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The Vocational Imperative

Kazuo Ishiguro's Fictions and the Discourse of Denial

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Abstract

The reflective first-person narratives of Ishiguro's texts contain a representation of the way in which people's immersion in hegemony, combined with the demands of a disciplinary society, results in the internalisation of hegemonic values. This sophisticated understanding of the individual subject's relationship with his or her social environment puts Ishiguro in tune with ideas presented by various twentieth-century theorists. This thesis introduces the concepts of 'interpretive consonance' and 'vocational imperative' as a means of understanding Ishiguro's writing as a fictional embodiment and exploration of these ideas.

Following a general introduction, the first chapter establishes frames for a reading of Ishiguro's works by elucidating the theoretical underpinning of the concepts of interpretive consonance and vocational imperative. I use Gramsci's notions of hegemony and consent to clarify the concept of interpretive consonance, the idea that the uncritical ingestion of a particular set of social values shapes Ishiguro's narrators' perceptions of events in their surroundings. That is, their interpretation of their environments is consonant with the hegemonic values that they have assimilated. Foucault's analysis of power and discourse is then used to explain the development of the functionally based subjectivity of Ishiguro's narrators and their almost fanatical adherence to the confines of their vocations - the notion that they are bound by a vocational imperative. Freud's concept of the super-ego is then utilised to explain the individual psychological dynamic involved in shaping the personal identities of Ishiguro's narrators around their vocations.

Subsequent chapters follow the chronological order of Ishiguro's novels. In them, I use the concepts of interpretive consonance and vocational imperative to explore Ishiguro's writing. Chapter two, on *A Pale View of Hills*, emphasises Ishiguro's use of hegemony and the discourse of motherhood in his construction of the experiences of Etsuko in post Second World War Nagasaki. Chapter three focuses on Ishiguro's understanding of the relationship between power and subjectivity and the delineation of the development of the fascist beliefs of Ono, the narrator in *An Artist of the Floating World*, under the guise of his commitment to his career as an artist. Chapter four, on *The Remains of the Day*, analyses the type of vocational narration used by Stevens, the butler, in his attempts to negotiate both his personal failures and his historical misjudgements. Chapter five explores notions of self-division and dislocation to be found in *The Unconsoled*, as Ryder, the pianist, struggles in vain to fulfil his professional commitments in a bewildering environment. Chapter six, on *When We Were Orphans*, examines Ishiguro's construction of the vocational identity of Christopher Banks, the detective, on the basis of an understanding of how historical forces create conflict and loss in the sphere of the family. Chapter seven, on *Never Let Me Go*, discusses the fate of the clones who must complete their vocational imperative at the cost of their lives in a social atmosphere of total administration. I conclude with an assessment of Ishiguro's novels as an invitation to reflect on the personal and cultural devastation caused by the historical traumas and pressures of twentieth century, and early twenty-first century, life.

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Abbreviations

AFW	Kazuo Ishiguro, *An Artist of The Floating World* (1986; London: Faber, 1987)
NLMG	Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (London: Faber, 2005)
PVH	Kazuo Ishiguro, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982; London: Faber, 1991)
RD	Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of The Day* (1989; London: Faber, 1996)
UN	Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled* (1995; London: Faber, 1996)
WO	Kazuo Ishiguro, *When We Were Orphans* (London: Faber, 2000)

Introduction

This thesis puts forward an interpretive conceptualisation of the recurring themes to be found in the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro. It involves the introduction of two new concepts that are intended to facilitate a clearer understanding of the core consistencies to be found in Ishiguro's body of work than has yet been achieved. These concepts I have termed 'interpretive consonance' and 'vocational imperative'. 'Interpretive consonance' I use to refer to the tendency to interpret events in a way that is consonant with an already established, and accepted, set of values. I argue that Ishiguro utilises this spontaneous effect of the assimilation of hegemonic values in the construction of the point of view of the first-person narrators of his texts. 'Vocational imperative' is the concept I use to refer to the overriding compulsion to fulfil the requirements of one's social function. I argue that Ishiguro uses the idea of a strict adherence to the demands of one's vocation as a way of setting the parameters of his characters' experiences and narratives. For the sake of clarity, my thesis, to a certain extent, imposes a logical progression on elements that, in the fiction, are perpetual cyclical and interconnected concerns. In order to facilitate this, the sequence of the chapters follows the chronological order in which the novels were published. In this introduction, I present a general indication of the arguments that I employ throughout.

Since the publication of his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), Kazuo Ishiguro, who was born in Nagasaki, Japan in 1954, and moved to Britain with his parents in 1960, has come to be recognised as a major

international novelist. The list of prizes and honours awarded to him include the Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize (1982), the Whitbread Book of the Year (1986), the Booker Prize for Fiction (1989), the *Premio Scanno* (Italy, 1995), the *Premio Mantova* (Italy, 1998), the *Chevalier de L'Ordre des Artes et des Lettres* (France, 1998), and the OBE (1995), and his works have been translated into thirty languages. Despite this fact, much of the critical material on his writing remains fragmented. There has been, to date, only a limited attempt to understand both the reason for the consistent recurrence of certain thematic material in his work, and the reason why his novels have such wide appeal on an international level. Such material as exists concentrates mainly on different aspects of individual novels, the work most referred to being *The Remains of the Day*, which was made into a successful film by Merchant Ivory in 1993. Generally, the kind of critical approach adopted falls within the confines of a basic set of concerns, centred on such issues as: Ishiguro's manipulation of genre and particular features of his narrative technique;[1] the unreliability of memory;[2] forms of repression;[3] professionalism as a recurring theme;[4] or a broad postcolonial interpretation of his use of historical

[1] See, for example, Charles Sarvan, 'Floating Signifiers and *An Artist of the Floating World*', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 32/1 (1997), 93-101; Deborah Guth, 'Submerged Narratives in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Remains of the Day*', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 35/2 (1999), 126-37.

[2] See, for example, M. Griffiths, 'Great English Houses/New Homes in England?: Memory and Identity in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* and V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*', *Span*: *The journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature*, 36/2 (1993), 488-503.

[3] See, for example, Ben Winsworth, 'Communicating and Not Communicating: The Trues and False Self in *The Remains of the Day*', *Qwerty*, 9 (1999), 259-266; Cynthia F. Wong, 'The Shame of Memory: Blanchot's Self-Dispossession in Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills*', *Clio: Literature, History and Philosophy of History*, 24/2 (1995), 127-145.

[4] See, for example, Bruce Robbins, 'Very Busy Just Now: Globalisation and Harriedness in Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', *Comparative Literature*, 53/4 (Fall 2001), 426-441; Lisa Fluet, 'The Self-Loathing Class: Williams, Ishiguro and Barbara Ehrenreich on Service', *Keywords*, 4 (2003),100-130.

moments.[5] While none of these approaches are irrelevant, they do not provide a satisfactory explanation for the thematic consistency to be found even in Ishiguro's most abstract work, nor do much to deepen the sense of the historical, political or ideological relevance of his writings to the modern-day, international, globalised community. In this thesis, I hope to go some way to correcting this anomaly by identifying the core features of Ishiguro's body of works as a consistent whole, and exploring how the texts themselves respond to the context in which they were written.

An implicit understanding of the part that a nexus of hegemonic forces has to play in the formation of identity recurs time and again in the works of Ishiguro. This is so in each of his six novels to date, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), *The Remains of the Day* (1989), *The Unconsoled* (1995), *When We Were Orphans* (2000) and *Never Let Me Go* (2005)[6]. Ishiguro focuses on the complexity of this issue through the recollected experiences of his characters, which disclose how their lives are caught up in, or became casualties of, the functioning of the barely comprehensible machinery of hegemonic indoctrination, historical change, cultural conflicts, national and international politics and, even, the social use of medical science - forces over which they have little or no influence. The life histories of Ishiguro's characters are constructed on the foundations of an implicit understanding of the way in which the force of hegemony both shapes,

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[5] See, for example, Rebecca Suter, '"We're Like Butlers": Interculturality Memory and Responsibility in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*', *Qwerty*, 9 (1999), 241-250; Susie O'Brien, 'Serving a New World Order: postcolonial Politics in Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*', *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies*, 42/4 (1996), 787-806.

[6] Kazuo Ishiguro, *A Pale View of Hills* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), *An Artist of the Floating World* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), *The Remains of the Day* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), *The Unconsoled* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), *When We Were Orphans* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000) and *Never Let Me Go* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005).

and is shaped by, a complex network of relationships. In his first five novels, such understanding is revealed in his representation of personal familial relationships, distorted by the pressures of the particular political and socio-economic forces prevalent in the societies in which his narrators find themselves. In his sixth novel, *Never Let Me Go*, a similar understanding of hegemony is expressed with the substitution of an educational establishment for familial background.

I show how the surface narratives of Ishiguro's texts can be interpreted in a way that reveals his understanding of the various avenues through which socio-political pressures impinge on individuals. This understanding informs his construction of the identities of his characters, the normalisation of their slavish behaviour and their engagement in an active, self-disciplinary maintenance of discourse, even, as in *Never Let Me Go*, to the point of death. Ishiguro's assumptions about the nature of this functional identity structure the type of first-person narrative through which the characters relate their histories, giving rise to the deep conflicts that they experience in their lives.

Through the introduction of the concept of 'interpretive consonance' I examine the way in which the first-person narratives of Ishiguro's texts reveal the complicated interplay of power structures, and their effect on the development of each character's individual personality, which brings the vocational imperative into existence. I argue that interpretive consonance and vocational imperative form the core around which Ishiguro's texts are structured. Driven by the pressure to conform, Ishiguro's narrators actively engage in the creation and maintenance of the discourses which define their roles in society. Their daily activities, their interactions with others, and the

way they narrate their experiences of those interactions, are constructed on the basis of an implicit awareness of this pressure. Thus, Ishiguro fuses social function with personal identity in a way that has a totalising effect in terms of defining the relationship between his narrators and their societies. In fact, a process of convergence is clearly discernable in the narratives; a process in which the personal idiosyncrasies of the characters and the demands of their social environments are consolidated in the formation of functional personas that attain a transcendent importance in constructing the pattern of their everyday lives.

I show that, in each of the texts, Ishiguro bases the narrators' establishment of a social identity on the notion of a convergence of social necessity with the continuation of the personal psychological characteristics they developed in childhood. In other words, according to Ishiguro, convergence is a process by which the raw material of childhood relationships aligns itself with social necessities and becomes solidified within the framework of a functioning social persona: it is a process that constructs, and maintains, the needs of a disciplinary society and the psychological condition of the individual as a unified whole. This is important because these factors all combine to influence how, when and why Ishiguro's characters engage in a given sphere of social activity, or indeed, commit themselves to a particular life-long vocation within society. Also, their fulfilment of the requirements of a particular discourse have contributed, in however small a way, to the direction their societies have taken.

One aspect of the maintenance of discourse can be found in the structure of the first-person narratives of Ishiguro's texts. It is a self-

disciplinary narrative that functions to embed the values of a particular discourse through repetition and, in the novels, its pressure has a profound impact on memory. Each of Ishiguro's characters express serious concerns about their inability to remember the events of the past with any degree of certitude. They attempt to submerge their inner conflicts and doubts, however, beneath a discursive surface. In the positivistic narrative of Ishiguro's characters there is an implicit denial of the forces that are compelling them to act as they do, as they seek to transform the fundamental impulse to conform from a necessary means of survival into an announcement of freely held beliefs. Such a denial of true purpose and intention creates a split both in the internal psychological world of the characters and in the perceived relationship between their behaviour and their historical environment. In other words, the narrative expresses the divisive nature of the vocational imperative that particularizes the characters' concerns, and isolates them from both internal and external conflicts. This tendency is reflected in the structure of the texts. Each one of Ishiguro's other texts displays the same feature: a seamless first-person narrative overlying an undercurrent of intense emotional turmoil.

Throughout the texts, the narrators make continuous attempts to discuss, explain and interpret innumerable points of professional concern and personal idiosyncrasies. This discursiveness tends to obscure the narrow limits of the narrative as the narrators attempt to reduce their personal experiences, and their relationship with the events going on around them, to a confirmation of the values of a specific discourse. Ishiguro engineers the disempowerment of the narrators in his novels to the point where they are unable even to recognise, let alone to effect, changes in themselves or the

world around them because vocational narrative will not allow any expression of concerns that lie outside its narrow discursive parameters. For instance, on a personal level, Stevens, in *The Remains of the Day*, is unable to express his love for Miss Kenton, and can only communicate with her about professional matters. Also, when he relates the concern that he felt in retrospect, about Lord Darlington's decision to dismiss the two Jewish housemaids he does so only in a way that seeks to affirm his professionalism.[7] In reality, he is simply reaffirming his unwillingness to step outside the self-imposed parameters of his vocational role in an attempt to change his personal life and influence the events around him. In other words, the negative complementarity of vocationally based narrative lies in the fact that it expresses disempowerment *positively*.

Vocational narration is shown as a form of narrative in which language is reduced to a purely functional role that denies the capacity for critical analysis and in which conceptual definitions become fixed and unquestionable, as with Stevens's understanding of such terms as 'dignity' and 'greatness'. In other words, the narrative is the expression of a *point of view* predicated on the necessity of conforming to the requirements of a particular social environment. At the same time, it functions to conceal the necessity that is its own root. It is this inner compulsion of Ishiguro's characters towards the unity of self and social function that provides a useful perspective from which to investigate several points concerning the great degree of consistency to be found throughout his writing. Most usually, this tendency of Ishiguro's narrators to relate to their surroundings in terms of a

[7] Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day* (1989; London: Faber, 1996), pp.161-162.

particular discourse has been thought of in terms of notions of professionalism. If, however, this were all, it would be easy enough to conceptualise this aspect of Ishiguro's work as a critique of professionalism, as has indeed been discussed by critics such as Bruce Robbins and Lisa Fluet.

In his essay 'Very Busy Just Now: Globalisation and Harriedness in Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', [8] Bruce Robbins goes so far as to suggest that what is seemingly an anti-professional, anti-cosmopolitan stance in Ishiguro's writing becomes, in *The Unconsoled*, a type of utopian gesture that seeks to resolve the insurmountable conflicts between domestic and professional life in the harried world of postmodern global capitalism. Placing both *The Unconsoled* and *The Remains of the Day* within the context of a world in which the time deficit of modern life leads to a 'blockage of caring'[9] in the domestic sphere and an increase in the professionalisation of humanitarian endeavours on the global stage, Robbins takes Ishiguro to be painting 'an almost futuristic portrait of a *pure or absolute workplace*.'[10] He suggests that, in *The Remains of the Day*, the conflict between domestic life and work are displaced from the realm of daily concerns onto the phases of a whole lifetime. In other words, the whole life of Stevens, the butler, is enveloped in work and he only returns to the domestic after retirement, thus conflating the domestic sphere with the prospect of decline and death. Robbins then extends this argument, based on the all consuming nature of professional life, into a consideration of *The Unconsoled* and Ryder's attempts to negotiate his

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[8] Bruce Robbins, 'Very Busy Just Now: Globalisation and Harriedness in Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', *Comparative Literature*, 53/4 (Fall 2001), 426-441.
[9] Ibid. p.431.
[10] Ibid. p.432.

hectic schedule in the unnamed city in which he is meant to be performing in a concert. In the process, Robbins argues that the element of time/space compression to be found in the novel 'also includes a utopian foretaste of unearthly temporal abundance'[11] and that the disruption of the sense of time in Ryder's opening elevator ride is a way of 'refreshing our sense of the city's historical achievements and continuing utopian energy'.[12] Thus personal and professional identity are seen to blend into one another in a globalised utopia in which hours fit into minutes, in the vain hope that the impossible demands of postmodern life will be met. Following on from this, Robbins claims that Ryder's behaviour in the uncontrollable, heterogeneous environment to be found in the novel is indicative of Ishiguro's unique response to the conflict between work and the family. The personal is the international, Robbins argues; such a state of being requires 'a broader and more inclusive civility, and the civility of the city can be a daily model and training site for it.'[13] It seems that, for Robbins, the all-consuming nature of the professional identities of Ishiguro's narrators and the seamless, polite, narratives that they produce is symptomatic of the increasingly professionalised and metropolitan world that the writer himself inhabits.

Robbins emphasises the utopian attempt to negotiate this world over the single, most obvious, difference between Stevens and Ryder. This is the fact that Stevens is at least successful in carrying out his professional duties, even if his personal life is utterly destroyed. Ryder, on the other hand, not only has a disastrous family life but also fails to fulfil his main professional commitment, which is to perform in a concert. This professional failure is the

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[11] Ibid. p.438.
[12] Ibid. pp.438-439.
[13] Ibid. pp.439-440.

result of the fact that he cannot refuse the many extra demands made on his time. In other words, Ryder's excessive politeness, or, rather, his 'broader and more inclusive civility', as Robbins puts it, is ultimately self-defeating. As utopian gestures go, this must surely be a failure. Moreover, it indicates that Ishiguro's writing is based on far more complex assumptions about the relationship between his characters' personal history and their professional lives than Robbins suggests. Ryder's consistent emphasis on his professional dedication provides a seamless narrative mask that overlies both his stressful emotional relationship with his wife and child, and his confused relationship with his cultural context.

In her essay 'The self-loathing class: Williams, Ishiguro and Barbara Ehrenreich on service', [14] Lisa Fluet considers Ishiguro's representation of professionalism in *When We Were Orphans* and *The Remains of the Day* from the standpoint of Raymond Williams's contention that professionalism is a form of middle-class servitude. By doing so, she aims to 'elucidate the crucial yet theoretically problematic position of a guilty, self-loathing affect within these accounts of professional middle-class consciousness'[15] and rescue modern professionalism from Williams's negative identification of it with previous ideas of servitude. In the process, she discusses the fact that a belated and ironic meditation on the Victorian middle-class's idea of service, which 'leaves in its wake a troubling legacy of self-sacrificing intentions, unforeseen effects and, ultimately, lives defined by a desire to *matter*, coupled with the periodically disturbing, lonely revelation that they do not matter',[16] is

[14] Lisa Fluet, 'The Self-Loathing Class: Williams, Ishiguro and Barbara Ehrenreich on Service', *Keywords*, 4 (2003), 100-130.
[15] Ibid. p.100.
[16] Ibid. p.109.

to be found in both novels. The result of this meditation is to expose 'modern professionalism's troubling interdependence with older social models of compelled life'.[17] Fluet then discusses the validity of what she sees as Williams's view of the inevitable self-hatred of service professionals who are unwilling to admit to their pursuit of 'personal self-justification through public self-abnegation'[18] and whose inherent hypocrisy is symptomatic of their 'inadvertently negligent class *un*consciousness'.[19] In this sense, the form of compulsion described by Fluet is grounded in middle-class, service-centred, education. Her treatment of both novels confirm this, as she views the professionalism of Stevens and Christopher Banks as both a means of avoiding issues that they do not want to face about themselves and as a way of gaining membership of society. However, these notions of compulsion and education, and the desire to avoid the unsavoury reality of the narrators' existences, although visible in Ishiguro's writing, have a limited application to the texts. The insights underpinning Ishiguro's understanding of the cause and effect of his narrators' identities surely penetrate to profounder levels. There is, in the novels, a deep-rooted sense of the narrators as active embodiments of the nexus of social values and historical forces that surround them. I argue that this is pushed to the extent that there is no point of differentiation between the personal psychology, and moral agency, of Ishiguro's narrators and the force of these social values.

It seems to me that the concept of 'professionalism' is much too narrow to be able to accommodate the breadth, complexity and consistency of Ishiguro's understanding of the relationship between individual identity and

[17] Ibid. p.109.
[18] Ibid. p.104.
[19] Ibid. p.105.

broader social values. It is certainly unable, for example, to provide a satisfactory means of explaining the relationship between *A Pale View of Hills*, *Never Let Me Go* and his other novels. The difficulty that arises is that, in *A Pale View of Hills*, the life of the narrator, Etsuko, is just as consumed by the discourse of motherhood as are the lives of the narrators of the other texts by their respective careers. She is not paid to do what she does, and yet there is more than a passing resemblance between the characteristics of her narrative and that of Stevens, the butler in *The Remains of the Day*, or any of Ishiguro's other narrators. Further, the very idea of professionalism is completely inadequate to explain the complicity in their own destruction of the clones in *Never Let Me Go*, who go through a process of donating their vital organs on demand. It seems to me that the recurrent narrative style to be found in Ishiguro's novels indicates that his writing is aiming at a more fundamental understanding of the way in which personal identities are integrated, or even transformed, into social functions.

Nor does the concept of professionalism provide an adequate explanation either of the depth of the personal investment made by each of the narrators in the roles they have 'chosen' for themselves, or of the compulsive element to be found in their attempts to maintain these discourses at all costs. In fact, the concern with professionalism, displayed by four of Ishiguro's six narrators, could be seen as one of the end-products of his assumptions concerning these forces of integration. It seems to me that a much more appropriate means of referring to the unification of personal identity with social function to be found in Ishiguro's texts, and the fact that his

narrators feel deeply that they *are* what they do, can be found in the concept of 'vocation'.

The deep personal identification of each narrator with a particular vocational discourse establishes a priority of values on which is based every facet of his, or her, narrative. Ishiguro develops this implicitly, as in the case of Etsuko's commitment to being a wife and mother, as well as explicitly, through his use of the idea of professionalism. Whatever the means of establishing this priority of values may be, the significance of it remains the same: Ishiguro's narrators have effectively internalised the values inherent in the vocational discourse of their choice, which they then *feel they must obey no matter what*. In other words, Ishiguro's texts are based on an understanding of the way in which the values of particular vocational discourses are transformed into internalised imperative rules. Hence, my choice of the term 'vocational imperative' as a way of conceptualising what seems to me to be the common ground on which Ishiguro sets the very different experiences of his narrators. The main characteristic of the vocational imperative is that it conceals, primarily from the characters themselves but also from others, both the mechanisms of power and the self-inflicted distortion of their lives. This self-deception is constructed around a representation of the way in which the combined force of personal psychology and hegemony drives each of the narrators of Ishiguro's texts into a state of total identification with a particular discourse.

Moreover, one of the consequences of this total identification is that the personal morality of the characters is defined by the parameters of the discourse. In other words, Ishiguro utilises the imperative nature of vocational

discourse, the inner compulsion towards the unity of self and function, in a way that enforces his narrators' abdication of moral responsibility for their actions. The result is that the place of personal morality is subverted by a slavish adherence to the dictates of perceived functional necessity, and this slavishness comes to be regarded as a virtue. This is not simply a matter of personal choice. In striving to fulfil the dictates of the vocational imperative Ishiguro's characters suffer deeply, not only on an individual level but also in relation to their changing historical and cultural environments. In other words, the structure of the vocational imperative is such that it has narrative, personal, societal, cultural and historical dimensions.

For instance, Stevens's relation to the outbreak of the Second World War in *The Remains of the Day* illustrates that on a deeper layer of Ishiguro's texts there is an exploration of the nature of the relationship between the vocational imperative, historical change, and conflict. Because of the psychological split created in the subject, cultural, national or international conflicts come to be seen as disconnected objective fact, the environment within which the characters must strive even harder to maintain the system of denial that is the cause of the problem in the first place.

It is in the very nature of vocational discourse to conceal both personal hypocrisy and deeper social contradictions. Through the displacement of moral concerns onto a concern for commitment to their particular discourses, Ishiguro's characters demonstrate that it is only necessary for ordinary individuals to go through the motions of their everyday lives in such a condition to make conflict an inevitability. The failure to negotiate these hidden contradictions results in conflict on personal, national and international levels.

There is a critical engagement with the ironic and tense relationship between the desire for stability and consistency on the one hand, and inherent socio-political instability on the other. Within the world of the texts, Ishiguro makes a literal connection between the hidden contradiction of vocational discourse and the reality of historical change as it is lived out in society: when conflicts of value are denied they will become manifest as an historical environment full of confrontation.

I extend the examination of the historical dimension of the texts to consider the purposes behind Ishiguro's use of 'moments in history.' This is a problematic issue because, even though the undercurrent of historical change is of central importance to the way Ishiguro's texts function, his attitude to history itself is anything but straightforward. As he has said: 'What I started to do was to use history....I would look for moments in history that would best serve my purposes, or what I wanted to write about.'[20] The purposes that lie behind Ishiguro's choice of historical moments are undoubtedly complex. Nevertheless, it seems that there are distinct features of his historical narrative that recur time and again throughout the novels, regardless of their specific historical contexts. Therefore, I argue that the most effective way to deal with the complexity of the issue, and to discover exactly what Ishiguro's purposes are, is to consider the different historical contexts to be found in his texts primarily as a narrative technique. The function of this technique is to highlight different aspects of the relationship between the individual and historical change *in principle.* In other words, even though the historical contexts of Ishiguro's texts may be accurate to a greater or lesser degree, and

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[20] Kazuo Ishiguro and Oe Kenzaburo, 'The Novelist in Today's World: A Conversation', *Boundary*, 18/3 (1991), 115.

may call into question specific issues relevant to that particular historical era, this is not the point of the historical narrative of the texts, and in this sense, Ishiguro is not a historical novelist.

In the first chapter, I seek both to elucidate the nature of Ishiguro's writing as a reflection of the condition of the world that he inhabits and to clarify my own approach to his work by setting out the theoretical underpinnings of my reading of the novels. Although the concepts of 'interpretive consonance' and 'vocational imperative' were originally developed as direct responses to the texts, their theoretical content and intellectual integrity can best be explained with reference to already established, historically validated, theoretical frameworks of various types. In this endeavour I draw on the work of twentieth century theorists such as Freud, Gramsci, Lukács, Foucault, Jameson and Bauman.

In order to situate Ishiguro and understand the forces at play on him as a writer, I utilise Fredric Jameson's notion of a text possessing a political unconscious. I argue that Ishiguro's writing is symptomatic of, not only his personal experience, but more so the historical forces at work in the post-war world of the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. Moving on from this, I turn to Gramsci's notion of hegemony as the widespread acceptance of ideological values throughout the social body. In doing so, I discuss the theoretical underpinning for my notion of 'interpretive consonance' as the act of interpreting the world based on the subject's assimilation of hegemonic values, and trace its connections with Foucault's analysis of power and discourse.

It seems appropriate, at this point, to give a brief definition of my use of the term 'discourse'. In Foucauldian terms, discourse is both linguistic and practical. It creates its own institutionalised body of specialised knowledge and gives rise to related practices. As Foucault states,

> [d]iscursive practices are not purely and simply ways of producing discourse. They are embodied in technical processes, in institutions, in patterns for general behaviour, in forms for transmission and diffusion, and in pedagogical forms which, at once impose and maintain them.[21]

In other words, a discourse is not simply a particular narrative construct, it is a real practice: real butlers serve real masters through a definite, concrete, mode of behaviour. This behaviour includes the way in which they use language both to express themselves, and to articulate the rules of the practices they follow.[22] As I point out in chapter four, Stevens thinks that he *is* a butler; he lives his entire life *as* a butler, and his narrative is both an expression, and a construction, of this identity. It is in relation to this understanding of the embodiment of discourse as a mode of being in the world that I introduce the concept of 'vocational imperative'.

I then proceed with a discussion of Lukács's theory of reification, based on his interpretation of Marx. I do so in order to highlight the fact that, in Ishiguro's novels, the trenchant identification of his narrators with their particular social functions has been carried to such an extreme that it has objectified their relation with not only the world around them but also their own

[21] Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), p.200.
[22] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (1975; London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 135-141.

desires and emotions. The reflective character of Ishiguro's narratives is due to the internalisation of the dialectical process. Zygmunt Bauman's analysis of the ethical implications of modernity is then introduced as a means of considering the way in which Ishiguro's novels pursue the moral implications of the all-encompassing nature of social function in contemporary society. Finally in this chapter, I turn to Freud's concept of the super-ego as the means of discussing Ishiguro's understanding of the way in which the forces of hegemony and discourse are assimilated into the individual identities of his narrators.

In my second chapter I examine the way in which Etsuko's family, in *A Pale View of Hills*,[23] resorts to a strong emphasis on traditional family relationships as a way of coping with the rapid democratisation of Japanese society in the aftermath of the Second World War. I show how, in the aftermath of conflict, Ishiguro's characters manage their experiences of interculturality and I discuss the forms of cultural resistance to which they resort as a means of establishing a sense of continuity and stability from day to day. I also discuss the way in which sweeping historical changes affect the everyday experience of intimate relationships. Tension between the older and younger generations is heightened in this way as it is the children that are the medium through which cultural change is introduced into family life. This experience of cultural change, and the attempt to defy it by an adherence to the dictates of a discourse that was itself the product of interaction with a different set of social necessities, produces a sense of psychological dislocation in Ishiguro's characters. Such dislocation opens up fissures in their

[23] Kazuo Ishiguro, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982; London: Faber, 1991). All further references to this work appear as *PVH* in parentheses in the text.

self-centred subservience, and brings them face to face with the reality of historical change taking place around them. Understanding this sense of dislocation involves a discussion of the way in which Ishiguro's construction of his narratives raises issues concerned with the nature of hegemony.

It is in this context that I first introduce the concept of 'interpretive consonance' as a way of understanding the construction of Etsuko's narrative. I argue that Ishiguro structures Etsuko's responses to the behaviour of her friend Sachiko and their changing historical environment on the basis of an implicit understanding of the way hegemony influences interpretation. Once assimilated into Etsuko's identity, the traditional role of wife and mother, along with the patriarchal culture of obedience to masculine authority, becomes the implicit set of criteria by which she judges the behaviour of Sachiko and her treatment of her daughter, Mariko. That is, Etsuko interprets what is happening around her in a way that is consonant with the hegemonic values which she has come to embody.

