel in this order.) necessitate to analyse a short knowledge of Japanese culture and history in the introduction in order to appreciate Ishiguro's work.

In this chapter our focus will be the aftermath of the Second World War and how Japan as a country handled the defeat and surrender. In the period after the Second World War Japan was facing an utter destruction, post-war trauma, and the loss of millions of lives, being demoralized, and exposed to the effects of radiation because of the two atomic bombs exploded in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, facing the danger of

¹ Kazuo Ishiguro qtd. in Cynthia F. Wong, "Like Idealism Is to the Intellect: An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro," 2001, **Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro**, Ed.by. Brian W Shaffer and Cynthia F. Wong, London, MacMillan International and Red Globe Press, 2008, p.188.

starvation, a bankrupt economy, high inflation, and the loss of national pride. Even one of these catastrophic events can cause a nation to crumble. But strange enough as in the Japanese proverb which talks about changing bad fortune into good by “bending adversity”² in one of the hardest times of Japanese history, Japan was able to change all these negativities into something positive. The resilience with which they overcome the traumas of war owes much to their deeply ingrained indigenous belief Shinto, philosophy of Zen and the reflection of these beliefs in the traditional arts like Ikebana. The ones who are invested with carrying these age-old customs to the future generations appear to be the women characters in Ishiguro novels which were situated in Japan.

Most of all it is important to notice and appreciate the Japanese people’s resilience in face of adversity and utmost destruction. Japan had found the way to economic development, but it had also lost some values and mores in the process. It was only something natural for Japan not being able to preserve most of its ancient culture, since their old world had practically become irrelevant to modern life. The industrial revolution in Europe had taken place gradually during the period of some hundreds of years. In contrast change came to Japan and his neighbouring Asian countries in a truly short span of time, besides, they were introduced to it by a quite alien culture. Most of their beautiful old cities were filled with concrete buildings for the same reason. By the time Meiji period had ended, they already decided to sacrifice national heritage and environment for rapid industrialization and economic growth.³

1.1 Japan as An Island Nation

Japan is an island nation which is translated into Japanese as “*Shimaguni*.” Its being an island nation has had some influences on its history and culture. To an outsider it is a mysterious and even an unknowable place. Before the American “black” warships of Commodore Perry came and forced Japan to establish commercial ties with the rest of

² David Pilling, **Bending Adversity: Japan and The Art of Survival**, London, Penguin Books, 2014, p. xxii.

³ Alex Kerr, **Lost Japan: Last Glimpse of Beautiful Japan**, London, Penguin Random House, 2015, pp.16-17.

the world by signing biased unequal trade agreements in the nineteenth century, Japan pursued the policy of “Sakoku” or closed country which was started to be employed as a system of isolating Japan from the rest of the world by the Tokugawa Shogunate in the early seventeenth century in the Edo Period. The idea behind it was to prevent people of Japan being influenced by foreign ideas and Christianity which might have caused people to rebel against the authority of the Shogun who replaced the feudal order. Thus, nearly some three hundred centuries (1608-1868) the Japanese government forbade its people and foreigners entering or leaving Japan on pain of death. Only some minimum relations in terms of trade were allowed with Korea, China, and Holland. Although the Edo period and the Tokugawa rule brought centuries of peace to Japan for more than two and a half centuries, it also inadvertently delayed Japan’s entrance into the international arena.

It is partly due to the effect geography can have on a nation’s identity that Japan had been so isolated from the influence of other nations. Japan has obviously seen itself as a nation apart for these reasons. It is both Japan’s strength when it is fighting against difficulties and its weakness. When Japan had faced the superior powers of the Western World through the danger Perry’s black ships pose, they decided to break their ties with the Asian world and their neighbouring countries like China which Japan had taken as a model for hundreds of centuries and turned their face towards Western technology and science.

1.2 The Meiji Restoration

Starting with the Meiji period they aimed to break with the influence of China seeing it being colonized and weak especially after the Opium War. They also started to question the knowledge provided by China with that of the Western knowledge, power, and technology. Even in the Sakoku (closed country) period some intellectuals started to understand the superiority of Western knowledge to that of Chinese one and these low-ranking samurais wanted to break with the influence of China in terms of science, literature, and philosophy. The only way to resist these imperial powers would be to turn their face to the West, the attaining of an industrialization power, cheap

markets, and colonies to exploit. One of these intellectuals is Yukichi Fukuzawa (1835-1901) a great liberal thinker who comes from a lower ranking samurai family. He was thinking that by opening Japan to Western ideas, Japan would become one of the powerful countries of the world and accepted as an equal by them. Whatever China was associated with was backward and it should be abandoned, for that reason they should leave Asia behind. As David Pilling argued in his book *Bending Adversity: Japan and The Art of Survival* this had meant being one of the imperialist powers of the world.⁴ In order to catch up with these powers they had to make reforms almost about everything, especially in education. In an unbelievably brief time like thirty-fourty years Japan passed from a feudal society ruled by a shogunate to a modern society with a neat army, navy, factories but they lack the very essence of any democracy: people who internalized the basic tenets of a democratic society. The philosopher Yukichi Fukuzawa said as long as the desire to have knowledge is not attained for the sake of knowledge itself, then the people of a country cannot be autonomous and really democratic, neither can be the country. Since the desire for reforms did not come from downward, the common people but from high-ranking classes of society, the desire to sustain democracy was not powerful enough. The moment they think they achieved the desired position in the world order, they were ready to turn their backs on democracy. Its self-imposed isolation policy “Sakoku” postponed their desire to join the international relations. When at last it achieved that with the Meiji Restoration and the last Shogun gave its power back to the emperor, it passed from a feudal ruled country into a semi-democratic one with the addition of an Emperor. From the beginnings of civilization, they had taken China as a model, they were indebted to Chinese knowledge and even modelled their own alphabet on the Chinese one and because of the great differences between languages they had to add two phonetic alphabets to it known as the Kanji. This influence has had some costs to Japanese policy, knowledge, and worldview. The Japanese restricted its relations with the West when the Industrial Revolution had started, and when the colonial expansion was at its highest. Especially, in terms of technology Japan was backward compared to the Western countries. During the 270 years peace of Tokugawa rule, gun-making did not

⁴ op.cit., p. xxxii.

develop and in terms of science they solely depended upon China. The backwardness of their knowledge was started to be felt by the scholars after the ban on Western learning started to be lifted during Yoshimune Tokugawa's rule who encouraged the study of the western calendar. In time the Japanese scholars found that the Chinese learning that they trusted so much was not equal to the Western learning which helped to fasten the break with Asia. In the meantime, a tendency in Japan called 'kokugaku' which means "country learning" started, it wanted to develop a native tradition breaking Japan's bondage from Chinese tradition. All this sounds incredibly positive but the desire to be one of the imperialist countries of the world and the policy pursued in achieving this end brought them to a kind of fascism aligned with imperial power. A new myth about the emperor was created in which the emperor was believed to have divine powers, a kind of patriarchal figure, a benign and beneficent patriarch who cared for his "shinmin," subjects. After the loss of war this myth about the father of the nation, the emperor, the direct descendant of Amaterasu, the sun goddess, leading figure among the Shinto gods was debunked. They elevated Shinto, a set of folkloric beliefs, to the status of a national religion.

1.3 The Rise of Nationalism and Imperialism, The Second World War

The desire for power and wealth accompanied by aggression and once the victim of unequal trade treaties, had become victimizer itself. After they achieved to produce warships and artillery, the next step was to become a world power, for this end they did not refrain from forcing their old neighbouring countries to sign unfair trade agreements with them this time. The Japanese army had beaten Russia in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 which changed the balance of power in Asia and set the scene for World War I and ultimately World War II, the result of the war was so certain that Russians agreed to leave Manchuria and recognize Japanese control of the Korean peninsula. Five years later the Japanese Empire would annex Korean peninsula. In the first Sino-Japanese War 1894-1895 Japanese had defeated the Chinese, it was basically a war between China and Japan over influence in Korea which marked the emergence of Japan as a major world imperial power. After this, Japan became a fully-fledged imperial country not easy to defeat. Having built their self-confidence through their

invasion of the countries like Korea, Taiwan, Philippines ...etc saying they would treat their “brother Asians” equally and “free them from the bondage of their previous masters”⁵ the Japanese Empire started to expand itself on other lands. However, the Japanese proved to be even more cruel than the Western imperial powers in this process, treating the Koreans, Thais, or Filipinos less than human beings or a kind of subhuman form since they were not Japanese. It is related to their being indoctrinated to believe in the superiority of the Japanese race above the other neighbouring Asian countries, from this and many other aspects they had similarities with the other Axis power countries. The atrocities of war, the crimes committed against the Chinese and Korean prisoners, and so-called biological and chemical experiments and rapes inflicted on those people in Manchuria in the state of Manchukuo, in a special section called “Unit 731”, the massacre and rape of Chinese people in Nanking were among the cruelties committed by the imperial Japanese army. It was reported that most of the researchers involved in these inhuman experiments afterwards slipped back to civilian life in the occupied Japan as if nothing had ever happened, many of them becoming prominent members of university faculties, they were not hold accountable for their crimes. To this day, “Japan has not apologized for, and China has not forgiven, the countless atrocities Japanese forces visited upon China between 1935 and 1945.”⁶ Imperial ideology had indoctrinated its subjects to believe that other fellow Asian countries’ subjects were inferior to that of Japanese, even subhuman, whereas Japanese were superior being the owners of ‘the land of gods’. Their indoctrination did not seem to be so much different from the Nazis who believed in the superiority of the German race. So, it is not difficult to surmise that Japan’s foreign relations with his former colonies is not a good one even today. The Japanese Koreans who live in Japan at the moment are not considered to be truly Japanese but “half.” Obviously, the Japanese still had some extremely strict notions about being purely ‘Japanese.’

⁵ Ibid., p.70.

⁶ Richard Stockton, “Inside Unit 731, World War II, Japan’s Sickening Human Experiments Program”, 2017, (Online), <https://allthatsinteresting.com/unit731>, 14 November 2019.

1.4 The Loss of War, Defeat and Occupation

After the military aggression of Japan was evidenced, its seizure of Manchuria was condemned and it was expelled from the League of Nations, Japan deserted its desire to be accepted as an equal by the Western nations. Then, there was nothing left to check its military power. Immediately after the United States started an embargo against Japan. In a backlash Japanese attacked the Pearl Harbour. The tide against Japan turned when it lost this naval war and most of its navy, then it could not reach its colonies and as a consequence the Japanese army situated in those parts was left without food, artillery, etc. Japan declared its loss of war after the atomic bombs destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki and announced its unconditional surrender to the “Victor” through the emperor Hirohito’s speech on the radio to his subjects.

Even after the war had ended it took some three or four years for these soldiers or repatriate Japanese people who were sent to these colonies to come back to their native land. Some of these soldiers came back crippled bodily or mentally, when they arrived, they were perceived with reproach and disdain since by that time the society was well informed about the atrocities committed by the imperial army, most of them committed suicide, some having no home or family or neither of them left, not being cared by the government, being despised by their own compatriots they had to live on the streets, taking refuge in subways begging for a living. John Dower said, “the veterans were seen as unwelcome losers in the Japanese society”⁷ The community that had sent them with parties and sent them comfort packages did not welcome them back. Worst of all “their unkempt appearance seemed a mockery of the heroic ideals and imagery that had saturated wartime propaganda.”⁸ The plight of the dead soldiers’ wives and their families were worse, they did not have any salary to live on being despised by their own society with their dependent children hungry, starving they had no remedy or any hope of salvation. These war victims became the outcasts of Japanese society. These people haunted the public places like Tokyo’s Ueno Station. There were orphans and street children who were outsiders of society, shunned by them being seen

⁷ John W. Dower, **Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Aftermath of World War II**, London, Penguin Books, 1999, p.59.

⁸ Ibid., p.56.

as “improper.” Some of the young girls and women turned to prostitution to survive, they are called as “pan-pan girls” which was a sign of a period of decadence. From the American perspective the enemy was transformed after the defeat suddenly from a group of bestial people to be annihilated into “receptive exotics to be handled and enjoyed, the pan-pan personified this.”⁹ Japan, a masculine, ferocious enemy had been transformed into “a compliant, feminine body on which the white victors could impose their will.”¹⁰ nothing was truly sacred anymore, according to a cynical saying of those days “women become pan- pan, men become carriers for the black market.”¹¹

1.5 The Trauma of Loss and The Denial

The destruction caused by atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki was a different aspect of war’s destructive power, they were civilian targets. People all over the world had hardly seen any photographs belonging to this destruction which would reveal the full-scale horrors of war. Since the United States propaganda ministry censored everything but only the explosion moment of these bombs seen like a mushroom was given to the press, it was impossible to guess the utter destruction and trauma they created upon a nation. These cities were virtually erased from existence over a day, there were serious traumas people were living through, besides there was a fear of contamination of radiation. The fear of the side effects of the atomic bombs and radiation were reflected in the spectacular movie of the time, *Godzilla* (1954). The American occupation formally ended in 1952 and with-it restrictions on local media in terms of the catastrophic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It was through a series of films about nuclear attack the national grief was finally expressed openly. *Godzilla* was one of the most successful of these movies. Inspired both by the atomic bombings and ongoing bomb tests the United States conducting in the Pacific, around the Bikini islands, it implicitly expressed the fear Japanese people felt at the time. It is not difficult to agree with the idea that “Godzilla was less of a monster movie than a

⁹ Ibid., p.138.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.138.

¹¹ Ibid., p.139.

film about human tragedy which describes psychological wounds of immense power.”¹²

Retrieval and negotiation of trauma is important for the present and future and these might lead to a cultural and personal healing. Although on a private level there are memoirs being written by former soldiers who felt guilty about the atrocities committed by the Japanese army, on an official level, they were not very willing to express remorse or apologize for Japan’s crimes during the war. One of the reasons of this absence of genuine remorse with regard to the war might be the Japanese people’s feeling themselves as victims rather than victimizers due to the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The ambivalence Japanese have in terms of their unwillingness to take war responsibility might also be attributed to the continuation of the same bureaucracy which approved of the war-like state and their desire to preserve the emperor after the war. On another level it can be also said that, in a way the Japanese are trying to figure out what to do with the knowledge that “even though they were victimized by the atomic bombs, they were also a legitimate aggressor committed numerous war crimes”¹³

Although Japan and Germany shared similar experiences as defeated Axis powers subject to post-war occupation policies of the United States and the Allied powers and both recovered to become giant economic powers, the perception gap between Japan and Germany widened and became more negative toward Japan recently. Especially with regards to the acceptance of war responsibility, Germans face with their past which they call **Vergangenheitsbewältigung**, which means coming to terms with their past, especially in terms of fascism. The Germans with evidence of the Holocaust could not deny their role as victimizers. Besides in Germany there are no major differences in the views held by the government, the parliament, and the vast majority of the public on the subject, whereas this is still a very contentious issue in Japan. One of the reasons of this different attitude in terms of recognition of wrongdoing can be related to pre and post war political leadership of the two countries. West Germany

¹² Nick Averbuj, “The Metaphor Behind Godzilla and How It Will Change Your Life”, 2014, (Online), www.thoughtcatalog.com/nick-averbuj/2014/12, 26 May 2019.

¹³ Jason Barr, “Shin Godzilla’s Politics and The Meaning Behind Godzilla”,(Online), www.inverse.com/article/22023-shin-godzilla, 26 May 2019.

was divided into four occupation zones and directly governed by the occupation authorities. Japan, on the other hand, was indirectly governed through the existing governmental machinery, and most officials, except military leaders and war criminals, remained in the government. According to Daizaburo Yui, as the Japanese leaders blamed the military or ultra-nationalists for the war, the sense of national guilt that was evident in Germany was not experienced in Japan. So, the spirit of reconciliation between victor and vanquished found in Europe cannot be found in the Asia Pacific region. Because of this reason certain war related issues still continued to trouble Japan, Korean “comfort women” who are forcefully turned to prostitution by the Japanese imperial army are fighting for their cases, on the other hand neighbouring Asian countries blame Japan for trying to whitewash history by using a language which covers the aggressive behaviour of the Japanese army in Asia during the war, and the textbook revisions which were done in 1982 by the Ministry of Education contribute to this issue further, and starting in 1985 post-war prime ministers of Japan visit the Yasukuni shrine where the war dead including war criminals buried resulted in international protests. Since the war time atrocities were rejected to be put into an official apology by the Japanese governments, it continues to be a controversial issue disturbing its international relations with especially neighbouring countries.

1.6 The Unconditional Surrender and Debunking of Myths

As a war time propaganda, it was argued Japan was “one hundred million hearts beating as one”¹⁴ united during the war against the enemy, whereas the reality the survivors of these bomb-attacks had experienced was quite different, they were stigmatized, even if they had not been branded as such, there were no hospitals left to look after these people contaminated with radiation. This was the last blow to Japanese army, after they lost a great part of their naval power they were in difficulty since communication with their colonies had ended, rice and other agricultural products could not be imported, there was widespread starvation. The surrender was unconditional, and it was announced to Japan by Emperor Hirohito who had never

¹⁴ Dower, op.cit., p.122.

made a public speech before. It must have been unbearable for Hirohito as well standing by General MacArthur, the general of the conquering army, and to deny that there was anything divine about him, contrary to the myth created by him to provide an absolute power over his subjects and army. Hirohito's declaration of defeat contradicted the war-time propaganda, since it defended to fight until death heroically, not to surrender in any way, it was better to commit suicide than to surrender. The civilians were also indoctrinated to fight till the end and die like "shattered jewels"¹⁵ It was inspired by the war ethics of samurai warriors like Miyamoto Musashi who was the author of the book, *The Book of Five Rings*, a master swordsman in early Edo period, a follower of bushido, and a master of strategy. His ideas about the strategy of war were turned into the blind sacrifice of young Japanese pilots as "kamikazes"¹⁶ against the Allied powers. Then in the postwar period the values Musashi represented would be condemned by the war veterans and common Japanese people who blame the rulers for turning "bushido" doctrines into the weapon of fascist discourse.

On the other hand, people's reaction to the emperor's speech was varied, some overcame with relief, some devastated with shame and anger, mostly for all of them acknowledging defeat was traumatic, the distracted and dejected state of these people started to be called as "**Kyodatsu** condition,"¹⁷ it was a state of psychic collapse very deep and widespread. It was not an immediate result of defeat but it had already started before the surrender. The reason was quite clear, for the Americans the war started in December 1941, whereas the case was different for the Japanese, they had been in war since the conquest of Manchuria in 1931, for fifteen years, while their situation became increasingly desperate, the war time propaganda wanted the hundred million to die defending their homelands very much like the kamikaze pilots were doing, a condition or traumatic state of collective suicide was expected or indoctrinated to them. Because of this as John Dower argues "to attribute the 'Kyodatsu condition' to the shock of defeat would be misleading, however, for exhaustion of a deep and complex sort had

¹⁵ Dower, op.cit., p.38.

¹⁶ Dower, op.cit., p.87-88.

¹⁷ Dower, op.cit., p.87-88.

set in long before August 15, 1945 as a result of the government's policy of wasting its people in pursuit of impossible war objectives."¹⁸

As a result of the loss of war, a period of reappraisal, high inflation, starvation, humiliation, anger, and questioning had started in Japan, all the absolute hierarchies shattered and demolished. Especially after Japan's being colonized by the Victor, an era of despair, questioning and decadence started. The values of the past which gave a meaning to their lives centred upon the motif of the closely-knit family ties hold by the oldest patriarch destroyed, since they felt betrayed by their Emperor who encouraged their ferocious fighting during the war by announcing that they were vanquished and what they did was wrong. In a likewise manner then the heads of the families, the old men who sent the young people to war for impossible war objectives and wasted their lives were also wrong, besides the war discourse which camouflaged the atrocities committed by the imperial army and its soldiers as fighting a 'holy war' proved to be a hollow one, the Japanese nation felt itself terribly betrayed and deserted by the rulers, officials and the Emperor. Hence, following the Second World War Japan had faced a big identity crisis. This was partly the result of its defeat and unconditional surrender afterwards and partly because of the role it had projected itself in the world.

1.7 Japan's Double Relation to Colonialism

Japan's struggle to find a place in the international arena goes back to centuries ago. One scholar says Japan's disturbing relationship with the world has given it "a shrill sense of inferiority and a sometimes obsessive preoccupation with its national status"¹⁹ Pyle describes the emerge of semi-feudal society in Japan after the collapse of the feudal one in the Meiji period and links the country's desire to be recognized as an important agent in the world arena as a part of "its hypersensitivity to rank in the world"²⁰ which "owed much to its distinctive honour culture nurtured over centuries

¹⁸ Dower, op.cit., p.104.

¹⁹ Kenneth Pyle qtd. in David Pilling, op.cit., p.56.

²⁰ Pilling, op.cit., p.56.

of feudal life.”²¹ Japan wanted to escape the indignity of falling to the position of a colony which many of its Asian neighbouring countries like Philippines and even China had experienced after the Opium War. David Pilling describes the status quo of the day as “by 1878, European nations and their offshoots controlled 67 per cent of the world’s landmass, a figure that would jump to an astonishing 84 per cent by 1914.”²² The only way out of such a bondage for Japan was to ensure being a strong and independent nation through opening itself to Western ideas. It was done in the name of Emperor and preservation of national identity. They only wanted to learn the practical things like how to make the trains, guns, and battleships because in this way they could defend their country against imperialism. The people who were behind the Meiji Restoration were military people who had firm belief in samurai codes, their revolutionary qualities were only limited to attaining the technology and knowledge of the West which guaranteed it a dominant regional position. Fukuzawa’s belief in the philosophy of individual inquiry which was indispensable for the success of a modern nation, which could only be attained by opposing feudal structures could not be grasped and put into action. He said: “only with the autonomy of the individual could the nation also become autonomous”²³ Contrary to his expectations Japan slipped into empire-building and militarism which also meant the limitation of individuals’ liberties and free-thinking. After the election in 1937, “the Japanese system came more and more to resemble the fascist states of Germany and Italy. There was a fanatical emphasis on the supposed purity of Yamato race, a near religious devotion to the emperor...and a strong desire ...to spread Japanese ‘values’ to other countries.”²⁴ Belonging to the so-called ‘yellow race’ they felt humiliated by the Western world which dispelled them from the world conference, culminated in their being condemned for conquering Manchuria and Korea. Japan’s victories over China and Russia and its colonisation of Korea gave it an unhealthy self-confidence which dragged the country to its near annihilation. Millions of Chinese (nine million in the war alone), Japanese, Koreans, Okinawans, Malaysians, Indonesians died either as

²¹ Pilling, op.cit., p.56.

²² Pilling, op.cit., p.57.

²³ Pilling, op.cit., p.71.

²⁴ Pilling, op.cit., p.73.

direct or indirect consequence of war, the ones who died of hunger and diseases were not even counted. From a historical perspective it seems that the Japanese had quickly recovered from this state of utmost depression but from a personal point of view it was a painful period of reappraisal.

Even before the war had ended some government officials had met secretly to plan what would be the post-war economy like. The committee discussing the future worked extremely hard thinking that “With a big effort, Japan will get back on her feet again, not by military means, but with modern technology and economic power.”²⁵ They decided to turn the country’s route to create peacetime industries. During the Meiji Restoration the country had passed from light industry to heavy industrialization, their motto was “Fukoku Kyohei”²⁶ could be translated as “rich country, strong army” which ultimately led to militarism and a fascist rule afterwards ending in near annihilation of the country and destruction of the Japanese Empire. Since Japan was forbidden to have an army and fighting by the Potsdam articles of surrender, it would be defended by the United States. The new constitution which was written under the hegemony of the United States had a pacifist clause. It meant that Japan could concentrate on its economic growth solely without the expense and necessity of keeping an army, in a way they turned this article into their advantage, which was known as the Yoshida Doctrine, named after the first Prime Minister of Japan in the post-war period, Shigeru Yoshida. It is another evidence of the Japanese skill of bending adversity. So, in less than two decades time Japan had become one of the biggest economies of the world and one of its biggest creditors. The national project of the post-war era was to catch up with western living standards. Only nineteen years after its surrender and its destruction physically and emotionally, according to some academicians like Ezra Vogel, Japan had become ‘number one’ country in terms of education and organization, it was equipped better than the United States.²⁷ By 1980’s many people in America started to see Japan as a threat, its trade surpluses rising to unheard levels. It also became an inspiration for the countries in its own region. If the

²⁵ Pilling, op.cit., p.85.

²⁶ Pilling, op.cit., p.85.

²⁷ Ezra Vogel, qtd. in Pilling, op.cit., p. 95.

Japanese could realize it, then the nations of Southeast Asia could emulate it as well, soon they were its followers. As David Pilling deftly puts it “Japan had proved to arrogant Westerners and to self-doubting Asians alike that colour was no bar to development.”²⁸

1.8 American Imperialism and Its Results

Despite the enthusiasm for Japan’s birth from its ashes, there was also concern for what was being lost. Urbanization and the movement this change brought to the lives of people, the loneliness, isolation, lack of communication between people, the shattering of traditional family understanding, the lack of respect felt towards the older generation, were some of the results of fast industrialization and urbanization. For the decade Japan was preparing for the Olympics Minoru Morita said: “I felt we had created a monstrous society for ourselves. In the city our atmosphere was contaminated, our rivers were dirty, our seas were polluted, and our national environment was destroyed. As far as our people were concerned, they’d come to desire economic profit primarily. They had abandoned all the greater humanistic ideals. I thought it was an era of despair.”²⁹ The Japanese could not preserve what was valuable as they modernize because the old world and the old values it represented had become irrelevant, or rather they were indoctrinated to believe by the Occupation army that it was the case, that they should leave all the mystical beliefs behind. Minoru Morita was not alone in his observation, Masahiko Fujiwara, an essayist, and Mathematics professor at Tokyo’s Ochanomizu University had written a book called *Dignity of the Nation* in which he expressed his yearning for a time before Japan started to follow Western capitalism. He yearns for a time Japanese used to despise money and were found of following their own set of values which was called ‘bushido’ the ethical and spiritual guide of the samurai whose ideals “spread from the elites to the general population via books and popular theatre like kabuki”³⁰ all of which started

²⁸ Pilling, op.cit., p.83.

