

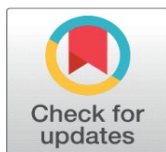
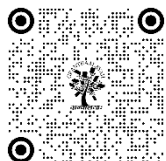


EXCAVATION OF THINGS PAST: A HISTORICAL PROBE INTO KAZUO ISHIGURO'S THE REMAINS OF THE DAY

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ABSTRACT

The paper aims to explore the historical aspects of the novel *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro. The novel deals with six days motoring trip in the life of the protagonist Mr. Stevens, an English butler from Darlington Hall, England to Cornwall for business purposes in 1956. The study traces how the physical journey leads him to recognize his past issues through a mental journey of a loyal butler. This helps him to identify his true self. The remembrance of his personal history, loss, historical events, places, historical figures, and political situation in Europe shape his existence. The novel & historical background is First World War and Second World War, which play a major role in this novel. The paper explains the problem statements as how Kazuo Ishiguro mentions the intermixing of Steven's personal and historical incidents in the novel. It analyses how strong emotion of suppression, suffering, regrets, and pain leads the protagonist to the emotionless condition in his life. The aim of the paper is to bring out the historical traces of the Nazi party, the Treaty of Versailles, the Hayes Society - an elite society of butlers in the 1920s and 1930s and the Suez Canal crisis in the novel. The paper also suggests ideas and the scope of further research.

Keywords: History, Loss, Social Expectation, Personal Identity, Memory, Treaty of Versailles, *The Remains of the Day*, Kazuo Ishiguro

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is artistic written work that kindles and sharpens the reader's imaginative power. History is usually made up of real events that happened in the past. Literature has its root in history. It is witnessed by various writings of world literature. Literature and history are closely related to each other. It helps to acquire human values and knowledge. A historical novel comprises historical events, places, historical figures, and facts. One such historical novel is *The Remains of the Day*

(1989), it is the third novel written by Kazuo Ishiguro a famous contemporary British writer who was born in Nagasaki, Japan. He won the Booker Prize for this novel in the same year he published the book. The setting of the novel is post-war England of the 1950s. It is about the protagonist Mr. James Stevens, an English Butler, working at Darlington Hall, England. He undertakes a six-day motoring expedition alone in the comfort of his present employer an American businessman, Mr. Farraday's ford (car) throughout Britain in 1956 aiming to visit his previous colleague Miss Kenton, the former head housekeeper. Ishiguro had written this novel in memory of Mrs. Lenore Marshall (1899-1971), an American poet, novelist, and activist. The novel's historical background is the First two World Wars, which plays an important part in this novel. The inter-war period also has a vital role in this novel. It is similar to an epistolary novel as it is comprised of letters that reveal the thoughts of the narrator, Mr. Stevens. [Emara \(2015\)](#)

2. THE OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER

The paper aims to bring out the historical representations, loss, and issues faced in the life of the protagonist. The primary attention solely focused on the personal memories of Mr. James Stevens at Darlington Hall, England, and historical traces such as The Hayes Society, The Treaty of Versailles, Fascism, and the Suez Canal Crisis. The purpose of the study is to explain how a loyal butler's physical journey helped him ponder over his memories and suppressed emotions.

3. THE UNIQUENESS OF THE PAPER

The uniqueness of the paper lies in Ishiguro's fictional narrative, the role of memory, history, and the significance of historical events and their aspects. Though research has been done on this historical perspective it is not been critically analysed by many scholars about the historical events mentioned in this paper.

4. PROBLEM IDENTIFIED

Ishiguro's narrators are usually preoccupied with personal history in almost all the novels. Especially two of his previous novels *A Pale View of Hills* (1982) and *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) also concentrated on historical events. Through these two novels, he takes his readers to experience the minds of the Japanese protagonists – Etsuko and Masuji Ono respectively. Both novels are set after the bombing incidents of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in Japan. The primary focus of the paper is his third novel, *The Remains of the Day*. It was published in 1989 and for this novel, he received Booker Prize for Fiction in the same year. In this novel too Ishiguro takes the reader on a compelling journey into the mind of Stevens, the protagonist through his narration. Ishiguro's novels do not aim to attempt to win over the past but rather to engage how each individual presents themselves by reconstructing their lives through history is given importance.

The story of the novel is said from Stevens' point of view. He is in his sixties, and he has served for over thirty years in Darlington Hall, England. He devoted his life serving to his previous employer Lord Darlington, at Darlington Hall. He had explored the outside world majorly for business purposes but not for personal enjoyment. Mr. Farraday, an American businessman, the current employer arranged Stevens' expedition for six days by permitting his ford (car) to explore the country. As suggested by Mr. Farraday he made a trip from the breath-taking countryside of England to the West Country.