I argue, therefore, that Ishiguro's depiction of Etsuko's experiences is founded on his construction of her character as the embodiment of hegemonic values. Interpretive consonance emerges as the narrator's unreflective imposition of a point of view on the world around her. In *A Pale View of Hills*, Etsuko is so implicitly intent on positively reinforcing her identity as a caring mother that, in her remembrance of the events of the past, she confuses her own daughter's behaviour with that of her friend's daughter, Mariko. The effect of this is to deny the role that she herself has played in the suicide of her own daughter, Keiko. (*PVH*, p.182) It seems as though Ishiguro has used memory as the arena in which to exploit the conflict between the desire to reassure

oneself of the rightness of one's choices based on a particular discourse and the desire to understand the reality of one's suffering. For Etsuko, the tension is unbearable and the endeavour to reassure herself that she has been a good mother overwhelms every aspect of her existence, even to the extent that it forms the core around which she reconstructs her past life. This endeavour can be seen as the force that underlies the necessarily repetitive nature of her narrative, and the foundation on which the recursive nature of the text is established.

The third chapter investigates Ishiguro's representation of the way in which the power networks inherent in society affect the development of what I term the 'vocational imperative' through an analysis of *An Artist of the Floating World*.[24] A key element in the development of Ono's vocational imperative is the way in which his relationship with an authoritarian father, who embodies certain socio-political values, affects the trajectory of his entire life, and influences the way in which his personal psychological needs eventually converge with those of the society around him. In other words, in his construction of Ono's experience, Ishiguro arguably puts forward the idea that familial relations, the political order and the psychological condition of the individual, are inseparable and irreducible.

Moreover, Ishiguro portrays the development of the political bias in Ono's art in a manner that clearly indicates the way in which Ono's psychological background enables him to assimilate the fascist views encouraged in him by his friend, Matsuda. I explore the means by which Ono re-adjusts his artistic lens to fit these new values and repeatedly refines his

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[24] Kazuo Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986; London: Faber, 1987). All further references to this work appear as *AFW* in parentheses in the text.

interpretation of events around him based on them. Ono's attempt to negotiate the reality of his wartime activities is offset by the way in which his narrative emphasises his total commitment to his artistic career. The strength of this commitment can be found in the degree to which he is prepared to distort reality in order to maintain the illusions under which he labours. The pressure of conformity to ingested ideological values implicit in Ishiguro's narratives is such that it not only distorts the personal experiences of individual characters, but also their relationship to their changing cultural and historical contexts. As Ono's historical environment changes, he must incorporate events within the parameters of his world-view in an attempt to maintain stability and avoid a direct confrontation with reality. The result is an underlying narrative that gives an account of historical transition from one social context to another. In *An Artist of the Floating World*, as Ono relates the progress of his artistic career, he cannot help but produce an underlying narrative that describes the transition of Japanese society from pre-war imperialism to post-war democratisation. Ishiguro's re-contextualisation of his character, through the mechanism of cultural and historical change, reveals the extent to which the construction of personal identity is an articulation of the wider historical, political and economic condition of society.

In chapter four, on *The Remains of the Day*,[25] I discuss how Stevens, the butler, in a similar way to Ono, attempts to re-affirm his system of values in a way that would allow him to avoid a direct confrontation with the changing world around him, and the regrettable choices he has made in his personal life. In the novel, Stevens takes a journey which separates him from

[25] Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day* (1989; London: Faber, 1996). All further references to this work appear as *RD* in parentheses in the text.

Darlington Hall and the world that he was used to - the world as 'a wheel, revolving with these great houses at the hub, their mighty decisions emanating out to all else, rich and poor, who revolved around them.' (*RD*, p.122) As he struggles to re-affirm his professional and ideological values in a different environment, it becomes clear that he has become an anachronism: the representative of a social structure that no longer has any currency in the real world. Nor, despite his self-deception, can he avoid revealing the personal tragedy that has been the result of constructing his entire life around the professional position that he holds within this social structure. Stevens exemplifies the particularly rigid adherence to the demands of a specific vocational discourse demonstrated by each of Ishiguro's characters.

Like Ishiguro's other narrators, Stevens makes an attempt to unify, absolutely, individual identity with social function. This seems to stem from a deep inner compulsion to internalise the social structure within which he finds himself, and subsume completely individual identity within the confines of a single discourse. Stevens thinks that he *is* a butler; he lives his entire life *as* a butler, and his narrative is both an expression, and a construction, of this identity.

More broadly, not only Stevens's personal identity but also his notions of Englishness and dignity are derived from his position in a society shot through with the effects of social hierarchy, imperialism and white supremacy. Moreover, the tendency towards interpretive consonance is also clearly revealed at the intersection of one world view with another. An example of the exposure of this tendency can be found in Stevens's conversation with Harry Smith, a character who has his own opposing view of what dignity is. This re-

contextualisation of Stevens as the embodiment of a particular hegemony transforms the narrator's self-deception from a means of attempting to maintain a sense of identity into a form of self-justification for previous misconceived moral choices, in an environment which he experience as both alienating and incomprehensible.

I also examine more closely, in chapter four, Ishiguro's elucidation of the personal tragedy that results from an unquestioning adherence to the dictates of the vocational imperative. I show how Ishiguro uses this unquestioning attitude to the parameters set by vocational narrative to construct a more general view of humanity in the mind of his narrator. This view spreads outwards through the text in a way that affects Stevens's relationships not only with other individual characters but also constructs the reader as a fellow professional.

The first and most devastating aspect of Stevens's character is defined by a loss of self. In fact, each of Ishiguro's characters demonstrates an extreme level of self-denial. They have become incapable of identifying their own needs, let alone acting on them. However, this is not simply a matter of repression. Everything about them is subsumed within a functional persona, which has made self-denial habitual. To elucidate this process, I introduce the theories of psychoanalysts such as D. W. Winnicot, who see adult conflicts as the result of childhood experiences, the cause of the creation of a false self based on compliance.[26] But I argue that Ishiguro takes this type of understanding further, through establishing a link between his narrators' active

[26] D. W. Winnicot, 'Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self', in his *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (London: Hogarth Press, 1965).

maintenance of vocational discourse and the fact that they have themselves become a force for promoting compliance and self-denial in others.

In *The Remains of the Day*, Stevens, by suffocating his own emotions, denies those of Miss Kenton also. This is not simply a matter of straightforward rejection. Consistently in Ishiguro's texts, not only does the denial of self lead to the denial of others, it also actively promotes the socio-political values implicitly embodied in a particular discourse. The consequence of this is the imposition of behavioural constraints on other characters, which, in its own turn, works to reinforce compliance and self-denial in general. This denial, which can be found, for instance, in Stevens's willingness to allow the world to disintegrate before acknowledging the fragmentation of the self, inevitably generates the type of situations that result in national, and international, conflict and war. In other words, vocational narration is a mode of expression that represents the disempowerment of the human being.

In chapter five, I argue that in *The Unconsoled*, [27] the type of implicit self-denial to be found in Stevens's narrative is transformed into a sense of self-division and dislocation. The narrative demonstrates a conspicuous breakdown of what I have termed 'interpretive consonance', as Ryder is reduced to coping with the unlimited demands placed on his time and space and is unable to give any coherent meaning to his life. It is a typical feature of Ishiguro's texts that the first-person narrators do not present themselves merely as the helpless victims of circumstance. Rather, the complexity of their narratives reveals the way in which these seemingly innocuous characters have become self-deceptive protagonists in the maintenance of the values

[27] Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled* (1995; London: Faber,1996). All further references to this work appear as *UN* in parentheses in the text.

that, throughout their lives, have helped to shape their identities and also lie at the root of their sufferings. In a sense, Ryder has chosen, and continues to choose, to maintain a social persona that will allow him to ignore the contradictions both in his relation to society and his own behaviour.

Ryder's deluded attitude is taken to an extreme at one point in *The Unconsoled*: the great musician fails to react to what is being said about him when he can clearly hear two reporters, who are planning to use him to fuel a local conflict over musical issues, discuss the ways in which they are going to flatter him to get what they want. He simply ignores what they are saying because it does not fit in to his carefully constructed, and rigorously maintained, idea of himself; he cannot comprehend the fact that he is a mere pawn in the cultural conflict carrying on around him. (*UN*, p.166-167) As this conflict progresses to its climax, and resolves itself, Ryder's preoccupation with his own importance is de-centred and relativised. His role is diminished, and the limits of his perspective are revealed; as circumstances change around him, so does the meaning of his self-deception. Although he remains the same, his re-contextualisation, through cultural change, highlights the contradictions that were always present in both his behaviour and his narrative. But it is doubtful whether Ryder himself ever succeeds in attaining any degree of insight whatsoever, remaining firmly entrapped in the perpetually cyclical nature of his existence as an international musician. (*UN*, pp.531-535)

As regards the cultural context, I argue that beneath the personalised surface of the text Ishiguro has inscribed a deeper strata of experience by once more utilising his understanding of social change. Despite the abstract,

dream-like quality of *The Unconsoled*, an underlying narrative of cultural transition is clearly discernible. As Ryder obeys his compulsion to fulfil the demands of his profession, his narrative provides an account of the way in which a local cultural conflict, primarily it seems over musical issues, is mysteriously brought to a satisfactory conclusion. The result of this transition is that a stable hegemony is finally established, to the satisfaction of everyone except Ryder, who does not seem to have any comprehension whatsoever of the nature of the local events unfolding around him. Indeed, Ryder's difficulty seems to typify a prominent feature of Ishiguro's texts, which is the problematic relationship between international priorities and local concerns. I show how Ishiguro's use of 'moments in history' encapsulates a response to his own historical period as a writer, and I discuss the different ways in which the implicitly constructed vocational imperative, and the underlying narrative of cultural transition, are, in his text, manifestations of a concern with issues of internationalism.

Generally, Ishiguro's representations of internationalism vary from showing characters to be simply the subjects of these seemingly uncontrollable forces, to a condition whereby they are an embodiment of them, even to the extent that they experience internationalism as a permanent ontological condition. This is clearly the case in both *The Unconsoled*, and *When We Were Orphans*, as Ryder and Christopher Banks respectively find themselves trapped on the roundabout of international detachment, unable properly to engage with a world in which the centre of power always seems to be elsewhere, and in which their adherence to the rules of a given discourse disallows them from an engagement with the reality of their own lives. I

discuss the way in which the features of the underlying narrative of historical transition to be found in Ishiguro's works highlight the relationship between localised conflicts and international politics. I then argue that the way in which Ishiguro engages with the complexities of internationalism, globalisation and local issues corresponds closely to modern economic theory, such as John Gray's assessment of the relationship between the global free-market economy and local political stability, the destruction of cohesive social structures, the market's relation to conflict, and the possibility of resistance.[28] In this sense, Ishiguro's work can be seen as a reflection of the inherent contradictions of the age in which he himself functions as a writer.

Chapter six, on *When We Were Orphans*,[29] involves a discussion of the way in which Ishiguro structures Christopher Banks's essentially middle-class view as that of a second generation combination of both his father's service to capitalistic colonialism and his mother's Christian missionary zeal. In the novel, Christopher Banks, the detective, recounts his attempt to trace his missing parents. As he relates the history of his search, he reflects upon his childhood life in the International Settlement in Singapore. Despite his best efforts to deceive both himself and the reader, his narrative reveals that from his childhood onwards his life has been shattered by political and economic forces, personal desires and ambitions, of which he has had barely any comprehension whatsoever. Moreover, the childhood fantasy that he constructed in order to cope with his sense of loss - playing detective - has become the driving force of his entire adult life. Banks remains obstinately

[28] John Gray, 'Postscript' in *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism*, (London: Granta, 1998), pp. 209-235.
[29] Kazuo Ishiguro, *When We Were Orphans* (London: Faber, 2000). All further references to this work are given as *WO* in parentheses in the text.

blind to the reality of his life, while presenting an account in which he portrays himself as the main protagonist in a great drama.

Finally, my discussion of *Never Let Me Go*,[30] in chapter seven, draws on Michel Foucault's theories concerning the anatomy of discursive power and its relation to the body to illuminate the nature of the experiences of Kathy, the narrator, and her fellow clones. I argue that Kathy's compliant attitude to the general assumptions about the value of the clones' lives, betokens the nature of her existence as the victim of a system of total administration. The clones, having been artificially produced for the express purpose of donating their organs, were reared in Hailsham. Hailsham was a special boarding school that was part of a whole network of establishments dedicated to the education of clones, or 'students' as they are referred to by the staff. Kathy's narrative reveals that, at Hailsham, the clones were drip-fed the necessary information for fulfilling their function over a long period of time. This made it difficult for them to be fully conscious of, and resistant to, the process of indoctrination to which they were being subjected. The effect of this indoctrination was the feeling, experienced by the clones, that donating their organs is what they *ought* to be doing, and that doing otherwise would not be acceptable. Ishiguro has created, in them, compliant characters whose willingness to do what they are told leads to deep-rooted personal torment.

This is most clearly revealed in the behaviour of Tommy, Kathy's friend. Tommy's unavoidable compliance with the demands of his role as an organ donor gave rise to an utterly futile expression of frustrated rage. Moreover, the clones' education established in them a general view of those outside their

[30] Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (London: Faber, 2005). All further references to this work are given as *NLMG* in parentheses in the text.

confined world that is lacking in any spontaneous expression of humanity. They are only able to relate to one another based on a perverse sense of belonging to an elite group of fellow donors whose experience is unique to them. In this way Ishiguro's writing recognises the profound effects of the type of discourse-based relationship required by a disciplinary society, and shows how deeply disturbing they are, the more so because they are implicitly denied at every turn. In this novel, the compulsive identification of Ishiguro's characters with their social role is pushed to a tragic extreme as Kathy and the other clones unquestioningly accept a functional identity that entails their own early death. Kathy's recollections reveal not only the ways in which she and her two closest companions, Tommy and Ruth, attempted to negotiate their identity and their destiny, but also how discursive power reconfigures experience to fit its own requirements. As with Stevens, in *The Remains of the Day*, Ishiguro emphasises the effect that discursive power has on understanding, but this time in a much more direct and devastating fashion. For instance, the clones' relationship with the world around them is mediated through terms such as 'possibles', which refer to the person from whom their genetic identity may have been copied. Their own death is also redefined as 'completion'. The vocational imperative thus becomes an emblem of the all-encompassing nature of discursive power in a contemporary world shot through with scientific and medical discourse.

Before embarking on a discussion of the novels, I begin, however, as already indicated, with a chapter which elucidates my concepts of 'interpretive consonance' and 'vocational imperative' in relation to already established

theories of hegemony, psychology and power that will, I suggest, help in the construction of frames for a reading of Ishiguro.

Chapter 1

Consonances and Imperatives:

Theoretical Frames for a Reading of Ishiguro

In *The Political Unconscious*, Fredric Jameson establishes a means of connecting literary genre with its historical context by viewing the literary text as the bearer of the wish-fulfilment, or desire, of the author in the context of contemporary ideological paradigms. Jameson overcomes what he sees as the limits of Freudian hermeneutics, in which 'wish-fulfilment remains locked in a problematic of the individual subject',[1] by re-inserting the author as a desiring subject into the nexus of historical dialectic. This approach enables him to delve into the ideological substrata of a narrative, or what he terms the 'political unconscious' of a text.

Inherent in Jameson's strategy is the necessity of considering the personal and psychological – as well as social - history of the writer. However, his method by no means follows the simplest form of biographical criticism which, according to Jameson,

> was essentially a genetic affair, whose object was the discovery in the appropriate archives of the source, model, or original of this or that character, event , or situation' and a form in which 'the "life" itself becomes yet one more text by the same author, no more, but no less

[1] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981; London: Routledge Classics, 2002), p.51.

privileged than his other works, and to be added into the corpus of study along with them.[2]

Rather, he chooses to read biographical information as 'the traces and symptoms of a fundamental family situation which is at one and the same time a fantasy master narrative.'[3] That is, the personal psychological characteristics of the author, as shaped by his family environment and the unfulfilled wishes and fantasies that it entails, provides the basic unconscious narrative structure for his writings. This more complex understanding of biographical material seeks to do justice to the influence of personal history in forming an 'unconscious master narrative' that permeates the productions of a creative writer. Jameson also indicates the compelling nature of these unconscious forces in giving rise to the recurring thematic preoccupations to be found in the body of a writer's work. These themes re-occur because unfulfilled wishes and fantasies create an unconscious master narrative that is an inherently 'unstable or contradictory structure... whose persistent actantial functions and events (which are in life restaged again and again with different actors and on different levels) demand repetition, permutation, and the ceaseless generation of various structural "resolutions" which are never satisfactory'.[4] The unsatisfactory resolution of these insistent unconscious forces in the psyche of the writer is seen as the main motivating force of the literary endeavour. However, the structure of these unconscious wishes is not simply confined within the bounds of personal psychological characteristics.

[2] Ibid. p.166.
[3] Ibid. p.166.
[4] Ibid. p.167.

At the same time as Jameson elucidates the core libidinal motivation for a literary work, he is also at pains to emphasise that 'what needs to be stressed, however, is that this contradictory situation is a social as well as a private, familial, or "psychoanalytic" one', and that we should endeavour to 'read the family situation as the mediation of class relationships in society at large, and to grasp the parental functions as socially coded or symbolic positions as well.'[5] That is, personal development cannot be divorced from the influence of social forces unconsciously as well as consciously introduced into the family by the parents who are in their very mode of being themselves embodiments of ideological discourse. The result is that the personal complexes developed by a child in the family will inevitably reflect the structure of the complex social forces shaping family life. Therefore, as Jameson indicates, 'the narratives of ideology – even what we have called the Imaginary, daydreaming, or wish-fulfilling text – are equally necessarily collective in their materials and form'. Such narratives give rise to thematic preoccupations within a writer's work, for which Jameson coins the term 'ideologeme'. He argues that

> the culture or 'objective spirit' of a given period is an environment peopled not merely with inherited words and conceptual survivals, but also with those narrative unities of a socially symbolic type which we have designated as ideologemes.[6]

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[5] Ibid. pp.166-7.
[6] Ibid. p.172.

Jameson stresses the political and oppressive nature of these ideologemes, which are not necessarily in any way progressive. On the contrary, as an example of such an ideologeme, Jameson refers to 'the narrative paradigm of the Dickensian heroine, which Alexander Welsh has aptly termed the "angel of the hearth".'[7] According to Jameson, this Dickensian narrative, which clearly defines and restricts the identity and role of women, performs an ideological function as part of a larger conceptual framework that organises Victorian middle-class fantasies and anxieties about class relations in industrial society.

With this model in mind, it is worth pursuing the question of the nature of the narrative paradigms that may be found in Ishiguro's writing.
If Jameson's approach is correct, then the recurrence of the internal, reflective and self-delusive narrative in Ishiguro's writing, which originates in the trenchant identification of his characters with a clearly defined vocational role, is indicative of the persistence of certain ideological pressures. Indeed, it suggests that the relation between the narrative structures of Ishiguro's novels and his historical environment in some ways resembles that of the works of the late nineteenth-century novelist George Gissing as analysed by Jameson. Jameson situates Gissing's work within the framework of the frustrations of the economic condition of the petty bourgeoisie in late nineteenth-century capitalist society. He then identifies Gissing's writings as embodying the consequent transformation of these irresolvable frustrations into a 'global refusal of commodity desire itself'. He states of Gissing's work that it is

[7] Ibid. p.173.

as if in a universe of high reification and increasingly massive commodification, the 'being' of things and institutions and the increasingly reified place and role of human subjects within them weigh so heavily upon the narrative imagination that shifts in register and the modal variation of destinies are no longer linguistic possibilities for the serious artist.[8]

It is within the context of the visibility of such trenchant alienation and historically constellated conceptual structures that Jameson recognises, in the case of Gissing, the severe constraints and limitations placed on the artist's use of language. He argues that this is so because Gissing's 'moment' is 'also that of the twin emergence of modernism and of mass culture',[9] although, perhaps because of his own determined optimism, he shies away from considering whether or not what is linguistically impossible is also materially impossible, and whether this moment also signals the folly of depending on the dialectical process to provide the impetus for the development of revolutionary class consciousness.

In a similar way, Ishiguro's use of language displays the tendency of historical forces to arrange the conceptual relations within a given discourse. For instance, in *The Remains of the Day*, Stevens's use of the term 'dignity' has a particular meaning and position within the constraints of his role as a butler. In Jameson's terms, and in parallel with his analysis of Gissing, I argue that, contrary to Lukacs's optimistic prognosis for the development of proletarian consciousness through struggle, Ishiguro's use of an immovable

[8] Ibid. p.183.
[9] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981; London: Routledge Classics, 2002), p.183.

narrative mode demonstrates a similar sense of the unavailability of different registers of self-expression within the conceptual constellation of postmodern global capitalism. Why should this be? A brief consideration of Ishiguro's biography and the nature of his historical context is necessary for providing an answer to this problem.

Many facets of Ishiguro's life are visible in his work. He was born in 1954, in Nagasaki, Japan. The devastation wrought by the atom bomb on that city forms the ominous background to his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, in which Etsuko, a Japanese housewife living in England, recalls her experiences of life in the aftermath of the attack. Etsuko's remembrances are triggered by the suicide of her eldest daughter, Keiko, with whom she was pregnant at the time. Indeed, Keiko's suicide seems to imply what psychologists refer to as secondary traumatisation, a condition resulting from the effects of traumatic experience being passed on from parent to child, and which is most commonly found in the children of holocaust survivors. In the novel, Etsuko's narrative displays a displaced acknowledgement of the traumatized relationship that existed between herself and Keiko, her eldest daughter. The medium for this displacement is the way in which Etsuko recounts the abusive and neglectful relationship that existed between a woman called Sachiko and her daughter Mariko with whom she became acquainted for a short time during the summer in which she was pregnant with Keiko. The wider implication of Etsuko's narrative is that such distressed relationships between parents and their children were widespread in post-atomic-bomb Nagasaki. Interestingly enough, there seems to be some resemblance between the structure of Etsuko's family in the novel and

Ishiguro's real life family – Etsuko having two daughters, Keiko and Niki, one born in Japan and the other in England, and Ishiguro having two sisters also born in Japan and England respectively. This is not, however, to suggest naively that secondary traumatisation must therefore be a feature of Ishiguro's childhood experience which surfaces in his writing. Rather, such a mixture of personal factors with fictional licence betokens an artistic assimilation of reality that displays a complex sensitivity towards the impact of the historical context on subjective relationships.

In 1960, when Ishiguro was six years old, his family moved to Britain with what was to remain an unfulfilled intention of returning to Japan at an unspecified time in the future. According to Barry Lewis, one of the effects of this deferred return to Japan is that 'Ishiguro's home is a halfway house, neither Japanese nor English, somewhere in-between departure and arrival, nostalgia and anticipation. He is, in short, a displaced person, one of the many in the twentieth century of exile and estrangement'.[10] Lewis argues that 'it is precisely because Ishiguro demonstrates such a 'homeless mind' that it is therefore useful to examine his fictions through the optic of displacement, and its effect upon his themes, characters, and style.'[11] Commenting on the fact that Ishiguro has worked with the homeless, Lewis admits that 'perhaps there is some truth in the idea that people are attracted by occupations answering some psychological need, and that this work helped Ishiguro wrestle with his own special form of homelessness.'[12] He notes too that the fact that Ishiguro has also worked as 'a member of the Queen Mother's Royal grouse beating party at Balmoral Castle ...furnished him with some direct experience of life

[10] Barry Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.1.
[11] Ibid. pp.1-2.
[12] Ibid. p.3.

as a retainer for the English upper classes',[13] which is of central importance to *The Remains of the Day* . As Lewis points out, '[i]t may seem incongruous for a Japanese to have such familiarity with both ends of the English social ladder', but Ishiguro does not feel himself to have either a strong Japanese or English identity: he, it would seem, is classless, homeless and nationless. Indeed, as Lewis notes, Ishiguro has indicated such himself, saying 'And so I had no clear role, no society or country to speak for or write about. Nobody's history was my history.'[14]

Ishiguro's attempt to cast himself as an international writer has been interpreted as a way of avoiding a confrontation with his Anglo-Japanese identity and the conflicts inherent in it. As Sheng-mei Ma has argued in his essay 'Kazuo Ishiguro's Persistent Dream for Postethnicity: Performance in Whiteface',[15] Ishiguro has attempted to overcome this conflict of identity by progressively de-ethnicizing both himself and his characters. In his consideration of the dynamics of this process, as it is found in the novels up to *The Unconsoled,* Ma points out that Ishiguro's use of 'perfect, precise British English in which every character speaks' performs the function of making them 'no more than mouthpieces and backdrops for Ishiguro's overarching concern for the human condition'.[16] '[A]ny commentary with so sweeping a scope betrays a desire to exceed one's limitations, such as ethnicity,'[17] Ma comments. Viewing the *Unconsoled* as Ishiguro's attempt to

[13] Ibid. p.3.
[14] Kenzaburo Oe and Kazuo Ishiguro, 'Wave Patterns: A Dialogue', *Grand Street*, 10:2 (1991), 82-83 quoted in Barry Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.4.
[15] Sheng-mei Ma, 'Kazuo Ishiguro's Persistent Dream for Postethnicity: Performance in Whiteface', *Post Identity*, 2/1 (1999), 71-88.
[16] Ibid. p.72.
[17] Ibid. p.72.

evade ethnicity, Ma asks whether 'Ishiguro's ethnicity is as much an ideological construct of our own making as postethnicity is of Ishiguro's?' 'Does it not stand to reason', he suggests, 'that the Japanese-ness perceived in the novelist in fact resembles the English-ness in Stevens and Ryder?'[18] Although Ishiguro, as Ma points out, 'has so far masqueraded as Japanese (Ono), Anglo-Japanese (Etsuko), English (Stevens and Ryder), and vaguely Central European (the townspeople in *Unconsoled*)', he has never once masqueraded 'as an Asian minority living in the West, or, to put it in unabashedly essentialist terms, in a subject-position similar to his own.'[19] Ma evidently sees Ishiguro's concern for the human condition as a way of avoiding the subject of ethnicity and does not offer any further explanation of the author's interest in universal themes. In this thesis I argue that, on the contrary, Ishiguro's concern with universal themes is not simply a way of exceeding the limitations of ethnicity but is, rather, symptomatic of his attempt to negotiate the ever more powerful restrictions and limitations set on people's lives in the world of postmodern capitalism.

A consideration of the forces at play on Ishiguro as a British writer reveal the complexity of this issue and provide a more comprehensive explanation for his concern for the human condition than Ma's reactionary interpretation. As Adam Parkes notes,

> Since the break-up of its empire at the end of the Second World War … Britain has had to face its increasing cultural marginality in relation to the rest of the world, and its writers have only just begun to find ways

[18] Ibid. p.73.
[19] Ibid. p.81.

> of adjusting their fictional lenses to this new historical situation. For Ishiguro himself, this means attempting to reach a more 'international' audience by abandoning subject-matter that appeals to a 'provincial' British reader.[20]

Ishiguro's formative years occurred at a historical moment which was also a time of transformation from a world of colonialism and modernity to postmodernity, and the emergence of global capitalism. His characters are themselves similarly situated at moments of historical shift. The limitations of Ma's criticism of Ishiguro are revealed in his failure to address this broader context. Nevertheless, Ma's concern over Ishiguro's attempt to achieve ethnic non-identity, Lewis's statements regarding Ishiguro's homelessness, and Parkes's endeavour to identify the ways in which contemporary writers are attempting to accommodate the huge cultural changes since the end of the Second World War, do demonstrate a shared sense of Ishiguro's negotiation of the conditions of alienation and cultural dislocation prevalent in one way or another in the increasingly global reach of capitalism in the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. I suggest that Ishiguro's sensitivity to this 'human condition' is evident in his construction of the relationship between his narrators and their historical environments and that this is another way in which he attempts to adjust his fictional lens to the post-war world. If, too, we accept what Jameson argues in the *Political Unconscious*, regarding the fact that fiction embodies the state of the world in which it was written, then it seems appropriate to proceed with a discussion

[20] Adam Parkes, *Kazuo Ishiguro's* <u>The Remains of the Day</u> (London: Continuum, 2001), p.14.

that utilises various theoretical approaches which help to highlight the assumptions implicit in Ishiguro's writing. With regard to this endeavour, it seems to me that a consideration of some of the characteristics of modernity is also appropriate to gaining an understanding of Ishiguro's work, and, I hope, will help to explain my interpretive approach to his novels. To facilitate this theoretical contextualisation of what I consider to be a central concern of Ishiguro's novels, I draw on the ideas of Gramsci, Foucault, Lukács, Bauman and Freud. I begin with Gramsci's notion of hegemony as a useful tool for gaining an understanding of the basic elements that make up the point of view of Ishiguro's narrators.

