



An Exploration of Historical Backdrops and their Consequences in former Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro

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Abstract— *The novels The Pale View of The Hills, An Artist of the Floating World, The Remains of The Day and When We Were Orphans hold the history of World War II predominantly and other historical contexts. Kazuo Ishiguro has placed history as an inevitable backdrop for most of his novels. The storyline blends with history and varies from traditional historical fiction. The protagonists are severely affected by the war, and the trauma recurring in the characters. This paper aims to analyse the historical instances and the trauma the characters had to undergo in the former novels of Ishiguro. In The Pale View of The Hills and An Artist of the Floating World, Etsuko and Ono, the protagonists, recount their trauma after the disastrous atomic bombs on Nagasaki. The hardship in rebuilding the city after the loss is eminently narrated through the characters. In the novels, The Remains Of The Day and When We Were Orphans the histories are pinned along as important events before World War I and inevitable consequences of the Sino-Japanese War respectively.*



Keywords— *World War I World War II History Trauma Loss*

INTRODUCTION

The former novels of Ishiguro have to be read with a concentration on the historical front as it is deeply rooted in the novels. The four novels—*A Pale View of Hills*, *An Artist of the Floating World*, *The Remains of the Day*, and *When We Were Orphans*—employ first-person narrative, enabling a more nuanced exploration of perspectives on Japanese culture and history. Ishiguro's works often explore the period from the 1910s to the 1950s, emphasising pivotal events such as the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, the decline of the British Empire during World War II, and Japan's incursion into China. Japan allied with Germany and Italy to establish the Axis during World War II. During that period, most citizens engaged in the war, although a minority expressed dissent. In 1945, other countries defeated the Axis forces in the war, and the detonation of two nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki had a profound impact on Japan. In the novels, history is shaped by memory and nostalgia as people reflect on their past to recount the narrative. The historical backdrop plays a

pivotal role in understanding the storyline in the novels of Ishiguro. The historical instances play a vital role in explaining the trauma of the character placed in Ishiguro's novels.

In *A Pale View of the Hills*, Ishiguro delineates the war and post-war history via the protagonist, Etsuko. On August 6, 1945, the United States deployment of an atomic bomb to annihilate Hiroshima was revealed to the international world, leading to a lasting and profound disruption in the course of history. The second atomic bomb, termed Fat Man, exploded in Nagasaki three days after the first bombing of the city with the first Fat Man bomb. Japan has seen considerable hardship due to the First and Second World Wars, resulting in widespread anxiety and unemployment among its people. The historical elements of the narrative mostly concentrate on several weeks in the late 1940s or early 1950s in an eastern region of Nagasaki, where Etsuko lives. Despite the conclusion of World War II, military hostilities persisted in Korea. The public was astonished by the nuclear devastation of

Nagasaki. Etsuko is in her second trimester of pregnancy, anticipating the birth of her daughter, Keiko.

Etsuko's friend Mariko's memories of the post-war period inflict anguish upon her. Sachiko and Niki, daughters of Mariko and Etsuko, have experienced hardship and loss in the past. Due to the deaths of their husbands in World War II, women in Japan endure more suffering than anybody else. Etsuko and Sachiko leave Japan with their daughters, relocating to England and America, respectively. This migration acts as a liberating tool for these characters to escape the trauma of post-war. The primary protagonists, Etsuko and Sachiko, embark on a voyage to the West to start over with their lives. Ishiguro employs the backdrop of pivotal historical events to create an atmosphere that prompts investigation or change inside the characters' realm.

An Artist of the Floating World is set during the American occupation of Japan, from October 1948 to June 1950. In contrast to *A Pale View of Hills*, the devastation and visual shocks presented by history are more profound. Ono, the protagonist, spends most of his retirement time rebuilding the mansion from the disastrous war as the novel sets in. The east wing, balcony, and extensive hallway suffered war damage. Nonetheless, the city's entertainment centre presents the most disheartening perspective of the devastation due to war. The war's tragedy significantly impaired Ono's memory, resulting in the loss of several family members and his recollections. This exemplifies the challenges encountered by those affected by the global war. Ono's personal life is so disrupted that he quits his painting career due to the profound effects of the war on his family.

The protagonist recalls the particular incident from May 1938 and the award conferred by the Shigeta Foundation. He is apprehensive about this occurrence due to its substantial impact on his life. Ono contemplates the past to recreate Japanese history. The narrative examines the past and incorporates distressing recollections. Ono perceives everything as meaningless, and he finds no joy in doing anything. He frequents the park, where he helps with its maintenance. It illustrates the protagonist's solitary amid the battle. His past torments him due to the loss of his family in the conflict. The harrowing experiences of the war-affected individuals and the artist are skillfully presented in the narrative.