²⁹ Minoru Morita qtd in Pilling, op.cit., p.95

³⁰ Masahiko Fujiwara qtd in Pilling, op.cit., p.37.

as a kind of swordsmanship then turned into the principles of conduct like sensitivity to the poor, and to the weak, benevolence, patience, courage and justice. These traditional theatre forms Noh, Kabuki and Bunraku puppet theatre were strictly censured during the Occupation by the United States, as it is expressed by John Dower “it had been feared that such tales of feudal loyalty and revenge might incite violent reprisals against the newly arrived occupation forces.”³¹ In a way the authoritarian government of fascist imperialist rule was taken over by the SCAP censorship. Unfortunately, these values had been lost due to their being exposed to the demands of modernity and dictates of the Western capitalist world and replaced with the values imposed by the imperialist power, the United States, and its assimilation policies.

Adopting the imperial discourse of Western racial and national hierarchies, the superiority of the self and the inferiority of the native people, the United States situated itself as the “honorary white” in order to engineer its own expansionism in Asia, and for this purpose it actively cultivated and even manipulated Japan’s admiration toward the West and its consumer culture. In Western colonizing processes the colonizers used the analogy of male-female sexual encounter to describe the relations between colonizers and colonized. In this context “Africa, the Americas, Asia, and the Pacific were imagined feminine, coloured and sexualized bodies, while European and American colonizing forces were white and masculine, invading, exploring and conquering ‘virgin lands.’”³² Similarly women and gender emerge as important issues in the politics of empire, and they are closely related to the indigenous women’s being viewed as “an important entry point”³³ into the native culture, and following their being ‘re-educated’, being ‘emancipated’ according to the norms of colonizing power, it would ensure the Western values to “filter downward to the rest of the indigenous population”³⁴ destroying the previous power structure of the society and its age-old customs and values in the process. So, rather than a sincere attempt to create a genuinely democratized Japan, the intention was to create Japanese women who would

³¹ Dower, op.cit., p.432.

³² Mire Koikari, “Feminism and the Cold War in the U.S. Occupation of Japan, 1945-1952”, **The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus**, Vol. IX, Issue 7, Number 1, Article ID 3487, 2011,(Online), <https://apjjf.org/2011/9/7/mire-koikari/3487/article>, 15 October 2024, p.10.

³³ Ibid., pp.10-11.

³⁴ Ibid., p.11.

be enfranchised to become conservative allies for the United States. Hence, considering the significant role women shoulder in terms of the overall project of Japanese modernity necessitates an analysis of women's position in the next chapter.



CHAPTER 2

THE CONFIGURATION OF WOMEN IN TERMS OF JAPANESE IMPERIAL AIMS AND IN TERMS OF THE OCCUPATION FORCES

2.1 Japanese Women's Position Before the Occupation

It was generally assumed the liberation of women in Japan in terms of politics and education owed much to Occupation Period, that in a way coeducation as a reform was forced upon them, and by implication it was contrary to the values and mores of Japanese society. On the contrary, the pre-war Japanese feminism included people like Koizumi Ikuko (1892-1964), a graduate of Tokyo Women's Upper School who went to study in the United States and came back to her native country in 1930. She had written a treatise named *Danjo Kyogakuron (On Coeducation)*¹ during a time when liberal 'Taisho democracy' was being replaced by militarism and cultural conservatism following the conquest of Manchuria by the Japanese army. She argued for woman's contribution to the society as the equal of man in a period the Japanese education system was built round the hypothesis that women should be trained as "good wives and wise mothers."² (ryosai kenbo) With this argument women's roles were relegated to their reproductive role in the society and barred their way to achieve their individual potentials. The double standard which was applied to women in terms of education was explicit in the following quotation taken from the speech of an official of the Ministry of Education: "As early as 1877... [Ministry of Education official] Nishimura Shigeki criticized [the notion of] identical school education for boys and girls. He argued that because the future work of men and women were different, after their earliest years at primary school, male and female pupils should be taught different subjects."³ From 1879 onwards the Japanese government began its gender-specific

¹ Koizumi Ikuko qtd. in Julia C. Bullock, "Coeducation in the Age of "good Wife, Wise Mother: Koizumi Ikuko's Quest for "Equality of Opportunity," **Rethinking Japanese Feminisms**, Ed. by. Julia C. Bullock, Ayako Kano, and James Welker, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2018, p.90.

² Ibid., p.90.

³ Ibid., p.92.

educational policies for women which guaranteed their low status and financial dependence on men ensuring it with the poor education they received. In order to ascertain women's incorporation in national polity, women's place was codified in the late nineteenth century. Being female subjects of the modern nation-state, Japanese women were doubly subordinated under the imperial and patriarchal domination. Koikari clarifies the subordination of women to patriarchal society by explicitly defining the official position of women according to the 1899 Imperial Constitution in following terms:

“The civil code...defined a clan like multigenerational family unit, as the basic unit of national polity headed by the emperor. Its household head, usually the oldest male held various rights over his subordinates. In the system of succession, the family name, the family inheritance, the rights of the house-hold head, and the right to perform family rituals and ancestor worship were handed on to the oldest son. This left women legally subordinated to the power of the male household head...Women's obedience to the family head was a significant obligation that was not simply legal but moral, not simply individual but national.”⁴

Koizumi argued for the necessity of preparing women to support themselves financially in order to attain equality with men. She emphasized that the “good wife, wise mother”⁵ (*ryosai kenbo*) lifestyle was not possible for the multitudes of women who had to work to look after their families. She concluded that the industrialized economy itself created this low-profile and less-paid jobs to use women as a source of cheap work force for doing the same work as men. In making these arguments and arguing for equal rights and coeducation for both men and women, she undermined the contemporary policy of education and the imposed idea of femininity on women which relegated them to the roles of mother and housewife. Besides by extension she says that “the contemporary gendered division of labour is both unjust and impractical, and that providing women with equal opportunity in education and employment would benefit society as a whole.”⁶ Koizumi was expressing her ideas during an unfortunate

⁴ Mire Koikari, **Pedagogy of Democracy: Feminism and the Cold War in the U.S. Occupation of Japan**, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2010, p.43.

⁵ Ibid., p.90.

⁶ Bullock, op.cit., p.95.

time when militarism in Japan had started and the pressure on the freedom of individuals had risen. In the pre-war period there were few who argued women should be offered professional job opportunities equal to that of men. Even if women found some job opportunities to have self-sufficiency, those occupations were chosen from the ones which were deemed compatible with gendered expectations of women's roles like being teachers and seamstresses. Whereas according to Koizumi they should be given access to any occupation conventionally thought to be masculine. Progressive people like Koizumi had to wait for the right time, and it was only possible after the defeat. Immediately after the end of the World War Koizumi was called into the Office of Education section of Occupation headquarters to confront with the English translation of her book *Danyo Kyogakuron* and was offered a position as an education adviser which she rejected.⁷ By this incident one can assume that American Occupation Authorities and Koizumi shared the same ideas about the pursuit of some ideals like equality of opportunities, the importance of individuality and freedom of thought and expression which underline Koizumi's arguments for coeducation, whereas this assumption would also prove to be hollow in the light of things which would happen later. It was important to note that the nature of equal opportunities Koizumi envisioned was not available to American women either at the time when she studied there.⁸ Besides, Koizumi was not alone in advocating for "equality of educational opportunities"⁹, she was one of the liberal intellectuals whose calls for reforms were swept aside by the militaristic propaganda at that time.

2.2 Japanese Feminism's Imbrication with Imperialism

In this context, Mire Koikari argues "Japan's double relation to colonialism provided a crucial context for gender relations in general and feminist politics in particular, creating an intimate and problematic connection among women, nation, and empire. With modernization, the category of Japanese women emerged, heavily

⁷ Bullock, op.cit., p.99.

⁸ Bullock, op.cit., p.99.

⁹ Bullock, op.cit., p.99.

invested with new political significance as female national subjects.”¹⁰ This view of women’s being invested with new meanings in accordance with the Japanese national polity is reverberated by Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval Davis as well, they argue that “women become participants in nation-state building processes in such capacities as biological reproducers of offspring, reproducers and transmitters of culture, signifiers of national and racial boundaries, participants in nationalist movements.”¹¹ In other words by becoming *ryosai kenbo* (good wife and wise mothers) women were rendered as “repositories of Japanese racial and national purity and strength”¹² as it is argued earlier. In line with this argument, during the Second World War, Japanese exalted “motherhood” concept to a higher level. Women were encouraged to have many “sons,” and they were expected to substitute the men’s places in the work, either in the fields or in the factories. Then women became “the Yamato nadesiko,” meaning “the daughters of the country”¹³, at last women became as valuable as the men in their contribution during war time as long as they bolster the patriarchal male ideology. We can safely say that women’s contribution to work force, their rising economic status helped them to develop their self-confidence but at the same time they become accomplices of the fascist imperial rule, since Japanese modernity also provided new opportunities to them by motivating women’s active participation in their efforts to build an empire and to subdue the neighbouring Asian countries to be transformed into colonies of Japanese Empire. As Japan ferociously pursued colonial expansion, by bearing and rearing “citizen-soldiers”¹⁴, Japanese women also contributed to the mission of establishing the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. The moral and spiritual contribution of women to the nation was also considered important by their staying away from subversive thoughts like socialism, communism and anarchic thoughts and activities, in a way they become “the backbone”¹⁵ of nation’s morality, and thus they were trusted with properly transmitting the necessary values of imperial nationalism to the future generations, but they are denied having any agency in

¹⁰ Koikari, **Pedagogy of Democracy**, op.cit., p.42.

¹¹ Koikari, op.cit., p.42.

¹² Koikari, op.cit., p.42.

¹³ Allen, Ohio State University, 1964, p.41.

¹⁴ Koikari, op.cit., p.43.

¹⁵ Koikari, op.cit., p.43.

directing it. As Anne Mc Clintock argues “excluded from direct action as national citizens, women are subsumed symbolically into the national body politic as its boundary and metaphoric limit...women are typically constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation but are denied any direct relation to national agency.”¹⁶

Despite their being rejected direct access to power, Japanese fascist imperial rule offered new opportunities and resources to women, they encouraged women’s willing participation in nation and empire-building. All Women’s Defence Association is one of the state-led mobilization where nationalism and colonialism led to more discursive and material resources for women. Through these organizations Japanese women contributed to empire-building efforts by cheering newly drafted soldiers, offering help to their families, and making care packages to send the soldiers fighting at the front. As it is documented by Japanese historians to become active in this way gave women a feeling of empowerment which was not possible to achieve otherwise in a stifling society full of rules limiting women’s lives. The Japanese women’s contribution to the war effort becomes problematic, if the experience of ‘the other’ women from poor backgrounds like factory workers and rural women or, the women who belonged to newly colonized lands under Japanese imperialism like Okinawan, Taiwanese, Korean and other Asian and Pacific Islander women were considered. These women were seen as unworthy and expendable; hence they were marginalized and disrespected unlike the racially and nationally superior Japanese women. Japanese colonialism showed itself especially in the system of military sexual slavery institutionalized especially after the Rape of Nanking in 1937 during which considerable number of Chinese were killed, raped, and tortured by Japanese imperial army.¹⁷

¹⁶ Anne Mc Clintock, **Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest**, New York, Routledge, 1995, p.354.

¹⁷ Koikari, op.cit., p.44.

2.3 Japanese Feminists' Attempts at Suffrage

In the meantime, in Japan feminist groups were trying to pass a bill from the parliament for abolishing prostitution and arguing for the emancipation of women. However, both the suffrage and civil rights bills were defeated in Diet sessions continually. At the same time, they started to show effort for the protection of motherhood. It coincided with the government's political plea to mothers to raise strong and healthy children. Since the militarists were wielding power and they were determined to expand into Manchuria and China, they need to have brave soldiers for their aims of imperialism. In the meantime, the league for the protection of motherhood was organized by Waka Yamada and at last the Protection Law passed from the parliament to help needy mothers and children. The women workers were given rights for their children's sake in 1937. Then, only through their roles as 'mothers' women were given some protection by law, or else the women's suffrage fight was already submerged because of rising waves of ultra-nationalism.

The emergence of Japanese modern feminism is also closely related with and enabled by racism, nationalism, and imperialism. This web of relationships also confirms Inderpal Grewal's analysis that "feminism is deeply intertwined with and enabled by racism, nationalism and imperialism."¹⁸ Two instances of feminist movement-the temperance and suffragist movements illustrate how Japanese feminism was mediated by its own colonial activities and by Western feminisms whose discourses and practises were motivated by Western imperialism. Both the suffragist and temperance movements suggest women's complicity in Japan's racial, national, and colonial politics. Although they challenge many of the state's patriarchal and nationalist discourses, well-known feminist leaders like Ichikawa Fusae; Hiratsuka Raicho and Oku Mumeo could not imagine women's empowerment outside the context of Japan's modernity, and in order to achieve empowerment and emancipation of Japanese women, they did not question the policies of the nation-state building of the Empire and collaborated with them. Japan Women's Christian Temperance Union, or Japan WCTU presents a striking example of how feminism, racism and imperialism

¹⁸ Koikari, op.cit., p.44.

were involved with each other in this context. Japan WCTU's collaboration with the Japanese government was not only limited to "modernizing the sexual mores of the populous along the lines of contemporary British and American societies, following the assumption of Western moral, sexual, and cultural superiority"¹⁹ but also it directly or indirectly started to support Japan's expansionism abroad, as Japan's colonial interest into Korea started to increase at the end the nineteenth century, Japan WCTU began to argue sending Japanese women to help liberate Korean women from oppressive, indigenous social conditions. Like their Western counterparts who saw advantages for women in colonial expansionism, Japan WCTU saw Korea as a country which would provide different job opportunities to Japanese women. When Japan started its cruel invasion of China and Korea, Japan WCTU denied the nature of violence inflicted by the imperial army on the native people. The involvement of organizations like WCTU and of individuals like Ichikawa in the problematic processes of Japan's modernity reveal that the state of gender relations even in the prewar years was more complicated than it was thought, and this reality challenges the narrative of passive victimhood prescribed to Japanese women by the Civil Affairs Handbook. Despite the claim of the Americans to the contrary, Japanese nationalist and colonialist politics provided the most-sought-for "enabling context for an indigenous prewar imperial feminism."²⁰ Yet unlike the presumptions to the contrary these relations between feminism, nationalism and imperialism did not end with the loss of war, but on the contrary, they continued to shape gender reform even during the Occupation.

2.4 Japanese Women After the U.S. Occupation

So, the narrative of "passive victimhood"²¹ attributed to Japanese women in *Civil Affairs Handbook, Japan* prepared by the American Occupation Headquarters did not reflect the truth. Notwithstanding the American emphasis on the oppressive nature of prewar Japanese rule, the state of gender relations proved to be more complex

¹⁹ Koikari, op.cit., p.46.

²⁰ Koikari, op.cit., p.47.

²¹ Koikari, op.cit., p.123.

than it was advanced by the Occupation power. In the light of above argument, it can be said that Japan's nationalist and colonialist politics provided an enabling context for the development of imperial feminism for both the Japanese feminists and as it would be later argued for the "emancipated"²² American women reformers who came to help 'the poor, subjugated' women of 'inferior' race, and in this way it helped them to prove that they could also be agents of their national policies, and compared to the women of these backward nations like the Japanese, they ascertained to their own societies that they are emancipated, superior and hence deemed worthy of carrying democracy, civilization and emancipation like their men-folk. During the occupation, American women participated in the United States imperialism by disseminating Cold War discourses of femininity, domesticity and promoted the Americanization of postwar Japan in the name of democratization. A kind of project like this inspired by and in turn promoted and justified American imperialism.

After the Allied Occupation of Japan, a new chapter of post-war United States-Japan relations opened with richly gendered and racialized symbolism. They perceived the Japanese as an alien race which suffered under feudal precepts for a long time. General MacArthur was confident in his success to transfer the American ideals to this 'inferior race' and lay the foundations for democracy, a kind of benign assimilation and civilization of the inferior race were the ultimate objectives. It was "within this context of the American project to civilize and democratize a racially inferior other that the Japanese women as gendered subjects emerged as centrally important figures."²³ Japanese women were seen by the occupation authorities as victims for centuries of oriental male chauvinism, and hence, they embodied feudal tradition, backwardness and lack of civilization in themselves. As helpless women of yellow race, they became an ideal candidate for American salvation and emancipation. In this way the American forces can see themselves as the saviours of these "poor, distressed women"²⁴, so that they would be the champion of democracy- a role they defined

²² Koikari, op.cit., p.26.

²³ Koikari, op.cit., p.40.

²⁴ Mire Koikari, "Feminism and the Cold War in the U.S. Occupation of Japan, 1945-1952", **The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus**, Vol. IX, Issue 7, Number 1, Article ID 3487, 2011, <https://apjjf.org/2011/9/7/mire-koikari/3487/article>, p.10.

themselves in against the undemocratic and totalitarian Soviet power during the Cold War. According to *Civil Affairs Handbook, Japan* prepared by the headquarters for the use of the Occupation army, to observe their new 'subject race' before they step into the conquered land, the Japanese were considered to be a backward nation compared to the civilization of the Germany, another subjugated nation, whom the United States observe more like themselves, whereas the Japanese are unlike anything in their experience. The imperialist United States considered themselves as superior, and the defeated Japanese as inferior civilization. In accordance with this view, one of the very first things MacArthur did was to grant the Japanese women suffrage, as if they had never fought for it until then. This was the very view reflected by an American officer. He said at a women's gathering: "You Japanese women are fortunate, for one morning you woke up and found suffrage lying by your pillows."²⁵ Whereas it was a known fact that *The New Woman's Association* had fought for the right to vote for a long time. Notwithstanding the history of Japanese feminist movement which campaigned for the rights of Japanese women for a long time, in the existing occupation narratives General MacArthur and Beate Sirota Gordon were celebrated as champions of the American emancipation of Japanese women. Strikingly, the Japanese women's historical and political agency in the narrative of their own emancipation history was erased. They were portrayed as 'fortunate recipients' of American heroic efforts, thanks to which they were liberated from centuries of male oppression by their 'saviours.' This discourse not only effaced the Japanese women's history of political struggles prior to and during the occupation, but also their problematic involvement and contribution in Japanese imperialism and efforts to establish nation-state were erased as well. The image of Japanese women as victims without agency concealed and thus made their active involvement in Japanese colonialism unimaginable, and they were constructed as innocent bystanders accordingly.

²⁵ Fujita Taki, "Women and Politics in Japan", **The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Women Around the World**, Vol. 375, 1968, (Online), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1037894>, p.92, 23 May 2019.

2.5 The Promotion of American Cold War Discourses Through Women

Considering the above arguments, it can be safely said that Japan was under the occupation of the victorious army not only geographically, but also in terms of culture. During the Allied Occupation, the model of the American middle-class wife was presented to the Japanese as the ideal model of womanhood. Despite American assumptions about the differences between Japanese and American gender relations, and the superiority of the American model, women's familial role constituted a significant component in American nationalist discourses during the Second World War and its aftermath the Cold War period sharing similarities with the Japanese one in investing women with the role of efficient homemaker and the preserver of national and moral values against the dangers of Communist infiltration during the Cold War.

Sonya Michel points out that especially in the wartime United States, "the family was regarded as the key link in the nation's defences and women were deemed essential to the family's survival and stability."²⁶ Besides, reinforcing the traditional understanding of women's role, this view invested the family with major political significance. Hence, it becomes more difficult for women to challenge the existing system of labour division without being labelled as traitor. Not only in the United States but in Japan also the resourceful homemaker and devoted mother concepts were now the ideals of motherhood. Especially during the period of rapid economic growth in the 1960s witnessed the development and imposing of the state-sanctioned model of masculinity and femininity in Japan. The men had to dedicate themselves to their work ethics and companies, seeing work as a kind of religion, turning into a machine, and belonging to their companies for a lifetime. This frantic dedication to work ethics is linked with Japanese habits of dedication to the principles of bushido, an unquestioning loyalty to the feudal lord or the emperor-worship cult, being found no longer trustworthy, they turned all their energy to work and improving the economical welfare of their country. In this process Japanese working men grew increasingly

²⁶ Mire Koikari, **Pedagogy of Democracy: Feminism and the Cold War in the U.S. Occupation of Japan**, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2010, p.51.

estranged from their private spheres where women and children were seen located. This sort of dedication necessitated support from women who lack the help of the immediate family circle which they enjoyed prior to the urbanization and changing motherhood concept brought by the capitalist system, whereas in the recent past most of the Japanese women were involved in the production processes as well, especially in rural communities. In this way Japanese women were aspired to become supporting housewives mothering the future generations, and as a result the children started to be seen as investments. Naturally, mothers started to spend more time on especially children's education as the pressure on women increased to raise 'high-quality children.' As economic competitiveness became fierce, and fertility rate dropped pressure on women had risen. In post-war Japan, the role of mother came to be associated with that of the self-sacrificial nurturer. It was not something new for them, gendered division of labour has always been a part of patriarchal system in Japan. Since it had always been the Japanese women who were the primary caretakers of the children and the elderly and also the responsible one for the household duties even if they worked outside the home. They were encouraged by the state to be "good wives and wise mothers"²⁷ *ryosai kenbo* in the Meiji Era (1868-1912), in short to be *Shufu*, translatable as 'housewife' in Japanese. Whereas after the Pacific War they were led to believe that they would be no longer indoctrinated officially to assume this type of role, that they would be emancipated as their counterparts, the American women and that they would be more involved in decision-making processes, whereas this was not the picture emerged in the post-war period under the heavy-handed censure of the SCAP.

2.6 American Imperialism as an Enabling Condition for Feminism

It is argued that "in the United States academy, the notion of U.S. imperialism is not always recognized or accepted."²⁸ As Amy Kaplan emphasizes, academic circles are unwilling to accept the imperialism of the United States and perceive United States

²⁷ Ibid., p.90.

²⁸ Ibid., p.17.

as inherently anti-imperialist nation since its declaration of independence from Britain. Hence, the current criticism tends to ignore the strong common points shared by European colonialism and American one, and the fact that “it has been an internally and externally a colonizing and imperial force on its own.”²⁹ Anne McClintock argues the same point by saying, “since the 1940s...the U.S. imperialism-without-colonies has taken a number of distinct forms (military, political, economic, and cultural), some concealed, some half-concealed...but nonetheless it could and did exert a coercive power as great as any colonial gunboat.”³⁰ Besides, U.S imperialism in the case of the occupation of Japan was formed by the nature of Japan itself. Tani Barlow calls this specific characteristic of Japan as “Japan’s double relation to colonialism.”³¹ Since Japan had been also a ferocious imperial power during its course of modernity, and while battling with Western colonialism, Japan followed its own imperial agenda by colonizing the neighbouring Asian countries. Besides, as it is argued earlier Japanese feminism was also born out of this enabling context.

The United States imperialism is a little bit different from European imperialism, but all the same they share the same vocabulary with them. Despite their efforts to be seen different in their colonization of Japan, American imperial feminism shares a number of noticeable similarities and enabling context for women with its British counterpart. Antoinette Burton shows how these dynamics exposed themselves in British women’s mobilization on behalf of their Indian sisters in Victorian and Edwardian England. British feminists argued that the Indian women were poor victims of indigenous patriarchal culture, and that the British women being emancipated sisters had a mission to help women of colour in India. By presenting themselves in such a role of the saviour of indigenous women who lack agency to speak for themselves, the British women established “their own imperial citizenship.”³² Likewise American imperial feminism shares some common characteristics with its British counterpart, especially in its offer of opportunities for feminist women. Although the American women missionaries, moral reformers and suffragists in the late nineteenth and early

²⁹ Caren Kaplan, qtd. in Mire Koikari, *ibid.*, p.17.

³⁰ Anne McClintock, qtd. in Mire Koikari, *ibid.*, p.17.

³¹ Tani Barlow, qtd. in Koikari, *ibid.*, p.19.

³² Antoinette Burton qtd. in Koikari, *ibid.*, pp.26-27.

twentieth centuries seem to be very critical of American imperial expansionism and European colonialism, and pursued a criticism of patriarchal domination at home and argue for an 'international sisterhood' among Western and non-Western women, all the same by unquestioningly accepting and recirculating the notions of their superiority and the inferiority of women of colour, and by doing so denying any agency these native women might have, they contributed to the imperialist agenda pursued by their country. In a way, these women's work in the colonized land provided an excuse for the United States expansion while endorsing their pursuit of hegemony, helped to legitimize it as well. In *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan analyse the problematic relationship between feminism and imperialism saying "our critiques of certain forms of feminism emerge from their willing participation in modernity with all its colonial discourses and hegemonic First World formations that wittingly or unwittingly lead to oppression and exploitation of many women. In supporting the agendas of modernity, therefore, feminists misrecognize and fail to resist Western hegemonies."³³ In *Home and Harem* Inderpal Grewal contributes to this argument by offering an analytical insight that is applicable to instances beyond British imperialism, putting non-Western feminist formations under analysis. According to her argument "nationalism, imperialism, and colonial discourses shaped the contexts in which feminist subjects became possible in both England and India."³⁴ Then she recognizes imperialism as an "enabling condition"³⁵, a condition that "provided possibilities and problematic"³⁶ for feminism is crucial to recognize, and it would colour my reading of the changing gender relations in Japan as well. The feminist postcolonial critique discussed above informs the analysis of the U.S. occupation of Japan and its rising dominance as a world power, and then ultimately its replacing British dominancy all over the world. Hence, this change in the status quo is also related to my analysis of these two Ishiguro novels both of which situated in the postwar, a period of reappraisal for both Japan and

³³ Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, qtd. in Koikari, *ibid.*, p.27.

³⁴ Inderpal Grewal qtd in Koikari, *ibid.*, p.28.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.28.

³⁶ Inderpal Grewal qtd. in Koikari, *ibid.*, p.28.

England in terms of politics and in terms of gender relations and the relevant discourses enabled by them.