According to Gramsci, hegemony, as the proliferation of a particular constellation of conceptual constructs and ideological values throughout civil society, is a normal social phenomenon whose function ensures a general acceptance of the status quo among the mass of the populace. Gramsci described the relationship between changing historical circumstances, the institutions, such as schools, hospitals and the law courts, that are created as a manifestation of historical necessity and the effects of these on the consciousness of the population as a dynamic process of change. According to Gramsci, 'History is both freedom and necessity.'[21] Paradoxically, the freedom of ongoing historical change gives rise to specific material circumstances in which human beings must struggle to survive. The accommodation of this necessity is accomplished through institutions 'in whose development and activity history is incarnated', and which 'are drawn

[21] Walter L. Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution: A study of Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural theory* (London: University of California Press, 1980), p.35.

up and maintained because they have a task and mission to realize.'[22] However, the effect of these institutions is more far-reaching than simply to 'draw up and develop determinate objective conditions of the production of material goods'; they also inadvertently give a determined structure to the relations that must exist between the people who maintain them, and thus order too 'the spiritual consciousness of men.'[23] By means of its effect on consciousness, the fundamental organisation of the conditions of production spills over into the structure of society and social relations and installs its values in the general consciousness of the populace. Moreover, because of the close relationship between the structural organisation of production and the prevalence of certain values in the general consciousness of society, any change in the former is bound to have far-reaching effects: 'If these objective conditions...change, then the sum of the relations which regulate and inform human society along with the degree of human consciousness changes also.'[24]

Gramsci's notion of hegemony, therefore, describes the dynamic process whereby the changing structure of the conditions of production becomes institutionalised in the civil order of society and, consequently, shapes the consciousness of the members of mass society. This shaping of consciousness comes in the form of the acceptance of the socially institutionalised relations of production as the common sense values of the mass of people. Common sense is thus 'the conception of the world which is uncritically absorbed by the various social and cultural environments in which

[22] Ibid. p.35.
[23] Ibid. p.35.
[24] Ibid. p.35.

the moral individuality of the average man is developed.'[25] This common sense view of the world is imbibed by the average man by means of a type of educational relationship that is not 'restricted to the field of the strictly 'scholastic' relationships by means of which the new generation comes into contact with the old' but which exists throughout society as a whole:

> It exists between intellectual and non-intellectual sections of the population, between the rulers and the ruled, elites and their followers, leaders and led, the vanguard and the body of the army. Every relationship of 'hegemony' is necessarily an educational relationship.[26]

In other words, the personality of the average person 'develops amid concrete social, cultural, and political circumstances which he not only does not choose but which embody assumptions about the world which he cannot initially even identify.'[27] The result of such implicit social indoctrination is that, for the ordinary people whose lives are shaped by these institutionalised values, fulfilling the temporary needs of a specific form of production becomes a necessity. This necessity functions in society by 'proposing concrete goals to the collective consciousness' and by generating 'a complex of convictions and beliefs which acts powerfully in the form of 'popular beliefs'.[28] Gramsci stated that everyday common sense, as the sum total of the popular beliefs that constitute it, 'is a conception which, even in the brain of one individual, is fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential', and is 'continually transforming

[25] Ibid. p.123.
[26] Ibid. p.142.
[27] Ibid. p.149.
[28] Ibid. p.126.

itself, enriching itself with scientific ideas and with philosophical opinions which have entered ordinary life'.[29] In this regard, the language of common sense is understood as a 'totality of determined notions and concepts and not just of words grammatically devoid of content.'[30] Language becomes a hegemonic instrument which reinforces the values of common sense and also transmits and disperses new necessities throughout the social fabric.

Ishiguro's sense of hegemony is most apparent in the way in which he situates his narrators historically. Inscribed in the narratives of his texts is a sense of the way in which the continuous flux of historical forces dislodges a discourse embedded in a particular world view from its context. The function of this inclusion of the sense of historical dynamism in the narrative is to expose the structure and assumptions inherent in a particular world view and also the manner in which it gives way to a new one. For instance, in *A Pale View of Hills*, Etsuko's traditional Japanese sense of propriety and domesticity are contrasted with the values of her youngest daughter, Niki, who has no intention of ever marrying. In *The Remains of the Day*, Stevens's sense of Englishness and dignity are thrown into sharp relief against the background of the changing nature of post Second World War Britain and its increasing democratisation. The narratives of both these characters and those of the other texts demonstrate a propensity to view the world and the behaviour of those around them in terms of the hegemonic values that they have ingested and which have become their common sense views of the world. This is the dynamic propensity for which I have coined the term 'interpretive consonance'.

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[29] Ibid. p.150.
[30] Ibid. p.150.

This concept, then, can be said to provide a description of the general, broad, application in Ishiguro's writing of what Gramsci referred to as common sense. For instance, in chapter two, I discuss the ways in which Etsuko perceives the democratisation of post-war Japan from the standpoint of her assimilation of the traditional values of Japanese culture. In my discussion of *The Remains of the Day*, in chapter four, I argue that Stevens's perception of the world around him has been shaped by the values of the social structure that he inhabits. It is this social structure that has given rise to his own interpretation of the qualities of the English landscape and the meaning of the concept of 'dignity'. However, Walter L. Adamson has suggested that 'Gramsci's dichotomy of force and consent is itself far too simple to comprehend the diversity and complexity of motives and behaviour actually encountered in the politics of everyday life,'[31] and that a more sophisticated understanding of the specific nature of the motivating factors at work in society at large is needed. Indeed, the complexity of the narrative structure to be found in Ishiguro's novels warrants a more sophisticated approach. This is because of the fact that his narrators not only assimilate the general hegemonic values of their social context but each also embodies the discourse of a definite functional role within that context. For example, as I discuss in chapter seven, on *Never let Me Go*, Kathy and her fellow clones are compelled to fulfil the mission that has been set out for them as carers and organ donors. There is, therefore, in the novels a more specific understanding of the effect of power networks on the individual experiences of his narrators. In order to address Ishiguro's understanding of the specific

[31] Ibid. p.243.

nature of the forces impinging on the consciousness of his narrators and the way in which he has incorporated another, more specific, layer of 'common sense' in his narratives, a consideration of Michel Foucault's account of modernity is necessary.

According to Michel Foucault, modernity is a system of social organisation characterised by a prevalence of discourse. Foucault's analysis of the development of modern society includes an account of human beings as physical machines which can be organised and controlled:

> The great book on Man-the-Machine was written simultaneously on two registers: the anatomico-metaphysical register, of which Descartes wrote the first pages and which the physicians and philosophers continued, and the technico-political register, which was constituted by a whole set of regulations and by empirical and calculated methods relating to the army, the school and the hospital, for controlling or correcting the operations of the body.[32]

The second, or technico-political, register described by Foucault refers to the change from feudal modes of power, operating through 'signs and levies',[33] to the manipulative, coercive, particularising modes of power needed to gain access to 'the bodies, ...acts, attitudes and modes of everyday behaviour'[34] of individuals. The source of this change in techniques of power could be found

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[32] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison* (1975; London: Penguin, 1991), p.136.
[33] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980) in Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 1984), p.67.
[34] Ibid. p.67.

in the need to solve the problems created by the development of an economic system that promoted the accumulation of capital, and the accumulation of men as a collective workforce, which came to be seen as synonymous. This new mode of power replaced the older one and created a conception of the world which was uncritically absorbed and institutionalised by society, and, in turn, became the social and cultural environment within which the moral individuality of the average man was developed in the modern era. Such a mechanistic conception of the human being gave rise to methods, 'which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility, [and which] might be called 'disciplines'.[35] The proliferation of such disciplinary discourses in society constituted what amounted to 'a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour.' According to Foucault, the human body 'was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it,' and a 'political anatomy', which was also a 'mechanics of power', was being born.[36] The purpose of these disciplines was to produce subjected, practised and docile bodies that were controllable and economically productive. Foucault points out that on the objective, political, level 'discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)' and, that on the subjective level, 'disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased

[35] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison* (1975; London: Penguin, 1991), p.137.
[36] Ibid. p.138.

domination.'[37] The development of such disciplinary discourses permeated the social structure and the bodies of the members of society to form the structure of what Foucault refers to as a new political anatomy in the modern era. The history of how this new political anatomy became the common sense embedded in the institutions of society unfolded in

> a multiplicity of often minor processes, of different origin and scattered location, which overlap, repeat, or imitate one another, support one another, distinguish themselves from one another according to their domain of application, converge and gradually produce the blueprint of a general application.[38]

In other words, modern society for Foucault is one in which the notion of disciplinary discourse permeates every aspect of life. Such a social condition involves the 'meticulous observation of detail, and at the same time a political awareness of these small things, for the control and use of men,' observations that bear with them 'a whole set of techniques, a whole corpus of methods and knowledge, descriptions, plans and data' from which 'the man of modern humanism was born.'[39]

The modern world, then, is characterised by a prevalence of disciplinary discourse that, among other things, defines the function and nature of a practice and the role of a person in it. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, for example, Foucault describes the discourse of clinical medicine as defining the role of the doctor and his relation to society at large:

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[37] Ibid. p.138.
[38] Ibid. p.138.
[39] Ibid. p.141.

Who, among the totality of speaking individuals, is accorded the right to use this sort of language (langage)? Who is qualified to do so? Who derives from it his own special quality, his prestige, and from whom, in return does he receive if not the assurance, at least the presumption that what he says is true? What is the status of the individuals who – alone – have the right, sanctioned by law or tradition, juridically defined or spontaneously accepted, to profess such a discourse? The status of doctor involves criteria of competence and knowledge; institutions, systems, pedagogic norms; legal conditions that give the right – though not without laying down certain limitations – to practise and to extend one's knowledge. It also involves a system of differentiation and relations (the division of attributions, hierarchical subordination, functional complementarity, the request for and the provision and exchange of information) with other individuals or other groups that also possess their own status (with the state and its representatives, with the judiciary, with different professional bodies, with religious groups and, at times, with priests). It also involves a number of characteristics that define its functioning in relation to society as a whole (the role that is attributed to the doctor according to whether he is consulted by a private person or summoned, more or less under compulsion, by society, according to whether he practises a profession or carries out a function; the right to intervene or make decisions that is accorded him in these different cases; what is required of him as the supervisor, guardian, and guarantor of the health of the population, a

group, a family, an individual; the payment he receives from the community or from individuals; the form of contract, explicit or implicit, that he negotiates either with the group in which he practises, or with the authority that entrusts him with a task, or with the patient who requests advice, treatment, or cure).[40]

According to Foucault, when fully articulated a discourse defines the mode of operation of the subject who inhabits its parameters in the most minute detail. However, Foucault also considers that even when a discourse is not fully articulated it can be said to exert an influence by being dispersed throughout society as a body of expectations and assumptions about how someone performing a particular role should behave and the sorts of relationships that are appropriate for them to carry it out. In this sense, a discourse can be described 'sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements'.[41]

In his attempts to answer the question of the relationship between the individual and socio-political institutions Foucault, as Michael Waltzer argues, 'is more a theorist than a historian, and the materials out of which he constructs his books consist mostly of the written projects and proposals for these sites, the architectural plans, the handbooks of regulations, rarely actual accounts of practices and experiences.'[42] It is not sufficient to simply elucidate the various aspirations of different modalities of power. The problem remains

[40] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972; London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 55-6.
[41] Ibid. p.90.
[42] Michael Waltzer, 'The Politics of Michel Foucault', in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p.58.

that, despite Foucault's indication that the distinguishing feature of modern modes of power is their positively coercive aspect, he leaves the lived experiences of individuals subjected to the various institutionalised mechanisms of power, such as the family, education and the work place, largely unexamined. However, it seems to me that there is a way of filling this gap, particularly when we consider the fact that Foucault's conception of discourse can be understood as describing the forces that conspire to shape any given social role from housewife to detective. It is not difficult to see how Foucault's conception of discourse, as a not necessarily fully articulated body of rules that act as a guiding principle of action for the enactment of any given social function, can be read as an implicit factor in the narratives of Ishiguro's texts. Ishiguro's novels, therefore, can be said to articulate a fictional mode of addressing this lack of experiential analysis in Foucault's writing.

It is my contention that each of Ishiguro's narrators is bound to a core identity based on discourse. For instance, in *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ono is concerned to protect his identity as an artist, and in *Never Let Me Go* Kathy's existence as a clone is premised on her fulfilling her role as carer and then organ donor. Her narrative is, in a sense, taken up with negotiating the boundaries of these roles, which will eventually consume her entire life. In *The Remains of the Day*, along with Stevens's waxing lyrical about Englishness comes his obsessive identification of himself with the discourse of the butler. Much of his narrative is taken up with a discussion of what it is exactly that makes a great butler. A similar identification with a particular discourse can be found in the case of the narrators of Ishiguro's other novels. In *When We Were Orphans*, Banks's search for his missing parents is inextricably

entangled in his role as a detective. In *The Unconsoled*, Ryder makes a desperate attempt to fulfil his mission as musician and, in *A Pale View of Hills*, Etsuko's narrative is circumscribed by the limits of the point of view allowed to the housewife and mother. It is this embodiment of discourse - the way in which it situates the subjective consciousness of Ishiguro's narrators in relation to their environments and the consequent compulsion they feel to fulfil its demands - that I have conceptualised as the 'vocational imperative'.

Moreover, the implicit role that discourse plays, over and above the forces of hegemony, in the construction of Ishiguro's writing suggests an understanding of the mechanisms of power, and their part in the formation of subjectivity, which can be seen in terms of an extension of a materialist analysis of everyday existence in capitalist society such as that put forward by Georg Lukács.

Lukács noted that the general condition of life under capitalism is one in which human beings lose a direct sense of the relations existing between them in society. Rather, their direct relations with one another are replaced by relations of property ownership and exchange mechanisms, a process which Lukács refers to as reification. Lukács states that 'the proletariat shares with the bourgeoisie the reification of every aspect of its life.' That is, capitalist society tends to cause the universal objectification of human relationships, in the form of relations between commodities, which effectively dehumanizes social interaction. However, Lukács comments on the fact there is a great difference between the way in which the members of the various classes in society experience this phenomenon. He refers to the observation of Karl Marx that

> The property-owning class and the class of the proletariat represent the same human self-alienation. But the former feels at home in this self-alienation and feels itself confirmed by it; it recognises alienation as its own instrument and in it it possesses the semblance of a human existence. The latter feels itself destroyed by this alienation and sees in it its own impotence and the reality of an inhuman existence.[43]

Marx's analysis clearly divides the different experiences of the dehumanising aspects of capitalist society along the lines of class. As Lukács asserts, the origins of such a situation are to be found in the transformation of labour into a commodity, a possession that can be bought and sold, the effect of which 'removes every "human" element from the immediate existence of the proletariat'.[44] This removal of the human from such a commodified existence is part of a process that also progressively eliminates 'everything "organic", every direct link with nature from the forms of society so that socialised man can stand revealed in an objectivity remote from or even opposed to humanity.'[45] Consequently, instead of being based on a direct relationship with the natural world, social cohesion comes to be made entirely from relations between people as bearers of labour power. This labour power then becomes objectified in the relationship between one commodity and

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[43] Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *The Holy Family* (1844; Stuttgart: Herausgegeben von Franz Mehring, 1902), p.132, in Georg Lukács, 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', in his *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (1968; London: Merlin Press, 1971), p.149.
[44] Georg Lukács, 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', in his *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (1968; London: Merlin Press, 1971), p.176.
[45] Ibid. p.176.

another. According to Lukács, it is 'in this objectification, in this rationalisation and reification of all social forms that we see clearly for the first time how society is constructed from the relations of men with each other'.[46]

For Lukács, it is in this rise to visibility of the construction of society from the relations of men with each other that the hope for the dialectical development of the proletariat's potentially liberating self-knowledge originates. This potentially enlightening process 'begins with knowledge of the present, with the self-knowledge of its own social situation and with the elucidation of its necessity (i.e. its genesis)'.[47] It is essential that the proletariat that wishes to comprehend the nature of its social situation understands that the concepts current in social discourse, which seem only to describe that existence, are actually one of the forces that shape it. It is vital that, to them, 'all the categories in which human existence is constructed must appear as the determinants of that existence itself (and not merely of the description of that existence)',[48] and that 'their succession, their coherence and their connections must appear as aspects of the historical process itself, as the structural components of the present.'[49] That is, the proletariat must understand that the conceptual make-up of social discourse, the sequence and internal order of its categories is, as described by Marx, 'determined by the relation which they bear to one another in modern bourgeois society, and which is the exact opposite of what seems to be their natural order or the order of their historical development.'[50]

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[46] Ibid. p.176.
[47] Ibid. p.159.
[48] Ibid. p.159.
[49] Ibid. p.159.
[50] Karl Marx, *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*, trans. N. I. Stone (1859; New York: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1904), p.304, in Georg Lukács, 'Reification and the

The hoped for resolution to this conceptual confusion and the painful condition of alienation created by the reification of human relationships is found in the raising of the proletariat's consciousness of its condition as a class through the struggle to ameliorate the contradictions inherent in capitalist society that it embodies in its daily life. The essential point is that Marx (and Lukács) see this dialectical process as a function of opposing class interests in society. However, I want to suggest that Ishiguro goes one step further than both Marx's theory and Lukács's account of reification by constructing his narrators in a way that depicts the human condition as being that of the complete internalisation of the contradictions of capitalism within the individual. This can be seen in the fact that the narratives of each one of his narrators demonstrate that, through their entrenched identification with a given discourse, they embody in a single character both aspects of Marx's description of the experience of alienation quoted above. That is, they are both validated as possessing 'a semblance of human existence' *and* destroyed as human beings by virtue of their identification with a particular discourse. Moreover, they fail to attain the 'correct' view of the discursive concepts and practices that dominate their existences. Thus, what was for Marx the dialectic of class conflict and, for Gissing, (according to Jameson) the intractable alienation of the subject, becomes, for Ishiguro, the internalised dialectic of the postmodern capitalist subject, whose relation to a clear dialectical development of self-consciousness is at best ambiguous, at worst non-existent. This situation is symptomatic of the increasingly penetrating forces of global capitalism and its tendency not simply to exploit, materially

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Consciousness of the Proletariat', in his *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (1968; London: Merlin Press, 1971), p.159.

impoverish and ideologically dominate some in favour of others, but rather to colonise the psyche of human beings in the postmodern world.

Having noted the disciplinary nature of the discourses permeating modern society, it is worth considering the effect of this in shaping what Gramsci referred to as 'the spiritual consciousness of men'. Zygmunt Bauman's critique of the effect of modernity on the moral self is particularly enlightening in this regard.

Modern society, according to Bauman, is a simultaneous mix of what he terms *socialisation* and *sociality*, and consequently, has two main ways in which it functions to undermine the moral self. He describes the difference between these two factors in terms of their effect on the moral self as being the difference 'between replacing morality with *discursive* rules, and replacing morality with *aesthetics*.'[51] The first is the replacement of spontaneously felt moral impulses with ethical rules. Bauman traces the process by which any deviation from standardised conduct is eliminated in highly organised, modern society. Based on the assumption that 'the most orderly society will be one in which idiosyncrasy of the individual's motivations is deprived of all influence on his or her actions' and on the 'reasonable expectation that most of its denizens most of the time will follow a uniform ethical code,' it follows that 'measures are to be taken first to reduce or eliminate the impact of moral impulses, always – irreparably – so personal, so obstreperous, so unpredictable.'[52] These measures include the instantiation of a social structure characterised by repetitiousness, monotony and predictability which 'may only exist as a continuous, perpetual product of the 'socialising'

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[51] Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p.119.
[52] Ibid. p.123.

pressure.'[53] In this process, the individual's authentic moral responsibility is replaced by a responsibility to follow the rules. Adherence to the ethical/legal codes of society is then regarded as a virtue.

The second factor discussed by Bauman is the participation of the individual in the mass of society. The sheer 'massness' of modern society swamps the capacity for individual moral responsibility at the same time as it promotes a sense of collectiveness. In the crowd there is only the sense of the present moment without reference to history or responsibility. As Bauman puts it, the 'crowd may intoxicate itself with images of another world, but it does not set itself that image as a goal, a task, a work to be done (being a crowd, it is not capable of 'doing work' anyway); it thereby cancels its own future'.[54] This phenomenon of modern life divests the individual of the capacity for effective moral agency by undermining the ability to relate to any moral issues on a personal level. In short, according to Bauman, while 'socialisation replaces moral responsibility with the obligation to obey procedural norms, in the crowd the question of responsibility never arises', and, although these two aspects of modern society seem to be contradictory, as 'far as morality is concerned, the two outcomes are much the same.'[55] In the case of Ishiguro's fictions, the narratives not only incorporate the mechanisms of hegemony and discourse but also trace the moral dispossession of the subject in the reified atmosphere of a discursive mass society. Such dispossession of straightforward moral sense accounts for the oblique way in which Ishiguro's narrators encounter the tragedies of their existences. Nevertheless, the degree of self-awareness they evince varies

[53] Ibid. p.123.
[54] Ibid. p.131.
[55] Ibid. p.132.

considerably. For instance, Stevens only comes to terms with the cost of his identification with his role as a butler after a lifetime of serving the wrong cause but, at least before the close of his narrative, he has some sense of what he has lost. Ryder, however, does not seem to have any comprehension of the causes of the ruination of his personal life, his relationship with his wife and son. He seems, rather, to simply live the crises engendered by the conflicting demands on his time. And in *Never Let Me Go*, Kathy's subdued reflection on her past and future reveal hardly anything more than an implicit sense of her harrowing state of mind.

The strength of the identification of Ishiguro's narrators with their roles and the complicated psychological effects of it on their subjectivity and their impaired capacity for reflective critical judgement betokens assumptions about the effect of the forces of hegemony, discourse and socialisation on the psychological development of ordinary people who must survive within, and who are worked on by, these forces. These assumptions are worth considering in light of Freud's notion of the super-ego. Freud asserts that during the process of cultural adaptation imposed on an individual as a matter of necessity, his natural aggressiveness is 'introjected, internalised; it is, in point of fact, sent back to where it came from – that is, it is directed towards his own ego.' Once re-directed, this aggression is 'taken over by a portion of the ego, which sets itself over against the rest of the ego as super-ego,' and 'in the form of 'conscience', is ready to put into action against the ego the same harsh aggressiveness that the ego would have liked to satisfy upon other, extraneous individual.'[56] Freud's basic contention is that civilisation

[56] Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930; London: Hogarth Press, 1972), p.60.

'obtains mastery over the individual's dangerous desire for aggression by weakening and disarming it and by setting up an agency within him to watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city.'[57] In simple terms, first 'comes renunciation of instinct owing to fear of aggression by the *external* authority' and, later, 'comes the erection of an *internal* authority, and renunciation of instinct owing to fear of it – owing to fear of conscience.'[58]

Importantly, Freud also recognised that in 'the formation of the super-ego and the emergence of a conscience innate constitutional factors and influences from the real environment act in combination.'[59] This acknowledgement of the collusion of both internal and external factors in the formation of an individual's conscience is significant. It means that Freud's account of the super-ego is more than merely the description of the genesis of an internally repressive psychological force based on the perverse re-direction of aggressive energy. The description of the collusion of internal and external factors makes it clear, rather, that the super-ego has an assimilative, as well as a repressive, function. This assimilative function is captured well in Freud's original description of the phenomenon of the super-ego as an 'ego-ideal'.

The notion of an ego-ideal, that is, the image of an exemplary personality set up in the mind as something to which the ego should aspire, suggests that an aspect of the innate psychological constitution of human beings is assimilative rather than simply repressive. Freud recognised this aspect of the dynamics of the psyche and its complementary relationship to

[57] Ibid. p.60-1.
[58] Ibid. p.65.
[59] Ibid. p.67.

the repressive forces of internalised authority when he stated that, by 'means of identification' an individual 'takes the unattackable authority into himself.'[60] Despite Freud's emphasis on the psychological dynamics of the family, it seems to me that there is no logical reason for limiting the reach of this propensity for the assimilation of values to those imposed in specific individual relationships, for example, that with the father. Rather, the relationship with the father, existing as it does within the institution of the family, can be seen as one of the mediums through which the assimilation of social values is made possible. In other words, Freud's description of the process of identification with authority, which establishes an ego-ideal, constitutes an acknowledgement of the internal integration of the positivistic, coercive forces of social power. These forces shape and direct the personality in ways that are consonant with them. The concept of the super-ego, as Freud's preferred description of this double-edged psychological dynamic, thus implicitly includes an understanding of the processes by which the deep internalisation of the values of society and particular discourses occur. There is no reason why this psychological trait should not be seen as a much more broadly adaptive phenomenon that, on the level of ordinary life, facilitates the assimilation of social values generally. This understanding of psychological processes complements Gramsci's notion of the development of public common sense. Once the prevailing values of a society are imbibed, they become the criteria for both the internally repressive aspect of the super-ego and for perceptual assessments of the social environment. Thus, I have coined the term 'interpretive consonance' as a way of conceptualising this

[60] Ibid. p.66.

latter phenomenon. Interpretive consonance essentially refers to the act of interpretation normally carried out by ordinary people in their attempts to gain an understanding of, and negotiate, the politics of everyday life. It is the means by which the common sense values of society are, to borrow a phrase of Freud's, instituted in the mind. In Ishiguro's fictions, the fact that the narratives reveal the processes of their own formation can be seen as an undertaking that resembles the process of psychoanalysis itself. In a sense, the narrators enact the psychoanalytic drama by very nearly deconstructing their own super-egos and inadvertently revealing the broader networks of power installed there.

Combining Freud's insights with those of Gramsci, Bauman and Foucault allows us, therefore, to re-consider the experiential dynamics of ordinary people in the postmodern era. The consequences for the individual of the internalisation of institutionalised social values are serious. In effect, it constitutes the replacement of personal morality with something akin to law-bound ethical standards. The tendency to transform personal morality in this way, when combined with the necessity of fulfilling the demands of vocational discourse as a condition of participation in society, can be summarised in the notion of a 'vocational imperative'.

It seems to me that Ishiguro's writing involves a unique approach to this complex of issues. The combination of the prevalence of discourse, mass society and the tendency to replace moral agency with adherence to ethical rules is a nexus of conflicts at the core of the subjectivity of his first-person narrators. However, this is a situation which is complicated by the fact that, in his approach to historical forces, Ishiguro traces the shift of these conflicts

over into the postmodern era of global capitalism. His implicit understanding of the change in historical dynamic is marked out by the ubiquitous presence of the shadow of the Second World War in his narratives. Moreover, the comments of Ma, Lewis and Parkes are symptomatic of a common cognition of Ishiguro's sensitivity to what Bauman refers to as the withering away of national, ethnic, and historically generated identities in the era of postmodern capitalism. Bauman states that, 'Globalisation' is not about what we all, or at least the most resourceful and enterprising among us, wish or hope *to do*. It is about *what is happening to us all*.'[61] Ishiguro's writing seems to indicate that the coming of mass society followed by the gradual destruction of the ordering powers of the state through the growth of global capitalism, and the destruction of conventional sources of identity, such as nationality, ethnicity and so on, has greatly impaired the development of a revolutionary class consciousness through the dialectical process. This is because labour as a commodity, and consequently class consciousness itself, has been subsumed within the universal, disciplining and particularising power of discourse. In the chaotic, unstable, postmodern globalised world, Ishiguro's characters are left with no choice but to use vocational discourse as a source of identity and to attempt to negotiate the vicissitudes of life in its terms. The force of this recurring theme in Ishiguro's writing, therefore, implies a study of the crises of postmodern existence inherited from modernity.

In the following chapters I discuss the genesis and nature of the habitual tendency of Ishiguro's characters to negotiate their existence in terms of the vocational imperative. This is a feature of Ishiguro's writings that

[61] Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalisation: The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p.60.

becomes visible in a variety of ways, in for instance, Stevens choosing not to attend to his father on his deathbed, or Christopher Banks's having to choose between being a detective and running away with Sarah Hemmings. Alternatively, it becomes visible in the permanent state of crisis in which Ryder finds himself as he struggles unsuccessfully to fulfil his professional role in *The Unconsoled*. It is manifest in the narrative of Kathy, in *Never Let Me Go*, whose consciousness barely encroaches on the limits set on her ability to think beyond the fulfilment of the mission set out for her by others. In order to embed the above argument, and the concepts of 'interpretive consonance' and 'vocational imperative' in the specifics of each narrator, I have dedicated one chapter to a discussion of each novel, in chronological order. Therefore, the concepts outlined in this opening chapter need to be borne in mind when considering each chapter that follows.

Chapter 2

A Pale View of Hills:

Hegemony and Interpretive Consonance

Born in Nagasaki in 1954, Kazuo Ishiguro, who moved to Britain with his family at the age of six, had two sisters, one born in Japan, the other born in England. Like his own mother, Etsuko, the narrator of his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), is the mother of two daughters, one born in Nagasaki, Japan, shortly after the end of the Second World War and the other born later in England. Widowed or divorced (we are never informed which), Etsuko is living in England when a visit from Niki, her youngest daughter, unintentionally prompts her to begin a process of reflection related to the recent suicide of her eldest daughter, Keiko. Her recollections are centred on a short-lived friendship that she developed with a woman named Sachiko and her daughter, Mariko, in Nagasaki shortly after the dropping of the atomic bomb on that city. As the narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that Etsuko has conflated the history of the relationship between Sachiko and Mariko with that of her own later relationship with Keiko, with whom she was pregnant at the time. This allows her to obviate a direct confrontation with the fact that her own distressed and abusive behaviour in the aftermath of the atomic bomb may have played a significant part in the development of the depression that eventually led to Keiko's suicide. The actual atomic explosion and its consequences are hardly mentioned, the effect of which is to generate an intense background atmosphere to the narrative.

Given the seeming similarity between elements in the story and some of the facts of Ishiguro's life, it is difficult to reject the idea that *A Pale View of Hills* was written under the influence of these historical circumstances on his personal experience. However, there is a limit to the usefulness of this biographically fuelled approach: Ishiguro himself has avoided the temptation to categorize his writings as either characteristically Japanese or as historically accurate. An article based on a recent interview with him suggests that he

> felt that the shadow of the bomb induced respectfulness in reviewers and 'even gaps in my imagination of [sic.] knowledge were taken for commendable restraint in the handling of potentially sensational material'. But the story was never 'about' the bomb or Japan and he was more concerned that the ending, where the narrator conflates her story with that of another woman from her own past, was 'a little too baffling.'[1]

This last reference, to the moment of confusion at the close of Etsuko's narrative, when she calls Sachiko's daughter, Mariko, by the name of her own daughter, Keiko, tellingly indicates Ishiguro's subtle use of the device of the unreliable narrator. But my own point is that Ishiguro's evasion of the question of the relevance of his biography to an understanding of the text, and his concerns over the effect of his 'gaps in knowledge' on his readers, serve only

[1] Nicholas Wroe, 'Living Memories', *The Guardian Review*, 19 February 2005, 23.

to highlight the puzzle posed by the unique combination of the historical and the personal in Etsuko's narrative.

