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An Artist of Floating Words — Illusory Connections in the  
Narratives of Kazuo Ishiguro

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Word Count: 11217

Kazuo Ishiguro, ‘in novels of great emotional force, has uncovered the abyss beneath our  
illusory sense of connection with the world.’

Statement by the Swedish Academy  
on awarding Kazuo Ishiguro the Nobel Prize in Literature 2017

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>PVH</i>	<i>A Pale View of Hills</i>
<i>AFW</i>	<i>An Artist of the Floating World</i>
<i>ROD</i>	<i>The Remains of the Day</i>
<i>UC</i>	<i>The Unconsoled</i>
<i>WWWO</i>	<i>When We Were Orphans</i>
<i>NLMG</i>	<i>Never Let Me Go</i>
<i>BG</i>	<i>The Buried Giant</i>

## INTRODUCTION

When Kazuo Ishiguro won the Nobel Prize in literature, the Swedish Academy released a statement that he is a writer ‘who, in novels of great emotional force, has uncovered the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world.’<sup>1</sup> This statement draws attention to Ishiguro’s creation, and resolution, of ‘the dialectic between revelation and concealment’ in his fiction, a central feature in his novels’ ability to act as parables for the human condition.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the Swedish Academy’s statement hints at potential theoretical interpretations of Ishiguro’s novels, the poststructuralist intimations of instability, in its various guises, being the most obvious. However, while recognising this abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world, Ishiguro’s novels do not succumb to the nadir of postmodern relativism. Rather, their anamnestic narratives lead them to eschew nihilistic, teleological conclusions in favour of an attitude recognising the value of connections, even when illusory.

Ishiguro’s development of the novel form is central to his creation of this attitude. His choice of setting, the ‘level banality’<sup>3</sup> of his prose style and ‘simultaneous absorption and subversion of realist narrative conventions’ encourage the reader to consider their own situation in the social context of contemporary culture.<sup>4</sup> Speaking of *AFW*, Ishiguro states he’s ‘inviting Western readers to look at it not as a Japanese phenomenon but as a human phenomenon.’<sup>5</sup> More generally he makes the point that, in a novel,

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<sup>1</sup> The Swedish Academy, ‘The Nobel Prize in Literature 2017’, Nobelprize.org, Nobel Media AB 2014, [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/2017](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2017), accessed 6th December 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Adam Newton, *Narrative Ethics* [electronic resource] (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p.285.

<sup>3</sup> James Wood, ‘The Uses of Oblivion: Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Buried Giant*’, *The New Yorker*, 23rd March 2015, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/03/23/the-uses-of-oblivion>, accessed 10th October 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Baker, *The Fiction of Postmodernity* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), p.3.

<sup>5</sup> Gregory Mason, ‘An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro’, *Contemporary Literature*, 30:3 (1989): 341.

there's always the tension between the setting you choose and the fact that you want to use that location for universal metaphors, for stories that can be applied to all sorts of human situations.<sup>6</sup>

By allowing his novels to act as overdetermined metaphors for the human condition, Ishiguro suggests ways in which we might come to terms with 'the abyss' of modern evils — the hegemony of ideology, commodification, mortality — and in so doing affirms the redemptive power of literature. As he says in his Nobel Appeal, '[i]t is hard to put the whole world to rights, but let us at least think about how we can prepare our own small corner of it'.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, while in interview Ishiguro has often rejected the self-reflexivity and intertextuality of postmodernism — he says 'there are more urgent questions than the nature of fiction'<sup>8</sup> — there are many aspects of postmodernism, as Hans Bertens definition usefully delineates, which prove highly illuminating when considering Ishiguro's works.

For Bertens, in postmodernism:

language constitutes rather than represents; the autonomous and stable subject of modernity has been replaced by a postmodern agent whose identity is largely other-determined and always in process; meaning has become social and provisional; knowledge only counts as such within a given discursive formation.<sup>9</sup>

These concerns recur throughout Ishiguro's novels in various guises. Of particular interest for describing his assertion of the illusory nature of our sense of reality, and affirmation of the value of human connection in spite of this, are: Jean-Francois Lyotard's skepticism towards metanarratives, 'grand projects of legitimation that link science and politics to

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<sup>6</sup> Sean Matthews, "I'm Sorry I Can't Say More": An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro', *Kazuo Ishiguro: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (2009): 117.

<sup>7</sup> Kazuo Ishiguro, 'Kazuo Ishiguro - Nobel Lecture', Nobelprize.org, Nobel Media AB 2014, [https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/2017/ishiguro-lecture.html](https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2017/ishiguro-lecture.html), accessed 7th December 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Matthews, 119.

<sup>9</sup> This model of postmodernism is necessarily subject to qualifications and provisionalities, since postmodernism is constituted as much by the negative space it occupies in the cultural imagination as much the positive. Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern*, quoted in Christopher Butler, *Postmodernism: a Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.122.

ideals of emancipation’;<sup>10</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin’s identification of the dialogic impulse in the novel form; Jean Baudrillard’s deconstruction of the boundary between reality and its representation in a hyperreal context.

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<sup>10</sup> Gary K. Browning, *Lyotard and the End of Grand Narratives* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p.35.

## I. Floating Words

‘Reality is a cliché from which we escape by metaphor.’<sup>11</sup>

The late twentieth century literary zeitgeist increasingly signaled a loss of confidence in the mimetic abilities of prose fiction; in 1993 D. J. Taylor noted that ‘to read postwar fiction is “to become conscious of a precipitous decline”’.<sup>12</sup> The epistemological problems of a Modernist world that ‘like a mosaic, [hung] together by its edges’<sup>13</sup> increasingly became the ontological problems of Postmodernism.<sup>14</sup> While the certainties and structures of literary mimesis were beneficial for their stabilising effect on post war culture,<sup>15</sup> its conventions were naively inadequate in an era of theory and postmodernism.<sup>16</sup> Developments in literary theory such as Bakhtin’s dialogism and Lyotard’s delegitimation of metanarratives — ‘grand orders of knowledge which can legitimate foundationalist claims’<sup>17</sup> — contributed to the sense that the stability of these traditional representational tropes

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<sup>11</sup> Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 195.

<sup>12</sup> D. J. Taylor, *After the War* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), quoted in John Brannigan, ‘A Literature of Farewell?: The Condition of England in Contemporary Literature’, *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Fall 2000): p.88. See also ‘The Literature of Exhaustion’ and ‘Desegregation of Art’ for other writers’ struggles with creative production in this period. John Barth, ‘The Literature of Exhaustion’, *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Nonfiction* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984), pp.62-76. Muriel Spark, ‘Desegregation of Art’, *The Golden Fleece* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2014), pp.26-30.

<sup>13</sup> William James, quoted by Steve O’Connor in conversation with Melvyn Bragg, ‘*The Waste Land and Modernity*’, *In Our Time*, BBC Radio 4, 39 min 51 sec, 26 February 2009: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00h1b38>, accessed 12th April 2017.

<sup>14</sup> See Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.10.

<sup>15</sup> Frank Kermode noted, twenty years earlier, how the form of the novel imposes certain paradigms on its subject matter: ‘As soon as it speaks, begins to be a novel, it imposes causality and concordance, development, character, a past which matters in the future.’ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of An Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.140.

<sup>16</sup> This was a phenomenon which was not restricted solely to literature but extended across the spectrum of late twentieth century culture. See for example Nancy Armstrong, who writes illuminatingly about how literary culture reflects wider cultural preoccupations; ‘the history of the novel and the history of the modern subject are, quite literally, one and the same’. In Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719-1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p.41.

<sup>17</sup> Patricia Waugh, *Practising Postmodernism, Reading Modernism* (London: Arnold, 1992), p.5.



could not be relied on.<sup>18</sup> Lodge, writing earlier, marks the paradox that while realism ‘denotes a literary aesthetic of truth-telling’,<sup>19</sup> a recognition that ‘the fictional reworking of personal experience inevitably falsifies it’ simultaneously undermines that aesthetic.<sup>20</sup> Boxall, writing in 2013 and referencing J. M. Coetzee’s 2003 novel *Elizabeth Costello*, describes this gradual failure of prose realism into the twenty-first century as ‘the breaking of the word mirror’;<sup>21</sup> over the last seventy years, the words on the page increasingly cannot be read as a reflection of reality.

Ishiguro’s oeuvre spans from the periods of high theory to the current time of post-theory<sup>22</sup> and, inevitably part of the ‘tissue of quotations’ drawn from the ‘innumerable centres of culture’, reflects preoccupations from across this time span.<sup>23</sup> His novels,

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<sup>18</sup> See also, Pieter Vermeulen, ‘The Critique of Trauma and the Afterlife of the Novel in Tom McCarthy’s *Remainder*’ *MFS*, Volume 58, number 3 (Fall 2012): 549–68. for a modern take on how psychological realism is being reimagined in contemporary depictions of historical trauma.

<sup>19</sup> David Lodge, *The Novelist at the Crossroads* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p.4.

<sup>20</sup> David Lodge, *The Novelist at the Crossroads*, p.14. See also *Mimesis* for the ways this mimetic representation has changed. The central point is made in its subtitle — ‘the representation of reality in Western literature’ — which implicitly posits a structuralist link between the text and that which it represents. With later developments in theory this link increasingly came to be seen as both illusory and naively formed. As Fredric Jameson suggests, realism is, like the novel form itself, almost defined by its resistance to critical prognoses; whenever ‘we attempt to hold the phenomenon of realism firmly in our mind’s eye’, it is ‘as though the object of our meditation began to wobble.’ See Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, Trask, W. R., trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013), p.1.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Boxall, *Twenty-First-Century Fiction: a Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.111.

<sup>22</sup> The development of Ishiguro’s works is interesting in this regard. His first novel was published almost contemporaneously with Eagleton’s classic work *Literary Theory: an Introduction* which ‘marks a critical moment in the establishment of “theory” as a critical orthodoxy’ (Boxall, *The Value of the Novel*, p.2). At the other end of the theoretical spectrum, Ishiguro’s most recent novel, *BG*, was published, ‘with the decline of Postmodernism as a cultural dominant’, (Boxall *The Value of the Novel*, p.8) when many, such as Boxall and even, in a surprising volte face, Eagleton, have again begun to ‘assert the enduring power of literature’ (Boxall *The Value of the Novel*, p.8). See Terry Eagleton, *How to Read Literature* (New Haven; Yale University Press, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> Barthes, ‘Death of the Author’, *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 2nd Edition (New York; London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010), p.1324.

functioning both as narratives in their own right and simultaneously functioning as parables of the human condition,<sup>24</sup> exemplify one way of figuring realism in these new conditions.<sup>25</sup>

These novels, with the exception of his most recent, *The Buried Giant*, are narrated in the first person by a character remembering their past, and so draw attention to the confabulatory nature of memory. Ishiguro's narratives are not nostalgic but, more properly, anamnestic, 'recovering the spirit and sensation of living in the past in order to reconcile the psychic disturbances of the present'.<sup>26</sup> Ishiguro notes that this anamnestic aspect is central to his first three novels, *PVH*, *AFW* and *ROD*: 'flashbacks [are] somebody turning over certain memories, in the light of his current emotional condition.'<sup>27</sup> Ono for instance mentions 'casting [his] mind back' to moments and 'searching [them] for significance' (*AFW*, p.53). The syuzhets are explicitly reconstructed by a, necessarily unreliable, first person narrator attempting to impose meaning onto the events of their fabula.<sup>28</sup>

In 'The Literature of Farewell?' John Brannigan locates this need to remember and construct the mythic certainties of the past as a key feature both in the novel and in society for recouping a sense of hope in the value of literature. In this respect Ishiguro and Brannigan echo each other. Discussing nostalgia, Ishiguro states the value of connections,

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<sup>24</sup> The peculiarly 'existential bent' of the parable as a form makes it a singularly apt means to communicate these ideas. (James Champion, 'The Parable as an Ancient and a Modern Form', *Literature and Theology* 3.1 (1989): 16) Similarly, John Crossan notes its suitability for making a critique of hegemonic discourses when he states in *The Dark Interval* (1975) that the 'parable is [...] purely subversive of the idolatry of cultural myth [...] and of any master narrative that purports to have an established relation to an absolute notion of being or truth.' (Champion, p.25) Adam Newton argues similarly that 'self-consciously addressive texts' such as *AFW*, *ROD* and *NLMG* exactly call for mimetic, performative acts from readers, in spite of the ontological and epistemic borders between fiction and reality.' Adam Newton, *Narrative Ethics* [electronic resource] (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p.22.