The same zeal to educate and civilize and save the women of colour was shared by a group of American women occupiers (led by Ethel Weed) as well. Many Japanese women also enthusiastically welcomed the efforts to democratize Japan, since the occupation provided them unprecedented opportunities to collaborate with American reformers and promote themselves as feminists, even for those people who openly challenged American occupation of Japan benefited from the new political and cultural space opened up by reformers in which women both bolstered and resisted the dominant structure of power and expressed their own views of gender and nation in postwar Japan. This picture of Japanese women being liberated from feudal male domination and gaining new rights under U.S supervision is engraved into the minds of many Japanese and Americans, and it was understood as a turning point in the history of Japan. Whereas the truth was far from it. The occupation's "gender reform was a case of imperial feminism where the agenda of Americans was only to turn American and Japanese women into complicit participants in the Cold War."³⁷ On the other hand, while being seen as willing participants in the Cold War mobilization it would be better to consider that as it is argued by Mire Koikari "neither the Japanese nor the American women completely believed in the containment narratives and assigned different, often radically opposing meanings to the ideas of femininity, domesticity and democracy."³⁸ The current understanding of the analysis of the Cold War falsely reflects Japan and the Japanese women as a 'subjugated' and lacking agency, and in this way help to reproduce the dominant orders of gender, sexuality and nation without giving attention to their resistance, subversion and contradictions that they displayed during the Occupation.

A critical understanding needs to be applied to Japanese women who pursued their own agendas utilizing the nationalist and colonial discourses that had survived defeat and surrender. Neither fully blindly following the containment narratives, nor completely turning their backs on the indigenous culture and values which comprised the backbone of their Japanese identity, the essence of Zen, and Shinto, the knowledge

³⁷ Koikari, *ibid.*, p.23.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.23.

of “mono no aware” which was ingrained in their love of nature, which takes into account the value and worth of another, being fully responsible to the other, women characters Setsuko and Noriko and Miss Kenton despite being in another oppressive system, would not succumb to guilt and self-deception and they would confront their circumstances with a pragmatic resilience and resistance. This thematic tread which involves the suppression of individual autonomy by oppressive systems of power transcends settings, cultures and backgrounds-whether the imperialist fascist military rule in Japan or the rigid codes of Englishness of the Darlington Hall, despite their being traumatized as much as the male characters, the women characters in Ishiguro novels appear as strong, energetic, forward-looking as makers of their own destiny, they demonstrated their determination by creating their own paths and by asserting their autonomy even living under these oppressive systems which would be the subject matter of the ensuing chapters.

CHAPTER 3

TRAUMA THEORY AND THE IMPORTANCE OF MEMORY

Whitehead argues that especially “trauma fiction arises out of and is inextricable from three interrelated backgrounds or contexts: postmodernism, postcolonialism and a post-war legacy or consciousness”¹ Hence what Whitehead argues is closely linked with where Ishiguro’s interest lies. Although Ishiguro is not a historical fiction writer, most of his novels at the beginning of his career including the novels which will be studied in this thesis *An Artist of The Floating World* and *The Remains of The Day* are set against the backdrop of the Second World War, particularly the atomic bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, the post-war decline of the British Empire and Japan’s invasion of Manchuria and the Korean peninsula. For the same reason Groes and Lewis argue Ishiguro is what the Germans call a “**Nachkriegskind**”² a child born into a generation that lives and writes in the shadow of the Second World War. “This generation had no active role in-or made direct contribution to the atrocities perpetrated during that conflict, but they struggle to live as inheritors of those tragic events which shaped them through their parents’ experience.”³ A similar kind of legacy would be the inheritance of traumatic experiences in the next generations: transgenerational trauma. These historical events provide Ishiguro with a historical background in which he can explore the emotional and psychological trauma the war has inflicted on his protagonists and show how they respond to these pressures.

Ishiguro’s *An Artist* and *The Remains* arise not only out of a post-war consciousness, both novels are also informed by postcolonialism, postmodernism and feminism at once. Like other trauma fiction writers, he opens up a narrative space for marginalized groups within a culture, (native) women, who tell their own version of traumatic *history*, thus undermining the patriarchy’s or the patriarchal metropolis’ attempt to repress trauma or conceal its role in historic violence and its guilt. Thus, it becomes the bounden duty of Setsuko and Noriko to reveal their father’s complicity

¹ Anne Whitehead, **Trauma Fiction**, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2004, p.81.

² Sebastian Groes and Barry Lewis, “The Ethics of Empathy,” **Kazuo Ishiguro: New Critical Visions of the Novels**, Ed. by. Sebastian Groes and Barry Lewis, London, MacMillan International and Red Globe Press, 2011, p.5.

³ Ibid., pp. 5-6.

with the atrocity and violence Japan's patriarchal ideology is guilty of, while at the same time making it impossible for Ono to conceal and repress trauma by the narrative strategies he adopts for this purpose. Hence, they carry a key role in Ono's and the society's coming to terms with what has been done, and by putting it into a sincere narrative form, they make it possible for the traumas of the past to be accepted and healed.

On the other hand, Miss Kenton in *The Remains of the Day* carries a similar function exemplifying in herself that without dehumanizing oneself one can also efficiently carry out one's work and gain the respect of the others, as in the case of Miss Kenton's taking a stance for the two maids Ruth and Sarah whom Lord Darlington would like to get fired only on account of their Jewish identities. In fact, it is Miss Kenton who knows what true dignity is and she does not refrain from acting upon it, unlike Stevens she does not adopt the false values of the upper middle class and fashion herself upon them. When they are sacked and had to leave home, she said:

"Had I been anyone worthy of ant respect at all, I dare say I would have left Darlington Hall long ago." Then she continued in a tired voice: 'It was cowardice, Mr Stevens. Simple cowardice. Where could I have gone? I have no family. Only my aunt. I love her dearly, but I cannot live with her for a day without feeling my whole life is wasting away...But I was so frightened, Mr Stevens. Whenever I thought of leaving, I just saw myself going out there and finding nobody who knew or cared about me. There, that's my high principles amount to. I feel so ashamed of myself. But I just couldn't bring myself to leave.'⁴

Miss Kenton's confession not only demonstrates her moral courage but also highlights her vulnerability and humanity. Unlike Stevens, who takes refuge in abstract notions of dignity and professionalism, Miss Kenton grapples openly with her choices and acknowledges her fears. This directness and sincerity contrast sharply with his evasive and detached behaviour. Furthermore, her role as a moral and emotional foil is further illustrated in her open confrontation of Stevens in terms of his dishonesty: "Why, Mr. Stevens, why, why, why do you always have to pretend? I suffered so much over Ruth and Sarah leaving us. And I suffered all the more because I believed I was alone."⁵ While she is deeply hurt by the injustice done to the maids, at the same time she feels

⁴ Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*, London, Faber and Faber, 2005, p.162.

⁵ Ibid., p. 162.

sorry for the missed opportunities in her own life and sensing that there is an alternative to a much more satisfying emotional life, she opts for departing Darlington Hall, despite her tears which are audible behind the doors. There are some pivotal moments of importance in the novel that the characters think over and over, and this incident is one of them, if one of them have acted in a different way, the result might have been different. When Stevens retrospects, he remembers this one as one of the traumatic turning points which change the relationship between him and Miss Kenton.

3.1 Trauma Theory Formed by Caruth and the Yale School

According to Peter A. Levine, “what has been poorly understood in clinical work with traumatic memories is that our present mood, emotions and somatic sensations...profoundly influence what we are remembering.”⁶ In short, they are selected by the individual to match his current emotional state. Then, we might presume that there might be numerous numbers of versions of the same event. Trauma emerges in Caruth’s writing as a “crisis of truth”⁷, then this crisis extends beyond the individual to affect the ways in which historical experience can be accessed at a cultural level. From that aspect for Cathy Caruth whose theory of trauma I will partly follow in this argument says, “literary fiction plays a crucial role in providing the reader with a narrative which is not straightforwardly referential, but which nevertheless offers a powerful mode of access to history and memory.”⁸ The desire among various cultural groups to represent or make visible specific historical instances of trauma has resulted in important works of contemporary fiction which copies the forms and symptoms of trauma, because of which “temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterized by repetition and indirection.”⁹ The novels in question exemplify the qualities mentioned in themselves, since both were situated in postwar periods in which Japan and England went through a serious identity crisis

⁶ Peter A. Levine, **Trauma and Memory**, Berkeley, California, North Atlantic Books, 2015, p.3

⁷ Cathy Caruth, **Trauma: Explorations in Memory**, Ed.by. Cathy Caruth, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, p.6.

⁸ Whitehead, op. cit., p.13.

⁹ Ibid., p.3.

in terms of their place in the world, being both exposed to the manoeuvres of the new imperialist power, the United States.

Cathy Caruth says interest in trauma can be dated to 1980, the time when the American Psychiatric Association introduced into its diagnostic manual the category of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Before this, Freud was interested in the shell shock victims during World War I whose ‘nightmares, flashbacks’ attested to the patient’s being ‘possessed’ by that traumatic event. The Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder classification started to be recognized after the Vietnam War, due to the pressure of returning war veterans; “it included the symptoms of what had been previously called shell shock (the First World War), combat stress, delayed stress syndrome, and traumatic neurosis, and referred to responses to both human and natural catastrophes.”¹⁰ There are not only, however, war veterans, but also rape victims, abused children, and other violent events’ victims who in trauma fiction are often given the opportunity to retrieve and narrate their memories of violation.

When people are exposed to trauma, that is an experience outside of the ordinary human experience, they feel a “speechless terror”¹¹. Since, that fear cannot be expressed on a linguistic level; this failure to arrange it in words and symbols, instead “it is organized on a somatic level: somatic sensations, behavioural re-enactments, nightmares, flashbacks.”¹² Psychoanalysis claims that it can work through the past and a complete healing is possible. The first step toward healing is the recovery and narration of trauma, which often takes place in discursive space.

Pierre Janet distinguishes between “traumatic memory” and “narrative memory.”¹³ Traumatic memory is inflexible and replays the past in a mode of exact repetition; while narrative memory is capable of improvising on the past so that the account of an event varies from telling to telling. Besides Pierre Janet argues that “a situation has not been satisfactorily liquidated, has not been fully assimilated, until we

¹⁰ Caruth, op. cit., p.3.

¹¹ Bessel A. Van Der Kolk and Onno Van Der Hart, “The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and The Engraving of Trauma,” **Trauma: Explorations in Memory**, Ed.by. Cathy Caruth, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, p.68.

¹² Brett and Ostroff qtd. in *ibid.*, p. 172.

¹³ Pierre Janet qtd. in **Trauma: Explorations in Memory**, Ed.by. Cathy Caruth, “Recapturing the Past,” *ibid.*, p.153.

have achieved, not merely through our movements, but also an inward reaction through the words we address to ourselves, through the organization of the recital of the event to others and to ourselves, and through the putting of this recital in its place as one of the chapters in our personal history.”¹⁴ He says only then the traumatized person can learn how to associate that event with the other events of his life. Karl Simms interprets the relation between narrative and self-understanding saying, “we understand our own lives-our own selves and our own places in the world- by interpreting our lives as if they were narratives, or more precisely, through the work of interpreting our lives we turn them into narratives, and life understood as narrative constitutes self-understanding.”¹⁵

3.2 Pluralistic Trauma Theory

Taking into consideration the view that memory is a fluid process of reconstruction rather than a storehouse necessitates to imagine the traumatic past as not retrievable in a frozen state, but to think of it as rather open to be created and recreated in moments of recollection, in short it means all memories are open to manipulation by constant working and categorization. Furthermore, Psychiatrist Laurence Kirkmayer argues that the recollection of traumatic events is “governed by social contexts and cultural models, for memories, narratives, and life stories. Such cultural models influence what is viewed as most salient, how it is interpreted and encoded at the time of registration, most important for long-term memories that serve autobiographical functions, what is socially possible to speak of and what must remain hidden and unacknowledged.”¹⁶ According to this description then what is kept as unspoken might be the outcome of cultural values which deem these memories inappropriate, rather than as a result of dissociation, connected to trauma’s neurobiological functions. This approach to trauma called as “the pluralistic model of

¹⁴ Ibid., p.172.

¹⁵ Wojciech Drag, **Revisiting Loss, Memory, Trauma and Nostalgia in The Novels of Ishiguro**, Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, p.29.

¹⁶ Michelle Balaev, “29 Trauma Studies”, University of South Australia, 2018, (Online), [unisa.edu.au, https://lo.unisa.edu.au/pluginfile.php/2655680/mod-resource/1/Balaev%202018-pdf](https://lo.unisa.edu.au/pluginfile.php/2655680/mod-resource/1/Balaev%202018-pdf), 23 October 2024, p.367.

trauma”¹⁷ which focuses the attention to the external, cultural factors that influence even the meaning of that traumatic event, because the recollection process is influenced by and shaped by to a certain degree in the present moment and in the context of recollection.

In this way the pluralistic model of trauma includes perspectives that argue traumatic memory though disruptive, might not always cause pathological symptoms which prevent its retrieval and assimilation into the individual. This view of trauma necessitates to shift the focus to the society, to the cultural factors that shape the meaning of traumatic event because as it is argued by Michelle Balaev “the recollection process in the present moment is influenced by cultural and historical contexts”¹⁸ which dramatically changes the way those traumatic events are recalled by the individuals or by the groups collectively. This change in the viewpoint of individuals or the society at large constitutes the subject matter of Ishiguro’s first three novels. So, in dealing with two novels which were situated in a post-war era in which all the values become topsy-turvy for the male characters who enjoy positions of power and influence; it is important to take into account what pluralistic trauma theory emphasizes: since what “the traditional concept of trauma presents as ‘unspeakable’ might be a ‘discursive production’ that evades moral responsibility in representing atrocity by privileging the problems inherent in speech rather than the ethical obligations involved in such representations.”¹⁹

In *Against the Unspeakable: Complicity, the Holocaust, and Slavery in America* Naomi Mandel argues “silence and forgetting are as much a strategic and self-conscious gesture on the part of the subjugated as they are the product of the subjugating culture’s demands and requirements”²⁰ So, rather than a true dissociation, it can be part of another attempt at denying any responsibility, by feigning not to remember it on the part of the perpetrators of trauma. In *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*, the ones who were in need of this denial of trauma and responsibility are Ono and Stevens, whereas the women characters are courageous

¹⁷ Ibid., pp.366-367.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.367.

¹⁹ Naomi Mandel qtd. in Michelle Balaev, *ibid.*, p.368.

²⁰ Ibid., p.368.

enough to retrieve trauma and live truthfully, and they are the ones who make it possible for the male characters or again their societies to confront the reality of their wasted lives for wrong causes. So, Setsuko, Noriko and Miss Kenton emerge as the potential healers of the societies they belong to, while at the same time, they have their own dilemma as well. On the one hand, Setsuko and Noriko in their own different ways should make a stance for their own lives and manipulate their fates neither bowing to the demands of what a woman should be like according to the old system of values in Japan, which valorises women as only *ryosai kenbo*, or the new image of woman as the judicious homemaker and bulwark against Communist influences which is the role cut out for them by the imperialist America during the Cold War. On the other hand, Miss Kenton chooses to make a stance for herself, while acknowledging the limitations of her choices, all the same she moves forward. Even if she admits she has stayed in Darlington Hall out of fear and loneliness, she does so with self-awareness, she never accepts anything at face value and demands reasonable explanations while she is serving in Darlington Hall. Miss Kenton's sheer presence challenges the myth of self-denying English butler.

Hence in postmodern trauma fiction you have critical voices who destabilize a character's attempt to conceal trauma as well as personal and cultural guilt. In both novels *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* women's agency emerges through their critical voices that destabilize the patriarchal systems. Setsuko and Noriko through their criticism of their father's actions and the trauma inflicted by Japan's wartime ideologies positioned as the narrators of their own and by extension their country's suffering. Miss Kenton, on the other hand while making a stance for herself and resigning from Lord Darlington's service, she also stands for those two maids who are fired on the grounds that these girls are Jewish, and sheds a critical light to English relations with the Nazis at the time of Appeasement, which was of course tried to be swept away into the dark corners of forgetfulness in the collective memory of England.

From the start there is a great difference between the discourses of Ono and his daughters, Stevens, and Miss Kenton. Miss Kenton asks Stevens once "Why, Mr

Stevens, why, why, why do you have to pretend?”²¹ In another instance when Ono assumes delusional tendencies regarding his fame and status as a renowned artist, Setsuko warns her father: “Forgive me, but it is perhaps important to see things in a proper perspective...Father was, after all, a painter.”²² Setsuko provides the right perspective to evaluate his war time efforts, by interpreting it in terms of postwar ideology of Japan. Since both characters Ono and Stevens in respective novels are morally and intellectually immature, then it becomes necessary for women characters to put them into their place. The language these immature characters used while reminiscing the old times with nostalgia what they deem as priority in their lives appears to be the reputation or dignity they achieved in life. Whereas the dignity they attributed to themselves turns into moral crimes they committed in the narratives of Setsuko and Noriko when they start to give their versions of those same events in a different and a truthful light. On the other hand, Miss Kenton also had to check Stevens when he starts to see himself in a delusional way, talking about the good old times of Darlington Hall under Lord Darlington, as his name is damaged after a libel action, it is revealed that he is a Nazi-sympathizer. Had it not been for the interference of these women in their lives, the male characters would not have achieved any true insight into their lives and careers.

3.3 The Retrieval and Negotiation of Trauma

The more the present is overshadowed and haunted by the unresolved effects of the past, the more trauma is transmitted across the generations, which is the case Ishiguro handles in both novels, *An Artist*, and *The Remains*. Since memories shape the very foundations of our identities and help us to define ourselves and find our way, though these memories might not be always right or accurate, they function like a compass to guide people through unknown territories, sometimes they carry the function of linking past and present, sometimes as in the case of male characters it serves to the purpose of escapism, whereas the women in these novels take full responsibility of their actions and of their lives. At the end of the novel, *The Remains*

²¹ Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*, op. cit., p.162.

²² Kazuo Ishiguro, *An Artist of The Floating World*, London, Faber, and Faber, 2001, p.192.

of the *Day* Miss Kenton says, “What a terrible mistake I have made with my life.”²³ On the other hand, Setsuko directly faces up to her father, in terms of Kenji’s death she says “Nevertheless, in the light of what came to pass, we can perhaps see that on one or two points at least, Mother may in fact have had the more correct ideas.”²⁴

The language of self-deception seems to be the common quality shared by all of Ishiguro’s male narrators. And this style revolves around the phenomenon of fallibility of memory. Ishiguro’s male characters seem to forget and remember at their own convenience. Because at some deep level these protagonists know what they should say and what they should avoid. Ishiguro draws our attention to this issue saying “there is no coincidence that they are usually worrying over the past. They are worrying because they sense there is not something quite right there.”²⁵ On the contrary the women characters do not rely on any of those ‘saving illusions’ of the male characters, and they navigated their own paths focusing on rebuilding their own and families’ lives empowering themselves through their rich and subtle cultural arts, the philosophy of Zen, rituals, and the healing powers of the spiritual. As it is pointed out by the pluralist trauma theory the women’s ability to redefine themselves and reshape their lives implicates an alternative way of survival, one which was not based on denial, but rather on self-reliance and resilience.

This is where the female characters in their role as ex-centric, critical voices step in. They deconstruct the fascist male’s attempt to conceal trauma and his own guilt. When Ono seems to be satisfied with the superficial excuse Jiro Miyake’s family suggested about their withdrawal from marriage negotiations, it is Setsuko who starts to ask questions and manipulates her father to make further investigations and encourages him to take precautions concerning his past involvement with the fascist Japanese government. On the other hand, when Stevens tries to find excuses for Lord Darlington’s firing of the two Jewish maids for no reason than their Jewish identity, an event which would not be perceived in a critical light by Stevens had it not been for

²³ Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*, op.cit., p.251.

²⁴ Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, op.cit., p.158.

²⁵ Kazuo Ishiguro qtd. in Graham Swift, “Shorts: Kazuo Ishiguro,” 1989, *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*, Ed.by. Brian W. Shaffer and Cynthia F Wong, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2008, pp.38-39.

Miss Kenton's protest of it, since she does not refrain from saying that what Lord Darlington has done is morally wrong and if she has the courage to do so she would readily leave the house, and find employment somewhere else.

Sometimes it is, however, felt by trauma survivors as if they are betraying the truth of their experience, when they put their traumas into a narrative form. In this context "Jill Matus (1998) correspondingly observes that the orderly and coherent narrative Janet proposes as part of the therapy resembles the 'classic' realist narrative"²⁶ and because of this reason "Caruth and Matus both question the *form* of narrative memory."²⁷ In accordance with their idea about this need to reflect the impact of trauma truthfully "they suggest the need for a narrative form which does not succumb to closure and coherence but retains within itself the traces of traumatic disruption and discontinuity"²⁸ which would especially serve the purposes of trauma theory better.

3.4 The Need for Healing and Pluralistic Trauma Theory

While traditional narrative styles fall short of reflecting the impact of trauma, the innovative writing techniques emerging out of postmodernist and postcolonial fiction might offer the contemporary novelist an efficient tool to communicate the reality of trauma without diluting the truth of it. In a way, trauma theory overlaps with and shares some qualities of postmodernism and postcolonialism. Especially trauma fiction makes efficient use of some narrative devices of postmodernism like intertextuality, repetition, and fragmented narrative voice. Writers like Ishiguro prefer to use these literary techniques which reflect the impact of trauma, like his use of memory consciously as a "technical device."²⁹ Concerning this issue Anne Whitehead says, "novelists have frequently found that the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology

²⁶ Whitehead, op. cit., p.142.

²⁷ Whitehead, op.cit., p.142.

²⁸ Whitehead, op.cit., p.142.

²⁹ Kazuo Ishiguro qtd in Sebastian Groes, "The new Seriousness: Kazuo Ishiguro in Conversation with Sebastian Groes," **Kazuo Ishiguro: New Critical Visions of The Novels**, Ed.by. Sebastian Groes and Barry Lewis, London, MacMillan International and Red Globe Press, 2011, p.258.

collapse, and narratives are characterised by repetition and indirection.”³⁰ Furthermore, she adds that “trauma fiction overlaps with and borrows from both postmodern and postcolonial fiction in its self-conscious use of stylistic devices as modes of reflection and critique.”³¹

On the other hand, Anne Whitehead draws our attention to the limits of trauma theory for postcolonial studies, such as its depoliticizing and dehistoricizing tendencies. In an article she has written on trauma in Wole Soyinka’s fiction, she questions the practice of mislaying a Western construct such as trauma theory onto the very different experiences of wounding and suffering in African postcolonial literature, observing that the author brings the reader to a realization of the importance of “localized modes of belief, ritual and understanding”³² in their response to trauma, rather than Western knowledge and expertise. In a way Whitehead emphasizes a critical point; while representing trauma outside the experience of Western world, the indigenous narrative traditions, rituals and spiritual beliefs should be taken into consideration in order to make trauma theory more comprehensive. The critique that spirituality is not conceptualized adequately in trauma theory has been frequently made, and for this reason the importance of Shintoism, Zen philosophy and the traditional arts of the Japanese culture like ikebana, would be taken into consideration while the impact of trauma on the individuals and on the nation are being discussed in this study.

In this context, Merlinda Bobois presents a persuasive case for the inclusion of spirituality and oral modes of literary expression in postcolonial studies of trauma by illuminating “how orality and rituals function as catalysts in processes of mourning and grieving in the aftermath of traumatic events.”³³ Other recent critical essays also point out to the complex interrelatedness of trauma, power, and recovery in postcolonial literature indicating that social activism and political protest may be integral to the aftermath of trauma and decolonization. From this aspect, as it is

³⁰ Whitehead, op. cit., p.3.

³¹ Whitehead, op.cit., p.3.

³² Irene Visser, “Trauma and Power in Postcolonial Literary Studies,” **Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory**, Ed.by. Michelle Balaev, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2014, pp.107-108.

³³ Ibid., p.107.

expressed before resistance and resilience are to be seen as not responses of individuals, but also a part of collective process of living through trauma. Hence, in our analysis of Ishiguro's novels we should keep in mind the argument of Forter as he says "the 'unrepresentable' character of trauma is thus not due to its being 'originary' and hence, beyond being history and representation, but rather, it has to do with the enforced rupture with precolonial past and the prohibitions against remembrance enforced by particular regimes of power"³⁴

3.5 The Impossibility of Coming to Terms with Traumas of War

The occupation of Japan after their defeat in the Second World War turned the Japanese into a subject race, and exposed them to an imperialist discourse and a heavy-handed censure was put into operation concerning the Japanese people's openly recognizing and talking about the national grief felt after the bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, or their democratic free will to opt for the socialist and communitarian values endorsed by the Left-Wing Unions or leftist newspapers, or protests, when Japanese women were actively involved into these protests and "denounced American democracy as a sham, thereby coming under strict surveillance and discipline by the Occupation authorities."³⁵ These were all forbidden by the Headquarters of the Occupation army after the war. In her analysis of trauma and the paradoxes of memorialization Mandel writes that "silence and forgetting are as much strategic and self-conscious gesture on the part of the subjugated as they are the product of the subjugating culture's demands and requirements."³⁶

In line with the above argument Maurice Halbwachs argued in *On Collective Memory*, "both individual and collective remembering are concerned to represent the past in the light of the needs of the present."³⁷ What he misses to emphasize is noticed by Nancy Wood, she points out to a distinction between individual and collective remembering:

³⁴ Greg Forter, qtd. in Balaev, op. cit., p.368.

³⁵ Koikari, op. cit., pp.20-21.

³⁶ Mandel qtd. in Balaev, op. cit., p.368.

³⁷ Maurice Halbwachs qtd. in Whitehead, op. cit., p.43.

“What differentiates these two modes of memory is that while the emanation of individual memory is primarily subject to the laws of unconscious; public memory- whatever its unconscious vicissitudes- testifies to a will or desire on the part of some social group or disposition of power to select and organize representations of the past so that these will be embraced by individuals as their own.”³⁸

It sheds light on the mechanisms how collective memory is intricately bound up with political structures and hence, their producing meanings in accordance with the interests of those power structures. But at the same time those “myths related to collective memory should be integrated at the level of individual memory, so these myths of collective memory are implicated in autobiographical memories of individuals”³⁹ and national identities are created in this way. Obviously, we should be aware of the dangers of myths, like the myth of English “dignity” or the samurai codes of behaviour, “bushido” about being honourable, and showing complete obedience to the feudal lord. In this context Lydia R. Cooper argues that “blind duty and obedience, however, are dangerous values to uphold, when such passive behaviour leads to atrocity.”⁴⁰ In both novels it is the male characters who emerge as adopting these suppressive systems of blind duty and self-sacrifice, until they internalize these imposed ideas and turned them into ideals to be achieved in life like the idea of “dignity” for Stevens, and “prestige” for Ono. This blind allegiance and the idealized myth of English “dignity” parallel other oppressive systems of obedience, such as bushido in Japan, where women were also expected to submit to feudal norms without question. When examining Stevens and Ono’s narratives closely, it becomes clear that these myths are not honourable; rather, they silence independent thought and perpetuate harmful systems of power, leaving both men and women disillusioned and trapped by their roles.