In his discussion of the 'Japaneseness' of Ishiguro's writing, Barry Lewis comes to the conclusion that the Japan about which Ishiguro writes in *A Pale View of Hills* is 'a recreation of an original that probably never existed', and that it 'is not primarily historical, though it may be accurately located in history. It is a purely functional Japan that serves as the background for Ishiguro's thematic preoccupations. In sum, it is a fictional Japan, and it is as fiction that it deserves to be appraised, rather than as social documentary.'[2] This notion of the primarily fictional nature of Ishiguro's Japan is complicated by his own acknowledgement of the influence of Japanese cinema on his writing. Ishiguro has stated that 'Cinema is the one area of Japanese 'culture' which I believe has had a direct effect on my writing'.[3] Gregory Mason has argued that 'Japanese films have modelled a setting and a style that have inspired Ishiguro very strongly'; from 'his privileged stance as insider/outsider, he has fashioned Japan into a metaphor for the broader ironies of history.'[4] According to Mason, both *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World* are heavily influenced by a form of Japanese film called *shomin-geki*, a genre of domestic drama that began in the 1920s.[5] The focus of *shomin-geki* is the mundane, everyday life of ordinary people and it combines an element of melancholy and farce. Mason suggests that the 'unself-conscious mundaneness of the *shomin-geki*...provides Ishiguro [with] the model he

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[2] Barry Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp.23-25.
[3] Clive Sinclair, 'The Land of the Rising Son', *Sunday Times Magazine*, 11 January 1987, 36.
[4] Gregory Mason, 'Inspiring Images: The Influence of the Japanese Cinema on the Writings of Kazuo Ishiguro', *East-West Film Journal*, 3/2 (1989), 39.
[5] Ibid. p.45.

needs of a "normal" Japan.'[6] Not only that, but the *shomin-geki* also provides a structural model of relative plotlessness and a 'domestic configuration of conflict between parents and children in an extended family setting with certain comic overtones.'[7] Moreover, Mason notes other features of *shomin-geki* that are also present in Ishiguro's novels, such as a sense of transience, wistfulness and regret.

Mason points out that the heyday of the *shomin-geki* was between the 1920s and 1950s, and that the aftermath of the Japanese defeat in the Second World War was clearly visible in them after 1945. The films' emphasis on the domestic and familial was a response to the disillusionment of a nation that had followed the process by which 'the long-standing feudal ideal of loyalty to one's lord had been transformed into the ideals of patriotism and nationhood'[8] through to its bitter conclusion. The popularity of the *shomin-geki* was based on a reaction to the state of Japan after the Second World War, and its influence on Ishiguro is an indication of the oblique way in which his writing could be said to have captured one aspect of Japanese history. This influence of Japanese films, then, is an indication of one of the origins of the 'Japaneseness' of Ishiguro's writing. However, as Mason points out, the *shomin-geki* tended to be tolerant, if not indulgent, towards a certain nostalgia for the wartime military camaraderie, whereas Ishiguro 'came of age after the watershed of Japanese military defeat and adopts a more critical stance.'[9] Ishiguro's personal history creates a distance in space as well as time. His move to the West has meant that 'the cultural upheaval and reorientation of

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[6] Ibid. p.45.
[7] Ibid. p.45.
[8] Ibid. p.47.
[9] Ibid. p.48.

post-war Japan furnishes Ishiguro a rich metaphor for a world in transition', and that from 'a rare Western perspective, familiar with but removed from traditional Japanese experience, he is able to explore the psychological and ethical dilemmas common to both cultures'.[10] This broader metaphorical aspect of the role that Japan plays in Ishiguro's writings is also an indication of the fact that the Japan about which Ishiguro writes is primarily both fictional and functional - fictional in the sense that it is a Japan that exists primarily in his imagination, and functional in the sense that it provides a starting point for Ishiguro's grasp of more widespread trans-national human concerns.

Ishiguro's assimilation of the elements of the *shomin-geki* enable him to maintain a sense of historical authenticity while avoiding the temptation to attempt a reproduction of historical reality by means of an objective narrative based on fact. Moreover, Mason points out that, in the *shomin-geki*, there is a sense in which the domestic sphere of post-war Japan was seen as the last bastion of the traditional values that had been discredited by the war. He argues that whereas 'the Japanese people in defeat largely wrote off their ill-fated past and energetically adopted the new values imposed by the American occupation, Ishiguro adopts a more problematic stance'.[11] In his representation of the opposition between the forces of retreat into the traditional domestic sphere and those of an enthusiastic engagement in the incoming values of American capitalism and democracy 'Ishiguro blends the humanism and objectivity of the *shomin-geki* with the revealing inner dimensions of the subjective novel.'[12] The result is that in 'so doing, he has succeeded in creating a psychologically probing dramatization of personal

[10] Ibid. p.48.
[11] Ibid. p.48.
[12] Ibid. p.50.

motives within his characters which is both realistically situated and psychologically distanced.'[13] In fact, not only does Ishiguro create a psychologically convincing illustration of personal motivation but he also has an understanding of the wider historical causes and implications of such motives and behaviour. According to Mason, this broader historical perspective implicit in Ishiguro's writing is a demonstration of the way in which he 'has put his Japanese to work at the service of his craft as a Western writer to create a distinctively personal style of unusual resonance and subtlety.'[14]

Ishiguro's use of the narrow perspective of first-person narrative incorporates a sense of the processes of historical change as a deep internal, structural, dimension of an imagined text. Indeed, Ishiguro's use of the processes of historical change can be seen as one element of what Barry Lewis refers to as the 'thematic coherence' of his 'fictive' work.[15] As Ishiguro himself has said: 'What I started to do was to use history....I would look for moments *in* history that would best serve my purposes, or what I wanted to write about.'[16] Ishiguro uses historical facts as and when they are convenient for the coherent explication of his thematic concerns. In short, far from being a historical novelist in the traditional sense, Ishiguro's attitude to history itself is anything but straightforward and suggests the necessity of a more subtle reading of the historical aspects of the novel. It is my contention that Ishiguro's understanding of history manifests itself in terms of the personal experience of cultural change that is expressed in the first-person narrative of

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[13] Ibid. p.50.
[14] Ibid. p.51.
[15] Barry Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.26.
[16] Kazuo Ishiguro and Oe Kenzaburo, 'The Novelist in Today's World: A Conversation', *Boundary*, 18/3 (1991), 115.

the text, and his skill is in conveying the universality of that experience for people caught in the same historical moments.

In this context, Gramsci's notion of hegemony can be used as a conceptual starting point for gaining an understanding of Ishiguro's construction of Etsuko's narrative. As the last chapter indicated, Gramsci defines hegemony as the common sense dispersal of the values which maintain the position of the dominant class throughout civil society; as such hegemony provides 'a unity of faith between a conception of the world and a corresponding norm of conduct.'[17] In other words, hegemony, as a unified conception of society and the individual's place in it, establishes common sense assumptions about social organisation and normal behaviour in the minds of ordinary people. These assumptions can be seen clearly in relation to the various roles that are performed by members of a society, particularly in the wake of some kind of social upheaval. For instance, Ishiguro's imagination of post-Second World War Japan, expressed through a first-person recursive narrative, is replete with Etsuko's anxious negotiation of the destruction of Japanese hegemony, based on an adherence to tradition and hierarchical family relationships, and her required adaptation to invading Western democratic values that promote the autonomy of women. Brian Shaffer's comment that there are hints in the text that 'Etsuko's narrative of Sachiko's motherhood is a way of talking about her own anxiety, depression, and feelings of inadequacy regarding her then-impending motherhood'[18] can be

[17] Roger Simon, *Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction* (1982; London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1991), p.59.
[18] Brian W. Shaffer, *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), p.22.

placed within the context of this wider social change, or, more precisely, hegemonic transition.

The effect of this hegemonic transition is conspicuously revealed at the very beginning of Etsuko's narrative, when she notes that the name of her youngest daughter, Niki, was a compromise between herself and the girl's English father: 'paradoxically it was he who wanted to give her a Japanese name, and I - perhaps out of some selfish desire not to be reminded of the past - insisted on an English one.' (*PV* p.9) However, reminding Etsuko of the past is precisely the function that Niki fulfils. Not only is she curious about the past, asking questions about what Nagasaki was *really* like, but her very name is itself an expression of the post-war social history of Japan.

Niki's presence also leads Etsuko to recall her experiences of life in post-war, and post-atomic bomb, Nagasaki. As her reflections intertwine her recollections of her own experiences with her view of the lives of those around her it becomes clear that, in this personal aspect of the narrative, Ishiguro has constructed a symmetrical relationship between Etsuko, Sachiko, Keiko and Mariko. Sachiko becomes a reflection of Etsuko's past behaviour, and her destructive relationship with Mariko connects Etsuko inescapably with her guilt over her treatment of Keiko. For Etsuko, remembering Sachiko is a cautious endeavour to assimilate, and reconnect with, the consequences of the traumatised relationship between herself and Keiko, which was itself a consequence of the experience of social devastation. Despite the fact that she attempts to dismiss the significance of what she relates by saying 'I never knew Sachiko well. In fact our friendship was no more than a matter of some several weeks one summer many years ago' (*PV* p.11), the effect of

remembering this short-lived friendship from the past proves powerful enough to illuminate her preoccupations in the present.

Psychologically this symmetry can be interpreted as Ishiguro's use of a type of unconscious projection or transference. However, rather than seeing the Freudian notion of transference as a clinical relationship, in which the patient projects childhood anxieties or neuroses onto the analyst, Ishiguro seems to consider it as a normal psychological condition in which any unacceptable desires, emotions or even deeply held beliefs are projected onto things or people in one's environment and, as in the case of Etsuko, shape one's memories of the past. This type of transference is not limited simply to 'the tendency of the unconscious to interpret present experiences and relationships as repetitions of earlier ones',[19] but facilitates the appropriation of language by any number of *currently unconscious elements*, and gives them access to consciousness. From this perspective, Etsuko experiences a return of the repressed elements of her relationship with Keiko through a reading of her own memories that is conditioned by her ingestion of traditional Japanese hegemonic values. It is a reading reminiscent of Freud's comparison of the mind's perception of its own machinations 'to the perception of the external world by means of the sense organs.'[20] On a personal level, her remembered experience of her friendship with Sachiko and Mariko helps Etsuko to grieve over her madness after the bombing of Nagasaki; her guilt at her consequent treatment of Keiko; and her shame and self-blame for Keiko`s suicide.

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[19] Christopher Badcock, *Essential Freud*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p.107.
[20] Sigmund Freud, 'The Unconscious', 1915, Pelican Freud Library, XI, p.172.

Conversely, as Cynthia F. Wong has noted, as Etsuko recalls her own personal history, her 'augmenting knowledge of the past provokes the reader toward a gradual move toward disclosure, ... or unworking, of the wartime past remembered by Etsuko',[21] and a first-person narrative that is shaped by the forces that are attempting to reconstruct society becomes the voice of many. Ishiguro generates the feeling of Etsuko's at least partial awareness of this complicated process by having her state that 'memory, I realize, can be an unreliable thing; often it is heavily coloured by the circumstances in which one remembers, and no doubt this applies to certain of the recollections that I have gathered here.' (*PV* p. 156) In his construction of Etsuko's narrative, therefore, Ishiguro is not simply, as Brian Shaffer argues, alluding to 'projection and rationalisation, both of which, like repression, are defense mechanisms of the ego.' [22] Rather, Etsuko's narrative could be seen as a gigantic parapraxis, a personal subconscious narrative that through a process of reflection on the deep and enduring connections between personal loss and social devastation inadvertently reveals the unity of personal experience and social hegemony.

Ishiguro's recognition and utilisation of the hegemonic aspect of the first-person narrative, combined with the type of transference described above, enables him not only to examine 'the wounds of nuclear destruction in the psyches of a few individuals as seen through Etsuko',[23] but to structure Etsuko's recollections in such a way that her account of her own experiences

[21] Cynthia F. Wong, 'The Shame of Memory: Blanchot's Self-Dispossession in Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills*', *Clio: Literature, History and Philosophy of History*, 24/2 (1995),136.
[22] Brian W. Shaffer, *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), p. 24.
[23] Cynthia F. Wong, 'The Shame of Memory: Blanchot's Self-Dispossession in Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills*', *Clio: Literature, History and Philosophy of History*, 24/2 (1995), 138.

is redolent with the experiences of many of those around her at the time of her friendship with Sachiko. In other words, Etsuko's narrative displays the psychological tendency to interpret events in a manner that is consonant with the hegemonic values that form the basis of the way that she functions as a member of society. This incorporation of hegemonic values within the structure of personal identity combined with the tendency towards psychological transference, or viewing the world according to one's self, is a feature of the narrative that I conceptualise as 'interpretive consonance'. By this I mean the tendency of individuals to interpret the experiences of their lives and events in their environments in relation to the values installed in their minds. This concept is also a way of defining that aspect of the psychological realism of Ishiguro's writing that, although not historically factual, engages with the hegemonic values of a particular historical moment. In turn, such an engagement generates a sophisticated first-person narrative that is heavily burdened with historical meaning.

The concept of 'interpretive consonance' is helpful in a discussion of the way in which Ishiguro's narrative investigates both the social extent and the chronological limits of the imposition of values. The narrative provides an implicit critique of the attempt to ascribe meaning and project sets of values both in personal relationships and across the social vista. It is a way of explaining the fact that Ishiguro's construction of Etsuko's view of Sachiko's behaviour is rooted in his account of the reassertion of the hegemony of traditional values based around the family. What Etsuko recognised in the relationship between Sachiko and her daughter Mariko was seen through eyes influenced by the ongoing reassertion of traditional family values with its

accompanying emphasis on the role of women as wives and mothers. This was reinforced by the fact that Etsuko was herself pregnant with Keiko at the time. Ishiguro constrains Etsuko's narrative within the parameters of her anxieties concerning her role as wife and mother. However, because the discourse of wife and mother is not simply personal but is also a social discourse that forms one aspect of the wider hegemony of values, it provides a barometric reading of what is occurring in the rest of society.

Etsuko's recollections reveal that in the immediate aftermath of the attack, there was emphasis on establishing a sense of normality through the reassertion of the pre-existing hegemony of traditional values. In the case of Etsuko, as for many other women, this meant a reversion to the emphasis on domestic and family life. Etsuko ran the home and looked after the children as well as her father-in-law, while her husband, Jiro, went to work. Her subordinate status in the family, and by implication that of other Japanese women at the time, is revealed in her description of a typical evening at home.

While Jiro and Ogata-San were playing chess one evening, they were interrupted by the entrance of a few of Jiro's friends. Given the order 'Etsuko, get some tea for the gentlemen', by her husband, Etsuko dutifully did what she was told. (*PV* p.61) Also, as the consequence of receiving an angry look from her husband, she refrained from taking a seat with the visitors and joining in with their discussion which centred on politics, instead continuing to supply them all with tea and cakes. Through this reversion to such a strict demarcation of roles in the domestic sphere, according to Cynthia Wong, the Japanese found 'a dependable structure in the institution of the family. ... In emulating their symbolic head of state, their emperor, [they stressed] the

importance of solidifying their familial relationships.'[24] This dependable structure, or hegemony, helped provide a sense of stability in the devastated post-war environment of Nagasaki. However, Ishiguro sets this desire for stability up against the democratic disruption of these traditional values by introducing into the domestic scene a discussion of the *newly developing* hegemony.

At one point in the conversation Jiro questioned one of his guests as to the truth of a rumour that his wife voted for a different political party from himself: 'I was told during the last elections, you threatened to beat your wife with a golf club because she wouldn't vote the way you wanted.' Much to the dismay of Etsuko's father-in-law in particular, the man finally admitted that he could not make his wife obey and that it was 'her personal right to vote any way she pleases'. (*PV* p.62) In pre-war Japan, 'women were prohibited not only from voting but also from belonging to political organisations.'[25] At another point in the narrative, Etsuko notes that young couples were beginning to hold hands in the streets. The point is that, through Etsuko's narrative, Ishiguro presents the fact that huge political changes, and more importantly, changes in the social hegemony, deeply affect even the most intimate aspects of everyday life. As Rebecca Suter has noted, ordinary people 'are constantly determined by the historical, social and ideological context in which we live, and we see this more clearly when this context

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[24] Ibid. p.139.
[25] Frank B. Tipton, 'Japanese nationalism in comparative perspective' in *Nation and Nationalism in Japan*, ed. Sandra Wilson (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), p. 151.

changes abruptly; yet we are also responsible for our interactions with this context.'[26]

Given the complex mix of the personal and historical in Etsuko's narrative, it is clearly not enough to read it merely 'as the self-revelation of one woman's madness ... [because to] indicate that Sachiko is Etsuko's alter-ego is to diminish the horrible fact that ... Etsuko was among many women affected by the bombing of Nagasaki.'[27] The dropping of the atomic bomb is never explicitly dealt with in the text. It is only referred to twice, once in reference to Etsuko's madness after the explosion and secondly in a description of the "Peace Park", in which stands a white statue in memory of those killed (*PV* p.137). In the first instance, Etsuko's response to a disaster of such magnitude is brought to the fore when she recalls the occasion on which she asked her father-in-law, Ogata-San, what her behaviour was like in the days following the attack. His response indicates both the scale of the event, and the general reaction to it: '[y]ou were very shocked, which was only to be expected. We were all shocked, those of us who were left. Now, Etsuko, let's forget these things.' (*PV*, p.58). The personal loss of orientation caused by the shock, combined with the social destruction indicated by the ominous phrase 'those of us who were left', was the point of total devastation from which the process of reconstruction began.

Ishiguro's emphasis on Japanese society's reversion to pre-war hegemony ensures that Etsuko's interpretation of the experiences of Sachiko and her daughter, Mariko, is implicitly constrained within the parameters of

[26] Rebecca Suter, '"We're Like Butlers": Interculturality Memory and Responsibility in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*', *Qwerty*, 9 (1999), 248.
[27] Cynthia F. Wong, 'The Shame of Memory: Blanchot's Self-Dispossession in Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills*', *Clio: Literature, History and Philosophy of History*, 24/2 (1995), 136.

her identification of herself with her vocation as wife and mother. In other words, because of the force of hegemony and its tendency to homogenise experience, in her reflections, Etsuko views Sachiko from the standpoint of how well she conforms to the traditional role of wife and mother. What her narrative reveals is Sachiko's failure to live up to the expectations of motherly discourse and her consequent abusive treatment of Mariko as a result of her traumatised psychological condition. Ishiguro makes use of the language of historical experience that transcends individual experience as it expresses it.

The fact that the chaos of traumatised behaviour is the ground upon which the re-establishment of social order is attempted is utilised by Ishiguro in a way that reveals how the proliferation of hegemony occurs. In the construction of Etsuko's narrative Ishiguro is intuitively recognising anxiety over personal behaviour as the embodiment of ideological conflict. It is possible, for example, to interpret Sachiko's behaviour from the point of view of the incoming democratic hegemony being spread by the American occupying forces in Japan at the time, rather than from Etsuko's perspective of anxious incomprehension based on traditional values, a narrative which quite naturally and unconsciously incorporates an implicit critique of Sachiko as a mother whose behaviour towards Mariko seems to be chaotic, neglectful and destructive.

For instance, Etsuko recalls Sachiko's reply to her offer of looking after Mariko while she is away: 'Why, how kind of you. Mariko's quite capable of being left on her own, but if you're prepared to spend a couple of hours with her tonight, that would be most kind.' (*PV* p.68) It is evident that Sachiko was in the habit of leaving Mariko alone quite frequently, despite the child's

protestations which she expressed through her unruly behaviour and difficult questions, such as 'Why do you always go away with Frank-San?...Frank-San pisses like a pig. He's a pig in a sewer.' (*PV* p.85)

Many Japanese women saw the collapse of traditional family values as an opportunity to escape from a suffocating existence. According to Ogata-San, Etsuko's father-in-law, 'A wife these days feels no sense of loyalty towards the household. She just does what she pleases, votes for a different party if the whim takes her. That's so typical of the way things have gone in Japan. All in the name of democracy people abandon obligations' (PV p.65) Sachiko's behaviour could be construed as belonging to those women who refused to comply with the demands of the traditional hegemony as expressed in Ogata-San's complaint.

The sense of guilt and inner conflict felt by both mothers as a result of abandoning their 'obligations', and with it the sense that they are not fulfilling the criteria of good mothering, is summed up by Sachiko's rhetorical question '[d]o you think I imagine for one moment that I'm a good mother to her?' (*PV* p. 171) This kind of neglect became positively destructive on the occasion when Sachiko used a box that Mariko had won at a *kujibiki* stand to drown the little girl's kittens in the river: Mariko 'stood there watching the box float on, her face still expressionless....Mariko began to run again. She ran on some distance along the bank, then stopped again to watch the box.' (*PV* p.168) The expressionless face of Mariko is difficult to read. It is possible that in this moment her mother's irrational destruction of her kittens revived the raw shock of her experience of witnessing a woman drowning her baby in a canal. While they were living in Tokyo, Mariko, having run away from her mother one

morning, was stopped in her tracks by the sight of a woman standing in a canal. According to Sachiko, this woman 'smiled at Mariko' and then 'brought her arms out of the canal and showed us what she'd been holding under the water. It was a baby.' (*PV* p.74) The woman, who reputedly killed herself later, came to haunt Mariko who reported seeing her from time to time. Sachiko's destruction of the kittens represented the destruction of the attachment to things Japanese and was a precursor to her and Mariko's leaving the country with the American soldier Frank which, despite some difficulties, they seem eventually to have succeeded in doing.

Despite the obviousness of it, Etsuko does not want to disclose the fact that Sachiko's story is close to her own. In a similar way to Sachiko, Etsuko married an Englishman and moved away to England, taking Keiko with her. Etsuko admits that she knew that the trip to England would not be good for Keiko, 'I knew all along she wouldn't be happy over here. But I decided to bring her just the same.' (*PVH*, p.176) Gramsci recognises that in order to be able to inhabit a new social and industrial context a 'process of psycho-physical adaptation to specific conditions of work, nutrition, housing, customs, etc' is necessary. But the adaptation 'is not something "natural" or innate, but has to be acquired, and the urban characteristics thus acquired are passed on by heredity or rather absorbed in the development of childhood and adolescence.'[28] Presumably, this is the kind of adaptation that, weighed down by the loss of her biological father, the traumatic childhood implied in Etsuko's narrative and the difficulties of facing life in a different culture, Keiko failed to make. A forceful illustration of Etsuko's feelings about this can be found in the

[28] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), p. 296.

account of her search for Mariko after she had on one occasion run away from her mother's cottage. After eventually locating Mariko Etsuko recalls what happened next: 'I became aware of a separate sound…I stopped to listen, then realised what had caused it; an old piece of rope had tangled itself around my ankle…When I held it up to the moonlight it felt damp and muddy between my fingers.' (PV p.83) This episode clearly relates to Etsuko's guilt over her treatment of Keiko, who committed suicide by hanging herself. In this regard also, Etsuko's fascination with the haunting image of the 'tragedy of the little girl found hanging from a tree' (*PV* p.156) is testament to the powerful way in which Ishiguro has her identify her own treatment of Keiko with the activities of a child murderer loose in the ruins of Nagasaki at the time. His complicated blending of the personal and historical, past and present, encapsulates an apocalyptic vision of human beings left without any social discourse, attempting to survive in the social crater left by the atomic bomb.

Sachiko also convinced herself that she was leaving Japan for America for the well-being of Mariko:

> America is a far better place for a young girl to grow up. Out there, she could do all kinds of things with her life. She could become a business girl. Or she could study painting at college and become an artist. All these things are much easier in America, Etsuko. Japan is no place for a girl. What can she look forward to here? (*PV* p.170)

From this perspective Sachiko's actions, based on the decision to give Mariko much broader opportunities than she had herself, constitute the

behaviour of a good mother who has the best interests of her child at heart. The irony is that this concern has inadvertently sanctified the installation of a democratic hegemony, that is, the American way of life, by means of overwhelming violence, the destruction of social infrastructure and the lives of ordinary people. Thus Ishiguro sets the definition of motherhood provided by two different hegemonies up against one another in a way that frustrates the reassertion of the traditional hegemony and disrupts its enforcement across the social vista. Interpretive consonance can be seen at work here as the internalised ideological structuring of Etsuko's perception of Sachiko's behaviour, and Ishiguro's writing reveals it as a psychosocial dynamic which is most readily comprehended by the exposure of its limitations. Ishiguro's narrator also encounters these limitations in terms of the relationship between past, present and future.

The chronological limitations of the force of interpretive consonance appears in the attempt to project values both forward and backward in time. For instance, the forward projection of values occurs when the older generation attempts to pass on the same values to the younger generation in some way. For instance, Etsuko recalls that Ogata-San, her father-in-law and a former teacher, tried to convince Jiro, her husband, to contact a former school friend of his who had written a magazine article criticising Ogata's, and a colleague's, past actions and implying that the teaching profession was 'well rid of us. In fact, he went so far as to suggest we should have been dismissed at the end of the war.' (*PV* p.31) Ogata-San was proud of what he thought both he and his colleague, Dr. Endo, had achieved. However, Jiro continuously avoided the issue, eventually questioning the value of teaching

children that 'Japan was created by the gods' and that the Japanese 'as a nation were divine and supreme' in the build-up to the Second World War. He concludes that '[s]ome things aren't such a loss perhaps.' (*PV* p.66)

This exchange between Ogata-San and Jiro provides a clear indication of Ishiguro's subtle use of historical material which conveys a sense of the tensions involved in the processes of hegemonic transition. Ogata-San is the embodiment of the values of pre-war Japanese nationalism. His role and attitude as a teacher exemplifies that of those involved in the development of Japan's imperial inclinations during the first half of the twentieth century, a time when the 'ruling elites intended that what children learned in the schools would determine their view of the world, of their nation, of their nation's place in the world, and their place in the nation.'[29] One aspect of this education was that, as Frank B. Tipton notes, Japanese children would memorise the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education, which stated 'Ye, Our subjects, be filial to your parents...pursue learning and cultivate arts...should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the state.'[30]

In the bitterness of Jiro's response to Ogata-San's statements, Ishiguro has captured the sense of betrayal and resentment felt by the younger generation whose view of the world was shaped by such deluded ideas as that of the divinity of the nation, and who paid for them with their lives. However, there is a more subtle and broader sense in which Jiro's response undermines the position of his father.

As Sandra Wilson notes, due to cultural and economic changes in the aftermath of the Second World War '[t]he two 'ideal types' of Japanese in the

[29] Frank B. Tipton, 'Japanese nationalism in comparative perspective' in *Nation and Nationalism in Japan*, ed. Sandra Wilson (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), p. 150.
[30] Ibid. p.151.

pre-war period – the soldier and the farmer – were largely inaccessible' and '[t]he 'salaryman' was the prime contender to take over.'[31] In light of this, Jiro can be read as the embodiment of a new ideal emerging from the ashes, which signals a much wider cultural transformation. Indeed, it could be argued that he embodies a redirection of nationalist forces in the sense that 'the hero of economic nationalism – the post-war 'salaryman' – has in turn become one of the prime stereotypes of the Japanese national character, with his allegedly selfless devotion to the company, endless capacity for hard work, and so on.'[32] I have already noted Gregory Mason's point that Ishiguro's use of the domestic setting is evidence of the influence of post-war Japanese cinema on his writing and is one of the ways in which he seeks to humanise his characters. Ishiguro's aim in using the domestic is to portray his characters as ordinary people, and to escape from the typical stereotype of the suicidal Japanese. Indeed, an effect of the fact that Ishiguro has situated this exchange between Ogata-San and Jiro in a domestic setting is that it humanises the relationships between what could be perceived as two stereotypical viewpoints while simultaneously emphasising the influx of political upheavals into the sphere of family relationships, a common experience of hegemonic transition which can be recognised across cultural barriers. My argument is that the reason why this particular episode is so striking is because it clearly demonstrates the failure, or chronological limitations, of what I have termed 'interpretive consonance.' Ogata-San fails to ensure the internalisation of imperial values in his son's generation.

[31] Sandra Wilson, 'Rethinking nation and nationalism in Japan' in *Nation and Nationalism in Japan*, ed. Sandra Wilson (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), p.16.
[32] Ibid. p.20.

Ishiguro uses the same device in the way he structures Etsuko's relationship with her daughter, Niki. Paradoxically, even after she left Japan, the tendency to cling to traditional values remained deeply entrenched in Etsuko`s psyche. Later, in England, in the narrative present, when she attempts to encourage her daughter to follow traditional family values, they have a disagreement. Niki, when pressed on the issue of marriage to her boyfriend, states that 'so many women get brainwashed. They think all there is to life is getting married and having loads of kids.' She does not understand the significance of her mother's reply that 'in the end, Niki, there isn't very much else' (*PV* p.180). Niki has no intention of marrying her boyfriend, and rejects Etsuko's subtle attempt to maintain her outdated values out of hand.

The lack of forward motion means that Etsuko is left high and dry on the outskirts of historical transition, as was her father–in-law. In both the past and the present of the narrative the older generation finds itself occupying a position of liminality, which is not only cultural but also chronological. The process of cultural transition goes hand in hand with the chronological disjunction of the generation gap and the impossibility of crossing its boundaries. This is what forces the realisation of the repetitiveness of both individual and historical life-processes to the surface in the texts. By virtue of Ishiguro's placement of her in history, Etsuko's narrative cannot help but reveal the limitations of hegemony in its relation to the passage of time. What surfaces in the text at this moment is the recognition that the force of interpretive consonance is no longer enough to convince the younger generation to consent to the same hegemony. Etsuko's attempts to resist acknowledging the part her own behaviour played in the suicide of her eldest

daughter fail and she reluctantly acknowledges that her youngest daughter's values are not her own.

In terms of the backward projection of values, it is Ishiguro's recognition of the anxiety caused by finding oneself on the outer limits of history, as a representative of a hegemony that is no longer the dominant driving force of society that fuels his preoccupation with the question of the reliability, or unreliability, of memory. Among other things, Keiko's suicide heightens Etsuko's sense of the fragmentation and disintegration of an old hegemony and the formation of a new one, a situation that she attempts to manage in an act of remembering that becomes an attempt to preserve her subjective identity.