<sup>25</sup> Boxall argues that such confluence of the literal and metaphorical has been a foundational part of the novel form ever since *Robinson Crusoe*. However I would contend that the uniquely flattened affect and arrangement of thematic architecture in Ishiguro's novels is truly an innovation of the novel form. See Boxall, *The Value of the Novel*, p.49.

<sup>26</sup> Brannigan, p.94.

<sup>27</sup> Kazuo Ishiguro, *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro* (Mississippi, University Press of Mississippi, 2008), p.48.

<sup>28</sup> In his Nobel Prize speech Ishiguro made the point that his work as a writer self-reflexively acts out the efforts of Etsuko and Ono to order their lives: He came to realise he could never visit his Japan, that it would always 'be an emotional construct put together by a child out of memory imagination and speculation'. 'It was my wish to rebuild my Japan in fiction to make it safe'. Ishiguro, 'Kazuo Ishiguro - Nobel Lecture'.

even when illusory; nostalgia ‘anchors us emotionally to a sense that things should and can be repaired [...] even though [...] they constitute] a flawed memory, a flawed vision.’<sup>29</sup> Rather than ‘[answering] the discourse of decline with the language of nihilism’,<sup>30</sup> Ishiguro does not allow the deferrals and removes characteristic of the athambia, aphasia and aporia of the present to undermine the value of these connections. His creative use of anamnestic narratives, which act as ‘a kind of emotional equivalent to idealism’,<sup>31</sup> acknowledges ‘the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world’, simultaneously affirming the value of forming connections such as human relationships in and of themselves.<sup>32</sup>

#### \* Naming \*

Ishiguro’s brilliant use of names suggests the variety of interpretations to which his novels are amenable. The title of *AFW* oscillates between the oriental context of *ukiyo*, the transient Buddhist ‘floating world’, and a recognition of the linguistic instability of the floating signifier.<sup>33</sup> The title itself may even begin the process of self-deconstruction some critics have seen at work in the novel; a poststructuralist interpretation reveals the essentialist, marginalising myth on which the Occidental perceptions of *ukiyo* are founded. The representation of a pastiche of ‘Japaneseness’, for example in the Kasuga Park Hotel or in the paintings Ono creates for Master Takeda, ‘the essential point’ of which ‘was that they

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<sup>29</sup> Brian W. Shaffer and Kazuo Ishiguro, ‘An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro’, *Contemporary Literature* 42.1 (2001): 8.

<sup>30</sup> Brannigan, p.89.

<sup>31</sup> Shaffer, p.7.

<sup>32</sup> The Swedish Academy.

<sup>33</sup> With historic sedimentation of meaning the term *ukiyo* has also come to be associated with the hedonistic world of the Japanese urban leisure district, which is the major way it is figured in the novel. As it happens there are a number of terms from Japanese art, especially painting, which usefully describe aspects of Ishiguro’s novels. Examples include *yugen* — a suggestive indefiniteness full of mystery and depth — and *mono no aware* — the sadness of things. These were used, not unreasonably, by several early studies of *PVH*, *AFW* and *ROD*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, almost immediately after Ishiguro’s novels moved away from specifically Japanese settings the critical fascination with him as a stereotypical Japanese author, despite his having lived in England since the age of 5, abated and these terms disappeared from analyses.

look “Japanese” to the foreigners to whom they were shipped out’, deconstructs it as a stable signifier for a cultural reality (*AFW*, p.116, p.69). Stereotypes come to signify a lack — they are in a Derridean sense defined by absence — and so their meaning is thus endlessly deferred down the chain of signification.

The title ‘*Never Let Me Go*’ seems to promise a melodrama, in complete contrast with the ‘delicately conflicted soul’<sup>34</sup> and ‘absolute simplicity’ of the text itself.<sup>35</sup> At the same time the phrase ‘never let *me* go’ hints at the clones’ struggle, to construct a stable sense of identity. Finally, the title takes on further associations as the name of the Judy Bridgewater song Kathy dances to and so, as Patricia Waugh has remarked, ‘conveys the fragility of the human self’ in a more biological sense.<sup>36</sup>

The title of *BG* points both to the novel’s literal setting of post-Arthurian Britain and to the metaphorical, and unacknowledged, the giant of submerged trauma, present both as dormant antagonism between national cultures and as repressed anger and hate within individuals. The buried giant could also be a metaphor for the national myths which subconsciously shape our sense of identity.

Likewise, ‘Hailsham’ in *Never Let Me Go* is similarly overdetermined. As the name of a peer — Lord Hailsham — and of a town in Sussex dating back to the Domesday book it has vague conservative associations. Moreover, as the Edenic boarding school at which Kathy spends ‘a kind of golden time’, Hailsham combines a greeting — ‘Hail’ — which is false — a ‘sham’ (*NLMG* p.76). This splitting has several possible implications; Toker and

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<sup>34</sup> Cusk, Rachel, ‘Rereading: *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro’, *The Guardian*, 29th January 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/jan/29/never-let-me-go-kazuo-ishiguro>, accessed 20th November 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Boxall, *Twenty-First-Century Fiction: a Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp.98-99.

<sup>36</sup> Patricia Waugh, ‘Kazuo Ishiguro’s Not Too Late Modernism’, *Kazuo Ishiguro: New Critical Visions of the Novels* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.18.

Chertoff<sup>37</sup> have for example shown how embedding an illusory connection in the structure of the most formative stage in the clones' education emphasises their orphanhood and lack of a sense of familial identity.<sup>38</sup> Hailsham may even, in a post-structuralist sense, represent the sham that characterises all linguistic utterances, such as greetings. Ishiguro's use of names thus represents a warning against forming too strong or too binary relationships with the world, instead suggesting interpretive plurality.

\* Narrative Structure \*

In the general sense that Ishiguro's novels destabilise and counteract hegemonic discourses, their critique of conformity is of a piece with other 'postcolonial' writers like Salman Rushdie and Timothy Mo.<sup>39</sup> However, in contrast to these writers, Ishiguro's style is marked not by ebullient creativity but a 'level banality'.<sup>40</sup> In interview Ishiguro rejects attempts to classify his work either as 'straight realism'<sup>41</sup> or 'out-and-out fabulism'<sup>42</sup> in favour of a form incorporating elements of both: 'Malcolm Bradbury [...] noticed the "quality of irrealism" and the "texture of oddity" in [...] *A Pale View of Hills*' and such a

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<sup>37</sup> Leona Toker and Daniel Chertoff, 'Reader Response and the Recycling of Topoi in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*', *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, Volume 6, Number 1 (January 2008): 163-180.

<sup>38</sup> This lack of identity is also hinted at by the way their surnames are abbreviated to single letters; 'Kathy H' (*NLMG*, p.3), 'Reggie D' (*NLMG*, p.14), 'Christopher C' (*NLMG*, p.59) etc.

<sup>39</sup> Rushdie for example intimates in *Midnight's Children* that historical narratives of nationhood are highly provisional upon cultural context: India 'a nation which had never previously existed[,] was about to win its freedom, although it had five thousand years of history [...] was nevertheless quite imaginary [...] a dream we all agreed to dream' (Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Vintage, 2008), pp.129-30). Ishiguro similarly remarks that 'from *The Unconsoled* onwards, "I became so self-conscious about this issue of people taking me literally that I almost retreated to a weirder world, an obviously fictional world, to announce how I want my novels to be read: don't take historical truth too seriously'. Wood, Gaby, 'Kazuo Ishiguro: "There is a slightly chilly aspect to writing fiction"', *The Telegraph*, 5th October 2017, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/books/authors/kazuo-ishiguro-countries-have-got-big-things-buried/>, accessed 10th October 2017.

<sup>40</sup> Wood, 'Uses of Oblivion'.

<sup>41</sup> Allan Vorda, Kim Herzinger and Kazuo Ishiguro, 'An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro', *Mississippi Review* 20.1/2 (1991): 141.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

texture is notable throughout Ishiguro's oeuvre.<sup>43</sup> The combination of style and generic fluidity in his works — 'I think genre rules should be porous, if not nonexistent'<sup>44</sup> — leads to a sense of flattened affect which nevertheless 'exerts its own pressure on the real'.<sup>45</sup> In this way, Ishiguro's uniquely metaphoric style of realism '[inherits] the legacy of theory, without betraying its spirit.'<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, Ishiguro's novels are structured around their 'thematic architecture';<sup>47</sup> '[t]angential thought associations, or the vagaries of memory',<sup>48</sup> rather than the limitations of linear chronology or a causal plot, 'move the novel from one section to the next.'<sup>49</sup> This way of arranging the syuzhet is 'an exciting, freer way of composing [a] novel; one that [produces] richness on the page and [offers] inner movements impossible to capture on the screen.'<sup>50</sup> For example, in *AFW*, Ono's musings on the phrase 'the greatest cowardice of all' lead him from the suicide of the President of Miyake's company in the present to considering Kenji's funeral years ago (*AFW*, p.56). This in turn causes him to evaluate his son's generation's contribution to the Japanese war effort and hence to describe and discuss the fate of the anachronistic Hirayama boy.

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<sup>43</sup> Alex Clark, 'Kazuo Ishiguro's Turn to Fantasy', *The Guardian*, 19th February 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/feb/19/kazuo-ishiguro-the-buried-giant-novel-interview>, accessed 21st November 2017.

<sup>44</sup> Sian Cain, 'Writer's indignation: Kazuo Ishiguro Rejects Claims of Genre Snobbery', *The Guardian*, 8th March 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/mar/08/kazuo-ishiguro-rebuffs-genre-snobbery>, accessed 8th February 2018.

<sup>45</sup> Wood, 'Uses of Oblivion'.

<sup>46</sup> Boxall, *The Value of the Novel*, pp.8-9.

<sup>47</sup> Claire Armitstead, John Mullan and Kazuo Ishiguro, 'The Guardian Podcast: Kazuo Ishiguro' (16th January 2015), <https://www.theguardian.com/books/audio/2015/jan/16/kazuo-ishiguro-the-remains-of-the-day-books-podcast>, accessed 4th December 2017.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* In one of his many references to his grounding in European literary history, Ishiguro remarks that he took his inspiration for this method of structuring a novel from Proust's 'methods of movement' in *Remembrance of Things Past*. See Kazuo Ishiguro, 'Introduction' to Kazuo Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World* (London: Faber and Faber, 2016), p.xi.

<sup>50</sup> Kazuo Ishiguro, 'Introduction' to Kazuo Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World* (London: Faber and Faber, 2016), p.xi.