The Remains of the Day has Stevens as the narrator who recalls historical events. Mr. Stevens is a fictitious character that embodies the former colonial concept of dominance. He is least concerned with the surrounding state matters and is concentrated on fulfilling his duties as a butler at Darlington Hall. He is on a journey to reunite with his former colleague Miss Kenton as the novel begins and

he's reminded of a significant incident in Darlington Hall and how he failed to fulfil his duty as a son by not looking after his father on the death bed. Recognising the significance of the March 1923 meeting at Darlington Hall, he persuades himself of the need to address the problem. Lord Darlington led the committee that meticulously orchestrated the meeting convened in 1923 after years of arduous labour.

Stevens recognises that his employer may not have been seen as a true gentleman, given the potential revision of the Treaty of Versailles discussed during the political gathering he organised at Darlington Hall. The novel's crucial moments include the preparations and organisation for the 1923 conference at Darlington Hall during his tenure. The employer believed that Germany had been unjustly criticised for this particular problem, which is why he was dissatisfied with the outcome of the agreement. The political discourse occurs concurrently with the narrative, enriching the historical context and providing background information about the treaty that concluded World War I between Germany and its adversaries.

The historical context is linked to immobilising Germany during World War II, with France adopting a stringent position, advocating for more penalties and insisting on the treaty's implementation. Conversely, Britain effectively maintained a pro-German position, advocating for a modified interpretation of the Versailles Treaty, which was generally considered unjust. As the Hitler administration consolidated its position, an increasing number of violations of the Treaty of Locarno, which had replaced the Treaty of Versailles, were revealed. Britain advocated for a peaceful ending and was prepared to offer Germany considerable concessions, including the possibility of reducing reparations or permitting further expansion of the Reich. Lord Darlington sought, out of charity and compassion, to cultivate contacts with the German administration to mitigate the burdens imposed by the stringent penalties of the Versailles Treaty.

Stevens neglected to recognise the possible impact of these events on the rise of Nazism in Germany. He neglected to identify or address this issue. Stevens' thoughts were dominated by the idea that these arduous conditions were a test of his requisite dignity to be an extraordinary butler. The distinguished German officer, Herr Karl Heinz Bremann, was a gentleman of exceptional dignity who made his ceremonial appearance at Darlington Hall post-war in his officer's uniform. The relationship between Bremann and Lord Darlington has increasingly been evident. It was seen that he and his employer had developed a strong friendship. Nonetheless, it continued until the pact was executed. Mr. Bremann resigned from the German

army after the ratification of the accord. The distressing conditions he faced at Darlington Hall on each subsequent visit were unmistakably apparent. His ailment was acute. There were several meetings taking place in the hall that circled the revision of the treaty.

In *When We Were Orphans*, Ishiguro adeptly merges the two cultures with which he is intimately acquainted, both of which are culpable for certain aspects of China's tumultuous history—the Japanese for the Asia-Pacific War and the British for the opium trade. *When We Were Orphans* meticulously depicts the conflict and its effects on individuals due to the Japanese War as the Opium trade was the inevitable outcome. In *Pale View of The Hills* and *Artist of The Floating World* history acts as the backdrop and facilitates. Aside from a few instances detailing the repair efforts and the hardly visible debris, there are no representations of bombing scenes. The graphic elements in *When We Were Orphans*, illustrating death and violence, may deepen young readers' comprehension of history by emphasising the devastating effects of war on people and society.

Chinese people originally identified opium as a therapeutic agent in the seventh century. Opium first being used recreally in the seventeenth century when Dutch and English businesses expanded their trading routes into China. Driven only by large financial gains from opium, British traders disregarded the moral, social, and political consequences of drug addiction. The opium trade was indeed essential for the survival of the British Empire throughout the 19th century. The opium trade had been skyrocketing despite the efforts to cease it. The opium trade had sustained expansion owing to a rising customer base, particularly during the two opium wars (1839–42, 1856–60). These conflicts enabled commerce by forcing certain coastal communities to become concessions. Although British enterprises reaped substantial profits, Chinese individuals endured extensive opium addiction, leading to declining mental and physical health, fractured families, and a demoralised societal framework. In the storyline, *When We Were Orphans*, the character Mr. Kung, of Chinese heritage, succumbs to the detrimental effects of opium and becomes an addict.

Motivated by his intense desire to eliminate evil and his mission to solve the mystery of his parent's disappearance, Banks landed in Shanghai in September 1937, coinciding with the invasion of Japanese forces in the city. Banks believes that his parents are now being held against their will, and it is probable that Inspector Kung, who oversees the inquiry, knows their whereabouts. Upon seeing the individual, Banks is astonished to discover that

they have been profoundly damaged as a result of opium addiction, once a mysterious and alluring figure.

To summarise, history plays a significant role in understanding the storyline of Ishiguro's Novels. History in the novel aids as a backdrop and justifies how the instances of the past have an impact on the current scenario characters' lives. The hardship that the characters had to undergo due to the war drastically changed the lives of the characters. The trauma attached to the historical instances is inevitable and the characters diligently carry the history. The former novels of Ishiguro hold history as a significant component and are ingrained in the characters deeply rooted in their trauma. Estuko, in *Pale View of the Hills*, tries to evade the consequences of the war by migrating to England. Ono strives to get accustomed to the new Japan. Stevens and Christopher struggle to overcome the circumstances that pin them down.

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