Despite her radically different present, the continuing entrenchment of traditional family values in her own mind shape her memories and undermines the factual 'truth' of Etsuko's narrative. However, this only makes her narrative unreliable in one sense, that of the reliability of the facts that she relates. In psychological terms her account conveys the deeper realities of her situation and that of many others in Japan, and throughout Europe, at the close of World War Two. Etsuko's narrative reveals that, for Ishiguro, history is the constant motion of hegemonic change lived by ordinary people.

The passage of time reveals the operation of the historical forces that are the reason why Etsuko's view of Sachiko is her repressed and projected view of herself, hence her frequent confusion between the identities of Mariko and Keiko in the narrative. In one episode, while remembering a trip to the harbour that she had taken with Sachiko and Mariko, Etsuko even replaces Mariko's name with Keiko's: 'Keiko was happy that day', she says (*PVH* ,

p.182). In fact, Keiko was not yet born. Etsuko's narrative is reliable in what it reveals about the emotional experience of being on the receiving end of historical forces and the complex self-deceptive psychology that is developed as a result. The passage of time functions as an analyst by breaking the dominance of a particular hegemony, and revealing the functioning of interpretive consonance in the process.

In this complicated array of positions Keiko's suicide, as the catalyst for Etsuko's reflections, is analogous to the atomic bomb in her personal life, throwing her into a chaotic state of mind which she tries to cope with by holding on to the same values, an attempt which is doomed to fail. Etsuko's eventual acknowledgement of change leads implicitly to a coming-to-terms with the past and the present.

Ishiguro's sense of the social forces which are involved in forming Etsuko's identity and the viewpoint of her narrative is made clear by his depiction of her struggle to reassert an identity in the face of the social destruction wrought by war. In her case, the struggle is based on the way in which the attempt to reassert an identity goes hand in hand with the reconstruction of a destroyed society. Ishiguro uses his understanding of these same forces, the relationship between power and subjectivity, in the construction of the identity of his narrators and their identification of themselves with a vocational role. In Etsuko's narrative, this general shaping of narrative viewpoint, or interpretive consonance, which is characteristic of the internalisation of the values of social hegemony is more specifically expressed in terms of the social role to which she has been confined.

As my discussion of Etsuko's submissive attitude to her husband indicates, Ishiguro has, as one aspect of his use of history, encoded an accurate account of a historically verifiable ideological debate in the text. As Frank B. Tipton indicates, a typical feature of nationalist ideology around the world, including imperial Japan, particularly in the context of increasing industrialisation in the approach to the Second World War, was that '[w]omen were, or were supposed to be, confined to the roles of wife and mother, creators of a safe haven from the struggles of the public realm.'[33] And, in a way that reflects Gramsci's notion of hegemony as the dispersal of ideology by means of civil institutions, formal education played a leading role in encouraging a belief in the naturalness and rightness of the idea that a woman's place is in the home. Practically, this meant that, in Japan, for 'girls, the schools inculcated the ideal of woman as 'good wife, wise mother.'[34] This is the role to which Etsuko aspires, and by which she measures every other aspect of her existence. Her narrative is an experiential exploration of what it is like to live the aspect of imperial discourse that impinges directly on women's lives. This experience shapes both her present, and, at least her memory of, her past.

The episode in which Jiro enquires about the truth of the rumour that his friend threatened to beat his wife with a golf club because she voted for a different political party to himself is another case in point. According to Tipton, the 'ban on political activity placed women in the same category as military personnel, teachers, and shrine and temple officers, thus reserving their

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[33] Frank B. Tipton, 'Japanese nationalism in comparative perspective' in *Nation and Nationalism in Japan*, ed. Sandra Wilson (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), p.150.
[34] Ibid. p.151.

energies to serve the state by supporting their families.'[35] The husband who threatened to beat his wife intended to carry out a deeply conservative political act in the face of changing circumstances.

In light of such blatant implications, it is evident that Ishiguro has structured Etsuko's experiences in close relation to the values of imperial ideology. In this sense Etsuko's narrative is laden with ideological allusions. Indeed, it seems that the success of the novel depends very much on an assumption that readers will possess at least a general understanding of these historical forces and will bring it to bear on their reading. If they do not, then the wider significance of Etsuko's seemingly trivial moment of confusion, when she mixes up the identity of Keiko with that of Mariko at the end of the novel, is lost. Keiko's suicide is deeply significant in terms of Etsuko's sense of having failed to live up to the values that have shaped her existence, despite the fact that this was due to the catastrophic effects of the atomic bomb.

Ishiguro's construction of Etsuko's identity as the embodiment of a particular aspect of imperial values, specifically those to do with her intended role as 'good wife, wise mother', can be seen as an expression of his understanding of the way in which the machinery of power impinges on the formation of subjective identity. His subtle use of the processes of hegemonic change that shapes social reality clarifies the way in which the internalisation of values occurs. To put it simply, in the case of Etsuko it can be inferred that, as a girl, she would have been subjected to the kind of education which emphasised her role as homemaker. Moreover, the social forces which

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[35] Ibid. pp.151- 152.

prescribed a particular role to women would have constructed expectations about the way she should behave in family life. In this sense, the enforcement of ideas concerning the role of women, through the spread of social hegemony, would have resulted in the normalisation of this prescribed behaviour. The internalisation of her prescribed role meant that Etsuko came to identify herself with it. In order to describe this subjective identification with a particular socially prescribed role, and the internalised compulsion to fulfil its demands, which can be seen as a major motivating force in Etsuko's narrative, I have coined the term 'vocational imperative'.

Ishiguro's sensitivity extends beyond a simple understanding of the discursive pressures that impinge on the formation of the subjectivity of his narrators to an appreciation of the insistent, coercive boundaries that these pressures impose. Etsuko's narrative does not stray beyond the bounds of the domestic into overt commentary on the state of the world in which she lives. As with Ishiguro's other narrators, the most that she can do is invite the reader to take up her own position and view the implicit commentary that is contained within it. In so doing her memory, in the words of Foucault, functions as one aspect of the 'system that usually makes it possible to snatch past discourse from its inertia and, for a moment, to rediscover something of its lost vitality.'[36] Moreover, Etsuko's narrative also gives an indication of what Foucault refers to as the 'archive' of social discourse, that is, the widely dispersed and inexhaustible configuration of power-related rules that govern the formation of any of the possible statements of an age. According to Foucault, it is

[36] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972; London: Routledge, 2002), p.139.

> not possible for us to describe our own archive, since it is from within these rules that we speak, since it is that which gives to what we can say – and to itself, the object of our discourse – its modes of appearance, its forms of existence and coexistence, its system of accumulation, historicity, and disappearance.[37]

Etsuko's lack of overt critical assessment can be seen as a consequence of the discursive limits set not only by the general possibilities of discourse available in imperial Japan but also by her own subjective identification with her role as 'good wife, wise mother'. In fact, in this sense of remembering, Etsuko's narrative and Ishiguro's writing serves to delineate the features of the archive of imperial Japan, and to illustrate the fact that the archive is felt as a presence whose contours emerge 'in fragments, regions, and levels, more fully, no doubt, and with greater sharpness, the greater the time that separates us from it'.[38] That Ishiguro's writing has tapped into this force with which the discursive possibility of an age is able to shape subjective experience is an indication of the assumptions that underlie the way in which he connects his narrators to their historical context. It is this relation between power and subjectivity that will be the subject of the next chapter.

[37] Ibid. p.146-147.
[38] Ibid. p.147.

Chapter 3

An Artist of the Floating World:

Power and Subjectivity

One of the main themes of Ishiguro's writing is the relationship between ordinary people and the mechanisms of power. His representation of power can be viewed from the standpoint of Michel Foucault's conception of its performative aspect:

> If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse.[1]

Power creates discourse. Power relationships form the use of language. As my discussion in the previous chapter indicated, rather than emphasising the repressive aspects of power, Ishiguro utilises its coercive, creative aspect – particularly the aspect of power that produces discourse – in the way that he shapes the subjectivity of the narrators of his novels. Their reflections on their

[1] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980) in Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 1984), p.61.

present circumstances and memories of the past clearly define the power relationships that have made them what they are.

Ishiguro's work demonstrates this understanding of the dynamic relationship between power and subjectivity by means of an implicit representation of some of the many different ways in which hegemonic power constructs human individuality, and the almost impossible task of attempting to resist these immense socialising forces. As Antonio Gramsci stated, social hegemony is created through

> the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.[2]

In Gramsci's terms, Ishiguro's narrators have internalised power relationships at such a deep level that their identification of themselves with their 'position and function in the world of production' is complete. They have lost the genuine freedom that, in this sense, would allow the open acknowledgement of function *as* function, rather than the identification of *function as self*. Ishiguro's concern is with the experiential aspects of these processes for ordinary people, the constituent members of what Gramsci refers to as 'the great masses'. Through his detailing of his narrators' experiences, Ishiguro provides exemplifications of Gramsci's notion of '"spontaneous" consent' to

[2] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), p.12.

'the general direction imposed' on society, and a critique of the consequences of consenting. In an interview, in 2000, he testified to the fact that,

> I've always been interested in what happens to peoples' values when they have invested all their energies and their lives in the prevalent set of social values, only to see them change...and to see what happens to people when, at the end of their lives, they find that the world has changed its mind about what is good and what is bad. But for this particular individual, it's too late. They had the best intentions, but history has proved them to be either foolish or perhaps even someone who contributed to evil.[3]

That is, as I discussed in my first chapter, Ishiguro's work provides insight into the powerful effect of historical context in the formation of hegemony in the minds of ordinary people, and its role in shaping the way in which people come to invest 'all their energies and their lives in the prevalent set of social values'. More specifically, however, I want to argue, in this chapter and indeed throughout this thesis, that this investment is characterised by the subsumption of personal identity beneath a commitment to the discourse of a particular vocation, historically pertinent and valid at the time in which it is adopted, but not necessarily historically valid for a lifetime.

In *An Artist of the Floating World* Ishiguro makes use of a particular understanding of the way in which socio-economic conditions, as mediated through familial relationships, impact on the development of subjectivity. It is

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[3] Writers Bloc, *Kazuo Ishiguro with F. X. Feeney: Wednesday, October 11, 2000 at the Writer's Guild Theatre, Los Angeles*, http://www.writersblocpresents.com/archives/ishiguro/ishiguro.htm, 17.

an understanding that complements traditional notions of power, such as Gramsci's description of the imposition of ideology from above, with a representation that explicates the subtle way in which a functional identity is taken up by a character under the influence of a combination of various social and psychological factors.

Masuji Ono, a retired artist, is thrown unwillingly into a process of self-reflection when the marriage engagement of his youngest daughter is terminated suddenly. He becomes concerned that this sudden change of heart has a connection with his own previous occupation as a painter of propaganda posters that promoted the rise of Japanese militarism during the Second World War, and that other people may now hold this against his daughter as well as himself. He is concerned about this despite the fact that he seems to have been forgotten by the society which, he believes, once held him in high esteem. When Shintaro, a former student, asks Ono to write a letter confirming that Shintaro had reservations about the work Ono asked him to undertake, Ono's reply indicates exactly the kind of situation that he is in: 'You wish me to write a letter to your committee ... disassociating you from my influence. This is what your request amounts to.' (*AFW*, p.103) Although Ono does not say so in direct terms, it is evident that he feels greatly insulted. He simply looks out at the falling snow while his visitor excuses himself and leaves. Ono's response to such a situation, in order to ensure his daughter's successful marriage, is to seek for a way of nullifying his past. His narrative is an attempt to negotiate his contradictory desire to both get rid of his past and justify it at the same time. This proves impossible. The difficulty of Ono's contradictory position is highlighted on the occasion of the *miai*, a meal with

the family of his prospective son-in-law. In a moment of drunken lucidity, when Ono admits to those present that there are some who believe his 'career to have been a negative influence. An influence now best erased and forgotten', and that his career was 'part of an influence that resulted in untold suffering for our own people' (*AFW* p.123), he succeeds only in confusing his audience.

The result of this contradictory situation is that Ono is thrown unwillingly into a process of self-reflection that, despite his best efforts to deceive himself and others, not only fails to reaffirm his previously held beliefs but also exposes the childhood foundations of the psychological predispositions that eventually led him to use his artistic ability in the way that he did. His narrative reveals both the constituent parts and the process of formation of a final unity of self and function that is the source of his identity: his vocational imperative.

Ishiguro situates the early childhood experiences of Ono's narrative in Japan at the beginning of the twentieth century, a pivotal time in the historical development of that country: according to Japanese historians 'Japan's take-off into sustained modern economic growth occurred in the final years of the nineteenth century and the first decade or so of the twentieth.'[4] This was a time in which Japan was going through a process of intense modernisation and internal reform in which the values and techniques of Western capitalist societies were being rapidly assimilated. By situating his account of the development of Ono's character within this context, Ishiguro is setting the scene for a discussion of the complex way in which economic development produced a more intense kind of disciplinarity by combining growing economic

[4] Jean-Pierre Lehmann, *The Roots Of Modern Japan* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1982), p.174.

force with traditional patriarchal relations. What Foucault stated as being generally true of the nature of capitalist economy and its relationship to the development of a disciplinary society is also of great significance in understanding the impact of these forces on personal development. 'The growth of a capitalist economy,' Foucault argues, 'gave rise to the specific modality of disciplinary power, whose general formulas, techniques of submitting forces and bodies, in short, "political anatomy," could be operated in the most diverse political regimes, apparatuses, or institutions.'[5] One of these institutions is the family. In his representation of the early development of Ono's character, Ishiguro discusses the way in which economic disciplinarity is able to filter through patriarchal family relationships into the developing sense of identity within an individual.

What Ishiguro countenances in Ono's narrative is the fact that one of the fundamental characteristics of a disciplinary society is the reconstruction of familial and personal relationships as institutions of power. This is combined with an understanding of simultaneous tendency for these institutions to particularise individuals functionally and compartmentalise them psychologically. Ishiguro's text constructs Ono's personality and psychological predispositions within a family subjected to uninhibited economic force, a family that was not, therefore, simply a microcosm of society, but an embodiment of the disciplinary forces of a growing capitalist economy.

Ono's reflections on his childhood are centred on his antagonistic relationship with his father, who was a businessman; his narrative reveals the way in which this relationship inadvertently fuelled his determination to

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[5] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison* (1975; London: Penguin, 1991), p.221.

become an artist. One day, on finding that he has wandered into the reception room of his family home, Ono recalls the strictness of his father in relation to the formality surrounding domestic life: 'I was forbidden even to enter the reception room until the age of twelve.'(*AFW*, p.41) The reception room was maintained for formal occasions, business meetings, or making offerings at the Buddhist altar. Ono relates how the fact that he was forbidden to enter this room compelled him to construct an image of it in his mind and, thus, encouraged his artistic imagination to take flight. His father, however, had other plans for him.

Ono reveals that, eventually, he was allowed to enter the reception room, but only on particular occasions: 'when I reached the age of twelve, the "business meetings" began, and then I found myself inside that room every week.'(*AFW*, p.41) These meetings were an attempt to initiate Ono into the mysteries of the business world in preparation for his future role as head of the family business. The intention of Ono's father that he should fulfil this role was clearly at odds with his own ambition to become an artist. The conflicting interests of father and son finally collided when, at the age of fifteen, Ono was invited to the reception room for 'a different kind of meeting.' (*AFW*, p.43) It is evident that this meeting proved to be of great significance to Ono's development.

Ono's father instructed him to bring his paintings to the reception room, and, in an atmosphere of subdued intimidation, proceeded to question him about his artistic ambitions. As the interview progressed, it became obvious that Ono's father was intent on humiliating him as well as destroying his

paintings. Ono recalls that his father was irritated because he had not brought all his paintings to be burned:

> 'Masuji, are you sure all your work is here? Aren't there one or two paintings you haven't brought me?'
>
> I did not answer immediately. He looked up and asked: 'Well?'
>
> 'It's possible there may be one or two I have not brought.'
>
> 'Indeed. And no doubt, Masuji, the missing paintings are the very ones you're most proud of. Isn't that so?'
>
> '...Masuji, gather together the rest of your paintings and bring them to me.' (*AFW*, p.43-44)

There are many possible reasons why Ono's father should behave in this way. However, the reference to pride makes it clear that there was a much deeper emotional dynamic to this situation than simply the destruction of undesirable works of art: the intention of Ono's father was to destroy his feelings of self-worth and independence by means of ritual humiliation that would instil a sense of shame. Ishiguro's development of the dynamics of such a situation, which clarifies the broader implications of such behaviour, can be found in the way in which Ono's father extended his criticism from Ono's desire to become an artist to encompass his entire personality. Recalling the fact that a wandering priest came to the house not long after Ono was born, his father said that this priest had gained deep insight into Ono's heart and warned his parents that Ono had been born with a flaw in his

nature (*AFW*, p.45). His father, at first reluctant to heed the priest's warning, went on to admit that he was wrong to do so:

> 'But then at every stage of Masuji's growing up, I've been obliged to acknowledge that old man's words. It can't be denied, there is a weakness running through our son's character. There's little in the way of malice in him. But unceasingly, we've had to combat his laziness, his dislike of useful work, his weak will.' (*AFW*, p.46)

The ridiculous pomposity of this statement is both half funny and very cruel, and is also a snapshot of the entire history of Ono's relationship with his father. To begin with, his father addressed these comments not directly to Ono, but to Ono's mother, whom he had also called into the reception room. The distancing effect of this kind of discussion is intended to objectify the subject of the conversation and render the sense of judgement more complete by the enforced acquiescence of a third party; neither Ono, who was humiliated, nor his mother, who was involuntarily implicated in the judgement by virtue of her implicit subjection to her husband's authority, dared to disagree directly. The statements of the wandering priest simply proved to be a convenient tool for use in a cynical attempt to borrow the power of religious authority for what was essentially personal criticism.

Although the particular incident being recalled by Ono occurred when he was fifteen, his father's reference to 'every stage' of his development is very revealing. Ishiguro is constructing their relationship as an on-going power struggle that began at a much earlier stage in Ono's life, in which this incident

was simply one more attempt to break Ono's will. This exercise in character assassination provides an insight into the long-term nature of the relationship between father and son, and also the foundations of that relationship.

Ono is portrayed as lazy, weak willed, and with a dislike of '*useful* work'. This is the character that has been projected onto him by his father regardless of his real qualities. Contrary to his father's beliefs, Ono is evidently neither lazy, because he works at his paintings, nor weak-willed, because he is determined to pursue his artistic career however strong his father's opposition may be. The issue of whether or not his work is *useful* is a matter of contention that reveals a point of view extending beyond the bounds of a straightforward personal relationship between father and son; it demonstrates the fact that the issue of parental authoritarianism has its roots in the more widespread social phenomenon of disciplinarity. The specific nature of the criticisms directed at Ono originated in his father's failure to distinguish between person and function. Ono's father did not simply criticise his son's paintings as being useless, but condemned Ono's personality along with them. Ono was rejected along with his paintings and his function, or potential function, as an artist. The son's response took a similar form: what Ishiguro has constructed, in this scene, is not just a relationship with patriarchal authority, but a relationship which, because of the emphasis of Ono's father on the importance of business, instils in him a hatred of businessmen and the discourse of capitalism in general. The hatred generated between them, therefore, is the result of viewing one another as the embodiment of discourses espousing diametrically opposed values.

From the father's point of view, the son's artistic activities are a threat to his ability to carry on the family business that he would eventually inherit. In this confrontation between father and son, Ishiguro has encoded a conflict that travels beyond the boundaries of their personal relationship. Rather than discriminating between the values of art and business, Ono's father did, in Ono's case, what he had done in his own: he identified the discourse with the person. Ono's father, as a businessman whose primary concern was with the creation of material wealth, was 'naturally' inclined to perceive his son's artistic endeavours as useless work. Because of the identification of his own person with business discourse, he failed to perceive the issue as a conflict of values, instead rendering it as an issue of his son's intrinsically lazy character.

Ishiguro further develops this representation of the failure to distinguish between personal characteristics and discourse by means of the portrayal of the subdued malevolence with which his father carried out the destruction of Ono's paintings. This could all, of course, have been done with the future welfare of Ono in mind. It could be claimed that Ono's father was concerned that pursuing an artistic career would make his son unfit for a place in society, and that, therefore, breaking his will through the destruction of his paintings was a necessary attempt to correct this situation. However, one of the consequences for Ono's father of the confinement of his own activities within the boundaries of the discourse of business was a feeling of jealousy towards Ono, who was free to be expressive in a way that his father was not. Here is a glimpse of the way in which the functionally generated identity of Ono's father created an undercurrent of emotional resentment, which, although being implicitly denied, both interfered with their personal relationship and, through

the effect of criticism as discipline, worked to impose on Ono an identification of his self with his art. In this sense, Ono's determination to hold on to his artistic ambitions represents his struggle to maintain his personal integrity in the face of his father's character assassination attempt. For Ono, the survival of his art is synonymous with the survival of his self. Ishiguro's narrator experiences established relationship patterns of a kind that make it hardly surprising that he should develop the habitual psychological tendency to reject reality in favour of a version of events that maintains this identity; it is the reason why Ono's narrative is couched entirely within the context of his artistic ambitions, effectively constructing a discourse of denial that holds unacceptable emotions at bay.

It seems plausible to argue that Ishiguro's representation of Ono's total identification with his artistic abilities is constructed around a negative relationship with his father as a living embodiment of business discourse. This negative relationship set Ono up with certain emotional predispositions that formed the structure of his personal psychology and resurfaced later as both the content of his political ideology and the form of his artistic practice; it also explains the continuation into late adulthood of his tendency to deny the emotions that are incompatible with his limited sense of identity and ignore the personal, social and historical significance of his actions. This becomes clear when Ono recalls a visit that he made to his old acquaintance, Matsuda. The purpose of the visit was to ask Matsuda to answer with delicacy any enquiries that were made concerning their past history in case they had a bad effect on the marriage negotiations of Ono's daughter. Matsuda understood his

reasons: 'You think perhaps I will praise you for things perhaps best forgotten.' (*AFW*, p.94)

The conflict between father and son was also a medium for the transmission of the disciplinary forces of society: by burning his paintings, Ono's father was effectively dumping the full weight of this conflict of values onto his son before he had even entered society. In Ono's case, the invasion of the disciplinarity of business discourse into family space not only forced the transformation of his artistic aspirations into a source of identity: it imposed on him the crushing disciplinarity of the entire social framework. By demonstrating this, Ono's narrative makes a powerful and deep connection between social disciplinarity and personal development. This connection serves as an implicit justification of his later reaction to the politico-economic environment in which he would find himself. It also explains the stages through which he passed before finally articulating his reaction to that environment fully in his propaganda posters. Ono's family, as the embodiment of societal disciplinarity and discourse conflict, provided a microcosmic social arena for the generation of his political and ideological predispositions. Ono was making no idle gesture of defiance when, in response to his father's burning of his paintings, he told his mother: 'The only thing Father's succeeded in kindling is my ambition.'(*AFW*, p.47) Later, the psychological predispositions that are developed by Ono, as a consequence of the impact of these conditions, converge with the various possibilities to be found in their social environments.

Ishiguro goes beyond a straightforward description of the formation of his character's psychological predispositions within the microcosm of the

family into a much more sophisticated explanation of the way in which the potential created through these experiences was eventually released in a social environment; it is necessary to give an account of the way in which the narrative portrays how the maturation of Ono's character occurred as the result of the convergence of his psychological and ideological predispositions with the political and economic milieu of the times.

The gradual process of convergence to be found in the text, and the subtle changes that mark its progress, is revealed in Ono's account of the development of his artistic career. This account reveals a stream of events and relationships that worked, in one way or another, to re-structure Ono's psychological predispositions within the framework of a functional identity; transformed his childhood experiences into his perception of social realities; and prompted his identification of necessary solutions to political and economic problems.

Ono recounts that, in 1913, he moved to a small attic room in the very poor Furukawa district of Tokyo, where he continued to paint. At that time, he had found employment in the art studio of Master Takeda, where, along with fifteen other artists, he produced cheap paintings for export. In reality, Takeda's studio provided the venue for an inauspicious beginning to Ono's illustrious career, where he had to work long hours, in cramped surroundings, for little payment. As Ono states:

> At times, if several commissions came in one after the next, we would be going from day to day dizzy with exhaustion. But for all that, I cannot recall our ever failing to complete a commission on time, and, I

suppose, that gives some indication of the hold Master Takeda had over us. (*AFW*, p.66)

It is at this point in the text, when it seems that Ono was simply struggling to survive in exploitative circumstances, that the first step in the process of convergence is explicated. Ishiguro's linear development of Ono's character towards an embodiment of social discourse is initiated with a subtle elucidation of the way in which Ono's emotional predispositions function in adult relationships in a social context. After leaving the family environment, the processes that were forming Ono's identity continued.

A new work colleague, whose name was Yasanuri Nakahara, had been given the nickname 'the Tortoise' by his fellow workers due to the slow pace at which he carried out his work. Gradually, the Tortoise's fellow workers became more and more resentful about the speed at which he worked, and Ono recalls one particular incident that exemplifies this.

On one occasion, two of Ono's colleagues approached the Tortoise to challenge him about his slowness. The Tortoise tried to defend himself by saying, in a very sycophantic tone, that he found it difficult to produce good quality work at high speed and was endeavouring to learn how to do this from his superior fellow workers. As Ono recalls: 'The Tortoise repeated this plea two or three times over, while his tormentors persisted with their abuse, accusing him of laziness and of relying on the rest of us to do his share of the work.'(AFW, p.68) After a few moments, the abuse became much harsher, and Ono, unable to stand by any longer, intervened. His defence was that the Tortoise was a man of artistic integrity who valued quality over expediency.

This scene has a familiar tone to it. Ono's defence of his beleaguered colleague was the result of his own experience; it was the result of his hearing, in the criticism of the Tortoise as work-shy and lazy, echoes of his father's voice. This thematic recurrence functions in the text as a means of further developing the problem of discourse and identity by re-contextualising a constant emotional dynamic. Ishiguro uses the idea of Ono's sense of the shame and humiliation of the Tortoise both to reinforce the identification of self and discourse and to introduce a sense of the progress of this identity from the state of childhood conflict into an underlying directive force of social integration. In this sense, the preconditioning effect of Ono's discourse-based conflict with his father has become a determining factor in personal relationships.

It is hardly surprising that Ono, haunted by his relationship with his father, befriended the Tortoise and gave him the opportunity to go with him when he left the Takeda firm. Ono's talent had caught the eye of Seiji Morayama, a painter and printmaker, who invited Ono to become his pupil; and Ono, since he considered Morayama to be 'a *true* artist. In all likelihood, a great one,' accepted. (*AFW*, p.71) The result was that both Ono and the Tortoise (after Ono had shown some of his work to Morayama) moved to Morayama's dilapidated villa to continue their studies. While there, Ono was trained in the more decadent style of painting developed by Morayama, whose preferred subjects were women from the pleasure district. Ono recalls that Morayama had 'long abandoned the use of the traditional dark outline to define his shapes, preferring instead the Western use of blocks of colour'. (*AFW*, p.141) Life at the villa, like Morayama's paintings, was also dedicated

to celebrating the ephemeral aspects of life. The drunken parties held there would run on continuously for two days or more. It was here that Ono's psychological and ideological predispositions began to reveal themselves in an unexpected way.

One day, a stranger called at the villa, looking for Ono. His name was Chishu Matsuda, a representative of the Okada-Shingen Society, which held exhibitions that provided a forum for new artists to present their work to the public. Ono was, naturally, very excited at the prospect of participating in such an illustrious exhibition. However, as their conversation progressed, Matsuda made it clear that he was not there simply as an errand-boy for the society:

> Now, Mr Ono, let us forget this exhibition. You must appreciate I do not merely work for the Okada-Shingen as a kind of clerk. I am a true lover of art. I have my beliefs and passions. And when every once in a while I come across a talent that truly excites me, then I feel I must do something about it. I would very much like to discuss certain ideas with you, Mr Ono. Ideas which may never have occurred to you before, but which I modestly suggest will be of benefit to your development as an artist....Please consider my request carefully, Mr Ono. I merely wish to discuss certain ideas with you, that's all. (*AFW*, p.89)

In this subtle, almost seductive, manner, Ono was being drawn into a political arena that would allow his antagonistic personal and ideological predispositions to emerge fully. This meeting was the point at which the process of convergence began in earnest. Through his deepening association

with Matsuda, Ono underwent a gradual but radical transformation that was articulated through the medium of his art; their relationship encouraged the realisation of Ono's latent predispositions by restructuring them in the form of political propaganda. The development of the subject matter of Ono's posters exemplifies this transformation. In the description of these posters, Ishiguro has condensed, within the text, a reflection on the process that is one of the driving forces of the narrative itself.