There is a problem with the present staff plan at Darlington Hall. During Lord Darlington, his former employer's period there were twenty-eight staff members employed in the house whereas after Mr. Farraday's arrival only four staff members have employed. They are Mrs. Clements, the new housekeeper, Rosemary, and Agnes are two girls to support her and Stevens himself. He finds difficulty with his current staff plans with four employees. This is the main reason for accepting a road trip.

Stevens expects to bring Miss Kenton. She was working as a head housekeeper at Darlington Hall, now Mrs. Benn, to save the house from the problem of a shortage of staff members. It made Stevens remember her because she had great affection for Darlington Hall. She is known for her exemplary professionalism. Such type of staff is impossible to find in the present situation.

Ishiguro mentions that before Stevens proceeded on his trip, he arranged his attires and spent time analysing the road atlas using the novel *The Wonder of England (1956)* by Mrs. Jane Symon. It is a book of seven-volume. Every volume focuses on one region of the British Isles, which was written during the 1930s. But the road maps were not updated because German bombs destructed the landscape completely. Mrs. Symons was a frequent visitor to Darlington Hall before the war. Stevens admired Mrs. Symon's astonishing descriptions and illustrations, which excited him with the idea of undertaking a motoring trip.

5. HAYES SOCIETY AND IDEA OF DIGNITY

During his journey, he remembers many incidents which happened in the past when Lord Darlington was alive, and his father and Miss Kenton were working at Darlington Hall. Stevens was a loyal butler to his employer Lord Darlington. Stevens started embracing the idea of dignity which every butler should possess. Ishiguro introduced the idea of dignity striving throughout one's career through Stevens' narration which is followed in Hayes Society. This is an elite society of butlers during the 1920s and 1930s. It is a rule that any butler who wants to be a member of the elite society must own "a dignity keeping his position". He recalls about profession over years at that point he remembers a debate,

The whole question is very akin to the question that has caused much debate in our profession over the years: what is a 'great' butler? I recall many hours of enjoyable discussion on this topic around the fire of the servants' hall at the end of the day. You will notice I say 'what' rather than 'who' is great butler; for there was no serious dispute as to the identity of the men who set the standard amongst our generation. (Ishiguro 1989 p. 29)

Mr. James Stevens tries to prove that he possesses the dignity which is required by the Hayes Society through his service to Lord Darlington. According to Stevens his father William Stevens is also a great butler. He was loyal to his employer Mr. John Silver at Loughborough. When he was serving his master, the house guests wished to explore the village. He took them because of his master's order. Those guests ill-treated him, but he was silent to those abusive words when the guests spoke about his employer badly, he stopped the car and opened the door to get them out of the car. Later they maintained complete silence till they returned to Loughborough. This shows his respect and loyalty towards his master which the Hayes Society expects from every butler. Stevens says,

My father, as I say, came from a generation mercifully free of such confusion about our professional values. And I would maintain that for all his limited command of English and his limited general knowledge, he not only knew all

there was to know about how to run a house, but he did also in his prime come to acquire that 'dignity in keeping with his position', as the Hayes Society puts it. If I try to describe to you what I believe made my father thus distinguished, I may convey my idea of what 'dignity' is in this way. (Ishiguro 1989 p. 36)

6. TREATY OF VERSAILLES (1919)

Stevens knows that his employer could not be regarded as a true gentleman because when the employer organised a conference for political purposes at Darlington Hall a potential effect was to revise the Treaty of Versailles. It is one of the important events in the novel. It involves the 1923 convention at Darlington Hall during his period. The employer was unhappy with the outcome of the treaty because he felt unfairly penalised Germany for this particular issue. Ishiguro has given some background information on the treaty which ended World War I between Germany and its opponent and that helps the reader understand the political discussion which is explained in the novel. This treaty was signed on June 28, 1919, in Versailles. This Darlington Hall was remembered for many events over fifteen years.

Herr Karl Heinz Bremann the great German officer, a gentleman of great modesty visited officially by wearing his officer's uniform for the first time during post-war Darlington Hall. Slowly Lord Darlington's friendship with Bremann has grown noticeably. It was observed that the employer had struck a close friendship with him. But it lasted until the treaty. After the treaty, Herr Bremann left the German army. One could not stop noticing the unpleasant situations that he faced from his one visit to another at Darlington Hall. He was seriously ill. Towards the end of the 1920s, Lord Darlington made his trip to Berlin and after his return, he was disturbed with great discredit to treat a defeated enemy. During that time Herr Bremann shot himself to death while travelling on a train. According to Lord Darlington England was the reason for his death for not helping Germans after signing the Treaty of Versailles. As a result, Britons, Germans, French, Swiss, Belgians, and Italians all ranks of clergymen, military gentlemen, writers, and great thinkers were all assembled at Darlington Hall to work on revising the Treaty of Versailles.