The mode of narrative representation in *BG* is largely realist and yet its ‘atmosphere of oddly vacated calm’ hints that mimesis itself might be only one of many myths, destabilising the sense of connection with the world it otherwise seeks to establish.<sup>51</sup> The novel opens by establishing the time, place and social context; ‘[m]ost of the roads left by the Romans would by then have become broken or overgrown, often fading into wilderness.’ (*BG*, p.3) However the third person narrator’s incessant use of modal verbs — ‘That *would* have been the picture Axl and Beatrice saw below them.’ — sets the narrative at a further remove from the reader (*BG*, p.53, emphasis my own).<sup>52</sup> Equally, aestheticising descriptions — ‘the picture’ — emphasise the representational aspect of the narrative. Moreover, even when the narrative focalises on a single character, such as the free indirect discourse through which Axl’s battle with the river pixies is narrated, there is a sense of dislocation; in this case evocative of Axl’s mental turmoil, temporal language affects spatial distortions: ‘he must *this time* have swung with the blade outwards [...] yet Beatrice remained *an age* away [...] and *now* [the pixies] came from the land too’ (*BG*, p.265, emphasis my own).

A later passage from the start of ‘Part IV’ exemplifies other narrative estrangements and also raises the complex questions of cultural memory *BG* engages with:

Some of you will have fine monuments by which the living may remember the evil done to you. Some of you will have only crude wooden crosses or painted rocks, while yet others of you must remain hidden in the shadows of history. You are in any case part of an ancient procession, and so it is always possible that the Giant’s

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<sup>51</sup>Alex Clark, ‘Kazuo Ishiguro’s Turn to Fantasy’.

<sup>52</sup> Ishiguro’s first use of a third person narrative voice has led several reviewers, unfairly in my opinion, to denigrate the novel. Toby Lichtig, for example, writes that ‘Unlike in Ishiguro’s previous six novels, and all five tales in his single collection of short stories, *Nocturnes* (2009), we are essentially in the hands of a third-person narrator, which means that the strangely stilted style, so effective in his other writing, is no longer the expression of an individual consciousness in psychic pain. [...] without decent characterization, or engaging, purposeful prose, Ishiguro leaves us with little more than a string of loosely linked events and overbearing metaphors.’ These reviews disparage the flattened tone because it no longer dramatises the internal psychodynamics of a central consciousness. In doing so they ignore, much to the detriment of their analyses, the expansion from the personal situation of the individual subject to a national consciousness in internal turmoil. Querig’s mist of forgetfulness provides a nonspecific, defamiliarised space onto which the novel’s battles, literal and metaphorical, over the benefits of remembrance and forgetting can be vividly projected. Toby Lichtig, ‘What on earth’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 5th October 2017, <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/earth-buried-giant-ishiguro/>, accessed 6th March 2018.

cairn was erected to mark the site of some such tragedy long ago when young innocents were slaughtered in war. (*BG*, p.305)

Following immediately after the doddery interior monologue of 'Gawain's Second Reverie', the opening of Chapter 15 marks a return to the third person narration of the majority of the novel. This ought to signal, likewise, a return to an essentially mimetic style of writing. However, in a stunningly disconcerting move, the narrator addresses the reader as if they are 'part of [the] ancient procession' of the dead. Further, the incredibly direct and personal use of the second person plural shockingly implies that the reader is not only dead, but a victim of an atrocity, one of the 'young innocents [...] slaughtered in war'. In this way the narrator both involves the reader and destabilises their preconceived relationship with the text.

Moreover, the second sentence, describing ever less externalised memorials to the dead, presents something of a paradox. James Young argues that 'the more memory is represented in its exteriorised forms such as monuments, the less it is experienced internally, allowing memory to become distanced from us.'<sup>53</sup> This progression is also, then, a regression. The physical monuments to the first two named groups, though initially the more impressive, are subject to decay and forgetfulness with time. By contrast the unnamed 'others', denied even the specificity of the personal pronoun, will enter into the 'ancient procession' of history, admittedly only in its 'shadows'. This increasingly vague determination of identity leads the reader to consider the repressed myths of oppression within their own culture; Ishiguro himself, for example, often mentions the willful amnesia of the Japanese concerning their aggression in WW2.

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<sup>53</sup> James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p.5. Quoted in Yugin Teo, *Kazuo Ishiguro and Memory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p.3.



The uncanny perspective the reader is therefore forced to adopt in this passage causes them to, first, confront their own mortality, and, second, to identify with victims of atrocities; being part of this procession, ‘any man’s death diminishes [the reader], for [they] are involved in mankind’.<sup>54</sup> The initially perplexing ‘and so’ in the middle of the third sentence, linking the ancient procession with the physical form of the giant’s cairn, serves as a device to broaden the scope of this monument and so memorialise all of dead humanity. Moreover, linking the literal giant’s cairn to the ‘ancient procession’ provokes consideration of the metaphorical giant of cultural genocide on which the novel’s peace is predicated, and which therefore that peace paradoxically serves to memorialise.

\* Novels as Metaphors \*

Critics such as Nancy Huston make the link between the text of a novel and the culture of those reading it, contrasting the experience of postmodernity with that of readers and writers in ‘the middle of the 19th century’ whose ‘reality was present, rather than presented or represented’.<sup>55</sup> Poststructuralist interpretations draw attention to the polyvalent effects created by the associational structures of Ishiguro’s novels which allow them to function metaphorically for the situation of the individual in contemporary society. De Man for instance contends that ‘figural language does not suppose a single meaning but makes reference to a chain of meanings, which has no one authoritative centre’<sup>56</sup> and key to Ishiguro’s novels’ sense of the flow of this ‘chain of meanings’<sup>57</sup>, their deconstruction of essentialist definitions, is the idea of ‘metaphorical extension’.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> John Donne, ‘Meditation 17’, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: Volume B, The Sixteenth Century and The Early Seventeenth Century*, 9th Edition, ed. Julia Reidhead (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2012), p.1421.

<sup>55</sup> Nancy Huston, ‘The Decline of Identity?’, *Salmagundi* 121/122 (1999): 12.

<sup>56</sup> Martin McQuillan, *Paul de Man* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 18.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Kenneth Burke, ‘Four Master Tropes’, *The Kenyon Review* 3.4 (1941): 425.

Metaphorical extension is the paradigmatic movement from the literal specifics of the given setting to the themes they provoke. It refers to the tendency of Ishiguro's novels to break free of the specific interpretive context established by their diegesis and to read as a metaphor for some wider issue in contemporary society. Importantly, metaphorical extension reveals the illusions underpinning a too-easy acceptance of ideology.

Although Ishiguro inverts the conventional idea that setting creates the novel's preoccupations, this does not diminish the importance of that setting, *qua* setting; the setting opens up the novel's thematic preoccupations to a variety of interpretations, both within its diegesis and in the social context of the reader. Ishiguro remarks he was particularly concerned that discussions of *BG* should not merely centre around the individual concerns of a particular historical event.<sup>59</sup>

I was tempted to look at actual contemporary events: The disintegration of Yugoslavia, the Rwandan genocide, France in the years after the Second World War ... But I didn't really, in the end, want to set it down in any of those particular settings. [...] As a novelist, I wanted to retreat to something a little bit more metaphorical.<sup>60</sup>

In *BG* the associative neutrality of the 'blank space in history'<sup>61</sup> after the Romans left Britain provides this metaphorical setting which allows its themes to resonate universally.<sup>62</sup>

Similarly, Ishiguro, who himself often describes his novels as images of the state of humanity, draws attention to how, within the diegesis of *NLMG*, the clones perform the situation of the reader:

'the big thing about *Never Let Me Go* is that [the clones] never rebel, they [...] passively accept the programme in which they are butchered for their organs. I wanted a very strong image like that for the way that most of us are'.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> This is also perhaps one reason Ishiguro uses the mythic apparatus of the Romance genre in *BG*.

<sup>60</sup> Scott Simon, 'The Persistence — And Impermanence — Of Memory In The Buried Giant', *National Public Radio* (28th February 2015), <https://www.npr.org/2015/02/28/389530345/the-persistence-and-impermanence-of-memory-in-the-buried-giant>, accessed 20th October 2017.

<sup>61</sup> Edyta Lorek-Jezińska, 'Testimonies of absence: Trauma and forgetting in *The Buried Giant* by Kazuo Ishiguro', *Crossroads: A Journal of English Studies* 15 (4/2016) (2016): 43.

<sup>62</sup> Clark, 'Kazuo Ishiguro's Turn to Fantasy'.

<sup>63</sup> Matthews, 124.

The shock attendant on the realisation that the students' situations are much like our own, creates much of the novel's affective power. More generally, Wai-Chew Sim notes how 'in its final arresting image of old carrier bags and debris caught along lines of barbed wire, [*NLMG*] relates the fate of the clones to an entire socio-economic order.'<sup>64</sup> *NLMG* acts as an extended metaphor for the way all human beings are steadily losing bits of themselves, steadily dying, and so foregrounds these sources of denial in contemporary culture. Just as the clones' lives have been written for them — twice — so too have ours. In *NLMG* the clones' disturbing reluctance to break free shows our unthinking and passive acceptance of institutional mechanisms.

*ROD* again shows Ishiguro's engagement with the issues of contemporary society. Stevens the butler becomes a 'metaphor for the relationship of very ordinary, small people to power'.<sup>65</sup> We, like Stevens, inevitably function on the periphery of some grand stage and our thoughts of affecting for example the machinations of international politics by polishing silver very well are merely pretensions; Ishiguro states that 'at an ethical and political level most of us are butlers'.<sup>66</sup>

Much the same might be said for Ono's contribution of propaganda to the Japanese war effort. Ono states that 'I am not too proud to see that I too was a man of some influence, who used that influence to a disastrous end.' (*AFW*, p.192). His daughter however urges him 'to see things in a proper perspective' (*ibid.*). For Setsuko, Ono's role as painter is in the Platonic sense removed from the subject matter he represents; he was never actively engaged in the war effort. Artists for Setsuko are inevitably part of *ukiyo*, the floating world of transitory pleasures which is an escape from, and cannot influence, the larger world of

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<sup>64</sup> Wai-Chew Sim, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), p.86.

<sup>65</sup> Graham Swift and Kazuo Ishiguro, 'Kazuo Ishiguro', *Bomb* 29 (1989): 22.

<sup>66</sup> Matthews, 115.

national conflict. She goes on to say that while it was ‘no doubt most influential amongst other such painters [...] Father’s work had hardly to do with these larger matters.’ (*AFW*, pp.192-3). Setsuko shows that the connections Ono establishes between his contribution and the fate of post war Japan are illusory, concluding that the realisation that he ‘was simply a painter’ should release Ono from his worries (*AFW*, p.193); ‘[father] must stop believing that he has done some great wrong.’ (*ibid.*). So *AFW* and *ROD* seem to imply, on gaining awareness of the illusory nature of these connections, that we are ‘ordinary men with no special gift of insight’, we must come to terms with the sense that our contribution may have been misused (*AFW*, p.200).

\* Consolatory Connections \*

However this recognition need not preclude a simultaneous sense of consolation. The narrators’ recollections themselves affirm a non-teleological ethical stance, with Adam Newton’s idea of ‘narrative as relationship and human connectivity’ at the centre.<sup>67</sup> As shall be examined in greater detail in the next chapter, in *ROD*, Stevens’s dejection is alleviated when he comes to realise the importance of human connection. As Ishiguro says, ‘this perfect butler [...] seems to be a powerful metaphor for someone who is trying to actually erase the emotional part of himself’ in order to conform to the role of the perfect butler,<sup>68</sup> ‘[y]et he doesn’t succeed because these kind of human needs, the longings for warmth and love and friendship, are things that just don’t go away.’<sup>69</sup> Likewise in *BG*, Axl and Beatrice’s unconditional love for one another despite the literalised mist of forgetfulness is an explicit

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<sup>67</sup> Newton, p.7.