Despite the fact that Ono is concerned to remember his work strictly in terms of its artistic merit and technique, he cannot avoid revealing the much more sinister influence that his relationship with Matsuda had on the content and the form of what he painted. For instance, while being taken through one of the poorest parts of the city by Matsuda, Ono witnessed the following scene:

> ...I noticed three small boys bowed over something on the ground, prodding at it with sticks. As we approached, they spun round with scowls on their faces and although I saw nothing, something in their manner told me they were torturing some animal. Matsuda must have drawn the same conclusion, for he said to me as we walked past: 'well, they have little else to amuse themselves with around here.' (*AFW*, p.167)

As they were approaching this area of the city, Matsuda had also pointed out that the squalor of these places was rarely seen by businessmen or politicians who were careful to keep their distance. This was evidently a deliberate ploy

on the part of Matsuda to share his ideas with Ono, and the result of this became clear later on. A few days later Ono produced a painting entitled 'Complacency'. In this painting, he portrayed the three boys in a way that, as he says:

> … differed from their models in one or two important respects. For although they still stood in front of a squalid shanty hut, and their clothes were the same rags the original boys wore, the scowls on their faces would not have been guilty, defensive scowls of little criminals caught in the act; rather, they would have worn the manly scowls of samurai warriors ready to fight. It is no coincidence, furthermore, that the boys in my picture held their sticks in classic kendo stances.
>
> Above the heads of these three boys, the Tortoise would have seen the painting fading into a second image – that of three fat, well-dressed men, sitting in a comfortable bar laughing together. The looks on their faces seem decadent; perhaps they are exchanging jokes about their mistresses or some such matter. These two contrasting images are moulded together within the coastline of the Japanese islands. Down the right-hand margin, in bold red characters, is the word 'Complacency'; down the left-hand side, in smaller characters, is the declaration: 'But the young are ready to fight for their dignity.' (*AFW*, p.168)

Evidently, the scene witnessed by Ono had a deep impact, especially as it occurred at a time when his life at Mori-san's (Morayama's) villa was

particularly decadent. However, despite the fact that Ono was evidently moved by what he saw, it is also important to note that in his transposition of the events that he witnessed into a poster, he makes no reference to the suffering of the animal being tortured by the boys in the original scene. The boys are not shown as the perpetrators of cruelty and inhumanity. They are, rather, shown in a heroic stance. Already, Ono's lack of empathy and Matsuda's influence on him are visible.

It seems possible that, in 'Complacency', what Ono had represented in the form of the three well-dressed men was a facsimile of his relationship with his father as business discourse. Although Ono makes no direct reference to them as businessmen, their identity could easily be construed as such. Also, by using the word 'Complacency' on one side of the painting, and the phrase 'But the young are ready to fight for their dignity' on the other, Ono seems to have been repaying his father for the condemnation of his character as lazy, weak-willed, and as having a dislike of useful work. In his representation of the men as decadent and complacent, and of the boys as courageous and defiant, Ono was performing a reversal of his father's claims about the condition of their relationship that also functioned as a rebuttal of his criticism; the well-dressed men were 'complacent', while the boys, being 'ready to fight', were anything but lazy or weak-willed.

In Foucaultian terms, Ishiguro's subtle elucidation of the rise of Japanese militarism takes the form of an acknowledgement of the increasing prevalence of the discourse of fascism in society as a field of disciplinary power. According to Foucault, '[i]n a society like ours - or in any society, come to that - multiple relations of power traverse, characterize, and constitute the

social body.'[6] With the modernisation of Japan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which saw the import of Western techniques and discourses, the structure of society would have altered to incorporate new strategies of power into what had been a strictly feudal social order. Foucault asserts that the nature of this disciplinary power is that it does not simply control the population but invests the social field with its discourses, thus shaping subjectivity. In this sense,

> Power functions. Power is exercised through networks, and individuals do not simply circulate in those networks; they are in a position to both submit to and exercise this power. They are never the inert or consenting targets of power; they are always its relays. In other words, power passes through individuals. It is not applied to them.[7]

Ishiguro situates Ono in a social context shot through with such networks of power. In this context, Ono's identity is shown to be influenced by the increasing power of fascist discourse. Moreover, the influence of fascist discourse, relayed by Matsuda, on Ono's painting can be seen in the way in which he reconfigures the stances of the boys in the original scene.

The production of 'Complacency' was an effect of the deepening of the process of convergence that allowed Ono to identify specific social problems in a particular way. However, this was not the end of the matter because Ono did not, at this point, *identify himself* with the socio-political situation as he saw it. In this sense, the imperative nature of his vocational aspiration could

[6] Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 24.
[7] Ibid. p.29.

still be said to have been in the process of formation. There was, evidently, one more step to be taken. This was not an easy process, and it was taken under the increasing influence of Matsuda.

Typically, Ono's response to the poverty that he witnessed was to attempt to find a solution based on art - a response that was entirely consistent with his commitment to pursuing an artistic career. It is later revealed that Ono suggested to Matsuda that the Okada-Shingen Society should hold an exhibition to raise money for the poor - a suggestion which Matsuda was quick to reject as naïve; preferring, instead, his own solution. What that solution was emerged through his influence on Ono and his art, which Ono reveals in his description of his later re-working of the subject-matter of 'Complacency' into the print 'Eyes to the Horizon':

> 'Eyes to the Horizon' was indeed a reworking of 'Complacency'...The later painting...also employed two contrasting images merging into one another, bound by the coastline of Japan; the upper image was again that of three well-dressed men conferring, but this time they wore nervous expressions, looking to each other for initiative. And these faces...resembled those of three prominent politicians. For the lower, more dominant image, the three poverty-stricken boys had become stern-faced soldiers; two of them held bayoneted rifles, flanking an officer who held out his sword, pointing the way forward, west towards Asia. Behind them, there was no longer a backdrop of poverty; simply the military flag of the rising sun. The word 'Complacency' down the right-hand margin had been replaced by

'Eyes to the Horizon!' and on the left-hand side, the message, 'No time for cowardly talking. Japan must go forward.' (*AFW*, pp.168-169)

As Ono himself indicates, he only mentions this print because of its relationship with the earlier painting and as a kind of acknowledgement of the influence that Matsuda had on his career. A more precise analysis of the relationship between the two paintings reveals not only the obvious and straightforward influence of Matsuda on Ono, but also the shocking and subtle way in which Ono's psychological predispositions became embroiled in a political identity.

Both paintings were split into two halves. In the top half of each painting there were well-dressed men, and in the bottom half were three poverty-stricken boys. In 'Complacency' the well-dressed men were decadent, obviously financially well-off, and self-satisfied, but otherwise pretty non-descript. The three boys in the lower part of the painting wore expressions on their faces that were not the guilty ones that Ono had originally witnessed; but rather, the unapologetic, defiant, scowls of little samurai warriors in fighting spirit. The further transformation of the boys from 'little criminals caught in the act' of causing suffering to 'stern-faced soldiers' in the final painting suggests Ishiguro's grasp of the processes of power. This transformation seems to be an encapsulation of the fact that 'one of the first effects of power is that it allows bodies, gestures, discourses, and desires to be identified and constituted as something individual.'[8] The physical stances, defiant gestures and imperial slogans to be found in his paintings, demonstrate how Ono has

[8] Ibid. pp.29-30.

re-constituted the boys into power-effects of fascist discourse; painting, like other modes of discourse, is also a means of transmitting these same fascist values to others.

Not only that, but Ono has himself been unwittingly re-constituted by the power network in which he finds himself. The change in Ono's perception of the social realities surrounding him, and his reconstruction of them in the representations found in his paintings, constitute a mental shift which highlights an act of what I have referred to as interpretive consonance. Ono's aspirations for social redemption through art have been corrupted by being merged with the more powerful and insidious discourse of fascism resulting in his warped consciousness. Consequently, his view and assessment of his situation has become consistent with the fascist values that he has imbibed under the influence of Matsuda. As he himself points out about his relationship with Matsuda: 'It is, I suppose, a measure of the appeal his ideas had for me that I continued to meet him, for as I recall, I did not at first take much of a liking to him. Indeed, most of our earlier meetings would end with our becoming extremely antagonistic towards one another.'(*AFW*, p.169) In Foucault's terms, Ono's character, and his art, embodies the notion that the individual is not

> power's opposite number; the individual is one of power's first effects. The individual is in fact a power-effect, and at the same time, and to the extent that he is a power-effect, the individual is a relay: power passes through the individuals it has constituted.[9]

[9] Ibid. p.30.

Despite the fact that Ono did not at first agree with Matsuda's ideas, Ishiguro enhances the sense of their irresistible influence on the artist indicating that there was something more personal in them that appealed to him. It is worthwhile considering the reason why Ono was so attracted to Matsuda's ideas, which encouraged a particular recognition of social problems and prompted Ono's identification of his self with a functional solution to them. The development of Ono's art reflects this final step.

What really seems to have tipped the balance in Matsuda's favour was the fact that this process took place alongside Ono's developing artistic ambitions and his disintegrating relationship with his master, Morayama. Ono, being more concerned with the social realities around him, had great difficulty understanding Morayama's decadent lifestyle and his obsession with capturing the transience of life, or what he called the beauty of 'the floating world' (*AFW*, p.145). Indeed, Ono's rejection of his master's viewpoint was reflected not only in his use of unsuitable social subject matter, but also in the fact that he had developed the technique of using heavy, dark, outlines in his work - a stylistic technique that tended to fix its subject firmly in reality, and which Morayama considered to be deeply flawed. Ono's paintings had evidently started to show signs of Matsuda's influence. However, Morayama's attempt to correct this technique, and explain the value of the floating world, ultimately led him to resort to his own form of authoritarianism: he confiscated and destroyed Ono's paintings in a way that was strongly reminiscent of Ono's earlier experience at the hands of his father:

'Incidentally, Ono,' he said, eventually, 'I was told there were one or two other paintings you've completed recently that were not with those I have now.'

'Quite possibly, there are one or two I did not store with the others.'

'Ah. And no doubt these are the very paintings you are most fond of.'

I did not reply to this. Then Mori-san went on:

'Perhaps when we return, Ono, you will bring me these other paintings. I would be most interested to see them.' (*AFW*, p.178-179)

The result of Morayama's act of domination was that it only served to strengthen Ono's identity with Matsuda's ideas by means of yet another negative relationship, this time with Morayama. Ironically, Morayama's belief in the transience of life became, in Ono's eyes, simply another example of self-indulgent, authoritarian, complacency towards the poverty that he saw all around him. It is likely that his perception of Morayama as hypocritical made him vulnerable to the influence of Matsuda.

Again, Ishiguro has here strengthened the identification of self and discourse by re-contextualising a constant emotional dynamic. Ono's deeply rooted resentment towards his father, deployed in the formation of his friendship with the Tortoise, and re-enacted in his relationship with Morayama, played a central role in drawing him on in his relationship with Matsuda. His latent hostility may not have been satisfied by the original artistic solution to the problems that he identified around him; despite his initial resistance, he

instead latched on to Matsuda's more radical solution. The driving force of the following transformation of latent aggression, from personal psychological characteristic into conspicuous social discourse, was the fact that, as I have pointed out, inherent in Ono's relationship with his father was an attitude towards business discourse in general. When, under the coercive influence of Matsuda, Ono became capable of articulating this attitude, society reaped what it had sown. In this sense, Ishiguro has created a character with a deeply ingrained latent ideological dimension. This dimension, along with Ishiguro's implicit critique of it, is an underlying motivating force of the narrative that becomes increasingly conspicuous as Ono's recollections progress.

The progression from 'Complacency' to the later 'Eyes to the Horizon' clearly reveals the fact that Matsuda's influence radically politicised both Ono's perception of the problem of poverty and his solution to it; the well-dressed men came to resemble 'three prominent politicians' who 'wore nervous expressions,' and the three boys were transformed into empire-building soldiers. And, on the level of personal psychology, the reluctance to confront feared authority figures proved a powerful incentive for taking the very easy and subtle step of transforming the three well-dressed men into three prominent politicians, turning the aggression, in the form of the three soldiers, outwards onto a socially legitimised target, Asia. The complex relationship between Ono's psychological predispositions, his relationships with Morayama and Matsuda, and the social environment all worked in a way that eventually fixed Ono's identity. The articulation of the establishment of the imperative nature of that identity can be found in two instances.

The first instance can be found in the influence of Matsuda who, as the seductive voice of imperialism, pleaded with Ono about the dreadful state of Japan and argued that the solution to the poverty that surrounded them lay in the rightful restoration of the Emperor as head of state:

> 'It's time for us to forge an empire as powerful and wealthy as those of the British and the French. We must use our strength to expand abroad. The time is now well due for Japan to take her rightful place amongst the world powers. Believe me, Ono, we have the means to do so, but have yet to discover the will. And we must rid ourselves of these businessmen and politicians. Then the military will be answerable only to his Imperial Majesty the Emperor.' Then he gave a small laugh and turned his gaze back down to the patterns he was weaving in the cigarette ash. 'But this is largely for others to worry over,' he said. 'The likes of us, Ono, we must concern ourselves with art.' (*AFW*, p.174)

This statement clearly demonstrates the ideological influence of Matsuda on Ono. The seductiveness, for Ono, of Matsuda's statements lay in the fact that the discourse of imperialism was here being condensed and packaged within a concern for art. In this deeply cynical manoeuvre, Ono's already established identity with the discourse of art was used by Matsuda as a point of entry that would allow him to connect Ono's unconscious predispositions with his own political views. The result of this psychological infestation can be found in the

second instance of the articulation of the establishment of Ono's vocational imperative, which is revealed in his final conversation with Morayama:

> 'I have learnt many things over these past years. I have learnt much in contemplating the world of pleasure, and recognizing its fragile beauty. But I now feel it is time for me to progress to other things. Sensei, it is my belief that in such troubled times as these, artists must learn to value something more tangible than those pleasurable things that disappear with the morning light. It is not necessary that artists always occupy a decadent and enclosed world. My conscience, Sensei, tells me I cannot remain forever an artist of the floating world.' (*AFW*, pp.179-180)

Initially, Ono's conscience dictated a very different response than Matsuda's to the social problems around him. However, through the process of continuous discussion and argument, Matsuda finally won the day and his ideology became Ono's conscience. The combination of the above two statements marks both the assimilation of Ono into the whole system of imperialist discourse and his internalisation of it, the proof of which manifested in his art.

The transformation from 'Complacency' to 'Eyes to the Horizon' is indicative of the deepening convergence of Ono's psychological and ideological predispositions with the specific characteristics of his social environment. Through his relationship with both Matsuda and his teacher in a poverty-stricken social environment, Ono's enforced identification with artistic

discourse and his latent anger towards his father transformed into a deep identification with fascist discourse which would infuse his art and commit him to a particular social function, that of a propagandist.

Despite the recursive nature of the narrative in *An Artist of the Floating World* it is clear that Ishiguro has structured the underlying identity of his narrator on the foundation of a discernible linear narrative, which describes a progressively deepening identification of self with function; that is, the development of the vocational imperative.

What we see in Ono's narrative is one instance of the effect of the flow of historical forces on the formation of the identities of an entire population. However, in the later stages of the novel, as Ono draws our attention to the 'groups of employees in their bright white shirtsleeves emerging from the glass-fronted building where Mrs Kawakami's used to be' (*AFW*, p.205), the reader is left wondering whether he or she is witnessing the beginning of a process of development similar to that which led to the Second World War in the first place. The process of the ingestion of a new hegemony is already visible in the text as Ono is confronted with the fact that Ichiro, his grandson, prefers to imitate the Lone Ranger rather than a more traditional Japanese hero. His attempts to convince Ichiro that it is 'more interesting, more interesting by far, to pretend to be someone like Lord Yoshitsune' (*AFW*, p.30) fall on deaf ears. The distress of this experience is exacerbated for Ono when he hears that Suichi, Ichiro's father, actively encourages his son to emulate such American heroes as the Lone Ranger because he believes that they provide a better role model for children than their traditional Japanse counterparts.

The motivating force of what Ono sees as his son-in-law's unthinking rejection of everything Japanese is Suichi's anger. This is revealed at the funeral service for Ono's son Kenji, who was killed in the fighting in Manchuria. In reply to Ono's enquiries as to the cause of his anger, Suichi comments that

> [h]alf my high school graduation year have died courageous deaths. They were all for stupid causes, though they were never to know that. ...Brave young men die for stupid causes, and the real culprits are still with us. Afraid to show themselves for what they are, to admit their responsibility. (*AFW*, p.58)

In his narrative, Ono confuses the statements of Suichi with those made on a previous occasion by Jiro Miyake, his younger daughter's former fiancé. During a chance meeting, Ono and Jiro got into a discussion about the recent suicide of the president of the group of companies for which Jiro works. Claiming that the president's suicide was a great gesture of apology that cleared the way for positive future growth, Jiro stated that

> [t]here are plenty of men already back in positions they held during the war. Some of them are no better than war criminals...Surely, it's only right they should acknowledge their responsibility. It's a cowardice that these men refuse to admit to their mistakes. And when those mistakes were made on behalf of the whole country, why then it must be the greatest cowardice of all. (*AFW*, p.56)

Despite the fact that Ono is confused about the original source of these statements, his concern over them expresses his general understanding of the atmosphere prevalent in the society that surrounds him, as well as his own implicit misgivings about his past, and the question of whether he should atone for it. Ishiguro's depiction of such widespread hegemonic upheaval deepens the sense of confusion in the text, and complicates the question of who is responsible for the calamity of Japan's involvement and defeat in the Second World War.

At the surface of the text this hegemonic change is manifested in the shifting definition of key terms. An example of this is found in Ono's attempt to visit Mr Kuroda, a former pupil of his. Mr Kuroda's paintings were burned and he was imprisoned as a result of Ono's own endeavours as an official advisor on Unpatriotic Activities to the Cultural Committee of the Interior Department. During his visit, Ono is confronted by Mr Kuroda's pupil, Mr Enchi, who informs Ono of what his teacher suffered during his imprisonment. Mr Kuroda was beaten and humiliated by the prison guards: 'Traitor. That's what they called him. Traitor. Every minute of every day. But now we all know who the real traitors were.' (AFW, p.113)

As Charles Sarvan points out in his essay 'Floating signifiers and *An Artist of the Floating World*', the whole tenure of Ono's unstable narrative is to upset the seemingly fixed definition of signifiers: his

> loss of memory leaves the reader chasing after elusive significance... So too with the key signifiers, 'traitor' and 'loyalty': those who were loyal

> during the War were seen by the new generation as traitors who misled the nation; conversely, the traitors of yesterday are now perceived as wise, courageous and truly patriotic.[10]

Ishiguro's representation of this historical about-face, and the uncritical acceptance of new values, undermines any suggestion that the new generation will have a more robust sense of their place in history, or the broader implications of their actions, than did Ono. The outlook of the younger generation is not only shaped by their bitter experience of the war, defeat and occupation but also by the new opportunities of Americanisation and democratisation. These new values are taken up as the measure of all things and the process of what I have termed interpretive consonance continues to operate, but with a new set of criteria. Ono, now caught in the confusing crosswinds of these hegemonic changes, only wishes that they were rebuilding the world that he once inhabited.

The extent of Ono's denial of the link between his pursuit of his vocation and the historical calamities that occurred around him are revealed in his bantering conversation with his pupil, Shintaro, and Mrs Kawakami, the proprietess of the bar, the Migi-Hidari, the former meeting place for Ono and his pupils. Shintaro tries to persuade Ono to convince his old friends to return to the bar: 'In fact, perhaps each time we see an old face from those days, we should be stopping him and telling him to come here to this little place . That way we could start rebuilding the old days.' (*AFW*, p.76) Ono comments that recently, they have had

[10] Charles Sarvan, 'Floating Signifiers and *An Artist of the Floating World*', *The Journal of Commonwealth literature*, 32/1(1997), 93-101.

> such conversations over and over. And who is to say the old district will not return again? The likes of Mrs Kawakami and I, we may tend to make a joke about it, but behind our bantering there is a thread of serious optimism.... Perhaps after Noriko's future is once and for all settled, I will give some serious consideration to Mrs Kawakami's schemes. (*AFW*, p.77)

Despite the fact that, by the end of the novel, the Migi-Hidari no longer exists – having been demolished to make way for the construction of new office blocks – Ono clings to his nostalgic desire for the past. Ono simply does not comprehend the fact that the wholesale revival of his own past would mean the re-enactment of the calamities that went with it. The notion that the revival of Japanese militarism is a cause for 'serious optimism' is a chilling one. Evidently, Ono has learned nothing from the death of his son and wife in the war. Ishiguro's construction of Ono as a type of everyman, blind to his own culpability, suggests the condition of those who, on a mass scale, remain ignorant of the broader social and historical significance of their actions. It also seems that for Ishiguro the irresistible functioning of the mechanisms of power means that there is little or no opportunity for people to be aware of these situations while they are in them, and that passing on their awareness to the next generation is just as difficult. Thus ignorance and arrogance make Ono complicit in the disaster of war and its consequences. Ono's reaction to these disasters is to avoid confronting the trauma by re-affirming his concentration on narrow concerns. The greatest irony of this narrow focus is

the fact that it naturally involves the inflation of one's ego and, consequently, gives rise to confusing misinterpretations of other people's behaviour. A most poignant example of this can be found in Ono's imagined professional acquaintance with Mr Saito.

Mr Saito, the father of Ono's prospective son-in-law is, as Ono informs the reader, a critic of some standing in the art world. Ono is convinced that they were aware of each other's reputations in the art world for many years, despite the fact that they had not met socially until the marriage negotiations were under way. In defiance of his daughter's denial that Dr Saito had heard anything of her father before their recent meeting at the meal for the prospective bride and groom, Ono recalls the

> sunny day some sixteen years ago when Dr Saito first addressed me as I stood adjusting the fence outside my new house. 'A great honour to have an artist of your stature in our neighbourhood,' he had said, recognizing my name on the gatepost. (*AFW*, p.194)

The suggestion here is that Ono's egoism caused him to misinterpret humorous comments that Dr Saito had made about the way in which Ono had painted his own name on the gatepost. The humourless intensity of Ono's self-delusion is indicative of the effectiveness of Ishiguro's development of his narrator's character around the increasingly imperative nature of vocational discourse. This vocational imperative provides the fundamental point of view of the narrative through which he tells and re-tells his history. The nature of this type of vocational narration is further investigated in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

The Remains of the Day:

Vocational Narration

In *The Remains of the Day* (1989), Stevens, the butler of Darlington Hall, takes advantage of the suggestion by Mr Farraday, his new American employer, that he should 'drive off somewhere for a few days' (*RD*, p.4), to attempt to redress his problems with the staff plan. The person he proposes to visit on this journey is a former housekeeper, Miss Kenton, now Mrs. Benn, in response to the fact that she has recently sent him a letter informing him that she has left her husband, and expressing a certain nostalgia for her days at Darlington Hall. At various points on Stevens's journey, he recollects his experiences of working for Lord Darlington, the previous occupant of Darlington Hall, during the period just before the outbreak of the Second World War, and it becomes clear that the professional reasons that he has for undertaking the trip conceal a whole world of repressed emotions, concerns and memories - painful issues that lie hidden beneath a narrative that is constructed on the basis of his professional identity.

In this chapter, I discuss the characteristics of vocational narration. I show how, in *The Remains of the Day*, Ishiguro has constructed a seamless, dispassionate, narrative surface that overrides Stevens's intense emotional turmoil. Vocational narrative is the means by which this self-delusive individual recalls the events in his life while attempting, simultaneously, to

hold any conspicuous emotional affect at bay; it is the means by which Stevens attempts to reinforce his ailing view of both his own life and the world around him by reinterpreting moments of personal and historical crisis in a way that justify the pursuit of his ambition to attain perfection in his vocational role.

In *The Remains of the Day*, as in *An Artist of the Floating World*, the vocational imperative exerts a particular kind of pressure on language and gives rise to a characteristic type of narration that goes beyond the particular aspects of each different vocation. As in the case of Ono, Stevens's narrative reveals the fact that guilt and the belated consciousness of the actual circumstances of one's actions is a major driving force in the maintenance of vocational discourse. It is a discourse in which memories are reconstructed in a way that seeks to maintain a consistent world view that will hold potentially disruptive doubt and self-consciousness at bay. One important aspect of vocational narrative, therefore, is its relation to ideas of the self.

In his essay on *The Remains of the Day*,[1] Ben Winsworth makes use of D. W. Winnicot's conception of the false self in an attempt to discover why an individual such as Stevens would live a life of compliance, suffocating his entire life and his personal emotions in his endeavour to fulfil his professional duties perfectly. This is a particularly pertinent question considering the fact that the pernicious consequence of this endeavour is Stevens's inadvertent support of the fascist ideals of his naïve master, Lord Darlington. Winsworth suggests that

[1] Ben Winsworth, 'Communicating and Not Communicating: The True and False Self in *The Remains of the Day*', *Qwerty*, 9 (1999), 259-266.

> for certain people, the division between these two polarities of being [between the false and true self] is so great that the true self remains split off from the world, and the individual is only able to exist in a state of compliance. Often, the true self may be lost or hidden from the individual, so that life may have little real meaning for that person, however much appearances may suggest to the contrary.[2]

The state of compliance referred to here is undoubtedly the main characteristic of the relationship that Stevens has with his employer. Stevens seems intent on denying almost every human trait that he possesses in order to become the perfect servant. However, Winnicot's conception does not perhaps sufficiently diagnose Stevens's condition: the division between the true and false self does not seem to do justice to the strength of Steven's identification of his life with his work. What needs to be added to an explanation of this type is the way in which Stevens has positively taken on the values of butlering as an ideal to be pursued. This process of assimilation is very much related to Stevens's relationship with his father.

Stevens's father was once an example of what Stevens considers to be a great butler. Indeed, Stevens gives examples of his father's professionalism with evident pride and inadvertently reveals the way in which the formation of his own identity has been affected by it. For instance, Stevens recalls a story that his father was fond of telling about a renowned butler who went to India with his employer. According to Stevens senior, on one occasion, this butler discovered a tiger in the dining room and managed to dispatch it without any

[2] Ibid. p.259.

disruption to the scheduled serving of dinner. The telling of the story would end with several repeats of what the butler was supposed to have said when asked by his employer if all was well: 'Dinner will be served at the usual time and I am pleased to say that there will be no discernible traces left of the recent occurrence by that time.' (*RD*, p.37) Stevens ascribes his father's fondness for this story to his intuitive grasp of what it means to attain the highest dignity of which his profession is capable. Moreover, Stevens's response to the suspicion that the story is apocryphal is a telling one. He states that

> [i]n any case, it is of little importance whether or not this story is true; the significant thing is, of course, what it reveals concerning my father's ideals. For when I look back over his career, I can see with hindsight that he must have striven throughout his years somehow to *become* that butler of his story. (*RD*, p.37)

Not only did Stevens's father seek a total identification with his vocation, but he passed on those same aspirations to his son. In my discussion in the first chapter, I noted that the aspect of the Freudian super-ego that is much neglected is that part of it which is concerned with the positive assimilation of values as opposed simply to its repressive function. What Stevens's statements suggest here is that, in effect, the father's ideals have been ingested as the ego-ideal, or super-ego, of the son. It is this aspirational aspect of Stevens's identity that demonstrates the limitations of an interpretation based on Winnicot's conception of self-denial. Self-denial is only

one aspect of a two-handed motion, which rejects desires or aspirations that are not compatible with a positively assimilated set of criteria for behaviour.

This view is confirmed by another such example of Stevens senior's professionalism, which can be seen as relevant to his son's identity. Stevens recalls that his father had once volunteered to attend to the needs of a general who had been responsible for 'a most un-British attack on civilian Boer settlements', which had resulted in the death of his first son, Stevens's elder brother, Leonard. Overriding his own emotions, Stevens's father had decided on this course of action for the sake of the business interests of his employer, Mr Silvers. Indeed, he carried out his duties so well that the general remained completely unaware of the loathing that Stevens's father felt towards him, and left complimenting Mr Silvers on the quality of his staff. (*RD*, p.42) Commenting on the loss of Stevens's brother, Adam Parkes, in his analysis of *The Remains of the Day*, points out that one 'might expect such a loss to reinforce the bond between father and surviving son, but the opposite seems to be the case; if anything, Stevens senior seems to have encouraged his butler-son to sacrifice everything to professional duty.'[3] Parkes then suggests that it is 'possible that Leonard died in South Africa in response to a similar paternal injunction, and that Stevens himself is congratulated on being a "good son" only because he is, in his own way, following in Leonard's footsteps.'[4] Conversely, it is evident that it is his father's capacity to fulfil the demands of his vocation to the limit that Stevens admires most; those professional terms, therefore, would appear to be the only ones in which he would be willing to consider his father as a 'good father', if at all.

[3] Adam Parkes, *Kazuo Ishiguro's The Remains of the Day* (London: Continuum, 2001), p.49.
[4] Ibid p.49.

This emphasis on professional duty is borne out by the fact that during his reflections, Stevens provides a description of what he considers to be the qualities that make a great butler. In this description, the vocational standards in terms of which he judges the value of his, and his father's, lives become clear:

> The great butlers are great by virtue of their ability to inhabit their professional role and inhabit it to the utmost; they will not be shaken out by external events, however surprising, alarming or vexing. They wear their professionalism as a decent gentleman will wear his suit: he will not let ruffians or circumstances tear it off him in the public gaze; he will discard it when, and only when he is entirely alone. It is, as I say, a matter of 'dignity'. (*RD*, pp.43-44)

As the narrative unfolds, Stevens recalls various incidents in which he attempts to live up to this notion of what constitutes an ideal butler. During the process it also becomes clear that, unfortunately, Stevens's notion of his professionalism as clothing, only to be discarded when alone, constitutes an identification so strong that it has rendered him incapable of relating, in any humane way, even to those closest to him. He can only relate, and refer, to his own father as a butler.

The extent to which the personal relationship between Stevens and his father had been replaced by a professional one becomes evident when Stevens recounts an incident in which his father, who was, during his final years, serving as under-butler to his own son, fell whilst carrying a tray of tea-

things across the lawn. This incident confronted Stevens with the fact of his father's decline and his inability to maintain 'a dignity in keeping with his position.' (*RD*, p.33) Without the safeguard of the standards of judgement set by the discourse of the butler, Stevens was exposed to the uncomfortable experience of having to face his father as a frail old man. When faced with this personal crisis Stevens proved unable to relinquish his vocational identity in favour of his humanity.