So, the present is overshadowed and haunted by the unresolved effects of the past in both novels as a result of traumas being transmitted across the generations, and

³⁸ Nancy Wood qtd. in Whitehead, op. cit., p.43.

³⁹ Christine Berberich, “Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day*: Working Through England’s Traumatic Past as a Critic of Thatcherism,” **Kazuo Ishiguro: New Critical Visions of the Novels**, op. cit., p.128.

⁴⁰ Lydia R. Cooper, Lydia Cooper “Novelistic Practice and Ethical Philosophy in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day* and *Never Let me Go*”, **Kazuo Ishiguro: New Critical Visions of The Novels**, op. cit., p.108.

Ishiguro questions whether there can be an end to this process in these societies. For recovery, there should be thorough and sincere acceptance of the crimes and atrocities committed by the people and the nation both on political and public levels without any excuses.

In the context of these dramatic events trauma theory rapidly grew ensuring the growth of its more recent and comprehensive form pluralistic trauma theory owing to the emergence of ethical and sociocultural tensions in postwar era. Hartman says “this arises from an awareness of the persistence of violence in a culture that no longer condones the martial virtues of war. After Nazism, and totalitarianism generally, yearning for the arts of peace has never been greater”⁴¹ Besides, he argues for “the need for resilience which would act as an antidote and “balm” to these sufferings to heal the wounds of human psyche.”⁴² His argument overlaps with the proponents of pluralistic trauma theory who argue for a more comprehensive approach to trauma, which takes into account the political and cultural and social contexts which formulate the recollection of those traumatic events. Also, Naomi Mandel argues that “the traditional concept of trauma as unspeakable is a discursive production that evades moral responsibility in representing atrocity by privileging the “problems inherent in speech” rather than addressing the “ethical obligations involved in such representations.”⁴³ The retrieval and negotiation of trauma play a vital role in forming the present and future, showing pathways toward both cultural and personal healing. By confronting the traumas of the past, both individuals and societies could begin to reclaim agency, and start to rebuild their lives anew ensuring reconciliation and hope for future generations.

Although cultural healing is a complicated matter, as potentially regenerative agents in their cultures, Setsuko and Noriko as well as Miss Kenton suggest that the most needed tranquillity or peace of mind would be found in the traditional arts of Zen which are closely bound with a deepened respect for nature and its capacity to repair trauma only if one can follow the nature’s path and flow like a breeze “furyu” which

⁴¹ Geoffrey Hartman, “Trauma Within the Limits of Literature”, **European Journal of English Studies**, Vol 7(3), 2003, (Online), <https://doi.org/10.1076/ejes.7.3.257.27984>, p. 269.

⁴² Ibid., p.269.

⁴³ Mandel qtd. in Balaev, op. cit., p.368.

suggests that our spirit should flow through life like the wind flows through all nature, respecting one's fellow men and women with a markedly diminished ego, knowing that like ikebana which is created to last only for a short time, it depicts the impermanency of all things exemplifying in itself the perfect attitude to life.



CHAPTER 4

THE AGENCY OF WOMEN IN CONFRONTATION WITH REALITY IN ISHIGURO'S *AN ARTIST OF THE FLOATING WORLD*

The female protagonists of *An Artist of The Floating World* Setsuko and Noriko are placed in a trauma culture, post-world war Japan. They are victims who lost their mother and brother, they must make sense of and come to terms with the past as emblemized in their father, who collaborated with Japan's fascist policy and whose role in the destruction of his family has been a constant shadow in their lives. The daughters, who belong to the marginalized group of women in patriarchal culture, presently function as critical voices who destabilize the grand narratives of history. They disrupt the formerly tyrannical father's attempt both to repress trauma and conceal his own and Japan's patriarchal and fascist ideology and violence. Setsuko and Noriko are thus vital in both the retrieval and negotiation of trauma memories, of loss and suffering, and the attempt to heal it. This attempt is, however, complicated by their own ambivalence. The sisters are both agents of historical change and reactionaries. In their attempt to heal their society, they shift between their cultural heritage and the influence of the Western invader America. It seems that their ambivalence toward the past and present is central to their journey, and only through this attitude they can create a space for themselves both to resist the suppression of traumatic postwar events shaping Japan and the imposition of roles by the defeated imperialist Japanese powerholders and the United States imperialist ideology which coerces the Cold War containment policies. Obviously despite the American assumptions to the contrary about the differences between Japanese and American gender relations, women's familial role constituted an important common ground between the two nations concerning the roles both the Japanese and American women are invested with in their respective gendered discourses.

4.1 Women as Agents of Change or Accomplices of Patriarchy

In short Japanese women are positioned in a difficult role in which they have to devise their own way by neither being involved in the fascist war- discourse of Japan, which has been patriarchal and hierarchical in nature, nor being exposed to the rehabilitation and reorientation processes designed by the Occupation forces as a part of the victor's propaganda of Americanization and instead, they would persevere in practicing their subtle cultural and mystic traditions exemplified in the arts of Zen and their ritual processes and practice, which is reflected in the Japanese people's love and admiration of nature with all the changing aspects of it, the ephemeral quality of it, summarized in the feeling of "mono no aware". It emphasizes the transitory nature of life which Ishiguro in an interview described as "There are no solid things...the floating world comes to refer in the larger metaphorical sense, to the fact that the values of society are always in a flux."¹ In this context it is worthwhile to note that women characters being empowered by their own deep culture, and Zen-related arts reject being defined by colonialism as "to be no more than its agent or its victim."² Because of their resilience to the impact of trauma and the resistance they exhibit to the constant threats of being shaped by hostile forces at work against their integrity, in pursuing arguments, pluralistic trauma theory which "uncovers new relationships between experience, language, and knowledge that detail the social significance of trauma"³ would be followed, since it argues for a broader and more inclusive understanding of trauma that incorporates indigenous beliefs, rituals, and collective processes of healing. It would be pursued to analyse how Setsuko and Noriko question and challenge the established conventions of subordination to the oldest patriarch in the house, Ono's wish to silence and ignore the reverberations of trauma, and their "disobedience" to communitarian values which dictate their lives so far.

¹ Kazuo Ishiguro, qtd. in Gregory Mason, "An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro" 1986, **Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro**, Ed. by. Brian W. Shaffer and Cynthia Wong, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2008, p.12.

² Irene Visser, "Trauma and Power in Postcolonial Literary Studies," **Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory**, Ed.by. Michelle Balaev, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2014, pp. 107-108.

³ Michelle Balaev, "29 Trauma Studies", University of South Australia, 2018, (Online), [unisa.edu.au, https://lo.unisa.edu.au/pluginfile.php/2655680/mod-resource/1/Balaev%202018-pdf](https://lo.unisa.edu.au/pluginfile.php/2655680/mod-resource/1/Balaev%202018-pdf), p.366.

This is the social context Setsuko and Noriko are born into, and it is these roles they are expected to perform like their mother Michiko before them and which she subtly undermines according to the reactions she has given to the events in the past, we are told by Ono in a critical light saying “...You never did have any artistic instinct. Neither you nor Setsuko. Kenji was another matter, but you girls took after your mother...”⁴ This is not meant to be a compliment, but rather it is a disparaging comment both for their mother who dies during a freak attack and the daughters who are blamed for being like their mother, he furthers his argument by identifying Noriko with his deceased wife, Michiko for saying what is in her mind directly without rhetoric: “your mother was like you, Noriko. She had no bones about saying whatever came into her head...”⁵ So, the legacy of Michiko who dies during a freak attack towards the end of the War is coded in both Setsuko and Noriko who would navigate their own ways against Ono and the perpetrators of the old discourse. In the distribution of the roles, especially it is Noriko’s part to blurt out the unwanted truths to her father’s face, on the other hand Setsuko being reticent and shy, pursues a much more subtle policy in family matters. Although Noriko knows that her father expects her to show deference to his authority and knowledge not only in terms of gardening but also concerning art like her mother Michiko, she rejects to play that subservient role, despite the protest of her father saying things like “...your mother would sometimes even make her comments while I was painting. She would try to make some point and make me laugh. Then she would laugh, too, and concede she knew little about such things...your mother could say such things and we would laugh together.”⁶

4.2 Resilience, Resistance, and the Symbol of Bamboo

The pattern of filial subjugation, or women submitting to their husbands who are supposed to be more knowledgeable than them is no longer applicable to Setsuko and Noriko’s relationships with their father, and rather it would be proved by them that it is the contrary, that Michiko is the one who has better ideas about how to raise children, which Ono would come to accept at the end of the novel, talking to Matsuda saying “I

⁴ Kazuo Ishiguro, *An Artist of The Floating World*, London, Faber, and Faber, 2001, p.106.

⁵ Ibid., p.106.

⁶ Ibid., p.107.

have been most fortunate as regards my daughters.”⁷, whereas it is Ono who is actively involved in shaping the character and fate of Kenji against the wishes of his wife, Michiko as in the case of Ono’s making Kenji drink sake at a very young age. Since he has not learned anything from his wrongdoings and losses, he would like to repeat the same mistake with Ichiro, his grandson by making him drink a little sake which is not allowed by Setsuko and Noriko, they would not let history to repeat itself.

During Setsuko’s previous visit with Ichiro, Noriko takes him to the garden and both of them are “examining a bamboo bush”⁸ which we are told “transplanted fully grown”⁹ to the garden and fits with its surrounding plants perfectly well, and because of its strength it supports another tree. Obviously the garden should be taken to represent not only the family of Ono but as well it stands for the state of Japan with the hints given in that direction, and being a garden carefully cultivated which is described as reflecting all the qualities a Zen garden should possess, it is tended and brought together by the previous owner of the house Akira Sugimura, at the same time it achieves to look as if no one has touched it, it is connected with the principles of Zen for gardens to be tended but at the same time gives the impression that it is not touched at all, as one of the ways, practices of Zen art it is associated with sublime and true art:

“For all it suffered during the war, our garden has recovered well and is still recognizably the one Akira Sugimura built some forty years ago. Down at the far end, near the back wall, I could see Noriko and Ichiro examining a bamboo bush. That bush, like almost all the other shrubs and trees in the garden, had been transplanted fully grown by Sugimura from elsewhere in the city...the result was-and remains today-splendidly harmonious. There is a natural, rambling feeling about the garden, with barely a hint of artificial design.”¹⁰

An argument starts when Noriko turns back from work and finds her father has pruned the bamboo shrubs in the garden. She, albeit in a covert way, provides access to both history and memory in a traumatized patriarchal society, pruning here alluding to both

⁷ Ibid., p.198.

⁸ Ibid., p.34.

⁹ Ibid., p.34.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp.34-35.

the marginalization of women, who however possess the resilience of bamboo, and the sacrifice of largely young men for the vision of a dominant, militarist Japan.

“Father, why have you cut the bamboo like that? It looks unbalanced now... Father tends to meddle too much. I think he is going to ruin that bush too.”

“‘Ruin that bush too?’ I turned towards my daughter. ‘Whatever do you mean? You are saying I have ruined others?’

“The azaleas have never gained their looks. That’s what comes of Father having so much time on his hands. He ends up meddling where it is not required...” “Noriko looked at the garden and gave a sigh. ‘You should have left things as they were.’... “Well, to my eyes, Father,’ she said tiredly, ‘the bamboo is unbalanced. And you have spoiled the way the tree hangs over it too.”¹¹

In the above speech and in general in the Japanese culture bamboo has an important significance. Traditionally bamboo reflects resilience in face of adversity, and it is a feminine image as well. There are some principles or rules bamboo connotes: one of them is about the size and strength of bamboo, although bamboo is not a large tree compared to the other much larger trees in the forest, they are resilient to extreme cold and hot summers, so from this teaching it can be surmised that by looking at size, one’s powers should not be underestimated, besides another characteristic of bamboo which should be noticed in this context is its strength, one of the most impressive things about bamboo that it sways with breeze, which is called “furyu” in Zen, it is harmonious with the laws of nature, despite its solid foundation it moves and sways harmoniously with the wind, but never fights against it, which is summarised in the saying ‘you cannot control the wind, but you can adjust the sails.’ Besides it is remarkable for its flexibility, and this quality is made possible by bamboo’s complex root structure which makes the ground around a bamboo forest very strong, and the last quality focuses on its ability to spring back: in the winter the heavy snow bends the bamboo back and back until one day the snow becomes too heavy, begins to fall, and the bamboo snaps back up tall again, brushing aside all the snow. The bamboo endured the heavy burden of the snow, but in the end, it has the power to spring back again to prove that it will not be defeated easily. Similarly, the

¹¹ Ibid., pp.105-106.

Japanese women are resilient like bamboo in spirit, which is argued earlier with reference to the resilience of Japanese people against the challenges geography brings termed as “bending adversity”¹² by David Pilling. In this context both Setsuko and Noriko emblemize this strength in their characters, words and actions, resilience, and joy of life in the postwar period.

Noriko represents this spirit of resilience in face of different adversities she faces in her life very well. She loses her brother Kenji and her mother Michiko during the war. Immediately afterwards her marriage negotiations with Jiro Miyake suddenly are broken with a superficial excuse, and in the period, she is in most need of motherly help, she is faced with cruel jokes of her selfish father Ono who says at that time he thinks Noriko “was play-acting a little”¹³, whereas Setsuko says “... but, of course such things are a terrible blow to a woman.”¹⁴, Ono does not even suspect or chooses to ignore his war time relationships with the fascist imperialist government might have been the cause the Miyake family chooses to withdraw themselves from this negotiation. Obviously Noriko feels the danger of being branded as an unmarried woman in a society which gives esteem to women only if they become wives and mothers, since it is ingrained in their psyche, so feeling this danger of being an embittered old maid whose only life and duty is to take care of the old “moping”¹⁵ father, she openly puts the anger and resentment she feels towards her father voicing her dissent on trivial matters, and according to Ichiro’s interpretation she is being “disobedient”¹⁶ to him and his patriarchal wishes which of course is the reflection of Ono’s viewpoint, not Setsuko or Noriko’s, or Ichiro’s.

So, when Noriko turns back from work, and finds her father cutting all the younger “shoots”¹⁷ and making the bamboo look unbalanced, as he has done before with the azaleas which are symbols of femininity as the bamboo, then she says “you should have left things as they were”¹⁸ which were the exact words Ono uses prior to this

¹² David Pilling, **Bending Adversity: Japan and The Art of Survival**, London, Penguin Books, 2014, p. xxii.

¹³ Ishiguro, Kazuo Ishiguro, **An Artist of The Floating World**, London, Faber, and Faber, 2001, p.18.

¹⁴ Ishiguro, *ibid.*, p.17.

¹⁵ Ishiguro, *ibid.*, p.39.

¹⁶ Ishiguro, *ibid.*, p.79.

¹⁷ Ishiguro, *ibid.*, p.106.

¹⁸ Ishiguro, *ibid.*, p.108.

scene as “You have disappointed him now. You should have left things as they were.”¹⁹, while she makes some plans to take her visiting sister Setsuko and nephew Ichiro to the deer park without feeling the necessity to take her father’s ‘permission’, so like the bamboo she springs back, twisting and giving a different meaning to the exact words used by her father, sends it back to him, she is not only talking about the bamboo and azaleas, but she means Ono has ruined his family by his selfishness, cruel patriarchal rule and wrong decisions, in an indirect way he causes the deaths of his beloved son Kenji, and wife Michiko.

The way Noriko acts and talks is very much coloured by the resentment she has felt to him for both his complicity in war-efforts, her losses, and the last blow she takes during the broken marriage negotiations with Jiro Miyake, after all she terms this relationship with him as a “love match”²⁰ and the negotiation in her eye is just an unnecessary formality. All the same she never gives up searching for the true cause of this split, and forces her father into a confession, which he evades skilfully. Notwithstanding her knowledge of the still-influential conventions and reticence and obedience observed by the conventional society, Noriko openly expresses her ideas about her unwillingness about taking care of her father after marriage, saying “well, he cannot rely on me to come back and cook when I am married. I will have enough to do without Father to look after as well.”²¹ In another instance to Setsuko Noriko says “I am relieved you have come at last, Setsuko. You’ll take Father off my hands a little.”²² In a way she openly rejects all the roles the patriarchal society piled upon the unmarried women who are still living with their parents and with little or no hope of marriage prospects, although Noriko seems to be above these stereotypical expectations because she has a work she seems to be proud of, still marriage seems to be only way to establish her own path in life.

Neither the Japanese imperialist feminists nor their American emancipated sisters could imagine an identity for women, but being the preserver of the home and morality, ryosai kenbo or the industrious homemaker. Compared to Setsuko, Noriko seems to

¹⁹ Ishiguro, *ibid.*, p.38.

²⁰ Ishiguro, *ibid.*, p.18.

²¹ Ishiguro, *ibid.*, p.14.

²² Ishiguro, *ibid.*, p.13.

be more strong-willed and outspoken, whereas it would be revealed in ensuing argument that Setsuko would emerge as a fierce critic and a consummate policymaker in the family. The shift would be from subordination to self-realization for both Setsuko and Noriko, empowering themselves with the traditional arts, they create a space, a *ma*- a place of full of potential for themselves.

Hence, in their own different ways Setsuko and Noriko would reject the pattern of obedient and self-sacrificial nurturer role who does not have a say in the family matters, like marriage. They would not only question, but also actively manipulate the outcome of the events which would influence their fates and protect the memory of their mother Michiko and Kenji against their father who reflects them in a disparaging light. The events would prove that contrary to the arguments of Ono and Suichi, both Setsuko and Noriko master the art of survival in hostile surroundings, neither completely bowing to the demands of patriarchy, nor completely giving in to the demands of American Cold War strategy whose face is revealed when they start to impose their version of women's role as efficient homemaker and bulwark against Communism.

4.3 The Fall of Patriarchal Patterns and Patterns of Subordination

From Noriko's narration of the past relationships in the family, Ono is described as a "tyrant"²³ who used to order them around, and whom they used to be very scared of. When Setsuko comes to visit them, she says: "You do not seem to believe me, Setsuko. Father's very different now. There is no need to be afraid of him anymore. He is much more gentle and domesticated."²⁴ After the defeat and surrender of Japan, the traditional hierarchies which empower the male patriarch above all the women in the household became topsy-turvy, along with the image of the emperor as the father of the Japanese nation. In a way the dethroning of the patriarchal father image might be dramatic for Ono and his generation who are seen by the younger generation to be the real culprits who derange the society's path towards fascism and imperialism and hence, cause the destruction and occupation of Japan eventually, but for the

²³ Ishiguro, *ibid.*, p.13.

²⁴ Ishiguro, *ibid.*, p.13.

downtrodden classes of society there is a sense of freedom. In terms of Setsuko and Noriko, and Kenji who dies during the war the one who betrays them is no other than their father Ono, who propagates and participates in the imperialist agenda of Japan by giving his art under the rule of those powerholders, likewise by indoctrinating Kenji with all that patriarchal and fascist arguments, sending him to an immature death in Manchuria in a hopeless attempt to cross a minefield, along with his comrades. The ashes presumed to belong to Kenji could arrive to his family only after a year, and during the ceremony when Ono says “Kenji died fighting bravely for his country”²⁵ his angry son-in-law who is held captive in Manchuria for years and could hardly turn back dramatically changed, berates him saying that “there seems to be no end of courageous deaths”²⁶, that young people’s lives are wasted in vain by people like Ono, who do not understand anything about what the truth of war is but still embellishing it with an empty discourse putting materialism, imperialism and nationalism above human life.

When the past is forgotten, there is the danger of history repeating itself and the old powerholders lapsing into previous patterns of subordination, master-pupil, oyabun-kabun, or filial subjugation all of which are related to patriarchal system. It is when Setsuko and Noriko step in as the voices of criticism. The traumatized women who gain a new insight after “the shattering of prior forms”²⁷, start to give their own version of the events of the family history and they seem determined not to let Ono manipulate events, or shape the next generation represented by Ichiro according to patriarchal teachings, as he wants. Although all the tragedy owes itself to this fascist ideology Ono is proponent of, he tries to present a complacent and flattering version of his career as a retired famous artist. Hence, it becomes very disturbing for Setsuko and Noriko to tolerate his self-complacency. They know that he has compromised and manipulated his art to give support to the fascist militarist regime in Japan and still he does not show any signs of regret.

²⁵ Ishiguro, *ibid.*, p.58.

²⁶ Ishiguro, *ibid.*, p.58.

²⁷ Robert Jay Lifton qtd in Cathy Caruth, “Interview,” **Trauma: Explorations in Memory**, Ed.by. Cathy Caruth, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, p.134.

Setsuko's visit to her father's house focuses our attention on the interactions between the family members which is full of discomfort and tension. As Ono speaks, Setsuko and Noriko exchange quick, uneasy glances, as they painfully become once more aware that their father is still denying how his actions dramatically has affected their lives. When he feigns ignorance as to the true cause of Noriko's broken engagement, their reactions to him give out how much Setsuko and Noriko are disturbed by his lack of knowledge and his limitless self-complacency. His being stuck in a version of himself which ignored his past involvement with Japanese fascist regime becomes intolerable. His attempts at authority to have a last say about family outings and issues concerning Ichiro remind Setsuko and Noriko what kind of a tyrant he is in the past, and they are once again resolved to check his attempts at ensuring authority. The relation between Ono and his daughters reminds one of King Lear and his daughters Goneril, Regan and Cordelia. King Lear is a spoiled old man who lacks self-knowledge and attains it when he is left to the mercy of his daughters. Then, Lear has seen through his own faults and his failure in distributing justice. Ono is not a king, but it is told by Noriko that he has been a "tyrant" in his time "ordering all of [them] around the house."²⁸

Setsuko and Noriko's refraining from openly blaming their father cannot veil the deep anger and resentment they direct against him. When he tries to confront Setsuko openly, she feigns ignorance, but when he lapses into complacent silence ignoring the part, he has played in arranging Noriko's marriage with the Miyakes, then Setsuko points out the excuse this family provides is a superficial one, that there should be something underneath it. Unsatisfied with Ono's explanations and easy acceptance of the matter, and anxious that her father's past might shadow Noriko's future, Setsuko is still questioning him about the reason of its failure, so that it is not repeated in the new negotiations with Saito family.

During the same conversation they have in the reception room, Setsuko has directed her father Ono "to take the necessary precautions"²⁹ so that Ono's past does not bring shame to her daughters and implicate Noriko's marriage prospects. Especially after

²⁸ Ishiguro, Kazuo Ishiguro, *An Artist of The Floating World*, London, Faber, and Faber, 2001, p.13.

²⁹ Ishiguro, *ibid.*, p.49.

learning that Dr Saito is acquainted with Kuroda, her father's most talented student, Setsuko says "I wonder how Mr Kuroda is these days. I can remember how he used to come here, and you would talk together for hours in the reception room."³⁰ To her inquiries Ono only says, "I've no idea about Kuroda these days."³¹ Somehow, Setsuko must have guessed there is a problem in this relationship which can endanger her sister's marriage prospects, because she insists on her point by saying "Forgive me, but I wonder if it may not be wise if Father were to visit Mr Kuroda soon."³² And then when Ono still feigns ignorance, she emphatically adds "Forgive me, I simply meant to suggest that Father may wish to speak to certain acquaintances from his past. That is to say, before the Saitos' detective does. After all, we do not wish any unnecessary misunderstandings to arise."³³ And Ono obediently answers as: "No, I suppose we don't,"³⁴ and then he returns to reading his paper. It is significant that Ono does not pretend to misunderstand her meaning this time, both of them seem to be aware what she has been talking about.

4.4 Maple Trees and Mamijigari (Maple Viewing)

Setsuko not only criticises the fascist, imperialist and patriarchal systems of both Japan and the invader America, but at the same time she offers a possible way of life which ultimately leads to healing. At the beginning of the novel, during Setsuko's visit to her father's house, when Noriko is talking and giving examples as to how far their father has changed, that she has "to keep him occupied or he starts to mope."³⁵ Then Setsuko suddenly says "the maple tree seems to have recovered completely. It is looking splendid."³⁶ No one seems to care much about her observation and Noriko goes on talking about her father's being changed, that he has become "gentle", "domesticated", and "even cooks meals from time to time"³⁷, that he is "becoming a

³⁰Ishiguro, *ibid.*, p.85.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.85.

³² *Ibid.*, p.85.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.85.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.85.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.13.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.13.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.13.

much better cook these days.”³⁸ Setsuko seems to be much disturbed by the way Noriko talks about their father in a humiliating manner. Then a similar speech has passed between Setsuko and Ono towards the end of the novel, when she feigns, she does not remember giving her father advice, rather an ultimatum during their dialogue in the reception room when she is in the position of authority while she is arranging the flowers at the Buddhist altar, urging her father to go and find his old acquaintances so that they do not reveal his shameful activities in the past. Ono says, “it was you who warned me last year. “Precautionary steps”- you remember that, Setsuko? As you see, I did not ignore your advice.”³⁹ to which she answers, “No doubt I am being most forgetful, but I am afraid I have no recollection of what Father refers to.”⁴⁰ And immediately afterwards she points out towards the maples: “How wonderful the maples look at this time of year!”⁴¹. While she is talking to Taro, Noriko’s husband she hears her father and Taro have talked about the composer Yukio Naguchi who commits suicide, which is found by Taro as “pointless”⁴² So, it seems she is anxious because her father might also attempt something of the kind, and contrary to her and Noriko’s attempts to make their father regret and atone for his involvement in the fascist imperial Japanese rule only a year ago, now Setsuko tries to persuade her father to the effect that his war-time contributions are of a minor kind saying “forgive me, but it is perhaps important to see things in a proper perspective...Father was simply a painter. He must stop believing he has done some great wrong”⁴³ Ono seems to be bewildered by the change of this direction in the argument, he expresses it as “Well, now Setsuko, this is very different advice from last year. Then it seemed my career was a great liability.”⁴⁴ Then Setsuko draws her father’s gaze towards the maple trees as “How wonderful the maples look at this time of year.”⁴⁵

³⁸ Ibid., p.14.

³⁹ Ishiguro, *ibid.*, p.191.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.191.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.191.

⁴² Ibid., p.192.

⁴³ Ibid., pp.192-193.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.193.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.191.