<sup>68</sup> Allan Vorda, Kim Herzinger and Kazuo Ishiguro, ‘An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro’, *Mississippi Review* 20.1/2 (1991): 153.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

recognition that illusory foundations, particularly in the past, need not impede the present value of these connections.

In recognising the confabulatory nature of narratives told through memory, Ishiguro's novels warn that the foundations on which our sense of connection with the world are built are merely 'projections on the walls of Plato's cave'.<sup>70</sup> Conversely, acting as overdetermined metaphors, they simultaneously affirm the creative and consolatory power of narrative and memory, its ability to set up dialectics between past and present, history and memory, fabula and syuzhet, and therefore 'communicate feelings, [...] [and] appeal to what we share as human beings across our borders and divides'.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Fredric Jameson, quoted in Baker, *The Fiction of Postmodernity* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), p.55.

<sup>71</sup> Kazuo Ishiguro, 'Kazuo Ishiguro - Nobel Lecture'.

## II. Illusory Connections

‘Lyotard takes the universalising impetus of grand narratives to be insensitive to the heterogeneity and incommensurability that compose the social bond.’<sup>72</sup>

Ishiguro concluded his Nobel Prize speech on 7th December 2017 with a ‘Nobel Appeal’,<sup>73</sup> affirming the power of literature to put ‘our own small corner of ‘the [...] world to rights.’<sup>74</sup> He continued, ‘if we are to play an important role in this future, if we are to get the best from the writers of today and tomorrow I believe we must become more diverse. [...] we must widen our common literary world with many more voices’.<sup>75</sup> Ishiguro’s first three novels perform a commitment to heterodoxy through their critiques of totalising metanarratives. This is particularly evident in *ROD*. Its presentation of ideology’s narrative equivalent, a monologic discourse, criticises the naive passivity with which its protagonist accepts and promulgates the values of British Imperialism. Furthermore, as Patricia Waugh notes, ‘the struggle towards understanding difference [...] is also the education into ethical being’.<sup>76</sup> These novels, in accepting a dialogic range of discourses, argue that one should actively account for one’s own contribution. However, they simultaneously also recognise the difficulties of attaining a transhistorical perspective from the vantage point of mediocrity.

### \* Monologism and Metanarratives \*

Mikhail Bakhtin, a major theorist in the discourse of the novel in the post-war years, developed the concept of monologism. A monologic work is one in which a single

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<sup>72</sup> Gary K. Browning, *Lyotard and the End of Grand Narratives* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p.2.

<sup>73</sup> Kazuo Ishiguro, ‘Kazuo Ishiguro - Nobel Lecture’.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Waugh, ‘Kazuo Ishiguro’s Not Too Late Modernism’, p.19.

transcendental consciousness organises and integrates the text of the work's field and, in doing so, creates 'all the signifying practices, ideologies, values and desires that are deemed significant'.<sup>77</sup> In *AFW* Ono's self-aggrandisingly attempts to display himself as an important, highly influential propagandist conforms in many ways to this definition. For instance he begins his narrative by telling how he won his house in an 'auction of prestige' (*AFW*, p.9). Ono projects a self-image of one whom, though he 'is not, nor [has] ever been, a wealthy man' (*AFW*, p.7), does not place value in such material trappings but rather prefers a contest 'in which one's moral conduct and achievement are brought as witnesses rather than the size of one's purse' (*AFW*, p.10);<sup>78</sup> a contest in which he is implicitly an esteemed contestant.

Published a few years before *PVH*, Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* presents a situation in which discourses of progress can no longer be relied upon to fulfill claims linking science and politics to ideals of emancipation;<sup>79</sup> he writes that 'it is no longer possible to call development progress'.<sup>80</sup> *NLMG* provides a similar repudiation of progressivism to Lyotard's, largely through the associational structure of Kathy's narration. By 'having a plot that doesn't move forward [NLMG] says [...] that abstract things like "technology", "progress" and "modernity" will *not* provide a cure' for rampant consumerism.

<sup>81</sup> Rather, commodification *ad infinitum* will lead inevitably to a loss of a stable sense of identity and of the value of aesthetic creations and human relationships.<sup>82</sup> As Mori, Ono's

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<sup>77</sup> Robinson, 'In Theory Bakhtin'.

<sup>78</sup> He later describes how he detests the 'fingering of coins, hour after hour' which is his take on his father's business and shows how he has chosen a life of aesthetic gratification rather than Capitalism (*AFW*, p.48).

<sup>79</sup> See Browning, p.35.

<sup>80</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, 'Note on the Meaning of "Post-"', *Postmodernism: a Reader*, Thomas Docherty, ed. (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p.49.

<sup>81</sup> Sim, p.90, (emphasis original).

<sup>82</sup> One might see a similar commodification of human life in *ROD*. When Mr Farraday buys Darlington Hall, Stevens comes as 'part of the package', commodifying his role and so making him essentially an object in the heritage industry (*ROD*, p.242).

Bohemian sensei, says, 'It's hard to appreciate the beauty of a world when one doubts its very validity' (*AFW*, p.150).

Although Lyotard's critique of metanarratives focuses specifically on the discourse of scientific progress, his analysis can be applied to other totalising discourses disseminating a 'truth' incommensurable to other perspectives; since their *a priori* claims only have recourse to themselves for legitimation, they are inherently destabilised by a pluralism of perspectives, figured in narrative as the dialogic impulse Bakhtin describes.<sup>83</sup> Such a destabilising effect can be seen in Ishiguro's first three novels, *ROD* in particular.

In Ishiguro's first three novels the intense focalisation on the first person narrators and their narrative's confessional format dramatises their psychomachias.<sup>84</sup> However, differences in the structures of *PVH* and *AFW*, on the one hand, and *ROD*, on the other, form a progression towards ever stronger criticisms of limited perspectives and unquestioning acceptance of the metanarrative of a given ideology. This progression culminates in *ROD*, in which Lord Darlington's truth, accepted without question by Stevens and conveyed through his narrative, constitutes this dominant metanarrative and establishes the hegemony, at least initially, of a stereotyped British colonialism in Stevens's narrative. Ishiguro has said that in *PVH* he 'was trying to explore [...] how people use the language of self-deception and self-protection'<sup>85</sup> and in *ROD* 'Stevens's own taciturnity',<sup>86</sup> both his behaviour and the repressed language of his narration, 'signals the degree to which he has embraced his master's ideology'.<sup>87</sup> His tortured attempts to rationalise 'bantering'

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<sup>83</sup> See Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, ed. by Fredric Jameson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 7.

<sup>84</sup> I have used the anglicised plural 'psychomachias' here for clarity. However, the word etymologically derives from the Greek, so strictly speaking the plural should be 'psychomachiai'. I am indebted to Dr Robert Carver, of Durham University, for this observation. February 2018.

<sup>85</sup> Mason, in Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro*, p.135.

<sup>86</sup> Dominic Head, ed., *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction: 1950-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.158.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*



and so break free of the convoluted syntax — ‘It seems increasingly likely that I really will undertake the expedition that has been preoccupying my imagination now for some days’ — and anachronistic language — ‘association football’ and ‘Southern Africa’ — by which the novel represents his internal psychodynamics, *ipso facto* establish him as a cog in the mechanism of this ideology (*ROD*, p.245, p.3, p.18, p.41).

\* Unreliable Narrators \*

Ishiguro’s first three novels clearly exemplify the paradox characterised the modern subject’s sense of connection with the world identified by the Swedish Academy when awarding him the Nobel Prize; the novels continually draw attention to this sense of connection, only to reveal its illusory nature. In *ROD*, Stevens’s unreliable narration often inadvertently betrays his own self-deception in a similar manner. He boasts that ‘Lord Darlington never made any efforts to conceal things from my own eyes and ears’ and that ‘on numerous occasions’ Lord Darlington had said ‘you can say anything in front of Stevens, I can assure you’ (*ROD*, p.74). Although meant to be taken as a mark of pride, a sign that he is in Lord Darlington’s inner circle, these remarks actually signify that Stevens is a man of no consequence, who, despite his pretensions, does not have the power to affect anything beyond his small sphere.

Ono may even admit to the same ‘in the margins’<sup>88</sup> when he describes the Tortoise’s self-portrait; ‘each of us it seems, has his own special conceits [...] to be fair, I cannot recall any colleague who could paint a self-portrait with absolute honesty’ (*AFW*, p.67). Ono’s attempt to characterise the Tortoise is coloured by his own subjectivity and thus serves to characterise himself. Such admissions, as well as drawing attention to the narrative’s status

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<sup>88</sup> ‘[A]s de Man repeatedly shows in his analysis of literature, the most decisive indication of the concerns of a text are to be found in its margins’. Martin McQuillan, *Paul de Man* (London: Routledge, 2001), p.14.

as text, also reveal the inherent subjectivity and self-deceptions of his narration. Likewise, just as writing is, for Derrida and adherents of his such as J. Hillis Miller, characterised by absence, so memory in Ishiguro's fiction is similarly *ipso facto* characterised by the absence of the event remembered.<sup>89</sup> Miller, in what O'Neill describes as a manifesto for the deconstructive enterprise,<sup>90</sup> remarks on the 'chain pattern'<sup>91</sup> of language which

is not so much an alternation of light and shadow as it is the replacement of one light source by another light source that puts out the previous one. [...] Each new light at once veils the old and affirms itself as a new source of illumination. This light is always the screen. It covers over as it illuminates, since it is a power of figuration that makes things be what they are not.<sup>92</sup>

Such replacement, veiling, screening and figuration is inherent in the retelling of these unreliable narrators. As Ono remarks:

These of course may not have been the precise words I used that afternoon at the Tamagawa Temple; for I have had cause to recount this particular scene many time before, and it is inevitable that with repeated telling, such accounts begin to take on a life of their own. (*AFW*, p.72)

Ono's, Stevens's and Kathy's narrativised memories are conveyed through the inevitable veils of language and so are marked by their iterability;<sup>93</sup> each remembrance is an alteration and modification of its original, which it is neither possible nor desirable to reiterate exactly as it was.

When Ichiro watches *Godzilla*, he provides a model for this performance of remembrance and reiteration in *AFW* and *ROD*. Genuine reiteration would embarrass him; Ichiro needs the veils of anamnestic representation to give the impression to his mother that he enjoyed *Godzilla*. Obscuring his vision with his raincoat, Ichiro only perceives fragments

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<sup>89</sup> See Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', *Limited Inc* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1988).

<sup>90</sup> Michael O'Neill, *Shelley: a Critical Reader* (London: Longman, 1993), p.218.

<sup>91</sup> J. Hillis Miller, 'Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*'. Quoted in Michael O'Neill, ed., *Shelley* (London: Longman, 1993), p.219.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> See Jacques Derrida, 'White Mythology', *Of Grammatology*, Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) and Derrida, 'Signature Event Context'.

of the film through Ono's whispers and the 'small gap [...] in the raincoat' (*AFW*, p.82). As the use of modal verbs shows — 'the gap *would* close and his voice *would* say' — Ichiro has no agency and is largely dissociated from the big picture, literal and metaphorical (*ibid.*, emphasis my own). When he returns home however Ichiro is 'full of enthusiasm for the film' and 'was still giving [...] his version of it when [...] sat down to supper' (*ibid.*).