The alienated state of the relationship between the two is clearly registered in the way in which they behaved towards one another on the occasion of one of the few visits that Stevens made to his father's room. Stevens recalls that he so rarely had reason to enter his father's room, that he 'was newly struck by the smallness and starkness of it' and that his 'impression at the time was of having stepped into a prison cell'. (*RD*, p.67) Indeed, these are the terms in which Miss Kenton was, at a later date, to refer to Stevens's own pantry. On entering his room one evening, she declared that '[a]ll one needs is a small bed in the corner and one could well imagine condemned men spending their last hours here.' (*RD*, p.174) The carceral imagery used in these descriptions is indicative of the disciplinary regime within which they both laboured, and which shaped their personal relationship. On this particular occasion Stevens, as head butler, was to inform his father of the fact that, because of his increasing infirmity, the duties of an under-butler were now considered beyond his capabilities and he would no longer be asked to wait at table.

During Stevens's recollection of the interview, it becomes clear that he was caught between the deference due to his father, whose features he

describes as 'still awesome', and the difference in their professional standing. The result of this conflict is a tone of contempt in the way in which Stevens used the word 'father'. Stevens said, '"His lordship is of the view, as indeed I am myself, that while Father is allowed to continue with his present round of duties, he represents an ever-present threat to the smooth running of this household."' (*RD*, p.68) Keeping himself tightly clothed in his own professionalism, Stevens's father showed no emotional response to his son's statement. The term 'Father' was transformed from the signifier of a personal relationship into one of professional objectivity. The fact that Stevens's father showed no response to this type of behaviour lends credibility to the argument that he was unable to relinquish his own functional identity in his relationship with his son. In this scene, Ishiguro has mirrored the vocational subjectivity of the father with that of the son.

Eventually, Stevens's own attempts to maintain 'a dignity in keeping with his position' destroy his relationship with his father. Stevens's behaviour on the night of his father's death exemplifies this. During an important, but unofficial, international conference held at Darlington Hall by Lord Darlington for the purpose of discussing the possibility of lessening German reparation payments in the aftermath of the First World War, Stevens's father was discovered in front of the large window on the first floor

> in a posture that suggested that he was taking part in some ceremonial ritual. He had dropped to one knee and with head bowed seemed to be pushing at the trolley before him, which for some reason had taken on an obstinate immobility. (*RD*, p.97)

In this scene, the trolley that Stevens senior had been using to carry out his reduced round of tasks takes on the facet of a sacrificial altar to professional dedication. The fact of the matter was that Stevens's father was quite literally being worked to death. He was taken to his room and, while he lay on his deathbed, Stevens continued to attend to the needs of the participants of the conference (such as the aching feet of the French ambassador). During one point in the evening, when Stevens went to inspect his father's condition, his father, who had particularly asked the chambermaid attending him to wake him when his son next appeared, said to Stevens, '"I'm proud of you. A good son. I hope I've been a good father to you. I suppose I haven't"', to which Stevens replied, '"I'm afraid we're extremely busy now, but we can talk again in the morning."' (*RD*, p.101) Later that evening Stevens senior suffered a severe stroke and died.

After being informed of his father's death, Stevens, who had to continue with his duties, permitted Miss Kenton to close his father's eyes. He explained his position to Miss Kenton: 'Please don't think me improper in not ascending to see my father in his deceased condition just at this moment. You see, I know my father would have wished me to carry on just now.' (*RD*, p.111) During his retelling of the events of the conference, Stevens says, of this refusal to allow the last moments of his father's life to disturb the fulfilment of his professional role, that '[f]or all its sad associations, whenever I recall that evening today, I find I do so with a large sense of triumph.' (*RD*, p.115) This sense of triumph represents further the subjective assimilation of the discourse of the butler. For Stevens, the successful fulfilment of his role has

taken on a deeply personal meaning. The identification of both father and son with their professional roles meant that, in this single episode, Stevens effectively performed an oedipal replacement of his father. Having re-enacted, at the moment of his father's death, the type of behaviour that his father demonstrated in relation to the General responsible for his eldest son's death, Stevens established the perfect identification of self with function that he so admires. In terms of Stevens's aspiration to *become* the butler in his father's favourite story, this is indeed a triumph. Stevens successfully replaces his father as the stronger man and the one more fitted to carry out his professional role.

This event, both personally and socially significant, foregrounds Stevens's subjective experience as an extension of the particular social power structure that gives rise to the discourse of butlering. In the character of Stevens, Ishiguro has created a narrative viewpoint in which discourse and subjectivity are one; an embodiment of both personal predispositions and the mechanisms of power. This narrative structure concurs with Herbert Marcuse's statement that in 'the most advanced sectors of functional and manipulated communication, language imposes in truly striking constructions the authoritarian identification of person and function.' [5] That identification is further demonstrated by Stevens's discussion of the concept of 'dignity', and his definition of it as the capacity of butlers to adhere single-mindedly to the dictates of vocational discourse by exhibiting the ability to 'inhabit their professional role and inhabit it to the utmost.' The term 'dignity' becomes part of a whole system of meanings which constructs such a rigid functional

[5] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (1964; London: Routledge, 2000), p.95.

identity. Conversely, it is this same system of meanings which provides a functional definition of 'dignity' as the successful accomplishment of the demands of the vocational imperative above all else.

Stevens's rendering of the meaning of his father's death within the form of vocational narration parallels Hayden White's description of the way in which discourse encodes events to fit its own criteria of meaning and value. From the perspective of this performance model of discourse, 'a discourse is regarded as an apparatus for the production of meaning rather than as only a vehicle for the transmission of information about an extrinsic referent.'[6] The factual tone of Stevens's narrative is illusive. His father's death is positioned within a narrative that provides it with a predetermined meaning. In this case, the death of Stevens's father is constituted as having a part to play in the 'triumph' of both father's and son's professional values.

An added complication to this situation is the very fact that Stevens's narrative is a recollection of events. Its recursive nature is indicative of his attempts to negotiate the difficult terrain of his memory. He cannot go forward without remembering what has happened, but neither can he face the reality of his past in its raw state; rather, he is compelled to re-imagine key events in his life in terms of his profession. This is not simply a matter of emotional repression, which is only one aspect of Stevens's dynamic attempt to maintain the integrity of his identity. Stevens's compulsive re-imagining of his past in terms of his particular social role also demonstrates that he is caught in the great undertow of the age in which he lived. The incidents of triumph to be found in Stevens's professional career are all linked in some way with his

[6] Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (London: John Hopkins University Press,1990), p.42.

proximity to events of historical significance. The vocational imperative thus underlies and structures the subjective narrative of Ishiguro's text to such an extent that memory is itself shaped by the desire to maintain it. In fact, it is a situation the implications of which reach far beyond Ishiguro's own straightforward observation that it is a matter of 'how one uses memory for one's own purposes, one's own ends.'[7]

Indications as to what Stevens is unwilling to face inhabit the narrative right from the very start. He notes that he has himself been 'responsible for a series of small errors in the carrying out' of his duties (*RD*, p.5). As his narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that these mistakes are not as trivial as he, at first, claims. In fact, the first sign of his father's mental decline had involved the slight error of leaving a dustpan at an inappropriate place in the hall. This incident proved to be one of many seemingly insignificant faults in the way in which Stevens's father carried out his duties. It eventually became impossible for Stevens to ignore his father's decline any longer on the occasion of the latter's fall while carrying 'a much welcome tray of refreshments' up some steps and across the lawn (*RD*, p.66). This incident led to Stevens's interview with his father, already mentioned, concerning the reduction of his duties.

Stevens's anxieties concerning the possibility that his own capacity to carry out his tasks properly may be following the same path, and that his father's fate awaits him, are revealed when he remembers an incident involving a fork. He recalls a recent breakfast during which his new American employer, Mr Farraday, 'simply picked up a fork, examined it for a brief

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[7] Gregory Mason, 'An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro', *Contemporary Literature*, 30 (1989), 347.

second, touching the prongs with a fingertip, then turned his attention to the morning headlines.' (*RD*, p.148) This was no small matter for Stevens, who immediately interpreted Mr Farraday's gesture as a sign that his employer was dissatisfied with the state of the silverware. On reflection, Stevens states, nervously, that

> Errors such as these which have occurred over the last few months have been, naturally enough, injurious to one's self-respect, but then there is no reason to believe them to be the signs of anything more sinister than a staff shortage. (*RD*, p.149)

Stevens then assures himself that such slips would become a thing of the past if Miss Kenton, the former housekeeper, were to return to Darlington Hall.

As Stevens's journey progresses, and he comes into further contact with the outside world, the more intensely he reflects on his devotion to his duty. As he does so, his initial anxieties over his inability to fulfil the demands of his vocation expand and it becomes clear exactly how much of his life he has hidden, even from himself. At the core of this expanding sphere of anxiety is the disruptive effect that Stevens's secret emotional life has on the integrity of his vocational identity. His recursive narrative is, therefore, a re-interpretive attempt to maintain the integrity of this identity. In terms of Stevens's personal life, the dialectical process instigated by the conflict between disruptive emotions and the drive to maintain his professional integrity is most clearly demonstrated by the way in which he perpetually

attempts to reconfigure his love for Miss Kenton as simply a medium of professional concerns. Ishiguro structures the gradual failure of Stevens's act of re-interpretation on the basis of a series of points, each marking a gradual shift in the nature of his relationship with Miss Kenton. Each point provides an example of Stevens's insistent misreading of various situations through the medium of vocational narration.

Stevens recalls one occasion on which Miss Kenton visited him in his pantry while he was reading a book, or, rather, while he was 'not in fact engaged in professional matters' (*RD*, p.174), as he puts it. He was so reticent about the nature of this book that she felt compelled to disentangle it from his grip in her attempt to find it out. Stevens notes that during this manoeuvre, Miss Kenton came very close to him and that the atmosphere in the room 'underwent a peculiar change – almost as though the two of us had been suddenly thrust on to some other plane of being altogether.' (*RD*, p.175) The book turns out to be a sentimental romantic novel, rather than the 'racy' one that Miss Kenton initially suspects. Books of this genre are the outlet that Stevens has for his repressed emotions, although, of course, he would never admit it. Rather, Stevens informs the reader that reading such material was 'an extremely efficient way to maintain and develop one's command of the English language' (*RD*, p.176), in order to serve one's master better. The kind of book that Stevens was reading, and the peculiar change in the atmosphere that arose between him and Miss Kenton at this point, inform the reader of the romantic emotional life that Stevens denied to himself in the name of his aspiration to professional perfection. Stevens rebuffs any notion that he is ashamed to be caught reading this type of book by declaring that he did not

respond to Miss Kenton's advances as a matter of principle. He declares that 'any butler who regards his vocation with pride, any butler who aspires at all to "a dignity in keeping with his position", should never allow himself to be "off duty" in the presence of others', and that a 'butler of any quality must be seen to *inhabit* his role, utterly and fully' (*RD*, p.178). Despite this denial, Miss Kenton's moment of intrusion into Stevens's pantry signifies the encroachment of repressed emotions which have been transferred *onto* narrative and re-enter his world *as* narrative. Stevens`s romantic life will always be thwarted because, unlike Miss Kenton or the reader, 'Stevens is not a sincere reader;' as Andrew Teverson puts it: he pretends 'to himself that he is reading [his books] because they enable him to learn good discourse and genteel behaviour.'[8] The fact is that Stevens is no good at reading his own emotions.

Further evidence for this can be seen as Stevens recalls the time when the housemaid, Lisa, ran off with the second footman. The letter of explanation that she left for Miss Kenton was three pages long and full of effusions of love: 'One line, as I recall it, read something to the effect of: "We don't have any money but who cares we have love and who wants anything else we've got one another that's all anyone can ever want."' Stevens also notes that 'Miss Kenton was noticeably upset', and that he 'cannot really recall seeing her more bereft than on that morning' (*RD* p.166). It is evident that Miss Kenton is not simply upset because the maid has run away. This is confirmed when, years later, she admits to Stevens, 'I get to thinking about a life I might have had with you' (*RD* p.251). Stevens, in reviewing his life, is in

[8] Andrew Teverson, 'Acts of Reading in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of The Day*', *Qwerty*, 9 (1999), 254.

the same condition. Because he consistently failed to recognise that he was in love with her – and she with him - the effects of these events merely served to separate them instead of bringing them together. Stevens's obsession with his professional role resulted in his never having understood 'how to read these incidents'[9] and he only experienced the uneasy feeling of a shift in their relationship without knowing why.

Stevens's constant concern as to whether or not he is reading correctly the letter that Miss Kenton wrote to him is another example of this. He must re-read it over and over again. This time it is because he is, to some degree, aware that he is projecting his own desires onto it. Stevens has a secret wish that Miss Kenton *is* unhappy in her marriage, that she *does not* love her husband, and that she *will* return to Darlington Hall with him. His fuss over her letter indicates that he is attempting to remove these transferred wishes from it so that he can read it properly. Of course, he denies his own emotions and puts them down to his concerns about staff shortage. He claims that if Miss Kenton were to decide to return to Darlington Hall, then that would provide the necessary solution. When, while stopping at an inn, he describes himself as lying in 'the darkness, listening to the sounds from below of the landlord and his wife clearing up for the night' (*RD* p.149), it becomes evident that this is in fact a transference of his memories of the time when Miss Kenton was still at Darlington Hall. Stevens has transferred his own memories, and his wish that Miss Kenton would return, onto the landlord and his wife. Then, by commenting on them, as a servant couple 'from below', he is inadvertently expressing the very thing he seeks to deny. His love for Miss Kenton, hidden

[9] Deborah Guth, 'Submerged Narratives in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Remains of the Day*', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 35/2 (1999), 132.

even from himself, usurps the repressive power of vocational narrative and appropriates a vocabulary that allows it to enter into the mainstream of the narrative. In this way, Stevens's love encroaches on his vocational consciousness. The encroachment of such emotions, however, is not strong enough to combat the force of the vocational imperative entirely, a fact which is clearly evident in Stevens's inability to communicate at crucial moments.

At one point, Stevens recalls his attempt to express his condolences to Miss Kenton after she had been informed of the death of her aunt, who had 'been to all intents and purposes, like a mother to her.' (*RD*, p.186) Having failed to offer his condolences on first hearing the news from Miss Kenton one morning in her parlour, Stevens decided that he would await a suitable opportunity to correct his mistake. That opportunity arrived the same afternoon, and Stevens informs the reader that, on following Miss Kenton into the dining room, he began to address the issue. What is most shocking about this scene is that Stevens, far from simply offering his belated condolences, begins the conversation with an enquiry as to whether Miss Kenton is 'experiencing any particular problems with the new recruits.' (*RD*, p.186) He then proceeds to point out that he has 'noticed one or two things have fallen in standard just recently' (*RD*, p.187), and offers Miss Kenton advice on how to manage new recruits. He ends this part of the conversation by saying, 'I regret to say this, Miss Kenton, but I believe you have been a little remiss in these respects.' (*RD*, p.187) Eventually, after having had Miss Kenton's assurance that she will check the work of the new recruits, he says, 'It is not like you to have overlooked such obvious things, Miss Kenton.' (*RD*, p.188) This last statement was evidently meant as an indication that Miss Kenton should

herself mention her feelings concerning her aunt's death, finally allowing Stevens to offer his condolences. However, what happens is that, in her confusion over his behaviour, she becomes upset and leaves the room.

It is only partially true to claim that Stevens's inability to communicate in this scene is due to his repressed emotional state. Not only in this scene, but in his relationship with Miss Kenton and with those around him generally, Stevens does not simply repress or deny his emotions. He actively re-structures his concerns about himself and others in terms of his vocational identity. The only way in which he is willing to recognise his difficulties is as a challenge to his ability to perfectly inhabit the role of the butler. Stevens's tendency to be limited to a professional viewpoint in all things is not confined to his relationships with other characters in the novel. His narrative also actively constructs the reader as a fellow professional. For instance, at the beginning, when he is describing the limitations of the present staff plan that he must work with, he addresses the reader in the following way: 'You may be amazed that such an obvious shortcoming to a staff plan should have continued to escape my notice, but then you will agree that such is often the way with matters one has given abiding thought to over a period of time' (*RD,* p.9). The phrases 'you may be amazed' and 'you will agree' clearly convey Stevens's assumption that the reader is familiar with the type of problem that he is facing. When asked, in interview, about this feature of his writing and the way in which it expresses Stevens's state of mind, Ishiguro stated that it was a way of establishing a very subtle relationship between the narrator and the reader, and that he had tried to write the whole of *The Remains of the Day* 'in

a kind of "butler speak."'[10] The constraints placed on Stevens's self-expression in his relationships with others, indicate Ishiguro's understanding that it is in the nature of vocational discourse to set parameters for both language and thought. One of the features of vocational narration is that, as Marcuse said of 'functional language',

> [d]iscourse is deprived of the mediations which are the stages of the process of cognition and cognitive evaluation. The concepts which comprehend the facts and thereby transcend the facts are losing their authentic linguistic representation. Without these mediations, language tends to express and promote the immediate identification of reason and fact, truth and established truth, essence and existence, the thing and its function.'[11]

Stevens's use of the concept of 'dignity' is a prime example of the confinement of language to a specific functional definition. According to Stevens, 'dignity' is the ability of a butler to maintain the persona of his profession regardless of the emotional duress, or moral conflicts, with which he may be faced. This purely functional definition of the concept of 'dignity' reduces the potential for critical thought. Rather than considering the various potential meanings of the concept of 'dignity' and thereby opening a space for the critique of his circumstances, Stevens actively inhibits the wider cognition of his situation by failing properly to raise the question of exactly how dignified it is to be so totally servile. Even his imagination is reduced to considering the

[10] Brian W. Shaffer and Cynthia F. Wong, eds., *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), p.103.
[11] Ibid. p.89.

further possibilities of discipline and technique rather than the possibilities of life. Much of Stevens's time is taken up with working out how he can serve his master better.

It is Stevens's concern to serve his master to the best of his ability that finally destroyed any hidden hope that he might have had concerning his relationship with Miss Kenton. An illustration of this is found in Stevens's recollection of another of the 'small incidents' that 'would render whole dreams forever irredeemable' (*RD*, p.189) which occurred on the evening of a secret meeting between the British Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and Herr Ribbentrop, the German Ambassador at Darlington Hall. This meeting was organised by Lord Darlington in his continuing attempt to influence the direction of Britain's post First World War relationship with Germany.

While this meeting was taking place, Miss Kenton, who had been out with an acquaintance named Mr Benn, returned to Darlington Hall. On her arrival, she informed Stevens that she had accepted a proposal of marriage made to her by Mr Benn and that she would be leaving Darlington Hall in the near future. After a moment of disbelief, Stevens's response was to offer his congratulations briefly and excuse himself in order to continue with his duties. On being challenged by Miss Kenton, who was upset by the fact that that was all he had to say on the matter, Stevens once again excused himself with the statement that 'there are matters of global significance taking place upstairs and I must return to my post.' (*RD*, p.230)

Stevens recalls that, later that evening, while standing on duty in the dark outside the room where the 'most powerful gentlemen of Europe were conferring over the fate of our continent' (RD, p.238), he once more felt a

feeling of triumph. He states that the events of the evening appeared as a 'sort of summary of all that I had come to achieve in my life thus far.' (RD, p.239) In effect, what this statement indicates is that, in terms of his professional ambitions, the moment when Stevens was standing in the dark between the ruins of his relationship with Miss Kenton downstairs and the discussions of the great men in the drawing room represented a moment of crisis/triumph similar to that presented by the death of his father. It is a tragic statement about the vocational imperative's ruination of the life of an ordinary man, the full force of which Stevens would only experience many years later.

Stevens's attempts to explain his behaviour in terms of his profession become more and more difficult until it is impossible for him to maintain the illusion that his life is fulfilled, and everything that is hidden within comes to the surface as the narrative unravels. The culmination of this unravelling process is Stevens's recollection of the tragic moment in which his illusions were finally shattered. On being told by Miss Kenton, while they were waiting for the bus that would take her home from their final meeting, that she sometimes wondered whether she might have had a better life with him than the unhappy one she has with her husband, Stevens was finally confronted by the fact that his chance of being with her had been ruined forever: 'Indeed - why should I not admit it? - At that moment my heart was breaking' (*RD* p.252). This culmination to the process of Stevens's reflections demonstrates that his entire narrative can be viewed as a dialectical process between his professional concerns and his personal desires based on the gradual failure of his attempts to maintain a level of narrative consistency (that consistency which I have previously linked with what I have defined as interpretive

consonance). That is, Stevens's narrative is a constant, and failing, battle to re-interpret his past in a way that conforms to the ethical and aesthetic standards of the profession with which he has identified himself so completely.

The internalised dialectic that is the product of the assimilation of vocation as an ethical and aesthetic standard helps explain the strange quality of Stevens's narrative, in which he manages to tell two conflicting versions of his own history simultaneously. He succeeds in recounting both his vocational triumphs and his personal defeats in a single narrative line. In this context Cynthia F. Wong has noted that Stevens's narrative is one in which he plays the part of both 'an "extradiegetic" narrator, who is "above" or superior to the story he narrates, and a "homodiegetic" narrator, who is a part of, or within, the story he tells', and that he 'casts himself as both progenitor of a virtuous life and victim of inexplicable physical or historical circumstances'.[12] While Wong's assessment of the double nature of Stevens's narrative is convincing, she does not pursue the question of Ishiguro's implicit understanding of vocational identity, and the assimilation of vocational values as ethical and aesthetic standards of behaviour, as a generating source of it.

During his analysis of Stevens's tendency to conceal his real self, Brian Shaffer notes Freud's description of repression as a state in which an individual keeps at bay wishes which are 'incompatible with the ethical and aesthetic standards of his personality',[13] and argues further that Stevens is a master of disguise, who attempts to conceal his 'striking sexual and political

[12] Cynthia F. Wong, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Devon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 2005), p.53.
[13] Brian W. Shaffer, *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), p.68.

disengagement' through 'the literal and figurative ways by which [he] clothes his private self from his own understanding and from the "public gaze".'[14] However, Shaffer does not pursue the nature of the ethical and aesthetic standards of Stevens's personality that are the motivating force behind his repressed behaviour. He prefers to read the various costumes that Stevens wears throughout the novel as ways of concealing his repression rather than as representations of the social structure that is part and parcel of Stevens's make up. As with the use of Winnicot's concept of the false self, the emphasis here is on the negative effects of the ethical and aesthetic standards of an unreal conscious personality. Focusing mainly on the discreet psychology of the individual in this way has a tendency to narrow down the socially generated aspects of the constitution of Ishiguro's narrator. In order to remedy this tendency, it is important to consider the ethical and aesthetic standards of Stevens's vocational identity in a broader historical context.

At various points in his narrative, Stevens reflects on the definitions of the qualities required of a great butler that have been put forward by the fictional Hayes Society – a somewhat elite professional body made up of a few of the most distinguished butlers in the land. The Hayes Society was an institution which dispensed professional values, and Stevens notes that it was at the height of its power during the 1920s, but that it had already begun to go into decline by 1929. Stevens thinks that one of the reasons for its decline was a too rigid adherence to some of its definitions of what makes a great butler. For instance, one such definition was that a great butler should be

[14] Ibid. p.64.

associated with 'a distinguished household.' (*RD*, p.120) Stevens notes that, for the Hayes Society, 'distinguished household' referred to aristocracy, rather than 'business.' (*RD*, p.120) He also notes that this snobbishness on the part of the Hayes Society contained the seed of its downfall: it meant that the Society was unable to move with the times. Stevens informs the reader that, in contrast to the outdated thinking of the Hayes Society, his own generation became more idealistic, being more concerned about the moral status of an employer than with whether or not they belonged to a titled family. In Stevens's account of the rise and fall of the Hayes Society, Ishiguro has inscribed an understanding of the fact that professional values change with hegemony. In the case of the Hayes Society, the societal shift from the dominance of an aristocratic hegemony to a capitalistic one caused a re-evaluation of the professional values necessary to fulfil the role of the butler. The result was that the vocational identity of those who practiced that particular profession also changed. Stevens's discussion of the definitions of the Hayes Society are in effect a discussion of the history of the discourse of butlering. It also reveals the fact that consideration of the moral qualities of one's employer is not a matter of the personal morality of each butler; rather, it is simply a recognition of the fact that, because of changing times, 'professional prestige lay most significantly in the moral worth of one's employer' (RD, p.121).The point is that professional prestige remains the thing that is most valued and the fact that Stevens's identification with his role as butler is one that he himself considers to be ethically and aesthetically sound is simply a matter of attempting to acquire it. This eminence given to professional prestige over morality is highlighted in Stevens's discussion of

loyalty. Stevens criticises butlers who move from one employer to the next because of dissatisfaction with moral standards and states that once a butler has encountered an employer that embodies all that he finds 'noble and admirable' (RD, p. 211), he should devote himself to serving such a man. According to Stevens this is loyalty that is '*intelligently* bestowed.' (RD, p.211) The problem is that, once such loyalty is bestowed, it becomes unthinking, as Stevens's own experience in serving Lord Darlington demonstrates.

On one occasion, after having come under the influence of fascists such as Mosely and von Ribbentrop, Lord Darlington declares, 'I've been doing a great deal of thinking, Stevens. A great deal of thinking. And I've reached my conclusion. We cannot have Jews on the staff here at Darlington hall' (*RD*, p.155). Despite his own incredulity, Stevens says and does nothing except blindly obey his master's instruction to dismiss the two Jewish housemaids. This refusal to take any moral stance at all is emphasised when he is confronted by Miss Kenton's question as to whether he may not consider this action to be '*wrong?*'. He replies that 'if his lordship wishes these particular contracts to be discontinued, then there is little more to be said' (*RD*, p.157). The fact that Stevens regards these incidents as evidence of the fact that he has succeeded in living up to the 'dignity' of his profession is yet more evidence of 'the smooth papering-over of injustice and suffering by which discourse covers its complicity with political malfeasance.'[15] Despite his concern with his employer's moral qualities, it is clear that Stevens has used his dedication to his profession as a means of avoiding any responsibility as a moral human being. It gradually becomes clear that his idea of dignity is, in

[15] Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p.72.

fact, slavery. As Deborah Guth points out, the reality of his philosophy is 'not to show any emotion, in fact not to feel; not to respond, never to question one's employer, not to have an opinion.'[16]

In order to satisfy the demands of his job, Stevens confines his view of the events occurring around him within the constricting bounds of vocational discourse. For instance, when challenged by Mr Cardinal, Lord Darlington's nephew, about the nature of the secret meeting between the 'British Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the German Ambassador' (*RD*, p.232) held at Darlington Hall, Stevens refuses to engage critically with the event: much to the dismay or Mr Cardinal who says to him,

> 'Tell me, Stevens, don't you care at all? Aren't you curious? Good God, man, something very crucial is going on in this house. Aren't you at all curious?'
>
> 'It is not my place to be curious about such matters, sir.'
>
> ...'His lordship is a dear, dear man. But the fact is, he is out of his depth. He is being manoeuvred. The Nazis are manoeuvring him like a pawn. Have you noticed this, Stevens? Have you noticed this is what has been happening for the last three or four years at least?'
>
> 'I'm sorry, sir, I have failed to notice any such development.' (*RD*, pp.232-233)

[16] Deborah Guth, 'Submerged Narratives In Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of The Day*', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 35:2 (1999), 130.

Later on, Stevens displays the same level of detachment when he relates the fact of Mr Cardinal's death, in the war, to Miss Kenton.

By confining his concerns to fulfilling his function, Stevens refuses to see the insidious nature of the events unfolding around him. His lack of critical engagement with these events amounts to a deliberate historical blindness. This deliberate blindness gives weight to Ben Winsworth's claim that 'Ishiguro is particularly interested in the tactics that people will employ to avoid taking responsibility for either themselves or their deeds.'[17] One of these tactics is the tendency to elevate one aspect of life to the extent that it becomes all encompassing. The way in which Stevens elevates his vocation evidently gives him a sense of self-importance, while also providing the means of repressing any unfavourable or painful experiences, either from the past or in the present. Ironically, though, the narrative of vocational subjectivity encompasses both personal and historical perspectives that unintentionally reveal rather than hide personal shortcomings.

In his determination to expound the worthiness of his professionalism Stevens has revealed his moral bankruptcy. He simply did not wish to face up to the historical events occurring at the time. Neither, on reflection, does he wish to face up to his own culpability in failing even to express any interest in those events. He simply relates the whole experience of the events leading up to the Second World War as if they were nothing more than further proofs of his dedication to his profession. He is denying *and* expressing his moral culpability. The fact is that he *did* stand by and watch his Lordship, and the rest of world, 'go over the precipice just like that' (*RD*, p.235). Stevens's

[17] Ben Winsworth, 'Communicating and Not Communicating: The True and False Self in *The Remains of The Day*', *Qwerty*, 9 (1999), 263.

obsession with professional prestige has led him into the contradictory situation of maintaining the vocational imperative even at the cost of his employer. Contrary to Stevens's belief in loyalty 'intelligently' bestowed, it seems that those butlers who went from one employer to the next because of their concern over morality, ultimately destroying promising careers, were the most moral of all.

Stevens's concern over loyalty is revealed as simply an excuse that disguises one simple fact. When asked why she did not carry out her threat to leave, which she had made in response to Lord Darlington's dismissal of the Jewish housemaids, Miss Kenton replied that it 'was cowardice, Mr Stevens. Simple cowardice ... I was so frightened, Mr Stevens. Whenever I thought of leaving, I just saw myself out there and finding nobody who knew or cared about me. There, that's all my principles amount to.' (*RD*. p161) In this sense, the fear of leaving Darlington Hall becomes a metaphor for the fear that both Miss Kenton and Stevens feel at the prospect of abandoning the safe sphere of vocational discourse. If we read Darlington Hall as Britain, we can extend this metaphor further. It becomes clear that, in this novel, Ishiguro connects the prevalence of vocational discourse in the minds of the ordinary people of society, and the consequent leaving of all-important political decisions in the hands of a, by turns, well-meaning, bungling, self-interested, professional political elite, with the outbreak of war.