It becomes very tempting to see this scene between Setsuko and Ono in relation to the traditional maple-viewing *Momijigari*⁴⁶ which was turned into a Noh play then a kabuki theatre, in which Princess Sarashina invites deer-hunting Taira no Koremochi, the shogun designate to Hanami-viewing, the fall of autumn leaves from maple trees, and through her dances and offer of sake makes them fall asleep, and then her real face is revealed as a demon. When he wakes up a fierce fight takes place between them. There are other hints dropped in this direction like Noriko's planning an outing to deer-park with Ichiro. Considering the status of the deer-hunting Taira as the prospective head of shogunate in Japan, this play has wider implications of a matriarchal order's anger at being subdued by the representative of patriarchy. In a way, although Setsuko masks the deep anger in the limits of traditionally acceptable forms by indirectly pointing out to her father that he is going too far, she is ready to face him as cruel as Noriko if it is needed. Bruce King also draws our attention to this indirect, subtle, understated anger and disappointment Setsuko and Noriko feel and which they reflect in different ways commenting on it as "the characters avoid shaming each other by denying that anything of a critical nature is intended; yet their subtle hints can be the cause of suicide."⁴⁷

In this context, it is no coincidence that Setsuko refers to Japanese Maple trees twice, at the beginning and ending of the novel. As Setsuko implies it, maple trees also suffered their share during war, it is reported that diverse kinds of Japanese maple trees "disappeared during the hard times brought about by World War II. To alleviate fuel shortages Japanese maples were used as firewood. Nurseries once devoted to cultivating horticultural specialities were mandated to use their land for growing food. Consequently, much of the legacy of centuries of Japanese maple cultivation was lost or destroyed over the course of about 20 years."⁴⁸ Since these trees are cultivated for centuries by the Japanese not only for their aesthetic beauty but also because of their

⁴⁶ Wikipedia contributors, "Momijigari (play)", Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopaedia, 2024, (Online), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Momijigari_\(play\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Momijigari_(play)), 6.01.2025.

⁴⁷ Bruce King, "The New Internationalism: Shiva Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Buchi Emecheta, Timothy Mo and Kazuo Ishiguro," **The British and Irish Novel Since 1960**, Ed.by. James Acheson, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 1991, p.208.

⁴⁸ Vegder, "Momiji: The Japanese and their love affair with the maple tree and its beautiful foliage," 2009, (Online), <https://printsofjapan.wordpress.com/2009/10/13/momiji-the-japanese-and-their-love-affair-with-the-maple-tree>, p. w.

adaptability to a wide range of climates, their strength and despite its delicate, frail look its resilience, thriving in various environments symbolizes strength and adaptability.

It is also possible to argue that Japan has lost millions of young soldiers like Kenji who are killed on the course of “that hopeless charge across the minefield.”⁴⁹ It can be argued as well that those Japanese maple trees which were destroyed and burned stand for the loss of millions of lives during the Second World War, a generation wasted by ultranationalist Japanese Empire, and hence, Ono as a painter endorsing the policies of this regime and manipulating his art for fascist purposes is blamed by her daughters and immediate circle for his war efforts.

Unlike spring’s cherry blossoms, which symbolize renewal, autumn’s colours evoke reflection and appreciation of life’s impermanence like the changing colours of the maple tree. Setsuko advises her father, Ono likewise should try to adapt himself to the changing circumstances in Japan and recognize that life is a constant flow and the best attitude to adopt is to flow with it by being humble and accepting change as an inevitable part of life, in a way she tries to communicate to her father the inevitability of change and the Maple tree being a living example of adaptability to environmental changes, teaches by example. The Japanese Maple has a rich history rooted in Japan; it has been cultivated for centuries; early records date back to seventeenth century. From that aspect it has been an integral part of Japanese folklore associated with changing seasons, it reflects the principles of Zen which reminds one of the transient nature of life, aligning it with Japanese aesthetic concept of “mono no aware” the awareness of the impermanence of things, the preciousness of living in the moment, *ichi-go, ichi-e*. Considering what Setsuko argues as a healing process for Ono to break the vicious circle of feudal subordination habits, she points at the maple tree which exposes the emptiness of being full of self-love, just being itself, the maple tree challenges “the unsteady autonomy of individuals or even social groups”, “in contrast to the apparent stability or self-regenerative capacity of ‘Nature’”⁵⁰ Besides, nature’s

⁴⁹ Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, op.cit., pp.56-57.

⁵⁰ Geoffrey Hartman, “Trauma Within the Limits of Literature”, *European Journal of English Studies*, Vol 7(3), pp.257–274.,2003, (Online), <https://doi.org/10.1076/ejes.7.3.257.27984>, 18 October 2024, p.270.

de-traumatizing role in personal development is emphasized, as it has been practiced in Buddhism, but the essence of these deep traditions were discarded or manipulated far away from their true essence by the imperialist ideology in pursuing colonization.

4.5 The Ambivalence of Women Characters Towards Americanization

The United States's colonization of Japan was coloured by the nature of Japan itself. Since Japan had "double relation to colonialism"⁵¹ the role of colonizing power was adopted by the end of the nineteenth century to challenge the approaching danger of Western colonial domination. In order to persuade the Japanese people, but especially the Japanese women into "the desirability of American democracy and prevent the proliferation of communism in the free world"⁵² Robert Haddow argues, "exhibiting American culture abroad constituted a salient U.S. Cold War strategy, and things associated with American domesticity, such as kitchen gadgets, played critical roles in persuading the subjugated race"⁵³ into the progressive and liberatory intentions of the American Occupiers. As Igarashi Yoshikuni argues Japan became a site where containment strategy developed itself. He argues "the occupiers' gender reform utilized radio programs, films, exhibits at department stores, and so on to introduce American domesticity as the marker of superiority and desirability of the American way of life and to mobilize Japanese women as allies in the Cold War."⁵⁴

The majority of the Japanese people hoped for a prosperous and peaceful society, they distanced themselves from the militarized imperial rule of the prewar and wartime periods. The United States government knowingly imposed the ideas of American popular culture connecting it with a vision of freedom and material wealth which contrasted with the poverty of Japanese people. The attraction of the American dream is portrayed in *An Artist of The Floating World* as well. In the novel one of the very arguments between Ono and Setsuko is based on Ichiro's taking American heroes like

⁵¹ Tani Barlow qtd. in Mire Koikari, **Pedagogy of Democracy: Feminism and the Cold War in the U.S. Occupation of Japan**, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2010, p.19.

⁵² Koikari, *ibid.*, p.13.

⁵³ Robert Haddow qtd. in Koikari, *ibid.*, p.102.

⁵⁴ Igarashi Yoshikuni qtd. in Koikari, *ibid.*, p.103.

the titular protagonist of *Lone Ranger* as his role model while he is playing. At first Ono cannot realize that his grandson is talking in English and acting a part from that serial. Realizing the situation, Ono urges Ichiro to pretend to be someone like Lord Yoshitsune or Miyamoto Musashi who was the writer of *The Book of Five Rings*, a master swordsman, a samurai. When Ono confronts Setsuko about this problem, Setsuko confesses that she and her husband take their son to see a cowboy film and that since then Ichiro is fond of cowboys and even, they buy a ten-gallon hat to him. When Ono openly shows his disapproval of how they are raising Ichiro, Setsuko does not refrain from saying “Suichi believes it is better he likes cowboys than that he idolizes people like Miyamoto Musashi. Suichi thinks the American heroes are the better models for children now.”⁵⁵ As it is later better revealed in the novel it is Setsuko who decides everything in her marriage and in terms of Ichiro’s choices, but she pays lip service to the existing custom of basing her authority on her husband’s, so that her actions become unquestionable by her father who would like to meddle in the way Ichiro is raised. The young generation is repelled by everything associated with the old discourse of imperialist Japanese nation-polity and the myths created by them to establish their militarist colonizer system on, like they do with Miyamoto Musashi’s principles of fight which are taken from their context and manipulated by the fascist imperialists to turn the Japanese soldiers to recklessly fight until death without surrendering or taking captive.

On the other hand, considering *Lone Ranger* in the Frontier necessitates to recognize the inferior role of the Japanese under the superior power of America, theirs could only be the role of Tonto, the native helpmate of the Lone Ranger, only a secondary role designed for Japan as an ally of the United States during the Cold War years and afterwards. Ichiro’s idolisation of the Lone Ranger also signals reassertion of patriarchy in post-war Japan. It is a capitalist patriarchy as suggested by Ichiro’s desire to work for Nippon Electrics, he is being apparently destined to become one of the many corporate workers who, at the end of the novel, emerge from their offices. Whether Setsuko really means what she says is quite ambiguous, but it is obvious that she positions the old repressive system against the new one, and she seems to enjoy

⁵⁵ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.36.

this new ma, potential space she creates out of this. While Ono and Setsuko are discussing the influence of American movies on Ichiro, Noriko is showing Ichiro the stone lantern in the garden, it is given as follows:

“Down in the garden, a breeze was making the foliage sway. Noriko was crouching by the old stone lantern, near the back of the wall, pointing something out to Ichiro...Ichiro seemed unimpressed by the stone lantern, for we could see him tugging violently at his aunt’s arm. Beside me, Setsuko gave an embarrassed laugh. ‘He is so arrogant pulling people back and forth. Such bad manners.’”⁵⁶

As it is argued before, the garden stands for Japan, and “a breeze...making the foliage sway”⁵⁷ is the wind of Americanisation. While Noriko is taking Ichiro round the garden, thinking that Ichiro might find it interesting, we are told that “Ichiro seemed unimpressed by the stone lantern”⁵⁸ The same stone lantern appears in another context while it is snowing and Ono gazing at his garden:

“I went on gazing at my garden. For all its steady fall, the snow had settled only very lightly on the shrubs and branches. Indeed, as I watched, a breeze shook a branch of the maple tree, shaking off most of the snow. Only the stone lantern at the back of the garden had a substantial cap of white on it.”⁵⁹

In the above paragraph two different approaches to life are pitted against each other: the first one which is symbolized by the static stone lantern represents the fascistic national-polity of imperial Japan which tried unsuccessfully to put Japanese people into the same stereotypical shape who uphold kokutai-Emperor’s sovereignty, which the Japanese people threw off along with the militarist indoctrination, at the same time it reveals the fragile nature of the ideology created by totalitarian regimes which can be easily discarded. Besides these indoctrinations are alien to their natural beliefs which do not impose any absolutes, since they “are quite likely to cause obstructions and blockages...like rocks in a stream, they break up the flow of the ever-changing

⁵⁶ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.36.

⁵⁷ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.36.

⁵⁸ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.36.

⁵⁹ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.104.

reality of life...in the absence of any God or absolute moral authority, it is easier to ensure that such fluidity is maintained.”⁶⁰ On the other hand, there is the maple tree, like the bamboo earlier mentioned connotated with women and their elasticity and their unbreakable strength, and their powerful root system enabling the other trees to be strong, and because of their capacity to sway with the breeze they are able to get rid of the snow with a shake. This view of life is directly associated with the essence of Japanese traditions, ethics, and aesthetic understandings and the reflections of Shintoism, the arts. It emphasizes the view expressed by Mac Farlane as follows:

“The essence of the undivided situation in Japan is that everything is partially fused with everything else...everything has to be relative, not absolute; time, truth, space, personhood, status-each rather than being fixed, absolute and external, is fluid, non-absolute and contextual. Likewise, all thought, and morality must be situational and relative, adapted to each situation, negotiable, provisional, unfinished, evolving and never completed.”⁶¹ (ibid., p:192)

The essence of it is nothing is fixed, and the external world is unstable, floating, changing and everyone has to constantly adapt themselves to it. In his interview with, Mason, Ishiguro also emphasized this point as follows:

“There are no solid things. And the irony is that Ono had rejected that whole approach to life. But in the end, he too is left celebrating those pleasures that evaporated when the morning light dawned. So, the floating world comes to refer in the larger metaphorical sense, to the fact that the values of society are always in flux.”⁶²

The women characters, Setsuko and Noriko practice this viewpoint in the way they handle life, and they point out to their father, that this is the only way of survival, after making peace with the past.

⁶⁰ Alan MacFarlane, **Japan Through the Looking Glass**, London, Profile Books, 2008, p.192.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.192.

⁶² Kazuo Ishiguro qtd. in Gregory Mason, “An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro” 1986, **Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro**, Ed. by. Brian W. Shaffer and Cynthia Wong, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2008, p.12.

CHAPTER 5

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY IN *THE REMAINS OF THE DAY*

In both *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*, the male protagonists are deeply implicated in supporting their respective countries' fascist and autocratic political projects. Ono, in *An Artist of the Floating World*, and Stevens, in *The Remains of the Day*, are characters who dedicate themselves to becoming the best in their professions by aligning with the ideological imperatives of the state, which, in turn, reflect the interests of their masters. For Ono, this allegiance ties him to Matsuda and the expansionist ambitions of the Japanese imperialist state; for Stevens, his unwavering loyalty is directed toward Lord Darlington, whose aristocratic world is steeped in the ideals of British imperialism and fascism. Both men, in their pursuit of these state-sanctioned ideals—rooted in rigid hierarchies and the supremacy of nationalist and imperialist interests—renounce their own happiness, emotions, and personal relationships, ultimately becoming instruments of the oppressive power structures, they serve. Yet, when these very systems crumble, revealing the moral failures at their core, both men absolve themselves of responsibility, retreating behind the claim that they are merely following orders and have no agency in shaping history.

However, *The Remains of the Day* introduces a rare but crucial voice of dissent within this rigid class-structured world: Miss Kenton. As a female protagonist in a patriarchal society, Miss Kenton functions as the only character who actively challenges the ingrained injustices within Darlington Hall, the symbolic stronghold of the English ruling class under Lord Darlington. Unlike Stevens, who remains wilfully blind to the ethical implications of his service, Miss Kenton does not passively accept the abuses of power that define the household. Her strong opposition becomes most evident when Lord Darlington, under the influence of fascist sympathizers, dismisses the two Jewish maids from his staff. While Stevens complies without hesitation, Miss Kenton is deeply disturbed by the decision, openly questioning the morality of such an action. Her resistance, however, is ultimately stifled by the patriarchal structure of the household, where her voice—though morally clear—is dismissed as irrelevant in a

system where obedience is demanded, especially from those of a lower social and gendered position.

The novel's historical backdrop—set against the turmoil of World War II and its aftermath—underlines the urgent need for individuals to recognize their complicity in oppressive structures. Postcolonial literature has long emphasized the importance of taking responsibility, as it forces individuals to confront their roles within the colonial hierarchy. While figures like Matsuda in *An Artist of the Floating World* and Lord Darlington in *The Remains of the Day* actively promote fascist ideals—both using the spectacle of poverty as a tool for ideological persuasion—Miss Kenton stands as the only voice resisting this tide like the poplar tree which holds its branches upright regardless of the wind. In contrast to Stevens, who remains a willing participant or a mute non-interfering observer in the upholding of these power structures, Miss Kenton's defiance, however limited by her position, signifies an internal resistance to the patriarchal and imperialist order that Darlington Hall embodies. Her character thus serves as a criticism of the blind servitude and loyalty that allow this system to exist, emphasizing the moral implication of submission in a world built on dehumanization of the lower classes for the perpetuation of a patriarchal, and colonizing culture. There is another common point linking these two Ishiguro novels in terms of the representatives of these repressive systems, their humiliation of democracy.

This tendency of looking down upon the mechanisms of democracy and finding it wanting and deficient is expressed by Harold Laski as an extension of the habits of imperialism. Laski is one of the political economists whose works Ishiguro has read in preparation of writing *The Remains of the Day*.¹ In “The Economic Foundations of Peace”, one of his essays, he argues that “the autocratic and oppressive ‘habits of imperialism’ learned by the British state as a whole in the colonies doubled back on themselves driving a deep ‘cleavage’ into ‘national unity’ between a putative support for democracy at home and an intolerance for democracy in the colonies. The state was thus forced openly ‘deny equality which is the affirmation of its own essence by

¹ Kazuo Ishiguro, “Kazuo Ishiguro: How I wrote *The Remains of the Day* in Four Weeks”, Book Club, 6 December 2014, (Online), <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/dec/06/kazuo-ishiguro-the-remains-of-the-day-guardian-book-club>, 03 February 2025, p. w.

the democratic system...and a society which denies equality within itself is bound by logic of its nature to deny it also abroad.”²

In short, Laski observes this tendency as an extension of the habits of imperialism, and the unequal and hierarchical nature of English class system as one of its symptoms. He observes “the social, civil, political, economic ideology at the heart of the ‘acquisitive society’ itself engendered the move towards imperialism.”³ Besides he argues “where there is repression within ...there will be at least the straining towards violence without; we become to others what we have been content to be each other.”⁴ The same reverence for class differences has been also at the heart of Japanese society which is reflected in *An Artist of the Floating World* through Ono’s and patriarchal Japanese society’s expectations of deference to his decisions and choices both in his private and professional life.

Besides, both of these novels that are the subject matter of this study, *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*, reveal the ideological implications of women characters who, though often relegated to the background, navigate and challenge the constraints imposed by the political projects of the men around them. The daughters of Ono in *An Artist of the Floating World* and Miss Kenton in *The Remains of the Day* exist within a world shaped by patriarchal and imperialist values, yet they each carve out spaces where they subtly resist and redefine their roles within these systems. Although they are traumatized by the loss of their dear relatives during and after the war, Setsuko and Noriko in *An Artist* and Miss Kenton in *The Remains* do not use it as an excuse to promote fascist and imperialist ideas or let themselves shaped by these patterns neither by the representative of old order or the new mild-seeming imperial power America. By empowering themselves through their strong ties with their deep cultural traditions which is given in their practice of Zen related arts in *An Artist of the Floating World*, and the age-old customs of reliance on the powers of nature symbolized in the figure of White Goddess and poplars in *The Remains of*

² Harold Laski qtd. in Jeanne Morefield, “Harold Laski on the Habits of Imperialism,” **Lineages of Empire: The Historical Roots of British Imperial Thought**, Ed.by Duncan Kelly, Oxford University Press, 2009, pp.231-232.

³ Ibid., p.230.

⁴ Ibid., p.230.

the Day, the women characters emerge as the redeemers of the corrupt societies they belong to.

Hence, the sickly nostalgia that Ono and Stevens feel for the old days is not shared by these women, who instead embrace the uncertainties and possibilities of a world no longer governed by the outdated ideals of their fathers and masters. Their perspectives reveal that the changing values in post-war Japan and England are not merely ideological shifts, but they reflect a personal stance as well. While they seem to be taking advantage of the new space, *ma*, which means an empty space full of possibilities, opened to them by the reforms and rights given to women under new constitution in Japan is a question needs to be answered, because this new imperialist power also has some demands from Japanese women, commodifying them as points of infiltration into Japanese society. On the other hand, England is not immune to the superiority of American hegemony which has spread all over the world economically, politically, and culturally. The heavy debts of England have forced the country to take some loans from its superior ally, America. Anglo-American relations have been strained in the Cold War years and in a way the secondary status of England in terms of imperialism has been announced to the world after the defeat of English and French attempt to claim sovereignty on the Suez Canal failed in July 1957, which is the date the first chapter of *The Remains of the Day* is situated. The way women characters react to the corruption embodied in the systems in these novels vary according to the social environment they live in, and their cultural inheritance, but there is a common point in them, it is certain that they would not give in to these imperialist capitalist system's operating in their relevant countries despite the mild seeming colonization policy they pursue. In this context Anne Mc Clintock argues "since the 1940s the U.S imperialism-without- colonies has taken a number of distinct forms (military, political, economic, and cultural), some concealed, some half-concealed." But nonetheless it could and did "exert a coercive power as great as any colonial gunboat."⁵ Thus, one needs to see "continuities in international imbalances in imperial power" between

⁵ Mire Koikari, **Pedagogy of Democracy: Feminism and the Cold War in the U.S. Occupation of Japan**, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2010, p. 17.

European dominance up to mid-twentieth century, and subsequent “U.S imperialism without colonies.”⁶

5.1 Chinaman: An Image of The Colonized Self in *The Remains of The Day*

Focusing on the ways how the upper and middle classes interact as exemplified by Lord Darlington and his butler Stevens’s relationship also reveals very precisely the way England treats its colonies. In this context Albert Memmi argues “the colonizer or master ensures that the servant exists ‘only as a function of the needs of the colonizer, i.e., be transformed into a pure colonized’”⁷ I think it is which underlies Stevens’s tragedy that he has been misled like most of the colonized, to internalize the colonizers’ interests as his own. Stevens, whose father is also a butler, has taken enslavement and servitude to the extreme by obliterating “all traces of his own personality, all instinctive drives and desires, all individual dreams in the service of his master. The dream servant is none other than the English butler, the human robot with the correct accent, the correct manners.”⁸ His self-effacement is so extreme that he has almost become an object, in this manner he fits Memmi’s description of the colonized which Memmi expresses as “he is hardly a human being. He tends rapidly toward becoming an object.”⁹ *The Remains of the Day* is also a novel about a privileged class’s access to wealth, it is inherently about those objects they own and take pride in, like the two Chinese porcelain statues owned by Lord Darlington which point out to the dubious source of wealth imperialism has brought to England, and the Opium War which was fought by the British Empire to continue their trade of opium, despite the Chinese Government’s desire to prohibit its use.¹⁰ As a result of the superior power

⁶ Anne Mc Clintock qtd. in Mire Koikari, *ibid.*, p.17.

⁷ Albert Memmi qtd. in Meera Tamaya, “The remains of the Day: The Empire Strikes Back”, **Modern Languages Studies**, Spring, 1992, Vol.22, No.2 (Spring,1992, (Online), [https:// www.jstor.org/ stable/ 3195017](https://www.jstor.org/stable/3195017), 03 January 2025, p. 46.

⁸ Memmi, *ibid.*, p.47.

⁹ Memmi, *ibid.*, p.48.

¹⁰ Wikipedia Contributors, "Opium Wars", **Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopaedia**, 5 February 2025 (Online), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opium_Wars, 12 February 2025, p. w.

of the British and later the French Imperial Armies winning easy victories against China, it was forced to legalise opium. In the context of this historical background, the way this object is evaluated gains another perspective, it directs the attention to the corruption lying beneath the wealth and influence of imperialism, and its representative in the novel, Lord Darlington.

“Mr Stevens is that the correct Chinaman or is it not?”¹¹ Miss Kenton asks Stevens, the head butler of Darlington Hall, and she relentlessly pursues Stevens all through the house until she makes him look at the Chinaman standing in the entrance of the billiard room where Lord Darlington’s sporting trophies are placed. This seemingly unimportant detail draws our attention to both of the objects in question, because there are two Chinamen in Darlington Hall, one in the landing of the first floor, the other just in the entrance to Darlington’s billiard room, and what they symbolize on a larger scale is intricately bound up with what the characters live through in the pre- and postwar climate in the historical background of *The Remains of The Day*. As we mentioned earlier Ishiguro has “reverence for objects and their ability to say more than a character could with words”¹² like Ozu, the Japanese film director Ishiguro has a great admiration for. The reference to the Chinaman is connected to the dismantling of the British Empire which is mentioned only as a date at the beginning of the novel, July 1956. The date is known in the West as the “Suez Crisis” when the Egyptian President Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal. It is a climax which shows a major shift in the power relations in Western Europe, signalling the loss of Britain’s colonial and imperial power and the rising importance of the Cold War politics. The great British Empire is crumbling, and its ideological foundations are started to be questioned. Besides the Second World War has left Britain economically shattered and in need of American financial aid. If we take Darlington Hall as the symbol of the power of British imperialism, then its being taken over by a wealthy American Mr Farraday after two centuries of Darlington family ownership signals a great power shift in terms of the change in the leadership of world power. The social and political upheaval after the Second World War and America’s rise to power permeates the lives of the

¹¹ Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*, London, Faber and Faber, 2005, p.61.

¹² Zylberberg, Nadine. “Late Spring: The Vessel,” 2021, p. w.

characters in *The Remains of the Day*, especially it is evident in the way they adjust themselves to those changes as in the case of Stevens who enters into another servitude under the seemingly mild imperialism of Farraday or reject to serve an oppressive system altogether as in the case of Miss Kenton who exhibits an honourable refusal to adapt.

Being the primary imperialist power for centuries, England has also developed an ideology in line with the belief system of its power holders who make sure that the lower classes cater to the needs of the upper class. Albert Memmi in his seminal study *The Colonizer and The Colonized* calls it as the “‘cruel hoax’, by which the colonizer or the master ensures that the servant exists only as a function in relation to the needs of the colonizer, i.e., the servant is transformed into a colonized subject.”¹³ The butler, Stevens exemplifies self-abnegation, repression and a stilted life in pursuit of ideals like “dignity” and “loyalty” which he thinks he can achieve by unquestioningly serving his “master”. He thus fits this description of the colonized perfectly well. Such loyalty and self-sacrifice are fostered through manipulation of the colonized subjects’ who identify with the colonizers’ interest. As it is expressed by Memmi, “it is common knowledge that the ideology of a governing class is adopted in large measure by the governed classes.”¹⁴ On the other hand, Miss Kenton, who is the housekeeper of Darlington Hall, being the female counterpart of Stevens in terms of work-ethics and dedication, has never let this system appropriate herself and compromise her soul as Stevens does. While at the same time she becomes part of the work force which is created by the enabling context of imperialism, she defies being defined by that system and being appropriated by that corrupt and immoral colonizer’s view which denies the humanity of the colonized subject and sees it only as a class that solely exists for their needs.

While Stevens is steeped in his selfless sense of duty, dismissing Miss Kenton’s critical views as emotional and illogical, she insists on confronting him with the truth of their lives and urging him to face the corruption that lies at the heart of this world like in the scene about the Chinaman:

¹³ Memmi, op.cit., 03 January 2025, p.46.

¹⁴ Albert Memmi, **The Colonizer and the Colonized**, Britain, Souvenir Press, 1974, p.132.