Just as Ichiro constructs a passionate and fully realised narrative to act as though he enjoyed the film, which he only has a fragmentary knowledge of, so too does Ono's narrative perform to the reader. For example Ono mentions how his 'artist's eye' is wont 'to construct an image [...] from occasional glimpses' (*AFW*, p.41). In this sense, characters throughout *AFW*, and Ishiguro's other novels, frequently show their 'need to make meaningful narratives out of broken histories'.<sup>94</sup> Moreover since within the narrative Ichiro essentially acts as a mirror for his grandfather, paralleling and yet ridiculing his actions through their childish mimicry, the implication is that all narratives, in their representations of their subject matter, falsify that subject matter. Ishiguro's novels are a performance of the 'breaking of the word mirror'<sup>95</sup> Boxall and poststructuralist theorists draw attention to, revealing 'the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world'.<sup>96</sup>

#### \* Narrative Style \*

The narrative style of Ishiguro's novels creates this urge in which the specifics of the novel's narrative relate by 'metaphorical extension'<sup>97</sup> to some wider societal issue. This style may be seen in the representation of the English countryside in *ROD*. When Stevens, told by a local 'You won't see a better view in the whole of England', looks out over 'field upon

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<sup>94</sup> Waugh, 'Kazuo Ishiguro's Not Too Late Modernism', p.5.

<sup>95</sup> Boxall, *Twenty-First-Century Fiction*, p.111.

<sup>96</sup> The Swedish Academy.

<sup>97</sup> Burke, p.425.

field rolling off into the far distance’, he sees that ‘the land rose and fell gently, and the fields were bordered by hedges and trees (*ROD*, p.25-6). This nonspecific prospect is shorn of adjectives and distinguishing landmarks; there were ‘dots in some of the distant fields which [he] assumed to be sheep.’ (*ibid.*) In fact Stevens even remarks that ‘it is the very *lack* of obvious drama or spectacle that sets the beauty of our land apart’, drawing attention to the especially unexciting nature of the landscape and, more particularly, the reductive vagaries of his own description (*ROD*, p.28).<sup>98</sup>

Furthermore, the fact this prospect causes Stevens to ‘adopt a frame of mind appropriate for the journey before [him]’<sup>99</sup> urges the reader to make the same intellectual leap.<sup>100</sup> Inspired by the landscape of what is effectively all England — ‘I find that what stays with me from this first day’s travel is [...] that marvellous view [...] of the rolling English countryside’ — his peroration on the nature of greatness shortly after becomes, by metaphorical extension, applicable to all who live in England (*ROD*, p.28).

Moreover, such narratives, as these novels’ protagonists often note, necessarily imply authorial selection of the events of their fabula. In ‘Four Master Tropes’ Kenneth

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<sup>98</sup> Incidentally, Ishiguro’s use of flattened style is one way of overcoming one of literature’s major struggles in the late 20th century, how to compete with, and differentiate itself from, new forms of media. Robert Scholes suggests that ‘[i]n the face of competition from cinema, fiction must abandon its attempt to “represent reality” and rely more on the power of words to stimulate the imagination.’ (Scholes, quoted at p.6 of *The Novelist at the Crossroads*) This is the solution Ishiguro adopts in his novels. The novel as a form cannot represent reality better than pictorial media such a cinema and television; it instead dramatises the gap between representation and ‘reality’. This is explicit in *AFW*, *ROD* and *NLMG* since their narrators foreground the re-presentational nature of their narratives. For example, in the film of *The Remains of the Day* the viewer is literally confronted with a recognisably West Country locale in all its abundant verdure. As Gibson notes, the audience is therefore forced into adopting a ‘tourist position’ (S. Gibson, 2004, ‘English Journeys: the Tourist, the Guidebook and the Motorcar in *The Remains of the Day*’, *Journeys*, 5 (2), p.65.) and the metaphoric extension, in the novel supplied by the suggestiveness of Stevens’s pared-back, affectless description, loses much of its generative force in the film. James Ivory, director, *The Remains of the Day*, [videorecording] *Columbia Pictures* (Burbank, Calif Columbia Tristar, 2001).

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> The quest trope is used elsewhere in Ishiguro’s novels to describe a process of self-discovery; in *BG*, movement through the physical landscape mirrors revelations in psychic space. Wistan for example describes how, though ‘these roads should be strange to me [...] at each turn it’s as if another distant memory stirs’ (*BG*, p.121).

Burke usefully substitutes the associatively-charged term ‘metonymy’ for ‘reduction’.<sup>101</sup> As Burke notes, ‘a reduction is a representation [...] thus, as reduction (metonymy) overlaps upon metaphor so likewise it overlaps upon synecdoche (representation)’.<sup>102</sup> Such selection and reduction implies representation and so change of perspective. Working backwards, Ishiguro’s notably inexpressive prose style and pointedly generalised landscapes throughout his novels are synecdochic of the world of the extradiegetic narratee; his novels’ diageses represent a larger whole. For example, in *ROD* the ‘understated, apparently affectless narrative style’<sup>103</sup> serves for Stevens as ‘a function of the narrator’s emotional repression as well as his habitual servility’ and, by synecdoche, the emotional repression and servility which individuals in modern society are inured to.<sup>104</sup> Aside from drawing attention to the chimera of deciphering the fabula from the syuzhet, Ishiguro’s novels thus read, by metaphorical extension, as representations of states of humanity.<sup>105</sup>

As Ishiguro has remarked in interview, *PVH*, *AFW* and *ROD* are in many ways reworkings of the same novel, the ‘thematic architecture’ remaining the same even as the setting and arrangement of the plot change.<sup>106</sup> Ishiguro has noted how the ‘whole narrative strategy’ of *PVH* ‘was about how someone ends up talking about things they cannot face directly *through other people’s stories*. [...] it’s really Etsuko talking about herself.’<sup>107</sup> *AFW* similarly functions to a large degree through doublings and parallels. It is itself an expansion of the subplot of *PVH*; Ono in *AFW* refigures Ogata’s plight in *PVH*. Within

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<sup>101</sup> Burke, p.421.

<sup>102</sup> Burke, p.426.

<sup>103</sup> Merritt Moseley, ‘The Booker Prize for 2000’

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> See Brooks, ‘The Heresy of the paraphrase’, *Norton*

<sup>106</sup> Ishiguro often repeats, and reimagines, themes and characters throughout his oeuvre. The plot of *AFW* is essentially the subplot of *PVH*, with the daughter Etsuko in *PVH* becoming the daughter Setsuko in *AFW*. Further, the porter at the start of *The Unconsoled* cannot but recall the Stevens of the start of *ROD* in his steadfast commitment to duty. See Armitstead, Mullan and Ishiguro, ‘The Guardian Podcast: Kazuo Ishiguro’.

<sup>107</sup> Mason, quoted in Barry Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.135, (emphasis original).

*AFW* itself Ono finds several parallels to his own life, for example in the figure of Akira Sugimura, an important businessman who committed seppuku having tried, and failed, to ‘transform not only the Kawabe district [...] but the whole cultural balance of the city’ (*AFW*, p.133). Ono finds much to admire in a man such as him ‘who aspires to rise above the mediocre [...] even if in the end he fails and loses a fortune on account of his ambitions’ (*AFW*, p.134). Through Sugimura’s story Ono derives personal consolation, a sense of ‘deep satisfaction [...] when looking back over one’s life’ that there is no guilt to be had ‘[i]f one has failed only where others have not had the courage or will to try’ (*ibid.*).

These themes are again echoed later in the novel through Ono’s interactions with Matsuda.<sup>108</sup> Ono only regrets that their ‘misfortune [was] to have been ordinary men during such times’ (*AFW*, p.200). Ono takes consolation in the fact that ‘whatever we did, we did at the time in the best of faith’ (*AFW*, p.202); unable to transcend his historical moment, a regrettable yet essential aspect of human life, he consoles himself that he had good intentions. These recollections are occasioned by the event of Matsuda’s death and yet Ono derives consolation for himself as much as for Matsuda; when he says ‘surely there was no reason for him to die disillusioned’ he is clearly thinking about whether there are reasons he himself should die disillusioned (*AFW*, p.201). The doublings and parallels within *AFW*, as in *PVH*, may therefore be interpreted as an external dramatisation of Ono’s psychomachia.

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<sup>108</sup> Matsuda is the character who first persuades the youthful, idealistic Ono to leave the ephemeral world of *ukiyo* and join the Okada-Shingen Society. In the novel he straddles both the small world of Ono’s personal life and the large world of national affairs. In fact his joke that ‘I find it hard to think of the world extending much beyond my garden’ (*AFW*, p.199) picks up this recurrent metaphor of small, personal worlds within larger, national worlds.

\* Monologism in *ROD* \*

However, as David Simpson has noted, ‘the fallacy of a finite and single interpretation derives [...] from the postulate of a privileged observer’<sup>109</sup> and Ishiguro’s novels show that the hegemony of a single discourse cannot be sustained under the dialogic pressure of other perspectives. By contrast with *PVH* and *AFW*, *ROD* marks a change from Ishiguro’s previous two novels so that, as in a monologic discourse, the narrator’s central organising consciousness creates ‘all the signifying practices, ideologies, values and desires that are deemed significant’;<sup>110</sup> events in the syuzhet function solely in their relation to Stevens. For example, Stevens always ‘[refers] to [Mrs Benn] as [he] knew her’, that is to say, as ‘Miss Kenton’ (*ROD*, p.48). Specifically the thematic architecture of *ROD* concerns Stevens’s progression from one conception of dignity — ‘a butler’s ability not to abandon the professional being he inhabits’ —, aligned with the tyranny of the ideology of British Colonialism, towards a second, more democratic kind which affords the individual a degree of control (*ROD*, p.42).<sup>111</sup>

In each section of *PVH*, *AFW* and *ROD* the protagonist adopts a slightly different psychological position. For the reasons mentioned in the paragraph above, marking the change in their perception of their own contribution is clearest in *ROD*. Stevens initially has no time for ‘wishy-washy pluralism’;<sup>112</sup> his definitions of Englishness and greatness, for example, are very clear and prescriptive. Throughout the novel however, ‘Stevens’s voice “conspicuously changes registers”’ and, by the eighth and final diary entry, ‘[h]is language

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<sup>109</sup> David Simpson, ‘Romanticism, Criticism and Theory’, in Curran Stuart, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 11.

<sup>110</sup> ‘This idea of tautological closure of dominant discourse is also found in Negri, Marcuse, baudrillard and Barthes.’ Andrew Robinson, ‘In theory Bakhtin: Dialogism, Polyphony and Heteroglossia’, *Ceasefire Magazine* 29 (2011).

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro*, p.78.

contains the “poignancy of incipient realisation”, its clarity blurred by interaction with other perspectives.<sup>113</sup> This dialectic between the protagonist’s hegemonic yet subjective narrative and alternative points of view is key to the novels’ critique of monologism and the ‘narrow artist’s perspective’ (*AFW*, p.199).