In this novel, Lord Darlington expressed his unhappiness with the outcome of the treaty. "Some were gentlemen who felt strongly, like his lordship himself, that fair play had not been done at Versailles and that it was immoral to go on punishing a nation for a war that was now over" (Ishiguro 1989 p. 78). Ishiguro mentioned France's rigid mind that brought down the power of Germany through the Treaty of Versailles. Though Stevens knows that his employer cannot be regarded as a true gentleman because when he organised a conference for political purposes at Darlington Hall to revise the Treaty of Versailles, he gained a bad reputation because Germans suffered under the Treaty of Versailles. Stevens shows his utmost loyalty to his master. He rejects all his desires in his life such as his love, his last moment with his father when he died, and being so loyal to his previous employer

7. FASCISM

The rise of fascism is another important movement that is mentioned in the novel. They are against democracy, and they supported a one-party dictatorship. In the early 1930s, Darlington involved himself with the English fascists and the German cause out of his ignorance. Attempts were made to establish fascism in England between the war periods. In the aftermath of the War Fascist views

emerged everywhere in Europe. Europe suffered a financial crisis and political problems whereas the situation in Britain was completely different because they were in a superior position in terms of finance. Aristocracy in Britain faced difficulties in adjusting to the new rules in society because there was a steady decline in their status.

Sir Oswald Mosley, an aristocrat, had a long political history before he involved with fascism. He was attracted like many other aristocrats by the ideas of strong authoritarianism. He served in the flying corps during First World War, and then he joined the conservative party. He was elected as the youngest Member of Parliament when he was 22, in the House of Commons in 1918. He founded a new party but failed, so he replaced that with the British Union of Fascists. He organised marches through Jewish districts of London to provoke riots. He was a visitor at Darlington Hall. But Lord Darlington felt the necessity to release his Jewish employees because he was not interested to offend them.

8. LITERARY FIGURES

As mentioned, some of the historical figures Ishiguro used a few literary figures in the novel such as George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells ([McKee 2015](#)). Bernard Shaw was a strong opponent of World War I. His pamphlet entitled *Common Sense* about the war created a great change in public opinion during and after the war. He is one of the most eminent playwrights of the 20th century. He vehemently opposed the war. He was a remarkable social activist who emphasised socialism, vegetarianism, and eugenics. H. G. Wells is another influential writer who supported England. He published a booklet entitled *The War That Will End War* was his first substantial contribution to the debate about the war in 1914. He voiced to defend the Belgian treaty and not quarrel with the Germans. He fought against Prussian imperialism and its destructing system of government.

9. SUEZ CANAL CRISIS

Another important historical event mentioned in the prologue of the novel is the year 1956. It has a significance that symbolizes the fall of British imperial powers during the time of the Suez Canal Crisis. It is not explained directly in this novel. But the setting of the novel shows Ishiguro's choice of mentioning the crisis would be deliberate. The Suez Canal is located in Egypt. It was opened on 17th November 1869. The Isthmus of Suez was a bridge between the two seas such as the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea. It was owned by the United Kingdom and France until 1956. The United Kingdom agreed to withdraw its military power from Egypt in 1954 but the last British troops left on 13th June 1956. The Suez crisis led to Britain's decline. [Schenkelberg \(2002\)](#)

10. FINDINGS

Stevens deeply admired his former employer, Lord Darlington. He suppressed all his strong emotions throughout his life for his professional life. The suppression led him to endure an emotionless state in his life. This emotionless state could be seen in almost all the protagonists of Ishiguro's novels. Mostly that is because of unconscious repression of the deep hurdles they experienced in their past life and that become painful memories. Though Stevens regrets believing his former employer a Nazi sympathizer he eventually accepted his past to face his future after

realising a desperate loss. The novel is packed with intense emotions, betrayal, and political issues that lead up to World War II.

11. FURTHER SCOPE OF EXTENSION

The scope for further research can be done with landscapes, a loss, and the intense emotions in the life of Stevens, representations of the butler's life, bantering, and political issues in this novel. [Thomas \(2000\)](#)

12. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the paper discussed the issues of historical aspects mentioned in the novel. It reflects the historical events of British society through the narrator's memory. The article merges Stevens' private and public history of England. Kazuo Ishiguro finely tuned the character and explained the unexplainable emotions of the protagonist's life. Due to Stevens' unaware state of mind when it comes to outside world knowledge and his blind loyalty towards his employer, Lord Darlington is one of the main reasons for the loss in his life. Through his physical journey, he recognised what really had happened in his life by travelling inwardly to identify his true self of life. This paper has shown the representation of history and the contribution of Steven's personal feelings and opinions of memory to help him reconstruct his past life. It helped him to realise the reason for his present situation of life in the novel. This paper analyses the perspective of historical events from a marginalised, suppressed, and oppressed point of view. His physical journey helps him to analyse his past and that leads him to his mental journey.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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