“‘Mr Stevens, I have just noticed something outside which puzzles me.’
 ‘What is that, Miss Kenton?’
 ‘Was it his lordship’s wish that the Chinaman on the upstairs landing should be exchanged with the one outside this door?’
 ‘The Chinaman, Miss Kenton?’
 ‘Yes, Mr Stevens. The Chinaman normally on the landing you will now find outside this door.’
 ‘I fear, Miss Kenton, that you are a little confused.’”¹⁵
 “‘I do not believe I am confused at all, Mr Stevens. I make it my business to acquaint myself where objects properly belong in a house. The Chinaman, I would suppose, were polished by someone then replaced incorrectly. If you are sceptical, Mr Stevens, perhaps you will care to step out here and observe for yourself.’
 ‘Miss Kenton, I am occupied at present.’
 ‘But, Mr Stevens, you do not appear to believe what I am saying. I am thus asking you to step outside this door and see for yourself.’”¹⁶

It is a small scene, and it is a small object Miss Kenton points at for Stevens to see, but it reflects the emotional blindness of Stevens, since to look at might necessitate accepting the errors committed by his father, elder Mr Stevens who works as an underbutler in Darlington Hall under his son. The father confuses the two imported Chinese statues and places the wrong Chinaman in the entrance of the wrong room. It is not the only error which has been committed by Stevens’ father, several pieces of silver are not polished good enough, and the dustpan is left out in the hall which Stevens claims are “trivial errors”¹⁷, which points to Stevens’ wilful blindness to his father’s aging and failing to fulfil his duties as an under-butler. Since he has modelled all his life and belief system on his father’s, the failure of his father who has been once a great butler himself signifies Stevens’ immediate and unavoidable destruction both in his career and private life, since these are intricately bound up in his life, you can take one for the other.

“‘These errors may be trivial in themselves, Mr Stevens, but you must yourself realize their larger significance.’
 ‘Miss Kenton, I do not understand you. Now, if you would kindly allow me to pass.’
 ‘The fact is, Mr Stevens, your father is entrusted with far more than a man of his age can cope with.
 ...
 Whatever your father was once, Mr Stevens, his powers are now greatly diminished. This is what these “trivial errors” as you call them really signify and if you do not heed them, it will not be

¹⁵ Ishiguro, op. cit., pp.59-60.

¹⁶ Ishiguro, op. cit., pp.59-60.

¹⁷ Ishiguro, op. cit., pp.59-60.

long before your father commits an error of major proportions...I believe there are many duties your father should now be relieved of..."¹⁸

Besides, there is another level of argument here, the ability to see, not just to look at but to observe the porcelain figure in its true context, if he could be able to see that, then maybe he would also be able to see his father's mistake of offering Stevens as the next sacrifice to the self-negating, self-destructive machinery of colonization, changing one Chinaman for the other, taking "the old" servant, making mistakes, too old to wait at the table, or carry laden heavy trays, and instead of himself, he changes the Chinaman at the entrance of Lord Darlington's billiards room with the other, another sacrifice at the altar of colonial British empire. As Miss Kenton emphasizes and wants Stevens to see it is nothing more than the reality of the institution of service, that he turned himself into a "still porcelain figurine"¹⁹ In short, the Chinaman is symbolic of both a way of life which is on the wane, which is about to be destroyed, a kind of life style which is shouldered by self-sacrificing, hard work of the servants.

Yet, there is another emphasis in the way Miss Kenton says over and over the same thing with a slight difference as "But, Mr Stevens, you do not appear to believe what I am saying. I am thus asking you to step outside this door and see for yourself."²⁰ It becomes tempting to read it in the light of what happens very late in the novel, only when he leaves Darlington Hall behind, in order to see her once more after twenty years, which turns into a quest of the truth of how his life is wasted for an empty idealism, then Miss Kenton's call for "stepping outside this door"²¹ which refers to Darlington Hall, described like a white sepulchre, or like a prison, a place haunted by the moral crimes of its late owner, Lord Darlington is left behind, his journey of self-discovery starts.

As Miss Kenton predicts, Stevens' father falls down, while he is carrying a heavy tray to the summer house where Lord Darlington entertains his guests. Immediately afterwards since "he represents an ever-present threat to the smooth running of this

¹⁸ Ishiguro, op.cit., pp.61-62.

¹⁹ Michael Koresky, "Slight Nod: Chinaman," 2021, (Online), https://www.reverseshot.org/symposiums/entry/2871/remains_day, 3 January 2025, p. w.

²⁰ Ishiguro, op.cit. p.60.

²¹ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.60.

household, and in particular to next week's important international gathering"²² he is forbidden to serve to the expected important guests. The same evening both Miss Kenton and Stevens are at the top floor of the house checking the guestrooms, then Miss Kenton calls Stevens to a window in one of the rooms, they start to watch Stevens's father down below on the lawn:

"...No doubt, she was feeling a certain sense of guilt as the two of us watched from our window my father's figure down below. The shadows of the poplar trees had fallen across much of the lawn, but the sun was still lighting up the far corner where the grass sloped up to the summerhouse. My father could be seen standing by those four stone steps, deep in thought. A breeze was slightly disturbing his hair. Then as we watched, he walked very slowly up the steps. At the top, he turned and came back down, a little faster. Turning once more, my father became still again for several seconds, contemplating the steps before him. Eventually, he climbed them a second time deliberately. This time he continued on across the grass until he had almost reached the summerhouse, then turned and came walking slowly back, his eyes never leaving the ground. In fact, I can describe his manner at that moment no better than the way Miss Kenton puts it in her letter; it was indeed 'as though he hoped to find some precious jewel he had dropped there.'"²³

It is the fall of British Empire, or the fall of the myth of the self-denying butler is given graphically in the above paragraph, and the "breeze"²⁴ symbolizes the change Britain is about to experience in terms of its imperial power, which is in itself contradictory and corrupt. This system is based upon the denial of the humanity of the colonized, so that the colonizers thrive. It has imposed on its subjects self-negation. It becomes the legacy of the elder Mr Stevens, who is himself a great butler, which is handed to his son, Stevens, what they deny is the presence of the world of emotions and truthfulness to the self which is symbolized in the scene by the presence of the poplar trees, the "jewel"²⁵ which Stevens is unable to appreciate, Miss Kenton, who is associated with the regenerating power of nature, and the world of emotions, the poplar tree, *populus alba*, which is also the symbol of the White Goddess.

²² Ishiguro, op.cit., p.68.

²³ Ishiguro, op.cit., pp.69-70

²⁴ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.70.

²⁵ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.70.

5.2 Poplars

In many cultures and spiritual traditions, the poplar tree is respected as a symbol of change, renewal, and growth. Especially “white poplar tree ...is pale grey with lines of black diamond- shaped pores, called lenticels”²⁶, hence what elder Mr Stevens is looking for is embodied in Miss Kenton and the values she embodies is life-giving, life-ensuring like the poplar tree which signifies where fresh water supplies can be found. As Miss Kenton’s name is also associated with Celts, or people who are from Kent, it is also associated with Celtic Mythology in which “the poplar tree is identified with the cycle of life and renewal due to its flexibility and ability to grow rapidly. The Celts considered the poplar tree as a tool for establishing a deep connection with nature and believed it to be a ‘wise’ tree. The constant movement of the poplar tree’s leaves represents the dynamic structure of the soul.”²⁷ The poplar tree, like the maple tree in the previous chapters, reminds us that life is a constant flow full of change and opportunity. In a way it invites us to join the rhythm of nature and to listen to our own inner voice. Just as the poplar tree stretches its roots deep into the earth to find support, Miss Kenton connects herself to the native culture of her land and strengthens her identity, yet she remains rooted in humility in the way she tries to bond with the maids working under her, teaching them, trying to give them a sense of belonging by their work, a career to make their lives, to go on living with true “dignity” which is not tainted by the ideology of the colonizers like Lord Darlington, and the system of imperialism. It is important to observe that Miss Kenton never refers to the other servants as a group, or dehumanizing them, she calls the two maids who are fired as “my girls”²⁸, and she takes pleasure in choosing girls as maids especially not approved by Stevens, and investing in them, nurturing them in order to make them self-sufficient, in this context she is revealed as the White Goddess and her girls as the nymphs loyal to her.

²⁶ Ulukayın, “Poplar Tree Symbolism,” 2024, (Online), ulukayin.org/poplar-tree-symbolism, 15 December 2024, p. w.

²⁷ Ibid., p. w.

²⁸ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.157.

The dynamism of poplar is reflected in the “volatile”²⁹ and “lively”³⁰ nature of Miss Kenton which necessitates an active reading of her in the society she is present, so much so that Stevens who is used to ordering people round the house, when it comes to facing the anger of Miss Kenton about the firing of two Jewish maids whose names are Ruth and Sarah, says “I was not unperturbed at the prospect of telling Miss Kenton I was about to dismiss two of her maids.”³¹ It is also worth to note that when it comes to the names of the servants in the Darlington Hall, for Stevens they are only “two of her maids”³² or “the employees concerned”³³ In this context we can argue this kind of reference to the servants in the Darlington Hall overlaps with Memmi’s argument about the desire of the colonizer to depersonalize the colonized, he says “sign of the colonized' s depersonalization is what one might call the mark of the plural. The colonized is never characterized in an individual manner; he is entitled only to drown in an anonymous collectivity”³⁴ Because the colonizer refuses to consider personal, private occurrences in the maid's life; that life in a specific sense does not interest him, and his maid does not exist as an individual.

These two views of life are pitted against each other in the novel, on the one hand there is a system which turns the lower class people into objects like the Chinaman in question, on the other hand the truthfulness, humility and the belief that before everything ethics comes first argued by Emmanuel Levinas as “responsibility towards the other precedes any "objective searching after truth".”³⁵ which is reverberated by Robert E. Carter as “a major part of ethics is being able to recognize the value and worth of another.”³⁶

In most of the scenes Miss Kenton interacts with Stevens, she either carries flowers in her hand, fresh cuttings from the garden or there are poplars in the background

²⁹ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.245.

³⁰ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.245.

³¹ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.156.

³² Ishiguro, op.cit., p.156.

³³ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.158.

³⁴ Albert Memmi, **The Colonizer and the Colonized**, Britain, Souvenir Press, 1974, p.129.

³⁵ Emmanuel Levinas qtd. in Wikipedia contributors, “Emmanuel Levinas” , Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopaedia, (Online) 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Emmanuel_Levinas&oldid=1265732317, 04 December 2024, p. w.

³⁶ Robert E. Carter, **The Japanese Arts and Self-Cultivation**, op.cit., p.37.

which Stevens looks at longingly, the ensuing scene which takes place in the summerhouse of Darlington Hall is one of them:

“I recall a mist starting to set in as I crossed the lawn that afternoon. I was making my way up to the summerhouse for the purpose of clearing away the remains of his lordship’s tea there with some guests a little while earlier. I can recall spotting from some distance-long before reaching the steps where my father had once fallen – Miss Kenton’s figure moving about inside the summerhouse. When I entered, she had seated herself on one of the wicker chairs scattered around its interior, evidently engaged in some needle work. On closer inspection, I saw she was performing repairs to a cushion. I went about gathering up the various items of crockery from amidst the plants and the cane furniture, and as I did so, I believe we exchanged a few pleasantries...it was extremely refreshing to be out in the summerhouse after many continuous days in the main building...on account of the encroaching mist, and the daylight too rapidly fading by this stage, obliging Miss Kenton to hold her needlework up to the last of it...In fact, I was looking out over the lawn to where the mist was thickening down around the poplar trees planted along the cart-track, when I finally introduced the topic of the previous year’s dismissals.”³⁷

The scene is loaded with hints, especially when Stevens refers to his father’s fall the previous year at the same place, on the lawn which leads to the summerhouse. The elder Mr Stevens studies the lawn and finds out that it is the “crooked steps”³⁸ which has caused his fall, he repeats twice that “Seamus should be told to put those right, before someone else does the same thing.”³⁹ The next one to fall metaphorically would be his son, Stevens, because he follows the footsteps of his father, in his failure to recognize his emotional needs and the joy of life Miss Kenton embodies in herself. In fact, it is not the crooked steps which makes elder Mr Stevens fall, but the roots of the poplar tree, poplar being the symbol of the world of emotions, it is not a coincidence that elder Mr Stevens is also disabled because of the way he sees the world, and it is the legacy he hands to his son, who also suffers utter self-abnegation.

The summerhouse in which Miss Kenton stands on a wicker chair, and the cane furniture scattered around shows the ongoing and uncertain colonization of Britain in the far distant lands like India where originally these kind of furniture were used, the crockery scattered around implies people like Stevens, and Miss Kenton who are positioned in the service system, working to the point of exhaustion for the perpetuation of a way of life led by the upper classes, are only to be discarded aside or

³⁷ Ishiguro, op. cit., p.160.

³⁸ Ishiguro, op. cit., p.69.

³⁹ Ishiguro, op.cit., p. 69.

tossed after when they are no longer able to operate, like elder Mr Stevens who has waited “at table every day for the last fifty-four years,”⁴⁰ and when that happens, there is no family warmth to enwrap them, since they do not have either time or emotional capacity left, estranged even to themselves after so many years of hard-work which is implied by “the cart-track”⁴¹ along which poplar trees are planted, it reminds one the hard work of the peasants.

The poplars also stand for the people who lost their lives during the war, as maples in *An Artist of the Floating World* which stand for Kenji and the other wasted lives in vain, poplars are also used as firewood in the absence of other materials in England, during the war a lot of young people like Stevens’ brother Leonard die, all wasted lives for empty causes which reminds us of Kenji’s death in *An Artist of the Floating World*. The fascist, war-like imperial, patriarchal rule of British Empire is not quite different from the Japanese Empire in the ways they waste young people’s lives for “stupid causes”⁴². Likewise, the system at the Darlington Hall in Stevens’s terms necessitates “new recruits”⁴³ for the general Stevens to command in his fight to serve selflessly to his masters, as it is done by his father before him. Even while his father is dying in a prison -cell like room upstairs, with bleak, gloomy, barren walls which bear no sign of any individual life at all, Stevens is serving port to the important political guests of Lord Darlington tears in his eyes. It is Miss Kenton who accompanies the elder Mr Stevens when he dies, and it is her again who takes permission from Stevens to close his father’s eyes. In all those emotionally difficult events Miss Kenton provides him friendship, unwavering companionship and human kindness, it is not a coincidence that she is “repairing a cushion”⁴⁴ in the summer-house, she represents human warmth, and kindness, and Levinas’ philosophy of “ethics as first philosophy”⁴⁵ finds its definition in Miss Kenton’s approach to people around her with “wisdom of love.”⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Ishiguro, op. cit., p.68.

⁴¹ Ishiguro, op. cit., p.37.

⁴² Ishiguro, **An Artist of the Floating World**, London, Faber and Faber, 2001, p.58.

⁴³ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.187.

⁴⁴ Ishiguro, op.cit., p. 160.

⁴⁵ Levinas, op. cit., p. w.

⁴⁶ Levinas, op. cit., p. w.

5.3 Metamorphosis: Poplars

Just like the maple tree which has a rich history rooted in Japan, being an integral part of Japanese folklore indicating “mono no aware”, which means the transient nature of life, likewise the poplars, either *populus alba* or *populus nigra*, white and black poplars have been important part of Britain’s past, featuring prominently in folklore and legends and also emerges as an important symbol of the world of emotions in *The Remains of the Day*.

In Greek mythology poplar is a tree considered to be sacred to the Underworld, the world of the dead. From this aspect Darlington Hall with its whiteness and its inhabitants mostly being lack of or rather repressed emotions, repressed efficiently so that they have no love interest, or sexuality, represents an alternative Underworld, to Hades. Meera Tamaya interprets this aspect of Darlington Hall and its residents as: “Darlington Hall, for all its grandeur, resembles a luxurious monastery in one key aspect: none of its inmates has any kind of sex life. From the master down to the housekeeper, all lead celibate lives, strenuously sublimating their libidinal energies in the performance of their duties.”⁴⁷

Besides, in terms of his physical appearance with his tall, lean, and crooked physiognomy Lord Darlington is an exact representation of Hades. In “artistic depictions, Hades is typically portrayed holding a bident and wearing his helm with Cerberus, the three-headed guard-dog of the underworld, standing at his side. Roman era mythographers eventually equated...and merged all these figures into Pluto, itself euphemistic title, “the rich one””⁴⁸ Besides like Darlington Hall, “The House of Hades was described as full of “guests”, though he rarely left the underworld.”⁴⁹ Furthermore, Darlington Hall is also a damp and dark place very much like Hades, the Underworld. Then it becomes very tempting to think if we take Lord Darlington as Hades, his

⁴⁷ Meera Tamaya, “The remains of the Day: The Empire Strikes Back”, **Modern Languages Studies**, Spring, 1992, Vol.22, No.2 (Spring,1992), Modern Language Studies, [https:// www.jstor.org/ stable/ 3195017](https://www.jstor.org/stable/3195017), 03 January 2025, p.50.

⁴⁸ Wikipedia contributors. "Hades." **Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopaedia**, 05 February 2025, (Online) 12 February 2025, p. w.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. w.

unquestioningly loyal dog Cerberus stands for Stevens who is similarly unquestioningly loyal to Lord Darlington and wastes his life to serve and protect him like Cerberus. It is given that “Cerberus (*creoboros* means flesh-eater, Cerberus means in Indo-European etymology as “not yet successful”) was a three-headed (past, present, future) dog who guarded the Underworld. Cerberus was the “obedient and loyal” pet-dog of Hades, God of the Dead, and his wife Persephone, solemnly tied to his duty. Cerberus was not evil, very kind and friendly to the dead entering the Underworld. He would become fierce and eat anyone that tried to get past him in escaping to the land of the living.”⁵⁰ Stevens’s being dead in life, like being anesthetized, not fully responding to life, seeming to be devoid of emotions perfectly fits the above description of Cerberus who “fawns on anyone enters into the Underworld”⁵¹ like Stevens’s servile attitude to the visitors of Darlington Hall. Besides, Stevens’s habit of turning his head at a strange angle to his side, while he is listening to the doors, or wavering in indecision to knock and get in Miss Kenton’s parlour at some certain times, which afterwards he considers to be turning points in their relationship before Miss Kenton declares her decision to get married and leave Darlington Hall, can be associated with this ritual of paying respect to Hades. It is given that in the realm of Hades, which of course we can take as the Darlington Hall, “the person who offered the sacrifice had to avert his face.”⁵² while he is approaching that altar. Stevens like his father, who falls on the “crooked”⁵³ steps of the landing towards the summerhouse, is another sacrifice to the system of imperialism, and the ultimate representative of this order in Darlington Hall, to Lord Darlington by his self- negation, and the denial of the world of emotions which is represented by the poplar trees in the novel.

In the above-mentioned myth of metamorphosis, poplar trees also have important symbolism. According to Greek mythology, the black poplar is created after Phaeton’s fatal attempt to drive his father Apollo’s chariot and being unprepared “he has taken

⁵⁰ Wikipedia Contributors, "Cerberus." **Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopaedia**, 29 January 2025, (Online), <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cerberus>, 12 February 2025, p. w.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. w.

⁵² Wikipedia Contributors, “Hades”, op.cit., p. w.

⁵³ Kazuo Ishiguro, **The Remains of the Day**, London, Faber and Faber, 2005, p.69.

too much responsibility”⁵⁴ and fails “resulting in alternating drought and frost”⁵⁵. He dies struck with a thunderbolt sent by Zeus. His sisters, Heliades crying for him are turned into black poplar trees, and their tears turned into amber, and they stand sentinel by the grave of their brother Phaeton, poplar being a tree also planted in the graveyards. Another myth about metamorphosis into poplar is about Leuke (whose name means white) is a beautiful nymph brought to the underworld by the god Hades.⁵⁶ Being a mortal, she does not survive in the land of the dead and dies, and she is turned into a white poplar tree by Zeus. Like Leuke Miss Kenton rejects adapting herself to the inhuman and corrupt practices of Lord Darlington and leaves the manor in order to survive in a more humane environment.

The name *populus Alba*, white poplar is also associated with England’s first name, Albion and it is closely associated with a matriarchal culture. Robert Graves argues in *The White Goddess* that “...Britain derives its earliest name, Albion, by which it was known to Pliny, from Albina (‘the White Goddess’), the eldest of the Danaids... Sir James Frazer regards her as either Demeter or her double Persephone. The word ‘Argos’ itself means ‘shimmering white’ and is the conventional adjective to describe white priestly vestments. It also means ‘quick as a flash’”⁵⁷ It is another characteristic that can be associated with Miss Kenton, it is noticed by Stevens, years later when they meet for the last time in Rose Garden Hotel that “Miss Kenton appeared, somehow, *slower*. It is possible this was simply the calmness that comes with age...the spark which had once made her such a lively, and at times volatile person seemed now to have gone.”⁵⁸

Then, in the light of the above argument I will contend that the poplar tree, often depicted as a symbol of transition and the boundary between worlds, finds its most striking parallel in Miss Kenton, the emotional counterpart to Stevens’s rigid self-discipline in *The Remains of the Day*. Just as the poplar is believed to stand at the

⁵⁴ Mira Karakitsou, “Populus Spp: Underworld-Source-Paradox,” (Online) <https://atemplewild.com/materia-mythica/poplar/#index>, pp.6-7.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.6.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p.6.

⁵⁷ Robert Graves, *The White Goddess*, Ed.by. Grevel Lindop, Faber and Faber, Manchester,1999, p.64.

⁵⁸ Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*, op.cit., p.245.

threshold of the underworld in Greek mythology, Miss Kenton represents the threshold of feeling—always present, always stirring, yet never fully crossed by Stevens. Where Stevens embodies the immobility of the porcelain figure Chinaman, bound to its place, Miss Kenton is like the trembling leaves of a poplar, responsive to the shifting winds of emotion. Her presence in Stevens's life is a reminder of what he suppresses: the ability to feel deeply, to embrace change, to acknowledge the richness of human connection. In one of the scenes when she comes in Stevens's pantry with a vase of flowers full of new cuttings from the garden, she tries to open his eyes to the world of emotions which he powerfully represses, the below dialogue passes between them emphasizes their contradictory viewpoints:

“Miss Kenton, I appreciate your kindness. But this is not a room of entertainment. I am happy to have distractions kept to a minimum.”

“But surely, Mr Stevens, there is no need to keep your room so stark and bereft of colour.”⁵⁹

In Norse mythology, the poplar is linked to wind and water, elements of movement and communication. It is thought to carry the whispers of the gods—messages that Stevens, refuses to heed, while Miss Kenton listens. She is the one who speaks, who questions, who seeks to break through the silence that defines their relationship. If the poplar serves as a bridge between worlds, Miss Kenton is the bridge between duty and desire, reason and feeling, structure and spontaneity. She reaches toward Stevens, but like a porcelain Chinaman which is devoid of life, he resists the movement, choosing stillness over change.

The dual nature of the poplar—its roots buried deep while its branches stretch toward the sky—reflects the profound divide between Stevens and Miss Kenton. He is rooted in service, clinging to the past, while she, though equally bound by duty, reaches for something more. Miss Kenton embodies the possibility of balance, the ability to both serve and feel, to honour the past but also engage with the present. Her departure marks the final bending of the poplar's leaves before the wind stills—Stevens remains, unchanged, his emotions buried like the poplar's unseen roots.

⁵⁹ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.55.

This dynamic is further illuminated through the myth of the White Goddess, a figure representing inspiration, fate, and emotional truth. If Miss Kenton is the White Goddess, she is not the gentle muse but the relentless force that demands recognition of feeling. She is the moment of confrontation; the choice Stevens refuses to make. The twelve maids who traditionally serve the White Goddess symbolize the cycles of time, the recurring opportunities to choose passion over duty, and yet Stevens, like so many before him, denies the call. Just as the poplar tree stands at the threshold between worlds, watching but never crossing, Stevens watches his own life pass, unwilling to step into the world of emotions that Miss Kenton represents.

In the end, the poplar tree stands as a testament to what remains unsaid, the emotions that ripple but never break the surface. Miss Kenton, the embodiment of movement and feeling, leaves, while Stevens remains—a man who has mastered restraint but lost the only thing that could have made his life truly meaningful.

5.4 Mona Lisa Smile: A Return to Emotions

In various different sources it is said that “the poplar is a fast-growing, deciduous tree in the willow family found near freshwater rivers and streams...whether white or black or both-this liminal tree indicates the location of life-giving waters, while also appearing burnt or parched.”⁶⁰ It reminds us to seek the source of life-giving fresh waters, as in the case of ikebana, the way of the flower, poplar also teaches us by example. If we want to survive in a changing world, we must follow the way of the poplar, and in order to exist the cold of winter, and the heat of summer without losing our integrity, then like the poplar reaches deep to the flow of groundwater which nourishes the roots of a tree, we should nourish ourselves with establishing strong relationships with the people we care most about. In *The Remains of the Day*, Miss Kenton is the only character who seems to be endowed with all these positive traits in her person. Since the very first day she has arrived in Darlington Hall, she has tried to establish meaningful relationships with the people she is working with. Like the poplar tree whose “dense root structure contributes to the retention of nutrients for other plant

⁶⁰ Mira Karakitsou, “Populus Spp: Underworld-Source-Paradox,” (Online) <https://atemplewild.com/materia-mythica/poplar/#index>, p.1.

species and increases environmental resistance”⁶¹ in a similar manner Miss Kenton establishes a nurturing relationship with the maids working under her, Stevens and the rest of the servants in the house. In the case of two fired maids Ruth and Sarah, how angry and hurt she has become is referred to before.

After the dismissal of the Jewish maids, new replacements needed, and Lisa becomes one of them, although Stevens does not seem to approve Miss Kenton’s choice of Lisa as a candidate. Maybe it is exactly because of that reason, in order to prove Stevens’s judgement wrong, or because Miss Kenton is too much hurt her “girls”⁶² being taken from her, she insists on giving Lisa a chance. In a way like the tendency of poplars forming a family of trees standing together, she tries to form her own family to sustain her feeling of belonging. In a similar manner she tries to give Lisa, an unpromising candidate for a maid at first when she arrives at Darlington Hall, a chance of belonging, the effort Miss Kenton shows in the way she strives to teach and develop her is appreciated by Stevens as well. Unlike the prejudiced expectations of Stevens, day by day Lisa improves her skills, and Miss Kenton takes a pride in raising Lisa as a potential housekeeper for another house. According to Stevens’s observation:

“As the weeks went on, and the girl appeared miraculously to have been transformed into a useful member of staff, Miss Kenton’s triumph was obvious. She seems to take particular pleasure in assigning Lisa some tasks or other that required a little extra responsibility, and if I were watching, she would be sure to try to catch my eye with her rather mocking expression. And the exchange we had that night in Miss Kenton’s parlour over cocoa was fairly typical of the sort of conversation we tended to have on the topic of Lisa.”⁶³

Ultimately when Lisa elopes with the second footman to get married, she leaves a letter behind to Miss Kenton to explain why she has done something like that. Her reaction to Lisa’s leaving them is quite strong:

⁶¹Ulukayın, “Poplar Tree Symbolism,” 2024, (Online), ulukayin.org/poplar-tree-symbolism, 15 December 2024, p. w.