At the end of the sixth section, Stevens is in a psychological position akin to that of Ono at the end of *AFW*. Ono at this point describes his ‘conviction that one’s efforts have been justified’ (*AFW*, p.204) on receiving the Shigeta Foundation Award. Stevens similarly describes his ‘first-rate’ contributions as ‘loyalty intelligently bestowed’ and as being, ‘quite properly’, ‘confined’ to his ‘professional realm’ (*ROD*, p.201). Similarly, seeming to echo Ono’s professions that ‘despite certain flaws [...] we have the satisfaction of knowing that whatever we did, we did at the time in the best of faith’,<sup>114</sup> Stevens concludes that ‘it is hardly my fault if his lordship’s life and work have turned out today to look, at best, a sad waste — and it is quite illogical that I should feel any regret or shame on my own account’ (*AFW*, pp.201-2; *ROD*, p.201).<sup>115</sup> Again, when he recollects Miss Kenton leaving Darlington Hall in 1936, Stevens’s ‘mood was — I do not mind admitting it — somewhat downcast’ (*ROD*, p.227). Slowly though, this melancholy is replaced by ‘a deep feeling of triumph’ due to his having a sense that he is ‘as close to the great hub of things as any butler could wish’ (*ibid.*). The disappointments of the small world of his personal life are, laughably, subsumed

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<sup>113</sup> Newton quoted in Sim, p.108.

<sup>114</sup> In some respects, Ono is Stevens’s antithesis, since he took an active role in making his contribution; he had the ‘will’ and ‘courage’ to put his ‘convictions to the test’ (*AFW*, p.202). Unfortunately for Ono, his perspective does not allow him to see that his trust has been misplaced, that his work as an artist was not as important as he thought. Conversely Stevens, acting an essentially similar role, does eventually come to realise this.

<sup>115</sup> Yet even within Ono’s narration there are intimations that this satisfaction is founded on a conflated, and even illusory, sense of the value of his contribution. ‘I accept [...] that mine was part of an influence that resulted in untold suffering for our own people’ (*AFW*, p.123). This word ‘untold’ works to deconstruct the certainty of his statement. He is exaggerating, clearly, but one also questions if, since these people have not told of their suffering, whether the narrative that Ono is promulgating is a false construction.



by his sense that he has contributed meaningfully to the events of the big world in the drawing room next door.

However, unlike *AFW*, *ROD* does not end here, but with Stevens's epiphany of self-awareness when he realises that his sense that he has contributed meaningfully is only an illusion. In the final sections Stevens's narrative noticeably submits to a dialogic impulse and the 'intense interanimation and struggle between one's own and another's word' disrupts the preceding hegemony of his narrative.<sup>116</sup> Realising the illusory nature of his constructions deflates his rigid conception of the professional role as butler. In the second sense of dignity, Stevens comes to realise his situation is profoundly *undignified*; '[y]ou see, I *trusted*. I trusted in his Lordship's wisdom. All those years I served him, I trusted I was doing something worthwhile.' (*ROD*, p.243) The repetition of the word 'trusted' calls attention to the false premises, the illusory connections, which Stevens has made, and which now uncovers the abyss the Swedish Academy drew attention to when awarding Ishiguro the Nobel Prize.

#### \* The Dangers of Ideology \*

Moreover, since monologic "'truth" [is] constructed abstractly and systematically from the dominant perspective', a monologic mode of narration has tyrannic, even horrific, implications.<sup>117</sup> Through the character of Stevens, perhaps dramatising Hannah Arendt's idea of the banality of evil, Ishiguro criticises trust and unthinking obedience.<sup>118</sup>

What is politically repressive is what synthesizes narrative elements and suppresses their plurality under the monological claim to know "reality"; what is politically liberatory is

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<sup>116</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 2nd Edition, Vincent B. Leitch, ed. (New York; London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010), p.1073.

<sup>117</sup> Robinson, *In Theory Bakhtin*.

<sup>118</sup> Rachel Cusk makes a similar point about *NLMG*: 'This is a book about evil, the evil of death, the evil of banality: "he must have known he wasn't going to make it"' Cusk. See also Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York, N.Y.; London: Penguin Books, 2006).

whatever escapes and disrupts such a monological closure by engendering the plurality of narrative accounts and the undecidability of knowledge.<sup>119</sup>

In *PVH*, *AFW* and *ROD* the self-consciously subjective narrative of the novels' protagonists renders unstable the grounds for empirically justifiable knowledge and understanding.<sup>120</sup> Likewise the underlying ideologies of Ono's Communist propaganda and Stevens's right-wing language prove harmful in light of subsequent historical events such as Japanese war crimes in Manchukuo, concentration camps and the Holocaust. Other moments too provoke this line of thought. The description of the government officer in *AFW* poking the bonfire of Kuroda's life works with a stick, and his officious statement 'It's our policy to destroy any offensive material', recalls the Nazi book burnings, with their horrific implications for creative and personal freedom (*AFW*, p.183).

Waugh states perceptively that Ishiguro 'shows that, at the heart of what makes us ethical in the first place, is our imaginative and aesthetic ability to conjure counterfactuals, or to empathise with other minds through imaginative projection'.<sup>121</sup> Stevens is initially unable to empathise with other minds and thus dramatises a kind of Arendtian banality of evil in pursuing his duties without considering their purport.

Ishiguro shows how these monologic narratives, forced into dialogue with other perspectives, must crumble into a welter of regret as the adherent, in this case Stevens, realises their insufficiencies. The attempt to provide a meta-perspective incommensurable with perspectives other than its own is inevitably destabilised by these other voices.<sup>122</sup> Once,

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<sup>119</sup> Graham MacPhee, 'Escape from Responsibility: Ideology and Storytelling in Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*', *College Literature*, 38(1), (2011): 179.

<sup>120</sup> 'epistemology, n.' *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, January 2018), [www.oed.com/view/Entry/63546](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/63546), accessed 16 February 2018.

<sup>121</sup> Waugh, 'Kazuo Ishiguro's Not Too Late Modernism', p.19.

<sup>122</sup> See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Robert Hurley, trans. (New York: Vintage, 1990), pp.100-1, and Sara Mills, *Discourse*, (London: Routledge, 1997), p.42.

just for one moment, [Stevens's] armour [cracks]' and he allows 'for a vast and tragic yearning to be glimpsed underneath'.<sup>123</sup>

I do not think I responded immediately, for it took me a moment or two to fully digest these words of Miss Kenton. Moreover, as you might appreciate, their implications were such as to provoke a certain degree of sorrow within me. Indeed — why should I not admit it? — At that moment my heart was breaking. (*ROD*, p.239)

By the end Stevens realises that he has been 'a man so encapsulated in protocols that all the major events of his life, political and emotional, happen on the periphery of that life'.<sup>124</sup> Stevens's admission then, coming all at once and as a surprise, is all the more affecting because in *ROD* subplots function purely in their relation to his single organising consciousness. The breakdown of his formal discourse is an admission of the potential validity of the statements from other perspectives throughout the novel — Miss Kenton's, Sir Leonard's, the landlord of the Coach and Horses's — in an overwhelming rush of dialogism.

This passage marks a major change between *AFW* and *ROD*. Ono's and Stevens's outbursts have very different manners of delivery. Ono's admission that 'he made many mistakes' at Noriko's miai is not so astonishing since he has already intimated that some might feel embarrassed about his role in the war effort, although he himself does not (*AFW*, p.123). Moreover his admission is interpretable merely as his way of clearing the air with the Saito family. Ono presents the tension between the families and the 'stiff responses' of his 'daughter's performance for much of the earlier part of the evening' (*AFW*, p.118). By contrast, according to his narrative, the lucidity and sincerity of his outburst turns the miai 'from being an awkward, potentially disastrous one, into a successful evening' (*AFW*, p.124). Ono even states that he made his statement because the 'circumstances [...] impressed on

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<sup>123</sup> Ishiguro, 'Kazuo Ishiguro - Nobel Lecture'.

<sup>124</sup> Kauffman, S., 'An Elegy', *The New Republic*, (6th December 1993): 33.

[him] the prudence of doing so' (*AFW*, p.124). This statement implies a measured attitude not in evidence elsewhere in the novel. It seems his outburst was, rather, provoked by his intense embarrassment at the prospect of Noriko being unsuccessful in her marriage negotiations again on account of his past. The emotional force of Ono's later statements to the same effect is therefore diminished by the possible inauthenticity of his performance at the *miai*.

By contrast, Stevens's words — 'At that moment my heart was breaking' — are not in direct speech but interiorised (*ROD*, p.239). This far more direct expression of emotion is all the more affecting since it is conveyed with all the convulsive perorations of a tortured mind struggling against the bonds of dignity, in its first sense, and unrealised, in both senses of that word, desire. Ishiguro's decision to interiorise the emotional denouement of the novel elevates its conclusion to a tragic climax, creating a biting and heartfelt criticism of forming false connections with a large world at the expense of personal relationships.

\* 'Human Warmth' \*

As both *AFW* and *ROD* show, a change in values with time reveals the subordination of authority to ideology to be fundamentally undignified. Stevens finally registers this on the pier at Weymouth: 'I can't even say I made my own mistakes. Really [...] what dignity is there in that?' (*ROD*, p.243). With the recognition that 'his sense of participation has been merely an illusion', Stevens's previous self-deception dissolves:<sup>125</sup>

The hard reality is, surely for the likes of you and I, there is little choice other than to leave our fate, ultimately, in the hands of those great gentlemen at the hub of this world. (*ROD*, p.244)

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<sup>125</sup> Francis King, 'A Stately Procession of One: Book review of *The Remains of the Day*', *Spectator* (27th May 1989): 31.

However, as Waugh observes, '[w]ithin [the novel's] subtly ambivalent style there is a utopian impulse' and the concluding pages of *ROD* prove consolingly affirmative.<sup>126</sup> The butler whom Stevens meets on the pier exemplifies the narrative's new dialogism. His statement that 'your attitude's all wrong [...] you've got to keep looking forward', and the spectacle of 'a great many people [...] throngs of people [...] people of all ages' enthusiastically greeting the small event of the illumination of Weymouth pier, becomes a metaphor for taking joy and pride in the small contribution one makes over the course of one's life (*ROD*, p.243-4). This leads to Stevens '[adopting] a more positive outlook and [trying] to make the best of what remains of [his] day' (*ROD*, p.244). Exercising his new ability 'to conjure counterfactuals, [...] to empathise with other minds through imaginative projection',<sup>127</sup> Stevens enters in this community of 'strangers', a dialogue of many perspectives, and so consoles himself that his willingness 'to sacrifice much in life [...] is *in itself, whatever the outcome, cause for pride and contentment*' (*ibid.*, italics my own). Though recognising the connections he made proved to be illusory, Stevens nevertheless affirms the value of making them.

Finally, in a stunning *volte face*, Stevens concludes his narrative with the realisation that 'this whole matter of bantering [...] is not such a foolish thing to indulge in [...] in bantering lies the key to human warmth.' (*ROD*, p.245) The novel thus ends acceding to the dialogic impulse Stevens's narration had rejected in the preceding seven sections and, in so doing, vigorously affirms the value of human warmth and connection, even as it uncovers the abyss beneath that sense of connection.

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<sup>126</sup> Head, p.158

<sup>127</sup> Waugh, 'Kazuo Ishiguro's Not Too Late Modernism', p.24.

### III. Unstable Identities

‘Truth is a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms and anthropomorphisms in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed and embellished [...]: truths are illusions we have forgotten are illusions.’<sup>128</sup>

In contrast to *PVH*, *AFW* and *ROD* which focalise very closely on their protagonists, *NLMG*, though still employing a first person narrator, is preoccupied with marginalised perspectives. Ishiguro remarks how a proliferation of images ‘these days [means] it’s almost hard to hold onto the centre’<sup>129</sup> of one’s sense of identity and, performing as a decentered narrative, *NLMG* admits of a constant recognition of identity’s provisionality, its status as floating signifier or an ‘illusion we have forgotten is an illusion’.

<sup>130</sup> The proliferation of role models and external images in contemporary culture means that the previous model of Freudian repression has been succeeded by the anti-essentialist nadir of Baudrillard’s hyperreal.<sup>131</sup> Critics such as Brannigan have noted that *ROD* raises important questions about the stability of identity formation: ‘That Stevens’s archetypal English butler is revealed as a construction, as a performance [...] is an important recognition of the constructedness of narratives of identity.’<sup>132</sup> In much the same way, the clones in *NLMG*, inured to their situation as organ donors, dramatise the modern subject’s struggle to maintain a coherent sense of self.

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<sup>128</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*. Quoted in Lawrence M. Hinman, ‘Nietzsche, Metaphor, and Truth’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 43.2 (1982): 184.

<sup>129</sup> Matthews, p.119.

<sup>130</sup> Nietzsche, in Hinman, 184. The dragon Querig in *BG* may similarly be seen as the ‘absent centre of this post-romance narrative’ which simultaneously ‘condenses threats of aggressive dissolution levelled at the body politic and at its collective memory’ and ‘protects, preserves and endlessly defers the assignation of sense to this collective memory’. Carmen-Veronica Borbély, ‘The Monster as a Placeholder of the Memory/Oblivion Divide in Ishiguro’s *The Buried Giant*’, *Constructions of Identity*, Petronia Petrar and Amelia Precup, eds. (Hasdeu, Romania: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2016), p.23.

<sup>131</sup> For Baudrillard the ‘hyperreal describes the inability to distinguish between reality and a simulation of reality.’ Edward Hateley, ‘The Irrational Convergences of Modernity in J. G. Ballard’, Undergraduate Dissertation, Durham University (2017), p.14.

<sup>132</sup> Brannigan, p.96.

Thus while in *ROD* ‘the past becomes the signifier of the decentred status of contemporary England’, in *NLMG*, the clones live a hyperreal existence which signifies the loss of individuality in a culture of extreme consumerism.<sup>133</sup> Moreover the sparseness of Kathy’s utterances and descriptions renders identity formation a constant battle against the inevitable silence of death. Each sentence emerges out of the ‘repeated missing beat in the novel’s tinny language’ to erase and recreate the one before in an endlessly iterative cycle of remembrance and forgetting.<sup>134</sup> Just as the clones are themselves a repetition, a deferral, of their originals, so is Kathy’s narrative endlessly deferred through the removes of the novel’s frames, the pressures of forgetfulness and the anaesthetic effect of the euphemistic diction of ‘carers’, ‘donors’ and ‘completion’ (*NLMG*, p.3, *ibid.*, p.255).

By metaphorical extension the preoccupations of the specific setting of late 1990s England become amenable to the general situation of humanity.<sup>135</sup> This creates the force of the novel’s ability to act as an extended metaphor for commodification and the way ‘we accept the human condition, accept ageing and falling to bits and dying.’<sup>136</sup> Moreover, the fantasies we use to obscure this inevitable process, ‘less reality than a certain knowledge of reality’, and are in fact the source of Kathy’s consolation at the novel’s close.<sup>137</sup>

\* Flattened Affect \*

The level prose of Kathy’s narrative in *Never Let Me Go* serves both to repress the trauma of her situation through euphemism — ‘[the novel’s language] serves as a reminder “of the ways in which language can normalize atrocities deemed necessary in a given

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<sup>133</sup> Brannigan, p.99.

<sup>134</sup> Boxall, *Twenty-First-Century Fiction*, p.41.

<sup>135</sup> This setting is made clear in the paratextual note before chapter 1.

<sup>136</sup> Matthews, p.124.

<sup>137</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘The Reality Effect’, *The Rustle of Language*, Richard Howard, trans. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986), p.148.

ideology”<sup>138</sup> — and as an ‘elision of the humdrum and the sinister’.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, this mode of representation calls into question the stability of the identities the clones fashion for themselves. In a hyperreal situation, the line between representation and reality becomes blurred. In *NLMG* this leads to a situation in which commodification becomes the dominant principle of society; the aesthetic is denigrated in favour of the biological. Since everything is thus seen as an object, it is only valuable for its functional use.

Perhaps surprisingly, the flattened affect characteristic of this euthanised tone proves, in a postmodern context, wonderfully affirmatory:

[Doctorow] suddenly makes us realise that this is the only image of the past we have, in truth a projection on the walls of Plato’s cave. [...] an insistence of the very flatness and depthlessness of the thing [...] makes what isn’t there very vivid [...] [it is] the use of very limited instruments to show their limits.<sup>140</sup>

The very flatness of Ishiguro’s prose style evocatively conjures unstated associations and so affirms the value of the social bond.

The first chapter of *NLMG* establishes a number of boundaries so that the rest of the novel is, likewise, read through veils of separation. At Hailsham the girls view the football match through ‘windows’ (*NLMG*, p.7). Since the windows focalise attention through a frame, they serve as a device dramatising the students’ sense of connection with the world. However, they also act both to mark a distance and a difference, ‘as Derrida fondly reminds us, framing, as a representational act, mainly exposes representation and thus deferral’;<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Keith McDonald, quoted in Silvia Caporale Bizzini ‘Recollecting Memories, Reconstructing Identities: Narrators as Storytellers in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go*’, *Atlantis*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (December 2013): 74.

<sup>139</sup> Cusk.

<sup>140</sup> Fredric Jameson, quoted in Baker, p.55.

<sup>141</sup> Paxson, p.130. Derrida expands this discussion of framing into the next metaphorical level when he writes ‘In the frame of the text, one side of the square, one surface of the cube will represent [...] this transcendental illusion. [...] In representing representation, it will reflect and explain it in a very singular mirror. [...] “oblivion closed by the frame”’ (*Dissemination* 297).



Kathy states that the boys seemed ‘pretty remote from us’ (*NLMG*, p.7).<sup>142</sup> More generally, Kathy’s first-person, anamnestic narrative, ‘recovering the spirit and sensation of living in the past in order to reconcile the psychic disturbances of the present’, is an attempt to make connections with others.<sup>143</sup> These human relationships help resist the stultifying repetition of brief meetings at recovery homes or hospitals and her lonely drives through ‘the flat fields of nothing and the huge grey skies’ (*NLMG*, p.281). The novel revolves around forming connections, even if it later proves that such connections are only illusions covering over an existential abyss.

*NLMG* thus dramatises Jameson’s description of postmodernism:

“what you have when the modernisation process is complete and nature is gone for good.” The end of art’s autonomy has, then, led not only to the commodification of culture, but also to the aestheticisation of the external object world, producing [...] “a society of the image or simulacrum”.<sup>144</sup>

*NLMG* represents a point at which nature has ‘gone for good’ in the sense that everything is biologised. Since humans are ontologically objects, they become, like everything else, ‘commodities in the culture of exchange’.<sup>145</sup> Such commodification of human life questions the hypocritical ethics of care underlying welfare capitalism. Moreover such ‘aestheticisation of the external object world’ creates a hyperreal situation which provokes intense questioning of the nature and solidity of identity in postmodern culture.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Importantly for posthuman interpretations of the novel, the boys’ humiliation of Tommy sets up another boundary, between those who conform, and hence are natural, and those who do not, and are hence performing a role; Tommy, in his rage seemingly ‘rehearsing his Shakespeare’, qualifies as the latter (*NLMG*, p.10). This is one example of the many ways Ishiguro questions the difference between humans and clones and, more generally, the validity of ascribing essentialist qualities in situations where no such distinctions can be sustained.

<sup>143</sup> Brannigan, p.94.

<sup>144</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.ix quoted in Stephen Baker, *The Fiction of Postmodernity*, p.53.

<sup>145</sup> I am indebted for this observation to Patricia Waugh in her lecture. Patricia Waugh, ‘Kazuo Ishiguro and Affective Irony’, lecture, Durham University, 10th December 2017.

<sup>146</sup> Jameson, quoted in Baker, p.53.

## \* Narrative Différance \*

The associational, retrospective narrative and euthanised diction of *NLMG* emphasise the borders and veils through which the novel is read and constitute ‘the structure of (“spatial”) differences and (“temporal”) deferrals’ inherent for Derrida in all linguistic signs.<sup>147</sup> For example ‘Hailsham’, repeated like an incantation through the first chapter, appears, removed, through a haze of idealisation. When Kathy describes Hailsham’s ‘nooks and crannies, the duck pond, the food, the view from the art room over the fields on a foggy morning’, it appears as a place of prelapsarian bliss, separated from her by distances spatial (differences) and temporal (deferrals) (*NLMG*, p.5).<sup>148</sup> Moreover, like the original Paradise, a word deriving etymologically from the Persian for a walled garden, Hailsham is surrounded by high fences, emphasising, in its seclusion, its specially elevated status.

A passage from Chapter One sets up this narrative *différance*:

Driving around the country now, I still see things that will remind me of Hailsham. I might pass the corner of a misty field, or see part of a large house in the distance as I come down the side of a valley, [...] and I'll think: “Maybe that's it! I've found it! This actually *is* Hailsham!” Then I see it's impossible and I go on driving. (*NLMG*, p.6, emphasis original)

Deictically pointing — ‘that’s it’ — at what she sees while at the same time establishing herself firmly in the present — ‘now, I still see’ — Kathy represents the original Hailsham as an other, inaccessible under the differential pressure of her narrative in the continuous present: ‘Then I see it’s impossible and I go on driving.’ For Kathy the landscape recalls Hailsham fragmentarily, in ‘the *corner* of a misty field’ (my emphasis) or the triple removed description of ‘*part* of a large house *in the distance* as I come down the *side* of a valley’ (my emphasis). Hailsham, remembered in this way, thus metonymically signifies the idealised whole of happy childhood. Similarly, when Kathy analyses her own reasons for loving a part

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<sup>147</sup> Jack Reynolds and Jonathan Roffé, eds., *Understanding Derrida* (New York; London: Continuum, 2004), p.12.

<sup>148</sup> The implication is of course that, by contrast, Kathy and everyone else occupying the narration’s contemporary are living in a postlapsarian world characterised by knowledge of the inevitability of gradual decay and death.

of Hailsham, she does so because that part evokes a pleasant memory of something which has already been narrativised. For example she loved the ‘sports pavilion [...] because it reminded [her] of those sweet little cottages people always had in picture books when we were young.’ (*NLMG*, p.6.) Removed in this manner, the memory is characterised in a Derridean sense by its own absence, its status as a floating narrative signifier, a simulacrum of an originary reality. Through its dependence on memory and fragments of other narratives — the magazine advert which the story of Ruth’s possible in Norfolk is partially constructed on is found discarded on a road — *NLMG* therefore marks, both implicitly and explicitly, the necessary provisionality of the clones’ sense of identity.

\* The Hyperreal \*

The clones’ sense of their own identity is thus presented as radically unstable, for two reasons. Firstly, the clones mark the ‘slippage’ that Bhabha examines in ‘On Mimicry and Man’: ‘mimicry is at once resemblance and menace.’<sup>149</sup> The clones’ artistic production for the Gallery, despite being intended to show their humanity, eventually only proves to be another way of showing their difference from the non-clones. Their eventual knowledge of their purpose, that they are ‘bags of organs’ being matured for ‘unzipping’, becomes one of the great taboos of the novel (*NLMG*, p.86). Once they become aware of this, fictions about possibles, deferrals and the Gallery proliferate, obscuring the disturbing truth that Hailsham is a transient humanitarian experiment and that its ‘clones — *students* as we preferred to call you — [exist] only to supply medical science’ (*NLMG*, p.256, emphasis original). Secondly since for the students the distinction between reality and its representation is nebulous, their sense of identity is formed through narratives, through

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<sup>149</sup> Homi Bhabha, ‘Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse’, *Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 28, (Spring, 1984): 127.

language, and is therefore inevitably subject to freeplay of signs down the chain of signification. Their lives are constructed through constant deferrals, linguistic — ‘clones’ become ‘students’ — and medical — waiting for their next donation — and they thus become ‘pawns’ in a commodified system of exchange, their lives simulacra of the ‘normal person’ of which they are themselves a copy (*NLMG*, p.252, p.137).