⁶² Kazuo Ishiguro, op.cit., p.162.

⁶³ Kazuo Ishiguro, op.cit., p.164.

“Miss Kenton was noticeably upset. At the time while I was running my eye over the young woman’s letter, she sat there at the table before me, looking down at her hands...I cannot really recall seeing her more bereft than on that morning.”⁶⁴

Miss Kenton is quite disappointed when Lisa just leaves the career opportunity she has given to her, but as Stevens observes it seems to be more than that, she would like to raise this maid like her own daughter investing all her knowledge, skills and approach to work, in her approach to Lisa, she is the Master and Lisa emerges as an apprentice. Then nurturing and bringing up Lisa as an ideal housekeeper for Miss Kenton becomes as a kind of art, and Lisa is an artwork. When we associate the name of Lisa with the name of famous painting by Leonardo da Vinci and recognize the fact that black poplar wood is used as a panel for that painting, rather than a canvas, then Lisa’s betrayal of Miss Kenton, and her being extremely dejected because of this event becomes more understandable. Prior to this event two of her maids are taken from her, and in this instance one of her girls betraying her threatens the matriarchal order Miss Kenton tries to establish under Darlington Hall’s roof, the very pillar of the patriarchal and colonizing order, and in her role as the White Goddess, like the poplar whose roots stretch themselves to widespread areas to regenerate anew if need rises, in a similar manner Miss Kenton would move on to somewhere else to start from the beginning.

Greek myths are important in this context, because they signal a different social order, a matriarchal one like the order which is started at the beginning of ancient times in the history of Albion, the name of England at that time, by the fifty Danaids, the daughters of Danaus, after killing their husbands whom they get married against their wills, arrive in England and start a matriarchal order anew and founded Argos.⁶⁵ These Greek myths also share some common points with ancient Celt myths which also contain positive representations of mother-daughter relationships such as the one between Persephone and Demeter which is reflected to *The Remains of the Day*, the strong bonds of sisterhood established by Miss Kenton, in her role as a kind of Leuke endowed with the regenerative power of nature. Because of its rich versatile nature,

⁶⁴ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.166.

⁶⁵ Wikipedia Contributors, "Danaids." 9 February 2025, (Online), **Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopaedia**, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dana%C3%AFdes>, p. w.

the black poplar wood is called as “a hidden gem”⁶⁶. Not only it nurtures, but also it supports other art forms with its wood, “it has been the backbone of many artistic masterpieces, including the iconic Mona Lisa.”⁶⁷ I think the basic problem Miss Kenton faces here, is she seems to ignore the precariousness of the human subject, the rich life of emotions which makes Lisa to elope with the second footman, whom she thinks she is in love with. There seems to be two extremes in the novel, either there are people like Stevens and his father who negate and repress the emotional sides of their lives and live in a wasteland of loneliness, on the other hand people like Lisa who sacrifice everything for a dream. The solution seems to be finding the balance between these two realms as it is perfectly blended in Miss Kenton, and the poplar stands as a symbol of living truthful to yourself as a liminal tree between these two contradictory ways of lives.

The attraction Leonardo’s painting *Mona Lisa* or *La Gioconda* which means ‘the laughing’ one rests on the formula of *sfumato* (smoked off, blurred) which “is a painting technique for softening the transition between colours, mimicking an area beyond what the human eye is focusing on, or out of focus plane... Leonardo describes it as ‘without lines or borders, in the manner of smoke.’”⁶⁸ In this style of painting there are no lines or borders, it is a technique of blending colours and tones. There is a similar style of painting in *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ono under his previous art master Mori-San follows “the modern Utamaro line”⁶⁹ in which lines are blurred, there are no strict lines, “with light and shade to create a three-dimensional appearance”⁷⁰ along with “the use of subdued colours”⁷¹ to evoke “a certain melancholy, nocturnal atmosphere around his women”⁷². Ono’s master then says what he is after is to draw something elusive, the “floating world”⁷³ of pleasure district.

⁶⁶ Kristen Rankel, “Symbolism and Benefits of the Black Poplar: *Populus Nigra*,” 14 February 2024, (Online), <https://greg.app/black-poplar-benefits>, 21 January 2025, p.2.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.2.

⁶⁸ Wikipedia Contributors. “Sfumato.” **Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopaedia.**, 24 Jan. 2025, (Online), <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sfumato>, 10 February 2025, p. w.

⁶⁹ Ishiguro, **An Artist of the Floating World**, op.cit., pp.140-141.

⁷⁰ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.141.

⁷¹ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.141.

⁷² Ishiguro, op.cit., p.141.

⁷³ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.145.

Only in acting in accordance with nature can one's creative powers will develop and express themselves, so one must flow with nature and its laws rather than strive to overcome them. To be in harmony with nature has a special terminology in Zen, and it is called "furyu"⁷⁴ Fu means "wind", and ryu means "to flow" : "this means that our spirit should flow through life like the wind that flows through all of nature."⁷⁵ True art is about floating world, and while everything is in a motion, fluid and in a flux, to be obstinate, being stuck with a static, stoical, fascist or dogmatic state of mind is to betray oneself and life, or art whose mission is to be true to life, mirror life in a most sincere way.

The same energy is associated with poplars whose leaves shimmer and dance with the breeze, being a springy tree it moves with the wind, never fights against it, its dynamic presence calls to mind the ever-active nature of life, like a river flowing, and by being as such it has become a symbol of both the strength and the ephemeral beauty of nature in English folklore which has its roots in Celtic Runes. With reference to *Mona Lisa*, the same style is valid. It is said that Leonardo also believes in nature as the true source of knowledge, and hence reflected it into his works of art, and the floating quality of life which he has reflected in *Mona Lisa*. This feature of his work is considered to be its most striking side:

"The most striking feature of the painting is the sitter's ambiguous half smile. She looks directly at the viewer, but her arms, torso, and head each twist subtly in a different direction, conveying an arrested sense of movement. Leonardo explores the possibilities of oil paint in the soft folds of the drapery, texture of skin, and contrasting light and dark (chiaroscuro). The deeply receding background, with its winding rivers and rock formations, is an example of Leonardo's personal view of the natural world: one in which everything is liquid, in flux, and filled with movement and energy."⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Robert E. Carter, **The Japanese Arts and Self-Cultivation**, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2008, p.92.

⁷⁵ Dr Sen Genshitsu qtd. in Carter, *ibid.*, p.92.

⁷⁶ Carmen C. Bambach, "Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519)", 01October 2002, (Online), <https://www.metmuseum.org/essays/leonardo-davinci-1452-1519> *Mona Lisa* (ca.1503-6 and later), 10 February 2025, p. w.

In *The Remains of the Day* it is Miss Kenton only who makes Stevens smile while they talk about Lisa, or as in their last meeting at The Rose Garden Hotel, it is Stevens who makes jokes and tells about their common acquaintances and brings a happy smile to her face, in a way they complete each other, they are meant for each other which is also how Ishiguro portrays them to be and talks about it in an interview he has given to the Guardian⁷⁷, that Stevens and Miss Kenton are island people, very lonely and there is an element of fear of loneliness which shapes the way Miss Kenton tries to form meaningful relationships to bond with the other people. Every time she tries to create this bond with Stevens, she is rebuffed by him, and she has decided to get married and leave the service system she has been part of for a long time. Although she forms a family, and she has a daughter, Catherine whom she wants to meet Stevens, and a baby, a granddaughter is on the way, the bonds she would like to create seem to be achieved, she still yearns for and imagines what would it be if they could have formed this family with Stevens which she puts as “And you get to thinking about a *better* life you might have had. For instance, I get to thinking about a life I might have had with you Mr Stevens.”⁷⁸ If he could have only listened to his instincts which the whispering leaves of the poplars represent and reciprocate, follow the path of the poplar trees which symbolise the rich world of emotions and being truthful to oneself, then the possibility of happiness which he has denied both to himself and Miss Kenton would have been realized.

In the last meeting they have with Stevens, he observes that Miss Kenton “aged gracefully”⁷⁹, but “she remained slim and upright”⁸⁰ as ever, “she has maintained her old way of holding her head in a manner verged on the defiant”⁸¹, which means she is the poplar in character still, she has not given in or submitted to the expectations of patriarchy. However in order to create for herself a loving family with whom she will feel safe she has made this choice of a loveless marriage and thus made a compromise

⁷⁷ Kazuo Ishiguro qtd. in *The Guardian*, 6 December 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/series/bookclub>, 13 February 2025, p. w.

⁷⁸ Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*, London, Faber and Faber, 2005, p.251.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.244.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.244.

⁸¹ Ibid., p.244.

on her own terms, but when she gets angry with her husband from time to time, because he falls short of her expectations, because her perfect match in spirit is Stevens, which she would confess towards the end of their meeting years later, she leaves her house and stays with a friend. And Stevens at this point also comes to accept this lost chance of possibility for happiness and truthful life to himself as “Indeed-why should I not admit it? - at that moment, my heart was breaking.”⁸²

There are some changes to her which shows that she has not been happy, Stevens observes that for example she seems “somehow slower”⁸³, that there is a “weariness with life”⁸⁴, “the spark which had once made her such a lively, and at times a volatile person seemed now to have gone”⁸⁵, “when she is not speaking,...I thought I glimpsed something like sadness in her expression”⁸⁶

And then he seems to be verbally drawing a beautiful portrait of Miss Kenton with words like an artist:

“We spent some time reminiscing about various persons from the past, or else exchanging any news we had concerning them, and this was, I must say, most enjoyable. But it was not so much the content of our conversation as the little smiles she gave at the end of utterances, her small ironic inflexions here and there, certain gestures with her shoulders or her hands, which began to recall unmistakably the rhythms and habits of our conversation from all those years ago.”⁸⁷

With the focus on her hands and smile, this is a verbal picture of Mona Lisa, so loveable, Miss Kenton represents in her person the world of emotions Stevens is scared to embrace.

5.5 Butler to the World

In opposition to the world of emotions which makes life worth living, there is the materialist world which especially becomes more nuanced in England with the arrival

⁸² Ibid., p.252.

⁸³ Ibid., p.245.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.245.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.245.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.245.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.245.

of Americans who are “eager to play the part of a ‘real English Lord’...Stevens himself becomes a commodity...English culture constitutes a valuable form of capital in the new American-dominated world order.”⁸⁸ In a recent book published named *Butler to the World*, the author Oliver Bullough discusses how after the Second World War England has lost its primary position in shaping world politics and economy and it has been experiencing its ensuing results. He argues “the Suez Crisis of 1956 endangered Britain’s ability to finance its international trade. In terror, the City’s merchant banks abandoned the pound and not only borrowed dollars, as the Midland had done. But they actually started using them for global trading.”⁸⁹ In terms of the loss of the imperial power, the Suez crisis was a turning point which testifies to the changing equilibrium in world politics. Bullough argues that “in losing their empire, the British ruling class adopted the role of butler to the world’s richest people.”⁹⁰ The loss of power, and secondary position of England in terms of world politics is predicted by the former U.S. Secretary of State, Dean Acheson who said “Great Britain has lost an empire and not yet found a role.”⁹¹ In fact the role the U.S played in England’s loss of power in Suez crisis is revealed later. In order to make up for their loss of wealth and influence, Bullough claims “Britain has become the servant to tycoons, tax dodgers, kleptocrats and criminals.”⁹²

In *The Remains of the Day* the way the characters react to this new “breeze”⁹³ of Americanization is in line with their characters, positions, the class they belong to, and their stance towards their own innate culture and bonds with nature. Furthermore, it is

⁸⁸ John P. McCombe, “The End of Anthony Eden: Ishiguro’s “The Remains of the Day” and Mid-century Anglo-American Tensions”, *Twentieth Century Literature*, Spring, 2002, Vol.48, No.1 (Spring 2002), Duke University Press, 2002, (Online), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3175979> , 14 February 2025, p.89.

⁸⁹ Alan Gibson, “Butler to the World: How Britain Became the Servant to Tycoons, Tax Dodgers, Kleptocrats and Criminals by Olliver Bullough Review,” *Socialist Worker*, Issue 2836, 14 December 2022, (Online), <https://socialistworker.co.uk/reviews-and-culture/butler-to-the-world-how-britain-became-the-servant-to-tycoon>, 10 February 2025, p. w.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. w.

⁹¹ Douglas Brinkley, “Dean Acheson and the ‘Special Relationship’: The West Point Speech of December 1962.” *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 33, no. 3, 1990, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2639732>, 16 February 2025, p.599.

⁹² Ibid., p. w.

⁹³ Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*, London, Faber and Faber, 2005, p.70.

also important to consider England's "double relation to colonialism"⁹⁴, their role in the world arena as the leading colonizing country, which is another common point between England and Japan, and hence the two Ishiguro novels *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* which are the subject matter of this study.

In *The Remains of the Day* the way power shifts from the English upper classes who do not have the monetary power they used to have any longer is given with the change of the ownership of the Darlington Hall, once the hub of the world's international relations under the amateur attempts of Lord Darlington into the hands of a neu-riche American Mr Farraday who can afford the high expenses of owning a manor house as big as Darlington Hall. The new proprietor of Darlington Hall does not seem to observe the class distinctions and the distance the recognition of these necessitates, and the paternal role he is expected to play in terms of his employees. For example, he speaks to Stevens as if they are friends, he makes some inappropriate jokes about Stevens' desire to visit the country to see Miss Kenton again and embarrasses him⁹⁵, saying "My, my Stevens. A lady friend. And at your age."⁹⁶ while on the other hand he seems to be quite generous in offering the use of his car, a Ford and paying for the expense of the petrol the two week journey Stevens plans to take to the West country where Miss Kenton, the old housekeeper of Darlington Hall resides, and once she is persuaded in taking her place in this house again, then Stevens thinks the mistakes which has started to occur owing to a faulty staff plan in which he shoulders more responsibility than he can perform he has given to himself, would be solved. Since the new proprietor demands the curtailment of the staff, and to run the house on few numbers of servants as much as possible, some mistakes start to occur which only Stevens notices as a perfectionist.

Although the new American owner of Darlington Hall seems to be friendly, he does not want to own the house only, but he wants to own the people along with the house, especially Stevens, as a specimen of "genuine English butler."⁹⁷ Under the mild

⁹⁴Tani Barlow qtd. in Mire Koikari, **Pedagogy of Democracy: Feminism and the Cold War in the U.S. Occupation of Japan**, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2010, p. 19.

⁹⁵ Kazuo Ishiguro, **The Remains of the Day**, London, Faber and Faber, 2005, p.14.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.14.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.131.

colonizing attitude of Farraday, there is a fierce colonizer. Once there is another American couple who has bought another manor house in the whereabouts of Darlington Hall, the Wakefields come to pay a visit to Darlington Hall, and the lady asks some questions to ascertain the originality ⁹⁸ of the house and to Stevens to ascertain that he is “genuine”⁹⁹ English butler, not a “mock”¹⁰⁰ one, to this question Stevens says he has not worked for Lord Darlington. In his denial of knowing Lord Darlington, there is betrayal, it is as if Lord Darlington is a Christ figure wrongly blamed and crucified, and Stevens becomes Peter to him by denying his thirty-five years of service under him.¹⁰¹ Although Stevens alleges that he is not aware of Lord Darlington’s being a Nazi-sympathizer, then the truth is far from that. He is aware of his corruption, but to acknowledge it openly would implicate Stevens as well, so until the very last, until it becomes impossible not to confess this reality which happens at the end of the novel on the pier to a complete stranger who has been a butler lately but retired, who says “you have got to enjoy yourself, the evening is the best part of the day.”¹⁰² All the same Stevens goes on denying Lord Darlington’s fascist tendencies. On the other hand, Farraday is not far different from Lord Darlington’s possessive attitude towards servants, after the visit of his American friends Wakefields, he gets angry with Stevens for his denial of working for Lord Darlington:

“‘She kept asserting everything was “mock” this and “mock” that. She even thought you were mock Stevens.’

Indeed Stevens. I’d told her you were the real thing. A real old English butler. That you’d been in this house for over thirty years, serving a real English lord...In fact, she contradicted me with great confidence.’

‘I mean to say, Stevens, this *is* a genuine grand old English house, isn’t it? That’s what I paid for. And you’re a genuine old-fashioned English butler, not just some waiter pretending to be one. You’re the real thing, aren’t you? That’s what I wanted, isn’t that what I have?

‘I venture to say you do, Sir.’”¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.129.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.131.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.130.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.130.

¹⁰² Ibid., p.256.

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp.130-131.

It sounds as if Mr Farraday has bought the house including the butler, as a specimen of “genuine English butler”,¹⁰⁴ if he is served by him, he would feel elevated, he wants to show off his new possessions to the Wakefields who themselves have bought an old English manor house. It has been centuries since Feste in *Twelfth Night* answers to Duke Orsino who asks Feste whether they belong to Countess Olivia’s house to which he answers ironically as : “Ay, Sir we are some of her trappings”¹⁰⁵ People like Feste, the fool of Olivia, do not have much worth, they are “part of the package”¹⁰⁶ as the retired butler on the pier jokingly says to Stevens. It has become the fate of Stevens to be treated like an object or a kind of fool and entertainer to the guests of Darlington Hall which is the reason why Miss Kenton has put an end to her own career in there and in the service system which denies the humanity of the people involved in this system of colonization.

At the beginning and end of the novel, there are similar events with reference to the polishing of forks which calls attention to how the power has changed hands but in fact nothing has changed much in terms of the hierarchy of the rulers and ruled. The error concerning the polishing of silver is noticed by Miss Kenton. It is at the beginning of her career in Darlington Hall. One day she says “several pieces of silver had been laid out for the dining room which bore clear remains of polish. The end of one fork had been practically black”¹⁰⁷ It is in fact Stevens, the elder who is responsible for polishing the silver as the under-butler in Darlington Hall who commits this error which Stevens recognizes as : “the silver was one of my father’s main responsibilities and one he took great pride in.”¹⁰⁸ It is not the only error committed by Stevens’s father, there is another one which again Miss Kenton observes and informs Steven about: the dust-pan which is used and left in the middle of the entrance hall, the moment Stevens sees it, he remembers it is his father who uses it some time ago. Immediately Stevens goes and picks up “the offending item”¹⁰⁹ he says “before

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 131.

¹⁰⁵ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, Ed.by. Keir Elam, London, The Arden-Bloomsbury, 2021, p.321, 5.1.7-8.

¹⁰⁶ Ishiguro, op. cit., p.255.

¹⁰⁷ Ishiguro, op. cit., p.59.

¹⁰⁸ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.59.

¹⁰⁹ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.58.

realizing its full implication”¹¹⁰, he concludes that these are minor mistakes or as he calls it “trivial slips”¹¹¹, as Miss Kenton tries to warn Stevens about his father’s declining abilities which he resists to accept these “trivial errors”¹¹² is of consequence but later he would “realize their larger significance”¹¹³ which in a slightly different manner is reverberated by Lord Darlington as well. Immediately afterwards his father falls while he is carrying a heavy tray laden with refreshments for the guests of Lord Darlington, and he is immediately taken to his prison-cell like room to get rest and recover.

In this instance it becomes interesting to remember in the earlier argument about the relevance of Greek myths to the novel, Lord Darlington with his stooping tall slender figure and seemingly altruistic efforts to help people stands for Hades, the God of the Underworld holding a bident in his hand¹¹⁴, it is an object very much like a fork, just lacking one prong. The bident symbolizes the power he wields above his subjects who are welcome in the Underworld, but after their entrance there, they are not allowed to depart. Once one becomes one of the members of the army serving to the upper classes like Stevens’s father who has served for fifty-four years, then only when he is no longer able to serve there is a chance of release, after his death or else there is no home to return to for servants like him, too old to find an employment. As it is widely known being a servant brings long hours of exhausting work, and a little payment. When England has started to lose its power as an imperialist and colonizing country, and rich Americans start to buy the county manor houses which used to belong to English aristocracy and upper classes, either those houses like the Rose Garden Hotel turned to other uses, or they are sold to American businessman like Farraday or Wakefields who are ready to substitute the old ruling class.

Under the new employer, Mr Farraday some trivial errors start to emerge which disturb Stevens, since he is a perfectionist, this extremely disturbs him. During

¹¹⁰ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.58.

¹¹¹ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.58.

¹¹² Ishiguro, op.cit., p.62.

¹¹³ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.62.

¹¹⁴ Wikipedia contributors, “Hades”, **Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopaedia**, 05 February 2025, (Online) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hades>, 12 February 2025, p. w.

breakfast while he is attending Mr Farraday, the latter “picked up a fork, examined it for a brief second, touching the prongs with a fingertip, then turned his attention to the morning headlines”¹¹⁵ This gesture is immediately noticed by Stevens who says “I had spotted the occurrence and had advanced swiftly to remove the offending item. I may have done so a little too swiftly...then I decided appropriate to put the fork on the table with a certain emphasis, causing my employer to start a second time.”¹¹⁶ Mr Farraday might be seeming friendly and likes to have “bantering”¹¹⁷ with Stevens, which he seems to be not quite capable of but this seemingly easy, relaxed attitude of Mr Farraday there is a fierce imperialist as much possessive as Lord Darlington. The way Mr Farraday checks the tips of the prongs of the fork at the table is a metaphorical symbol of the nature of the absolute power the new imperialist super power Americans have, if need rises like Zeus in Greek myths uses his thunderbolts to punish Phaeton for approaching the sun too close and kills him for his overarching ambition, then in a similar way America is ready to use its atomic bombs as it did in the recent past in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.¹¹⁸ Over the grave of Phaeton it is inscribed “Here lies buried Phaethon, charioteer of his father’s chariot; if he did not manage to control it, at least it was in a great endeavour that he fell.”¹¹⁹ which is applicable to both male characters in these novels, forgetting their age-old customs and bonds with nature, and Zen in the case of Ono, and the strength and spirit of poplars in the case of Stevens, these characters, unlike the female protagonists in these novels, pledged their alliances to wrong political figures, and their fall has been mightily destroying their lives, and souls. It becomes very tempting to emphasize the parallel between Leonardo da Vinci and these ambitious characters for worldly power, Leonardo wrote on the margin of a book “the Medici created and destroyed me.”¹²⁰ This quotation reflects the complex relationship he had with the powerful Medici family who were the major patrons of

¹¹⁵ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.148.

¹¹⁶ Ishiguro, op.cit, p.149.

¹¹⁷ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.13.

¹¹⁸ Robert Graves, **The White Goddess**, Ed.by. Grevel Lindop, Faber and Faber, Manchester,1999, p.467.

¹¹⁹ Philip Hardie, “Riding with Phaeton: In Latin Literature, the Classical Tradition”, 2021, (Online), <http://www.antigonejournal.com/2021/phathon>, 12 February 2025, p. w.

¹²⁰ Leonardo da Vinci Quotes, 11 December 2024, (Online), <https://note.en.lv73.net/Leonardo-da-vinci/the-medici-created-anddestroyed-me>, 12 February 2025, p. w.

arts during the Renaissance period. It is noted that “the Medici family played a crucial role in supporting Da Vinci’s work, offering him commissions and providing financial backing him to pursue his artistic and scientific studies.”¹²¹ On the other hand, they had a destroying effect after the political, social climate changed against them, since Leonardo is associated with them, and he made some compromises, the changing fortunes of the family undermined his own true path in art which Leonardo expresses regrets even in his dying moments saying “he had offended God and men by failing to practice his art as he should have done.”¹²² The way Leonardo repents putting his faith in the hands of the Medicis, likewise Stevens repents unquestioningly following the path of Lord Darlington. Miss Kenton’s “What a terrible mistake I have made with my life”¹²³ seems to be similar, but it is different as well in the sense that she has never betrayed her essence, the truthfulness of poplar tree which extends its branches honestly upward and moves with the breeze, at least she can say that she has made her own mistakes, and there is a true dignity in that.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. w.

¹²² Wikipedia Contributors, "Leonardo da Vinci: Death", Wikipedia, **The Free Encyclopaedia**, 11 February 2025, (Online), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonardo_da_Vinci, 17 February 2025, p. w.

¹²³ Kazuo Ishiguro, op. cit., p.251.

CHAPTER 6

THE POSSIBILITY OF CULTURAL HEALING IN *AN ARTIST OF THE FLOATING WORLD* AND *THE REMAINS OF THE DAY*: IKEBANA AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF ZEN

In order to appreciate the importance of ikebana in Ishiguro's *An Artist of The Floating World*, and what flowers stand for in *The Remains of the Day* we should analyse ikebana and flowers in general in relation to the philosophy of life they reflect accordingly. Ikebana has always been valued in Zen Buddhism as a means of self-cultivation. By immersing oneself into the practise of this art, the doer can achieve a spiritual emptiness called "no-self" which is the basis of ethical behaviour according to Zen philosophy, at a basic level it aims to bring mindfulness to everyday life. When one has become "no minded" which means no longer filled with ego and self-importance, then one becomes a developmentally advanced human being who understands that we are all manifestations of the same creative energy. Through kado, we come to appreciate the life of a flower-the *inochi*- (literally mortal and temporary life) of it. So, to practice a do is to learn how to live one's life. Robert Carter says through these arts "we learn how to interrelate with other existing things."¹ It is offered as an alternative to the oppressive patriarchal societies in both novels which are characterized by the marginalization of women, militarism, and unrestrained capitalism.

This alternative philosophy as advanced by the women in the novels, then, suggest the possibility of healing traumatized and traumatizing cultures. While focusing on these two novels in terms of what flowers symbolise it becomes inescapable to notice how these novels overlap with each other in terms of Ishiguro's use of subtle floral imagery to reveal deeper truths about the repressed characters' emotional and spiritual identities. In both novels it is the women characters who practice the act of cutting and putting flowers in a vase. When we bear in mind the importance of seemingly unimportant objects like a vase for Ozu and how Ishiguro as a writer is following in

¹ Robert Carter, *The Japanese Arts and Self-Cultivation*, Albany, State University Press of New York, 2008, p.72.

the footsteps of his film techniques when he is writing his novels, then we can appreciate why he focuses our attention on the daily objects in these houses like vases as well. Since I think like Ozu, Ishiguro has “reverence for objects and their ability to say more than a character could with words.”² It is explicit that the traditional Japanese art of flower arrangement, or rather the way of flower is more than simply putting flowers artistically in a vase.