Likewise, the clones’ conception of self is further rendered unstable by their existence in a hyperreal context. Their lives are constructed around fictions which blur into each other until their reality becomes a series of illusory images and simulacra. Their sense of identity is constructed from narrativised representations rather than reality; they watch television to provide them with models of behaviour — Kathy notes that ‘so many of [the other students’] mannerisms were copied from the television’ — and have the counties taught to them with a single image (*NLMG*, p.118). In their ‘Culture Briefing’ classes at Hailsham they ‘role play various people we’d find out there — waiters in cafes, policemen and so on’, performing the stereotypes and yet simultaneously deconstructing them, and their own senses of identity, by the inevitable slippage of mimicry (*NLMG*, p.108).<sup>150</sup> This unstable construction of identity is most explicit in the search for Ruth’s ‘possible’ in Norfolk, when Ruth’s ‘dream future’ overlaps considerably not just with the physical office space they observe in Norfolk, tellingly viewed through the separation of its ‘big glass front’, but also with the magazine advert Kathy initially suspects Rodney and Chrissie have drawn their information from (*NLMG*, p.138, p.140, p.156). The three layers of representation show the illusions by which they define their senses of identity.

Further, Kathy, Ruth and Tommy’s departure from Hailsham should signify entry into the real world. This is all the more so because Hailsham’s Edenic associations imply

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<sup>150</sup> See Bhabha.

that the world outside is one defined by postlapsarian knowledge, experience following on from innocence. However it later becomes clear that Hailsham is a simulacrum, existing, like Disneyland, ‘in order to make [them] believe that the rest is real’.<sup>151</sup> In just the same way, the recovery centres exist only to obscure the fact that the whole of each of their lives is a purgatory of waiting for completion. To use Baudrillard’s phrase, these institutions are ‘deterrence [machines] set up in order to rejuvenate in reverse the fiction of the real’.<sup>152</sup>

To draw these threads together, the structure of Kathy’s anamnestic narrative, in an extension of memory’s iterative power noted in Chapter 1, dramatises the deconstructive freeplay process Derrida describes in ‘Structure, Sign and Play’, destabilising the clones’ sense of identity and hence criticising the commodification of a society inherent in a hyperreal context; life imitating art the clones become objects in a ‘culture of exchange’.<sup>153</sup> Importantly however, representation by means of metonymy does not simply substitute one centre for another. Instead it provokes a recognition that any awareness of a centre is subject to constant deferral. The result of this absence of the centre is that it is ‘equivalent to the disappearance of the self as constitutive subject’.<sup>154</sup> This however provokes a more worrying conclusion than simply an anti-essentialist conception of the self. The clones, denied an intrinsic sense of identity, instead must look outwards. However the means by which this outward reality is conveyed, their education at Hailsham, serves only to provide them with stereotypes and homogenising reductions.

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<sup>151</sup> Baudrillard, Jean, ‘Simulacra and Simulations’, *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, Mark Poster, ed. (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 1988), p.171.

<sup>152</sup> Baudrillard, ‘Simulacra and Simulations’, p.170.

<sup>153</sup> Waugh, ‘Kazuo Ishiguro and Affective Irony’.

<sup>154</sup> Paul de Man, *Paul de Man, Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism: The Gauss Seminar and Other Papers*, E. S. Burt, Kevin Newmark and Andrzej Warminski, eds. (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993), p.11.

## \* Consolation through Connection \*

In spite of worrying conclusions one might draw from *NLMG*'s metaphor for commodification, fatalism and mortality, the novel shows that such recognitions need not cause one to succumb to existential dread. *NLMG* avoids an all-consuming 'terror before the abyss of the self' by recuperating a sense of consolation in the power of human relationships and, self-reflexively, creative acts of the imagination.<sup>155</sup> At the start of the novel Kathy emphasises the creative possibilities of narrative when she mentions how her donor wanted 'not just to hear about Hailsham, but to *remember* Hailsham, just like it had been his own childhood' (*NLMG*, p.5, emphasis original). Implicitly, narrative has the power to heal past traumas and provide personal consolation.

Furthermore, Tommy's inarticulate 'scream' of existential dread after discovering that deferrals were only ever a myth is silenced by Kathy's hug (*NLMG*, p.268): '[N]ot saying anything, just holding each other [...] it seemed like we were holding onto each other because that was the only way to stop us being swept apart into the night.' (*NLMG*, p.269). Eventually, his teleological protestations that 'in the end is it really so important? The donors will all donate, just the same, and then they'll complete' are excluded from the discourse when he himself completes (*NLMG*, p.276). As with Stevens at Weymouth pier, their emotional connection, though illusory, is, all the same, valuable in and of itself.

Likewise, when Kathy is dancing alone in her dormitory to the song 'Never Let Me Go', she is watched by the head guardian, Madame. Importantly, in this interaction Madame is 'framed in the doorway' (*NLMG*, p.71).<sup>156</sup> In the image of Madame 'sobbing and sobbing',

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<sup>155</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections From Damaged Life*, E. Jephcott, trans. (London: Verso, 2000 [1974]), p.65.

<sup>156</sup> Madame is in fact almost always depicted as framed in one way or another. For example in Tommy and Kathy's final talk with her and Miss Lucy she appears between 'a pair of sliding doors' and then moves to stand between 'the heavy velvet curtains' around the windows, 'holding [them] in her glare' (*NLMG*, p.245-6).

Ishiguro thus establishes an intimate emotional connection between the two — Kathy later says ‘Maybe you [Madame] read my mind, and that’s why you found it so sad’ — centred around the myth of Kathy’s imaginary baby (*NLMG*, p.71, p.266). Yet the act of framing also sets up an uncanny species barrier between them: Madame was ‘staring at [Kathy] through the doorway [...] like she was seeing something that gave her the creeps’ (*NLMG*, p.71). Ishiguro draws attention to the illusory nature of these connections, even as he forges them with such affecting emotional force.

Just as with the hug mentioned above, the connection Kathy makes with her imaginary baby serves as a way of resisting trauma. It is ‘a reminder of the capacity of art as a “transitional object”<sup>157</sup> for consolation, its ability ‘to serve as an objective correlative and receiver of its audience’s, any audience’s, complex projections.’<sup>158</sup> The ‘great emotional force’<sup>159</sup> of the scene is therefore not undermined by but, rather, made all the more poignant for the fact it is founded on Kathy’s fantasy.<sup>160</sup>

Other critics have also noted the consolation which *NLMG* derives from imaginative creations. At the novel’s close, Kathy creates another ‘fantasy’, in which she stands on ‘the spot where everything [she’d] ever lost since her childhood had washed up’ (*NLMG*, p.282). Tommy ‘would appear on the horizon across the field [...] and he’d wave, maybe even call’ (*ibid.*). Taking Storace’s suggestion that collecting objects ‘is a way of defying our mortality and trying to live forever’,<sup>161</sup> Bizzini for example concludes that, in keeping with the novel’s own status as metatext, ‘if art has not succeeded in demonstrating the clones’ human nature, then Kathy’s storytelling certainly does.’<sup>162</sup> Likewise, using Arendt’s line of thought, the act

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<sup>157</sup> Waugh, ‘Kazuo Ishiguro’s Not Too Late Modernism’, p.18.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> The Swedish Academy.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> Storace, quoted in Bizzini, 77.

<sup>162</sup> Bizzini, 77.

of storytelling may be seen as a way for the clones to ‘defy their ontological situation as victims’<sup>163</sup> and hence affirm their own identity, irrelevant of the judgement of their art in the Gallery. Rather than succumbing to blank nihilism in the face of the inevitability of mortality, the novel instead accedes to a recognition of the consolatory power of fantasy.

While not unrestrained — Kathy writes ‘though the tears rolled down her face, I wasn’t sobbing or out of control’ — the emotional force of this fantasy is a way of transcending the limitations imposed on the clones, and by extension on the reader, by the pressure to conform to cultural conventions (*ibid.*). More generally, while Ishiguro’s novels show the removes and deferrals characterising the modern subject’s sense of identity, they affirm the value of connections and of narrative creations. In so doing they provide reconciliation for ‘the intolerable aporia of the present’, both within the novel’s diegesis and in the societal context in which it is read.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> Brannigan, p.88.



## CONCLUSION

Ishiguro, looking back to his previous thirty years as a novelist in his Nobel prize speech, made the case that, fundamentally, stories should ‘communicate feelings and appeal to what we share as human beings’.<sup>165</sup> His novels, whilst paradoxically foregrounding the removes and deferrals by which these feelings are communicated, do exactly this. Ishiguro thereby nourishes ‘a literature that engages earnestly with real-world problems’ and transcends the limitations of its historical specifics.<sup>166</sup> The often-irascible Toby Lichtig notes approvingly that

Whether [Ishiguro’s] fiction is set in post-war Japan [*AFW*, 1986], pre-war Shanghai [*WWWO*, 2000] or dystopian England [*NLMG*, 2005], his characters inhabit the same realm. [...] a world in which all that really matters – personal fulfilment, love, survival – is buried beneath an avalanche of obfuscating detail.<sup>167</sup>

However Lichtig fails to realise that this avalanche of false connections is what gives value to ‘all that really matters’ both within the novels’ diageses and the social context in which they are read; although our ‘narrow artist’s perspective’ does not allow us to transcend our historical moment — we know we must, like the students in *NLMG*, someday complete — we can still derive consolation from the ‘human warmth’ which characterises the social bond (*AFW*, p.199; *ROD*, p.245).

Moreover, eschewing ‘postmodernism’s playfulness and affectation’,<sup>168</sup> Ishiguro’s use of the novel form sensitively performs Caputo’s description of the essence of postmodernism, its sense that ‘there are many different and competing beliefs and practices, and we should make every reasonable effort to accommodate them, to let many flowers bloom.’<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Ishiguro, ‘Kazuo Ishiguro - Nobel Lecture’.

<sup>166</sup> Gibbons.

<sup>167</sup> Lichtig.

<sup>168</sup> Alison Gibbons, ‘Postmodernism is dead. What comes next?’, *Times Literary Supplement* (12th June 2017) <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/postmodernism-dead-comes-next/>, accessed 6th March 2018.

<sup>169</sup> John Caputo, *On Religion: Thinking in Action* (London: Routledge, 2001), p.126.

The multifarious blooming of these many flowers is articulated by Ishiguro's evocative use of 'tangential thought associations', rather than the limitations of a causal plot or linear chronology, to structure his novels' 'thematic architecture'.<sup>170</sup> The resonant use of a defamiliarised setting allows them simultaneously to function both as eloquently anamnestic narratives and metaphorically as parables of the human condition.

Furthermore, Ishiguro's novels embrace the paradox that 'realism does not simply involve making pictures of the world, but rather requires that we live in the bottomless gap between the word and the world'.<sup>171</sup> It is in their elegantly understated depiction of this paradox that Ishiguro's novels engage with their contemporary social context, simultaneously uncovering and coming to terms with the 'abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world'.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>170</sup>Armitstead, Mullan and Ishiguro, 'The Guardian Podcast: Kazuo Ishiguro'.

<sup>171</sup> Boxall, *The Value of the Novel*, p.67.

<sup>172</sup> The Swedish Academy.

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