6.1 Ikebana, the Way of Flower

In fact, ikebana is as Canning suggests “a way of being whose end is to invoke introspection, a seeking to better understand oneself as an integral part of something.”³ Then ikebana is “the art of arranging more than flowers, that a literal translation would be “living plant material arrangement” and considering the ultimate aim in dealing with the cut flowers namely the impermanence of everything, then as Coe analysed “the flowers are generally the least important part of the arrangement.”⁴

According to this argument then the arrangement itself is not important either. The arrangement is just a pointer, a symbol indicating the depths and magnitude of what lies beneath the surface, an indicator of the developing profundity of the psychological, spiritual, aesthetic, and ethical self-development of the artist. Yet, it does not mean that this practice creates or adds some new characteristics to the artist of **kado**, “rather [it] reveals what has been there all along, from the beginning, but was covered over the accretions of wrong-thinking and ego-centeredness.”⁵ In short practice brings to the surface who you really are. With reference to this Coe says “your basic nature, your real self, underneath layers of conditioning will come to the surface. And they will be apparent in all of your activities, your words, thoughts, and feelings as well.”⁶ It means that the way you go about your flower arrangement, exactly the

² Nadine Zylberberg, “Late Spring: The Vessel”, 2021, (Online), https://www.reverseshot.org/archive/entry/2883/late_spring, 04 October 2024, p. w.

³ Donna Canning, “Origins of Ikebana,” (Online), <https://newuniquejapan.com/about-ikebana>, p. w.

⁴ Stella Coe qtd. in Robert E. Carter, **The Japanese Arts and Self-Cultivation**, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2008, p.99.

⁵ Stella Coe, *ibid.*, pp.99-100.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.100.

same way you are going to deal with everything in your life, its aim as an art is this, to bring out your real self and through the display of the arrangement make the viewers observe, rather than just look and appreciate the subtle message it conveys, the very impermanence of life, “**mono no aware**, the sadness yet appreciation that is related to the fact that the flowers that are now budding will also soon wither. It is a sadness tinged by joy; joy tinged by sadness.”⁷

Then, the way women in Ishiguro novels deal with flowers would be reflected the way they would deal with people and life in general. In both novels it is women characters who draw the attention of men to important issues that they ignore or have difficulty to observe; unlike the male characters they were not scared to ‘bring out their real selves’, which is the ultimate aim in **kado** or ikebana, which was reflected into the way they talk as well. The way Setsuko, Noriko and Miss Kenton talk are, at least at times, very direct, they do not need the stilted language of male characters, because they are truthful to themselves. The focus point of the male narrators is the past, whereas what the women focus on is the moment and future.

In *An Artist of the Floating World*, it is Setsuko who deals with the flowers surrounding the altar at the tokonoma in her father’s reception room. It is an important scene both in terms of what it stands for symbolically and in terms of exemplifying what pluralistic trauma theory has signalled about native culture, traditions, and mysticism which help bring about a kind of feeling of empowerment in order to face postwar traumas people go through. On the other hand, in *The Remains of the Day* Miss Kenton also enters Stevens’ room with “her vase of flowers”⁸ according to Stevens’s narration she came in with her vase of flowers in order to “to brighten things up”⁹ which Stevens quotes as Miss Kenton’s exact words, this ritual of Miss Kenton’s visiting Stevens’ room was repeated three times and it was repelled by Stevens each time along their career at Darlington Hall.

As it is earlier argued in the first paragraph while Setsuko and Miss Kenton putting flowers in a vase, at the same time they are pointing out to the emotional loneliness of

⁷ Robert E. Carter, *ibid.*, p.92.

⁸ Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of The Day*, London, Faber and Faber, 2005.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.173.

Ono and Stevens, since “a vase is essentially an empty object waiting to be filled”¹⁰ it can easily stand for the disability of these male characters who are denying the importance of their emotional and family lives, and instead dedicating themselves to their profession in such a loyalty which denies the existence of their own lives and emotions without any self-appraisal. So, despite a lack of any reference to Japanese-ness in *The Remains*, and the only Asian object referred to being the two Chinamen standing in the landing and outside the staircase at Darlington Hall, there is a strong tendency among the critics to see the Japanese values reflected to those of the Englishness. Especially in terms of strong feelings of guilt and shame male characters attribute to the ideas of tradition, loyalty, dignity, and the extent of sacrifice they can venture in performing their duties despite the adversities they face stoically reminds one of the ideals of bushido. It might be also attributed to the similarities between the repressive systems of these two countries Japan and England in the wake of the Second World War, both were imperialist countries, dependent upon the work of lower classes to continue with their systems of colonizing the people who work under them, besides both of these countries in different ways were exposed to American imperialism in the post-war period.

6.2 Ikebana and Women as Agents of Change

During the American Occupation of Japan, Noriko ties and puts away her father's paintings in the attic, since he has become a discredited artist owing to his affiliation with the fascist imperialist Japanese government, he is forced to be retired, his paintings are never to be brought back to the guest, or the reception room where there is a tokonoma (a special alcove) to enjoy the status of respect. It would be better to analyse what tokonoma is and what it represents in a Japanese house in this context. The tokonoma or alcove is decorated with three things: a hanging scroll painting or calligraphic inscription, a treasured art object of some sort of and a Buddhist altar to pray and at the same time it is decorated with flowers put in a vase designed in such a way, which is called ikebana, in order to pay respect to the ancestors. There are special

¹⁰ Zylberberg, op. cit., p. w.

rules applied when there are important guests, the correct etiquette is to seat the most important guest closest to tokonoma, in short it can be said that the tokonoma represents aesthetics, spirituality, and the richness and depth of Japanese culture in itself. Besides, the strict rules which order the civil codes of the Meiji Era dictates who the head of the house is, how this power would be distributed between family members. According to “this system of succession, the family name, the family inheritance, the rights of the house-hold head, and the right to perform family rituals and ancestor worship were handed on to the eldest son. These left women subordinated to the power of the male household head...”¹¹ So in terms of family relationships whoever is seated close to the altar, that person is ordained as the household head.

In her second visit to her father’s house, it is Setsuko once again who inquires into the broken engagement of Noriko, she is decided not to give up until she reaches the truth about the failure of the Miyake marriage negotiation. In the reception room which is only reserved for receiving important guests there is a Buddhist altar, Ono reminiscences a conversation, he has had with his father long ago, when his father wants Ono’s initiation into his business, he has had serious talks with him in the reception room, just like Setsuko would have with her father. When she comes into the room carrying freshly cut flowers to be put into the vases surrounding the Buddhist altar, the way she changes the old flowers and replaces them with the new ones with care and respect draws the attention to the scene, she is not only discarding the old flowers aside without thinking, but she is handling them with respect, and she carefully shakes each stem of “tired flower”¹² and putting the freshly cut ones into the vase:

“As I recall it, Setsuko had seated herself before the Buddhist altar and had begun to remove the more tired of the flowers decorating it. I had seated myself a little behind her, watching the way she carefully shook each stem before placing it on her lap...Setsuko began to transfer one by one, the fresh cuttings from out of her vase into those surrounding the altar. She was performing this task with great care, pausing after each flower to consider the effect...She sat back, pondering her work, then turned to me with a smile. ‘I have little skill in these things,’ she said, indicating the flowers.
“They look splendid.”

¹¹ Mire Koikari, **Pedagogy of Democracy: Feminism and the Cold War in the U.S. Occupation of Japan**, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2010, p.43.

¹² Ishiguro, **The Remains**, op.cit., p.48.

“She gave a doubtful glance towards the altar and laughed self-consciously.”¹³

Although Setsuko claims many times in the novel that she cannot express herself as her husband Suichi, it is rather the contrary, he cannot rival Setsuko in her skilful manipulation of her father Ono, which would be revealed in the ensuing scene. If tokonoma is considered both as a kind of altar of worship and a throne which is bestowed only on the eldest son of the family as the succeeding representative of order, then according to the emerging picture the new representative of order is Setsuko. In her own gentle way, she reminds her father that like a withered flower in the vase, which she shakes gently through her insinuations that it is time to change the rule in Ono's household. On the other hand, Noriko would imply the same thing later in the context of pruning the younger shoots of the trees and plants, that it is time Ono should “have left things as they were.”¹⁴ His patriarchy is over, and as it is revealed through the events in the family history, he destroys everything, it is subtly given at the beginning of the novel what kind of a havoc is wrought on his family house, which is destructed by the bombs, but he is so full of self-importance that he still has difficulty in processing this reality. The tokonoma which becomes the centre point of the scene is in the focus of the readers who are also invited to share this viewpoint like a movie audience to look at Setsuko from Ono's point of view, Ishiguro uses this technique very often, he uses his narrative like a camera, and he would like us to see the subtlety of the scene through this lowered camera angle, which implies the necessity to turn back to the true essence of Japanese character-their humility, the recognition of “the other”, the reverence for the other, this feeling is lost during their desire to achieve being an imperialist country like the colonizer Americans, or Europeans. (The influence of Ozu can be discerned in these scenes; he is one of Ishiguro's favourite film directors.)

¹³ Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, London, Faber and Faber, 2001, pp.48-50.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.107.

6.3 Ikebana and Ma in Art and Life

The vase, like the one in Ozu film *Late Spring* which the camera focuses twice, represents the relationship of the father and his daughters, it signifies that for Japan the time has come for men to step aside and let “the women”¹⁵ as Ono calls his daughters, have their own way and build a new nation from its ashes. It is also important to analyse Setsuko performs this task with great care, after placing each flower to its destined place, pausing “to consider its effect”¹⁶ As an artist or as a father Ono has never done this self-appraisal and he has never stepped back and considered the effects of his brush-strokes, or his actions, his ideas, his imposition of patriarchal ideas on Kenji, and his daughters. In terms of his work, he is only too proud of himself when he starts to work on a painting he says he works “frantically”¹⁷ without considering the effect of it, he speaks disparagingly about a friend whom he named as “tortoise”¹⁸ because he “insisted on stepping backwards every few minutes to view his canvas”¹⁹ This gesture of stepping back, slowing down, seeing and feeling from a holistic perspective is what leads people to personal growth, it reminds us that our actions play a role in shaping the world we share, feeling responsibility for the others, being ethical, and it is ultimately where we can find fulfilment, expressed as *yugen* in Zen. This worldview is an antithesis to patriarchal oppression, be it in the form of the marginalization of women, militarism, or capitalist exploitation. Besides, when one steps back to observe an arrangement, one can feel the interplay between space and form. Ikebana reminds one to slow down, to show priority to feelings, not to materials. Unlike her father Ono, Setsuko emerges as a true artist, while she is placing her flowers into the vase, she listens to every flower, as it is argued by the masters of this art, or rather way, ikebana is a way of becoming, one should listen to every branch, twig and place them as they dictate. The way of flowers also teaches one how to handle human beings, like Setsuko if you deal gently, not forcing your opinions on them, there is a chance of achieving *satori*, a kind of enlightenment. In some certain schools of ikebana, a pointed ‘**kenzan**’ is used to position the flowers in an arrangement, which

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.48.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.160.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.158.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.160.

means that you force them against their own natures, which was the policy of the fascist imperial Japanese rule during war time, naturally people become estranged to themselves and their culture, and it causes several atrocities to be committed against other human beings, and the destruction of the country. To heal the immense wounds

caused by different adversities the only way out seems to be their remembering the close bonds Japanese have with nature, aesthetics, divine and even prior to aesthetics, ethics, the responsibility one feels to the other. In this context it would be noteworthy to quote Emmanuel Levinas when he says before everything ethics should come first.

In his view, responsibility towards the other precedes any “objective searching after truth.”²⁰ With reference to this issue of ethics Robert E. Carter shares similar ideas, he says “a major part of ethics is being able to recognize the value and worth of another.”²¹

Immediately after Setsuko arranged the flowers on the altar, there is a breeze which gently changes the position of them, her reaction to it is given as follows:

“Suddenly, Setsuko raised her hands in despair. ‘The breeze,’ she said with a sigh, and reached forward to her flowers once more. ‘I like them like this, but the breeze doesn’t seem to agree.’ For a moment, she became preoccupied again.”²²

Setsuko is an artist and through her reaction to the “breeze”²³ in a way she teaches by example how to respond to life, how to interrelate with other existing things since the physical expressions of the *do* are extremely important rather than abstract words- “like pouring liquid from one cup into another.”²⁴ Only in acting in accordance with nature can one’s creative powers will develop and express themselves, so one must learn to flow with nature and its laws rather than strive to overcome them. And the one who needs to learn this lesson is Ono. To be in harmony with nature has a special terminology, it is called “**furyu**.”²⁵ “**Fu** means “wind”, and **ryu** means “to flow”: “this suggests that our spirit should flow through life like the wind that flows through all of

²⁰ Emmanuel Levinas qtd in Wikipedia contributors, “Emmanuel Levinas”, **Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopaedia**, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Emmanuel_Levinas&oldid=1265732317, 04.12.2024.

²¹ Robert E. Carter, **The Japanese Arts and Self-Cultivation**, op.cit., p.37.

²² Ishiguro, **An Artist**, op.cit., p.49.

²³ Ishiguro, op.cit., p.49.

²⁴ Masuno Shunmyo qtd. in Robert E. Carter, op.cit., p.72.

²⁵ Rober E. Carter, op.cit., p.92.

nature.”²⁶ Such an approach brings one to appreciate life, and nature in their changeability and to accept “all the stages of life as worthwhile in themselves.”²⁷ If we can eliminate the prejudices and preconceptions and stripped off all false teachings and become less ego-full, then the result will be joy in the moment. In a way “you become open to the subtle, continual, and ever-present changes all around you. Flowering and dying, summer and autumn, and one’s feelings about all this are a part of the meanings of *wabi* and *sabi*. *mono no aware*, the sadness yet appreciation that is related to the fact that the flowers that are now budding will also soon wither. It is a sadness tinged with joy; joy tinged by sadness.”²⁸

Ikebana arrangement is just a pointer, a symbol indicating the character of the practitioner, since it brings to the surface who you really are, and they will be apparent in all your other activities, thoughts, feelings as well. So, the way Setsuko goes about her flower arrangement, trying to make the flowers live a little longer -which is meant by the prefix “*ike*”- is reflected in all of her attitudes to life including the way she raises Ichiro, protects her sister Noriko, heals her husband Suichi, and tries to make her father Ono face with the reality of his life, and through her example offered a possible way of healing. What is revealed in the above paragraph is *yugen*, or profound mystery or great depth. Ikebana, like tea and the other *dos* unveils eternity by being thoroughly temporal. Setsuko and her father Ono are simply there, like the flowers at the altar, the effect of it reminds one the Buddha and his wordless flower sermon, what is being communicated is something priceless.

Ikebana’s philosophy also emphasizes a silent dialogue between the practitioner and the flowers. Practitioners are encouraged to respect the natural bent of stems and branches, fostering a meditative relationship that reveals their true selves. As Stella Coe explains, ikebana is “the art of arranging more than flowers”²⁹ embodying impermanence and the insignificance of ego.

²⁶ Dr. Sen Genshitsu qtd. in Carter, op.cit., p.92.

²⁷ Carter, op.cit., p.92.

²⁸ Carter, op.cit., p.92.

²⁹ Carter, op.cit., p.99.

6.4 Flowers and Emotions

As it is earlier argued in this chapter with reference to the larger significance of tokonoma where the flowers are artistically put into a vase both to adorn, pray and pay respect to the deceased meant at the same time a place of power, like a throne to be handed only to the eldest son of the house in accordance with the rules of patriarchy in Japan, then “the pantry” in Darlington Hall carries a similar function. In *The Remains of the Day*, we are told:

“The butler’s pantry, ...is a crucial office, the heart of the house’s operations, not unlike a general’s headquarters during a battle, and it is imperative that all things in it are ordered-and left ordered. I have never been that sort of butler who allows all sorts of people to wander in and out with their queries and grumbles...it is surely obvious that the butler’s pantry must be one place in the house where privacy and solitude are guaranteed.”³⁰

Then when Miss Kenton comes in with “a large vase of flowers”³¹ and puts it “on the table in front of [him]”³² and offers to bring “some more cuttings”³³ to “brighten [his] parlour”³⁴, to “enliven things a little”³⁵ in fact she has pointed out what is lacking in Darlington Hall and in the lives of all the characters inhabiting the house, it is human warmth, the world of emotions which is at the heart of all the problems between them. To run the household or their lives, or the country efficiently the world of emotions are repressed or denied all together, and these denials cloaked under terms like “dignity,” “loyalty,” or “honour.” Unlike the male characters who slavishly follow these sets of beliefs created by the imperialist sovereign class in England, Miss Kenton recognizes and emphasizes the importance of a moral self, untainted by the imposed ideas or a set of values created by the upper classes to perpetuate their rule in English class-structured system in which the common people are denied any agency, and moral principles of their own expressed in Lord Darlington’s arguments as to the deficiency of a parliamentary system which values “will of the people being as the

³⁰ Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of The Day*, London, Faber and Faber, 2005, p.174.

³¹ Ibid., p.54.

³² Ibid., p.54.

³³ Ibid., p.54.

³⁴ Ibid., p.54.

³⁵ Ibid., p.54.

wisest arbitrator.”³⁶ So, with or without a vase of flowers Stevens’ room resembles a prison cell, which is recognized by Miss Kenton as “stark and bereft of colour.”³⁷ On the other hand constant reference to Miss Kenton’s parlour, her territory which is associated with cocoa they drink with Stevens “in her parlour at the end of each day”³⁸ directly links the ongoing system in Darlington Hall to imperialism and slavery, while at the same time it gives the human touch which can make living under the circumstances present in Darlington Hall much more humane and bearable, thanks to the efforts of Miss Kenton who observes the maids under her rule as human beings with individual characters, and takes responsibility to raise them, to make them fit to function as servants of the house without dehumanizing them, her existence in Darlington Hall is a blessing for all the people concerned, even though Stevens is very late to recognize that, we understand he enjoys his cocoa talks with Miss Kenton very much. These are the only times he can come close to being a proper human being, he is urged by Miss Kenton to start to see his fellow workers with a new viewpoint.

This philosophy of ikebana resonates with the women in Ishiguro’s novels, who display a directness and authenticity absent in the male characters. In *The Remains of the Day* Miss Kenton’s actions in this scene reflect her persistent, as well as subtle, attempts to challenge Stevens’s rigid and emotionally sterile world. Her decision to bring flowers to his pantry underscores her awareness of the bleakness that permeates his personal space—a metaphor for the emotional barrenness of his life. Miss Kenton’s comment, “It seemed such a pity your room should be so dark and cold,”³⁹ is more than an observation about the physical environment; it is a veiled criticism of Stevens’s self-imposed isolation. For Miss Kenton, the flowers symbolize warmth, life, and humanity—qualities conspicuously absent in his sterile and bleak existence. Besides, her persistence in offering to bring “more cuttings”⁴⁰ suggests her desire to foster a connection, however modest, and to break through the impenetrable wall Stevens has built around himself. Yet Stevens’s blunt response, expressing his preference for

³⁶ Ibid., p.207.

³⁷ Ibid., p.55.

³⁸ Ibid., p.155.

³⁹ Ibid., p.54.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.54.

“distractions kept to a minimum,”⁴¹ reveals his resistance to any attempt at personal or emotional engagement. To Miss Kenton, this rejection of even the smallest gesture of warmth undermines the futility of her efforts, yet she continues undeterred.

Her second attempt, which happens some years later in the evening, when Miss Kenton comments on the inadequacy of Stevens’s electric bulb and likens his room to a “prison cell,”⁴² takes on a sharper, more emphatic tone. Her metaphor of the “condemned man”⁴³ is particularly striking, suggesting her growing frustration with the confines of Stevens’s self-imposed emotional imprisonment. The prison imagery also serves to highlight the disparity between Stevens’s constrained existence and the richer, more vibrant life Miss Kenton embodies in herself, energetic, sometimes volatile, and never accepting things as they are, even if it means to question authority of Lord Darlington. Her sheer presence brings life to Darlington Hall and to Stevens’ life as well.

The moment when she notices Stevens reading a sentimental romance introduces a fascinating dynamic. Miss Kenton’s playful teasing about the book—questioning whether it might be “shocking”⁴⁴—is layered with both humour and genuine curiosity. Her insistence on seeing the book, coupled with her physical closeness to Stevens, creates a moment charged with tension. The “peculiar change”⁴⁵ in atmosphere that Stevens describes likely stems from Miss Kenton’s shift in demeanour; her light-hearted teasing gives way to a deeper, more serious intent as she recognizes the vulnerability hidden behind Stevens’s rigid exterior.

From Miss Kenton’s perspective, this moment could represent both an opportunity and a revelation. Her physical closeness to Stevens and the careful, almost tender manner in which she “prizes”⁴⁶ the book from his hands suggests an unspoken intimacy- an implication of the emotional connection she seeks but which Stevens is

⁴¹ Ibid., p.55.

⁴² Ibid., p.174.

⁴³ Ibid., p.174.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.175.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.175.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.176.

incapable of acknowledging. Her eventual discovery that Stevens is reading a sentimental love story is both ironic and painful. It highlights the dissonance between Stevens's outward persona—a paragon of dignity—and the emotional needs that the book represents. In order to break his walls, she insists on seeing the book saying “‘Please show me the volume you are holding, Mr Stevens,’ Miss Kenton said, continuing her advance, ‘and I will leave you to the pleasures of your reading.’”⁴⁷ Although Stevens denies the existence of his emotional life, his choice of reading a romance in a hypnotized way proves that he lives a life of self-denial and his novel-reading satisfies this emotional void in him. Miss Kenton's reaction, “‘Good gracious, Mr Stevens, it is not anything so scandalous at all’”⁴⁸ might carry a note of disappointment. While the discovery of the love story reveals Stevens's suppressed emotional life, his immediate reaction of repelling her out of the pantry and accompanying cutting formality made her realize the futility of all these attempts to communicate with him. Foregrounding Miss Kenton's perspective allows us to see her actions as part of a broader effort to nurture a connection with Stevens, an effort that is both deeply human and increasingly tinged with frustration.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.175.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.176.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to present and analyse the role of women as the redeemers of the societies they belong to in two of Kazuo Ishiguro's novels: *An Artist of The Floating World* and *The Remains of The Day*, both of which are situated in the aftermath of The Second World War. While the systems perpetuated in the novels have already started to crumble, the two male protagonists whose memories seem to be the primary focus of these novels, still go on paying lip service to these damaged and damaging systems of power which are closely linked with imperialism. Although the systems are damaged, the characters still have to move through them or despite them, grappling with trauma due to the losses they experienced, exposed to the contexts of events taking place in the world: dead family members because of atomic bombings in Japan, wrong paths taken, lost chances at happiness, or lives founded on delusion.

It is the women characters who feel and express the need to go beyond these repressive systems of power to have a meaningful existence either by repairing or by negating them. Setsuko and Noriko in *An Artist of the Floating World* and Miss Kenton in *The Remains of The Day* overcome the traumas they were exposed to by empowering themselves by consolidating their sense of belonging, of friendship and mutual trust like it is pointed out in pluralistic trauma theory. In this respect the 'resistance and resilience' these female characters display is to be interpreted as not simply reactions of individuals but more vitally, as part of a common effort of a group of people who are traumatized. This view of trauma finds its meaning when traumatized people reject to be defined by it, neither accepting being its victim nor its agent. Colonialism and imperialism deny human worth and dignity, the most important thing to do is to challenge this classification with courage and find means to fight against it. Hence, Setsuko and Noriko in *An Artist of the Floating World* and Miss Kenton in *The Remains of the Day* subtly embody the possibility of change towards betterment and the power of resilience in face of the traumas brought about by the dramatical changes Japan and England went through in the postwar period.

Although these women characters sometimes have to make compromises and appear as the accomplices of the systems in question, in fact by fully empowering themselves through their native culture and strong relationships they established with the other people, they created a *ma*, an empty space full of potential for themselves, and become agents of change, unlike the self-deceiving men around them who resort to escapism of different kinds, these women emerge as fearless in facing their situation, even if it means accepting their limitations, they appear almost heroic in their subtle rebellion which are given with a look, a word, or flowers. The Zen philosophy and its subtle reflection in these novels surface as ikebana, the traditional Japanese art of flower arrangement or kado (the “way of the flower”), transcends the act of placing flowers in a vase. It is the women characters who deal with flower arrangements in these novels which points at their maturity, self-appraisal and the ability see things holistically unlike the myopic egotistical male characters.

To fully grasp the significance of ikebana in Ishiguro’s *An Artist of the Floating World* and the symbolism of flowers in *The Remains of the Day*, it is essential to explore the philosophy of life that these elements reflect. Both novels subtly integrate floral imagery to illuminate deeper truths about identity, introspection, and relationships, using flowers not merely as symbols but as extensions of the characters’ emotional and spiritual realities. Not only flowers but also trees have larger significance in the novels in question. Maples and bamboos in *An Artist of the Floating World*, and the poplar trees in *The Remains of the Day* are associated with the women characters who are implied to have the resistance, resilience, and the regenerative power of nature these trees symbolize.

If these societies would be regenerated, ultimately it would be the strong women characters Setsuko and Noriko in *An Artist* and Miss Kenton in *The Remains* would realize that, and if a true awakening and self-appraisal would be experienced, they would be the ones who motivate it with their decisions in life, the choices they make and through the direct and unelaborated language they use. In this way they would navigate themselves with integrity and motivate the ego-centric self-deceiving men they are involved with to truthfulness in these societies.

Ikebana, in this context offers a profound lens through which to view Ishiguro's works. It teaches that the arrangement is not the end but a pointer to deeper truths, much like Ishiguro's narratives, which unfold through layers of memory, regret, and revelation. Through these Zen-related arts, the practitioners recognize how to establish meaningful relations with the others. In both novels, flowers become not just symbols of beauty but of connection, impermanence, and the possibility of transformation.

I think what is being ignored in our contemporary world is the power of these deep traditions in the human psyche. As these deep traditions might be able to help people to survive with integrity in a world which becomes exceedingly dangerous, being a source of knowledge and understanding formed by those societies to fight adversity in order to survive centuries ago and proved their endurance. This kind of wisdom would be discerned in the way women characters of Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* meet life and regenerate the societies they live in.

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ÖZGEÇMİŞ

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