According to Rebecca Suter, the experience of Stevens 'underlines ... the difficulty of defining the role and responsibility of those "ordinary people",

and the way everyone is involved in the dynamics of power.'[18] Abdicating responsibility and avoiding the difficult question of what to do when faced with the injustices perpetrated by those in power cannot ultimately shield the individual from the consequences of their action or non-action. But Ishiguro's emphasis is rather on the fact that Stevens's dedication to his profession has made him into an unknowing and ignorant historical agent. He is a historical agent, nonetheless, but as Ishiguro himself noted, 'Often we just don't know enough about what's going on out there, and I felt that's what we're like. We're like butlers.' [19]

Stevens's performance of his professional role on the occasion of the conference held at Darlington Hall, during which his father died, exemplifies this relation between ordinary people and the mechanisms of power. Stevens recalls that the conference began 'during the last week of March 1923 in the somewhat unlikely setting of the drawing room.' (*RD*, p.95) He informs the reader that he was 'obliged during the course of the morning to go constantly in and out of the room, and was unable to follow the proceedings at all fully.' (*RD*, p. 96) He also comments that one of the speeches, given by Sir David Cardinal, seemed to him to be rather 'technical in substance, and quite frankly, rather above my head.' (*RD*, p.96) Despite this difficulty, Stevens did manage to note that the speech 'concluded with a call for a freezing of German reparation payments and the withdrawal of French troops from the Ruhr region.' (*RD*, p.96) Stevens's fragmentary grasp of the events of the conference was due to the fact that he was busy fulfilling his professional role. In this scene, he functions as a metaphor for the way in which the vocational

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[18] Rebecca Suter, '" We're Like Butlers" Interculturality, Memory and Responsibility in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of The Day.* ' *Qwerty*, 9 (1999), 248.
[19] Allan Vorda, ed., *Face to Face*, p.32.

imperative inhibits the active participation of ordinary people in the processes of government. Ishiguro recognises the way in which the structure of working life itself militates against a fully informed participation in democratic processes. Stevens's belated reflections on his vocation make this contradictory situation clear, but at the time his concern with fulfilling his function blinded him to the historical realities that surrounded him. In this regard, the vocational narrative that is carried on throughout the text can be illuminated by Herbert Marcuse's analysis of the language of total administration and its relation to both history and memory. In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse states that

> The functional language is a radically anti-historical language: operational rationality has little room and little use for historical reason. Is this fight against history part of the fight against a dimension of the mind in which centrifugal faculties and forces might develop – faculties and forces that might hinder the total co-ordination of the individual with the society? Remembrance of the past may give rise to dangerous insights, and the established society seems to be apprehensive of the subversive contents of memory. Remembrance is a mode of dissociation from the given facts, a mode of 'meditation' which breaks, for short moments, the omnipresent power of given facts. Memory recalls the terror and the hope that passed. Both come to life again, but whereas in reality, the former recurs in ever-new forms, the latter remains hope. And in the personal events which reappear in the

individual memory, the fears and aspirations of mankind assert themselves – the universal in the particular.[20]

In terms of Stevens's relationship with his environment, the inhibiting tendency of the functional definition of language amounts to a check on any potential for critical thought that might reveal the irrationality of a system that seems rational. Stevens's rationalisation of the demands of his duties, without considering the nature of the events unfolding all around him, can be seen as an example of the way in which vocational narration suffocates the kind of dialectical thinking that would reveal this atrocious state of affairs. The fact that Stevens's memories of his life are unavoidably couched in vocational terms is testament to the continuing force of his functional identity, which only collapses when the damage has already been done. The all-powerful rationality functioning *within* a system serves to conceal the *irrationality of the whole system itself*. That this contradictory validation of vocational discourse and full democratic participation is a problem endemic to the modern world is indicated by another incident which occurred at the close of the conference.

On the conference's final night, after the guests had finished their meal, a frank exchange of views took place between the French Ambassador, Lord Darlington and Mr Lewis, the American politician. After having been roundly criticised by the French Ambassador for his un-gentlemanly conduct during the conference, the somewhat inebriated Mr Lewis rose to his feet and gave an impromptu speech in which he declared that Lord Darlington was a well-meaning amateur and that 'international affairs today are no longer for

[20] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (1964; London: Routledge, 2000), p.101

gentleman amateurs.' (*RD*, p.106) He finished his speech with a toast 'to professionalism' (*RD*, p. 107) In Mr Lewis's relation to the other, European, representatives at the conference, Ishiguro has represented the relation of the new American hegemony to the declining one of Europe. Moreover, Lewis's statements clearly pinpoint vocational discourse and an unrivalled respect for professionalism as aspects of that hegemony. Since this is the case, it seems that the obstacles to proper democratic participation created by the vocational imperative could only get worse.

This link between vocation and hegemony also illuminates Stevens's statement that 'it is sometimes said that butlers only truly exist in England.' (*RD*, p.44) Stevens's narrative demonstrates a complicated relationship between his butlering and his national identity. It is after having given his definition of the 'Great' in Great Britain, that Stevens goes on to ask another, as he sees it, related question: 'The whole question is very akin to the question that has caused much debate in our profession over the years: What is a "great" butler?' (*RD*, p.29). His consequent discussion of the Hayes Society's attempt to define a great butler includes the definition, discussed already, of butlers as being 'great by virtue of their ability to inhabit their professional role and inhabit it to the utmost; they will not be shaken out by external events, however surprising, alarming or vexing.' (*RD*, p.43-44) Also, after having given numerous examples of the dignity of a butler as exemplified by his father among others he comes to the conclusion that it 'is with such men as it is with the English landscape seen at its best as I did this morning: when one encounters them, one simply *knows* one is in the presence of greatness.' (*RD* p. 45) The sense of quiet reserve and grandeur in this

description of the ideal butler matches Stevens's earlier description of the English countryside and Englishness. It thus establishes that butlering, a quintessentially English vocation, is also a function of the same hegemonic forces that he embodies. In Foucault's sense, Stevens's account of the landscape is also part of his attempt to define and construct the subjectivity of the butler, and much of his narrative is taken up with trying to maintain the integrity of this vocational discourse.

The act of interpretive consonance is highlighted in the passage in which Stevens discusses the qualities of '*Great* Britain':

> I would say that it is the very *lack* of obvious drama or spectacle that sets the beauty of our land apart. What is pertinent is the calmness of that beauty, its sense of restraint. It is as though the land knows of its own beauty, of its own greatness, and feels no need to shout it. In comparison, the sorts of sights offered in such places as Africa and America, though undoubtedly very exciting, would, I am sure, strike the objective viewer as inferior on account of their unseemly demonstrativeness. (*RD*, p.29)

In reference to this passage, Barry Lewis comments that 'the "objective viewer" appealed to here is anything but: he is English, white, associated with the upper class, a nationalist and imperialist prone to bouts of self-glorifying hyperbole – in short, he is Stevens himself.'[21] Interpretive consonance here means that the fact that Stevens embodies a certain hegemony is

[21] Barry Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp.79-80

demonstrated by his interpretation of his environment. Stevens exemplifies the same propensity as Etsuko and Ono to define the subject of his narrative in terms of the power networks travelling through him. Stevens is the embodiment of a world view which shapes his perceptions of the landscape, both physical and political, around him. The consequence is that this power simply brings its own knowledge back to itself.

As with the previous two novels, Ishiguro utilises the broader notion of historical change in order both to highlight and disrupt the seemingly enclosed psycho-political system of knowledge that he has generated in Stevens's narrative. In one particular scene, he provides a most dramatic example of the effect of an already changed historical environment on an established constellation of values that are embodied by an individual character as a socio-psychological paradigm. During the course of Stevens's journey, the car runs out of petrol and he is invited to stay the night in the cottage of Mr and Mrs Taylor, in Moscombe. While Stevens is there, some of the couple's friends call in and mistake him for a gentleman. As the evening progresses, they become interested in whether Stevens – as the gentleman - was ever involved in 'great affairs' (*RD*, p. 197). He answers in the affirmative, and the discussion then turns to the question of the nature of democracy and dignity. Here is a reversal of roles: Stevens, the servant, has now become the master, giving opinions and talking of how he was involved with the great political events of the past.

Here too is a reversal of the definition of dignity. The dignity of the master lies in the ability to freely express an opinion, while the dignity of the servant lies in remaining silent in order to be all the more attentive to his

superiors. Here, Stevens embodies the reversal of social power, in which the common man has become able to express himself politically and is no longer at the behest of his lord. Stevens appears almost himself transformed from being the servant of another man's will to an authority in his own right.

In this sense, Stevens's historical narrative clarifies his own place in the wider historical and social context. It is the historical context that provides the arena within which the nature of disciplinary society impacts on personal psychology; and it also forms a constituent part of the personality that develops as a result of this impact.

As the embodiment of a hegemony in which 'dignity' means unquestioning obedience to one's superiors and the perfect fulfilment of one's duties, Stevens comes into direct confrontation with the opinions of Harry Smith, a working class man, whose post–war opinion is that

> 'it's one of the privileges of being born English that no matter who you are, no matter if you're rich or poor, you're born free and you're born so that you can express your opinion freely, and vote in your member of parliament or vote him out. That's what dignity's really about, if you'll excuse me sir.' (*RD*. p.196)

In this short excerpt, Ishiguro has positioned Stevens on the borders between two conflicting value systems, which infuse the same words with diametrically opposed meanings, so that Stevens and Harry Smith can barely comprehend the fact that they do not understand one another's perspective. In a sense, Stevens and Harry Smith confront each other as representatives of different

discourses offering different definitions of the concepts of 'Englishness' and 'dignity'. In contrast to Harry Smith's liberal and democratic understanding of 'dignity', Stevens's definition turns out to be nothing more than that put forward by the Hayes Society, as 'dignity in keeping with one's position' (*RD*, p.33). One wonders what Harry Smith's description of the English countryside would be.

In this way, Ishiguro uses historical transition both as a way of pressing hegemonic discourse up against its own psycho-sociological limitations and as a way of capturing the paradigm in a complete rupture of unified meaning between different historical moments. The result is a demonstration of the effect of a changing environment on a seemingly stable narrative – the same narrative becomes invested with new and different meanings because of the change in historical context. In this clash of discourses Ishiguro has encapsulated, not simply the embodiment of historical processes, but a snapshot of the condition of contemporary Britain in which the monarchy and aristocracy exist side by side with a democracy in which the people are meant to be sovereign. In other words, Ishiguro's concept of the dynamism of history matches Foucault's description of a certain type of historical discourse in which history 'exists, events occur, and things that happen can and must be remembered, to the extent that relations of power, relations of force, and a certain play of power operate in relations among men.'[22] Ishiguro's complex view of history is that of 'remembering' power relations both in the sense of recalling the political conditions of the past and reminding us of the political terms of the present.

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[22] Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (London: Penguin, 2004), p.169

At the end of his journey, when Stevens is sitting on the sea-front contemplating the fact that Miss Kenton will not be returning to Darlington Hall, and the sea-front lights go on, there is a mixed atmosphere of sadness and hope. The sadness is due to the fact that there is no chance of redeeming lost opportunities; the hope arises because at last he has become aware of the hidden dimensions of his own life while there is still a little time remaining. The spontaneous cheer of the crowd as the lights go on accompanies the sense that this is a turning point in his life. As he talks to the man sitting next to him, it seems that '[i]n confiding in this sympathetic stranger, Stevens comes some way to crossing the bridge between reality and fiction in his life, and is able to communicate in a way that was previously denied to him.'[23]

At the beginning of his narrative, Stevens tells us that although he is still at Darlington Hall he has a new employer, the American gentleman, Mr Farraday. Stevens comments frequently on the difference between American and English culture. He puts some of Mr Farraday's behaviour down to his 'unfamiliarity with what was and what was not commonly done in England' (*RD*, p.4). At the end of his narrative he is looking forward to learning how to banter, which he considers, 'in the United States, no doubt, is a sign of a good, friendly understanding between employer and employee' (*RD*, p.15). He is on the boundary between two cultures and two times. His attitude belongs to pre-war British society and is made apparent as extraordinarily repressive when placed in the context of post-war Americanised Britain. The Second World War has become the vehicle for cultural colonialism, and an intermixture of cultures brings a change in the times. In the younger Mr

[23] Ben Winsworth, 'Communicating and Not Communicating: The True and False Self in *The Remains of The Day*', *Qwerty*, 9 (1999), 266.

Farraday, Stevens sees the future. However, instead of engaging with it fully, he decides that it will be his new master. It seems that he has not really learned to accept responsibility for his own historical destiny. The disciplinarity of vocational discourse and the denial of self and history, and self *as* history, still dominate. The self-divisive nature of vocational narrative distances the connection between the self and the world and masks the perception of the self *in history*. As Carl Jung notes, in *The Undiscovered Self*, the capacity of human beings to learn, combined with the necessity to adapt to an extrinsic reality, means that man's consciousness 'orients itself chiefly by observing and investigating the world around him, and it is to its peculiarities that he must adapt his psychic and technical resources.'[24] This is a task

> so exacting, and its fulfilment so advantageous, that he forgets himself in the process, losing sight of his instinctual nature and putting his own conception of himself in place of his real being. In this way he slips imperceptibly into a purely conceptual world where the products of his conscious activity progressively replace reality.[25]

Stevens's conscious orientation is directed towards the fulfilment of his vocation so powerfully that his perception of the world becomes confined within the conceptual parameters of the discourse of the butler and renders him senseless to the split in his own nature. However, the internal dialectic that is the psychological accompaniment to Stevens's physical journey to meet Miss Kenton culminates in the recognition both of his own broken heart

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[24] Carl Gustav Jung, *The Undiscovered Self* (1957; London: Routledge, 2002), p.57.
[25] Ibid. pp.57-58.

and of his irresponsible complicity with the misguided political judgements of his master. Stevens must grapple with the painful realisation that he has been an unconscious dupe of coercive power structures and historical events, and that, as Jung puts it, 'he harbours within himself a dangerous shadow and opponent who is involved as an invisible helper in the dark machinations of the political monster.'[26] Despite Stevens's growing awareness of the dark underbelly of his vocational identity, the damage has already been done. Such a split psychological state as that which Stevens possesses, which is unconscious of its own historical being as much as it is unaware of its instinctual self and the needs of others, cannot simply divest itself of such deeply ingrained conceptual parameters. The result is that what should have been a liberating, therapeutic, re-acquaintance with hitherto rejected aspects of the self turns out to be nothing of the sort. The fact is that Stevens, despite his awareness of the destruction it has caused in his life, continues the pursuit of professional perfection. In Stevens's concern to learn the art of bantering in order to serve his new master well, it is evident that the vocational imperative holds good. Indeed, as Bruce Robbins puts it, 'the mild pun on "remains" as both "time remaining in" and the "corpse of" the day would seem to underline the waste of the butler's life, a life evaded and distorted by means of professional rationalisation and overwork.'[27]

The last embers of Stevens's individuality have been snuffed out leaving the shell of his historically generated vocational identity to contemplate the consoling words offered by an ex-butler, possibly a substitute

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[26] Ibid. pp. 71-72.
[27] Bruce Robbins, 'Very Busy Just Now: Globalisation and Harriedness in Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', *Comparative Literature*, 53/4 (Fall 2001), 431.

father-figure, or even Stevens's own future self, who sits next to him on a bench overlooking Weymouth pier: 'for a great many people, the evening was the best part of the day, the part they most looked forward to' (*RD*, p.253). Whether one's vocational pursuits are able to provide any consolation for the vicissitudes of one's life is a theme that Ishiguro continues to pursue in his next novel.

Chapter 5

The Unconsoled:

Self-division and Dislocation

Ishiguro's fourth novel, *The Unconsoled* (1995), met with a wide range of critical responses, both varied and divergent. Brian Shaffer notes that the many different reactions to the novel from the critical community depended very much on whether a particular reviewer emphasised its similarities or dissimilarities to Ishiguro's previous work. According to Shaffer the novel 'represents a clear change of tone, direction and scope for Ishiguro', but those reviewers 'who stress *The Unconsoled*'s break with its author's earlier fiction...often overlook those characteristics that the novel shares with the earlier works'.[1] The differences between *The Unconsoled* and Ishiguro's previous novels can be found in the fact that it is absurd, uncanny, and 'exhibits some of the openly experimental play with time, space, and perception associated with literary modernism and metaficiton',[2] whilst the characteristics it shares with them come both in the form of stylistic similarities and thematic continuities. For instance, as with Ishiguro's earlier fictions, the reader is presented with a first-person narrative which condenses the narrator's unsettled relationship with his past and his troubled negotiation of the shifting ground of the society around him into a single entity. As Shaffer points out, thematic continuity between *The Unconsoled* and Ishiguro's earlier work can be found in a continuing concern with such issues as 'the

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[1] Brian Shaffer, *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), pp.90-91.
[2] Ibid. p.90.

problematic position of the artist in society ... [and] the myriad shortcomings that often hide behind professionalism.'[3] *The Unconsoled*, then, occupies an ambiguous, and seemingly contradictory, position within the body of Ishiguro's writing.

In the novel, Ryder, an international pianist, arrives in an unnamed city in an unspecified region similar in nature to Eastern Europe. He is meant to be giving a concert and making a speech, but does not succeed in doing either. He apparently has a schedule to follow but never gets to see it. He is in some way connected to what is happening around him, but no matter how much he attempts to discover exactly what is going on, he finds it absolutely impossible to do so. The people he meets are alien to him even though he should know them - his wife, son, father-in-law, or former school friends. For instance, Ryder only becomes re-acquainted with his own wife and son after having been asked by Gustav, the hotel porter (who later turns out to be Ryder's father-in-law, or so it seems), if he wouldn't mind having a word with his daughter, Sophie (who turns out to be Ryder's wife, probably), to try to find out what has been on her mind lately. As Ryder attempts both to rehearse for the concert that he is meant to be giving and to follow the agenda for his visit, he is continually diverted by requests to perform favours for other characters, all of whom appear to be related to, or projections of, various aspects of his past life or present preoccupations. Thus, as Carlos Villa Flor has pointed out, the novel is pervaded with 'a constant fear of the small daily duties or various commitments that might divert the person from his true vocation'.[4]

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[3] Ibid. p.91-92.

[4] Carlos Vills Flor, 'Unreliable Selves in an Unreliable World: The Multiple Projections of the Hero in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', *Journal of English Studies*, 2 (2002), 161.

In this chapter, I should like to argue that the stylistic difference between *The Unconsoled* and Ishiguro's earlier work is an effect of his continuing fascination with vocational obsession. In *The Unconsoled*, the extreme stress and confusion experienced by Ryder, the narrator, is related to his pursuit of the vocational imperative. The forces which have driven him towards an identification with his professional role as a musician are also the forces against which his anxious pursuit of this profession marginally protects him. I show that Ryder's pursuit of the vocational imperative ironically maintains his sense of identity in the face of a threat to the borders between the self and others. The fact that Ryder is particularly prone to being caught up in the personal problems of others, by means of his own multiple projections of aspects of himself onto them, causes him to believe in his own omniscience. In other words, Ishiguro has generated a fictional reality in which vocation is both the effect of childhood distress and the cause of the fact that Ryder's living experience has taken on the features of a gigantic anxiety dream. One of the main features of Ryder's fractured relationships with those around him is the fact that he has an uncanny ability to understand the thought processes and concerns of others. The following example of one episode in the novel illustrates the complex interconnection that Ishiguro has constructed between Ryder's distressed psychology, his sense of vocation, and the characters that surround him.

During his stay in the hotel, Ryder meets the hotel manager, Mr Hoffman, his wife and their son, Stephan. Stephan Hoffman asks Ryder if he would be willing to spend some time listening to him rehearse his pieces on the piano and give him some advice. It becomes clear that the reason for his

request is that Stephan's piano playing has become the source of marital harmony for his parents. Sometime later, Ryder recalls mysteriously an incident from Stephan's, rather than his own, past which illustrates this point:

> 'Come on, Stephan,' the hotel manager had said jovially. 'This is your mother's birthday, after all. Don't disappoint her.'
>
> An idea had flashed through Stephan's mind… an idea that his parents were conspiring against him… it was as though they had no memory at all of the anguished history surrounding his piano playing…
>
> For one giddying moment he saw the possibility… that he would somehow perform at a level never before attained, and that he would finish to find his parents smiling, applauding and exchanging with each other looks of deep affection. But no sooner had he commenced the opening bar of Mullery's *Epicycloid*, he had realised the utter impossibility of any such scenario…
>
> So he had continued, and when at last the piece had finished, Stephan had sat staring at the keyboard for several moments before working up the courage to look round at the scene awaiting him.
>
> Neither of his parents was looking at him. His father's head had now become so bowed the forehead was almost touching the table surface. His mother was looking in the other direction across the room, wearing the frosty expression Stephan was so familiar with and which, astonishingly, had been absent until that point in the evening. (*UN*, pp.68-69)

Ryder recalls these events from another character's life with great detail, events which he could not have witnessed himself. However, this cruel and funny scene resonates deeply with the fact that Ryder's own fundamentally distressed personality is centred around the anxiety created by his parents' dysfunctional relationship, in which his performance is still the criteria for familial stability. Later in the novel, Ryder is driven to distraction worrying about when his parents will arrive for the concert that he is meant to be giving. Ryder's strange remembrance of someone else's experience highlights the way in which his identity is blurred with that of the characters surrounding him so that his relationship with them comes to embody different fragments of his own distressed mind. The dream-like quality of the text makes it difficult to identify the boundaries between Ryder's estranged psychological state and the 'facts' of his environment.

The deeper connection of these characters to Ryder's life is triggered by an inexplicable sense of familiarity as Ishiguro dovetails Ryder's consciousness with that of those surrounding him. In the text, there are so many connections of this kind that Ryder's environment becomes wall-papered with his personal psychology in a way that generates a disturbing and unsettled atmosphere. As Carlos Villa Flor notes in his essay on the projection of multiple selves in *The Unconsoled*,

> [a]n alert reader might realise that many characters appearing in the novel... are likely to be projections or variations of the narrator himself... they are not necessarily his fabrication, but clearly many of

them embody what must have been or indeed are Ryder's own traumas and injuries.[5]

In his analysis, Flor also draws attention to the number of dysfunctional families to be found in the text. They are

Mr Hoffman	Brodsky	Gustav [Sophie's father]
Stephan	Bruno [a dog]	Sophie
Mrs Hoffman	Miss Collins	Boris

Ryder	Mr Ryder [Ryder's father]
Boris [Ryder's son]	Ryder
Sophie [Ryder's wife]	Mrs Ryder[6] [Ryder's mother]

Each family constellation is characterised by a chronic breakdown of communication, with the hope of reconciliation falling mainly on the child. Even Brodsky, a formally prestigious conductor bedevilled by alcohol and neurosis, sees in his case not a child but a child substitute, his dog, Bruno, as a means to reconstruct his relationship with his estranged wife, Miss Collins. The fact that Ryder is asked to perform favours for each of these families in order to facilitate reconciliation simply magnifies the fact that they are reflections of his own situation. Indeed, it becomes clear that Ryder, 'like Stephan or Boris, must have been severely hurt in his childhood by being a

[5] Carlos Vills Flor, 'Unreliable Selves in an Unreliable World: The Multiple Projections of the Hero in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', *Journal of English Studies*, 2 (2002), 163.
[6] Ibid. p.163.

witness of constant parental fighting and by suffering a subsequent neglect.'[7] The prismatic effect of the various family situations to be found in the text in elucidating the single point of unconsolable family trauma is a 'rarefied process [that] could be considered a peculiarly dreamlike metamorphosis in which the dreamer is the centre.'[8] Moreover, the dreamer is a centre constantly threatened by self-division.

However, Flor's analysis does not proceed to a broader consideration of the origin or importance of Ryder's obsession with his profession as a motivating factor behind his behaviour. He refers to Ryder simply as resorting to the arguments of an egoist who uses professional duty as an excuse for bad behaviour, commenting only that 'the feeling remains that such a reason is not convincing'[9]. In this context, it is worth considering a phenomenon referred to by the psychoanalyst Alice Miller as grandiosity. According to Miller, a child who has been raised in a family where love has to be earned by the performance of special abilities or specific roles becomes addicted to success as a means of attempting to secure a place in his parents' affections. At the same time, the performance of the child fulfils the needs of the parents who depend on his success for their own self-esteem. Such a child, when grown into an adult, finds it impossible

> to cut the tragic link between admiration and love. In his compulsion to repeat he seeks insatiably for admiration, of which he never gets enough because admiration is not the same thing as love. It is only a

[7] Ibid. p.166.
[8] Ibid. p.163.
[9] Ibid. p.168.

substitute gratification of the primary needs for respect, understanding, and being taken seriously.[10]

Ryder's egoism and its connection with his vocation can be understood as a complication of such a situation. The episode in which Ryder remembers Stephan's attempts to re-establish harmony between his parents suggests this. Stephan's father is anxious to avoid being on the receiving end of his wife's disfavour; he hopes that his son's performance will make up for his own inadequacies in the eyes of his wife who was, he supposes, sorely disappointed when she discovered that he was not a composer. The result is that the father's pressure on the son to fulfil the wishes of the mother, in order to maintain his own place in her affections, compounds Stephan's anxieties as his performance becomes the criteria for family stability. Ryder's anxiety over the arrival of his own parents and his performance indicate that he is in much the same situation. His professional egoism can, therefore, be seen as a correlate of his desire for love coupled with his anxious attempts to maintain harmony in the relationship between his parents. It also explains the compelling sense of mission that Ryder obviously experiences in relation to his vocation.

Ryder's attempts to console the members of each of the families he meets are not only multiple attempts to repair the relationship between his own parents but also demonstrate that he has taken on this role as part of his social persona. His profession as a musician is the means by which he seeks to console people for their grief. It is also the way in which he attempts to

[10] Alice Miller, *The Drama of Being a Child* (London: Virago Press, 1987), p. 58.

maintain a coherent identity. Without Ryder's consistent efforts to pursue his vocational imperative, his consciousness would be completely fragmentary.

Indeed, the nearness of mental destruction to Ryder's consciousness is demonstrated in the immanent relationship that he has with his past. This becomes apparent in the way in which Ryder, apparently waking up in the middle of dozing off to sleep, describes his room in the hotel:

> The room I was now in, I realised, was the very room that had served as my bedroom during the two years my parents and I had lived at my aunt's house on the borders of England and Wales. I looked again around the room, then, lowering myself back down, stared once more at the ceiling. It had been recently re-plastered and re-painted, its dimensions had been enlarged, the cornices had been removed, the decorations around the light fitting had been entirely altered. But it was unmistakably the same ceiling I had so often stared up at from my narrow creaking bed of those days. (*UN*, p.16)

It is impossible to tell whether Ryder is meant to be awake at this point, or whether he is still asleep. Also, despite the fact that Ryder's detailed description acknowledges the fact that the room is entirely different from the one in which he stayed with his aunt, he still insists on the fact that it is the same one. Thus, Ishiguro generates a particularly complex and many layered texture by breaking down the borders between the conscious and unconscious elements of Ryder's mind and dispersing fragmentary

projections of his dissociated self, both from his past and present, onto other characters and even onto the material environment in the text.

The importance of vocation in maintaining an integrated and unique identity for Ryder, and the ridiculous extremes to which he is prepared to go in order to hold on to that identity, are symbolically mirrored in the text by his father-in-law, Gustav, the hotel porter. At the beginning of the novel, just after Ryder has checked into the hotel at which he will be staying during his visit to the city, he is shown to his room by Gustav. While they are standing in the lift, Ryder notices that Gustav is continuing to hold onto his suitcases instead of putting them down on the floor. In response to Ryder's suggestion that he should put them down, Gustav launches into a lengthy explanation of why he will not do so. According to Gustav, there is an abundance of hotels in the town and consequently many of the population have at one time or another had some experience of portering. This has happened to such a great extent in the town that, as Gustav says, 'many people here seem to think they can simply put on a uniform and then that will be it, they'll be able to do the job.' (*UN* p.5) While on holiday in Lucerne, Switzerland, Gustav witnessed the greater level of respect paid to porters, which started him thinking seriously about things. Eventually, a chance comment made by one of the city councillors of his own town, to the effect that portering was a carefree existence, prompted Gustav to take action to remedy the situation. He tells Ryder, 'I adopted my measures, sir, and I've stuck to them, ever since that day the city councillor said what he did.' (*UN*, p.7) These measures are expressed later on in the text when Gustav performs a bizarre table-top dance, called 'The Porters' Dance' (*UN*, p. 396). When Ryder and his son,

Boris, are invited by Gustav to join him and a few of his fellow porters in the Hungarian Cafe, they become witnesses to the way in which the porters relax and unwind. Gustav decides to encourage the porters to 'show Mr Ryder how we *really* enjoy ourselves! Let's show him how we do it' (*UN*, p.395). What follows is the Porters' Dance. In this dance, one porter after another climbs up onto the table and goes through a series of postures and gestures expressive of the job of portering. More items are introduced into the dance as it progresses, starting with a light cardboard box, which the first dancer pretends is extremely heavy. The climax of the proceedings comes when Gustav himself climbs onto the table and is given a heavy suitcase and a golfing bag containing an engine as his props. After immense effort, the strain of which dismays Boris, his grandson, very much, Gustav manages to stand up straight while holding these items. The result of his success is a few seconds of applause before everyone's attention is transferred to singing a song, and he is forgotten about. As Gustav and Boris embrace out of sheer relief, Gustav has this to say to his grandson:

> 'Boris, Listen. You're a good boy. If something ever happens to me, if something ever does, you'll have to take my place. You see, your mother and father, they're fine people. But sometimes they find it hard. They're not strong like you and me. So you see, if something happens to me, and I'm no longer here, you must be the strong one. You must look after your mother and father, keep the family strong, keep it together...You'll promise me that, won't you Boris?' (*UN*, p.407)

This episode in the text re-emphasises the complex connection that Ishiguro has identified between social conditioning, vocation and family relationships. The Porters' Dance, as a grotesque parody of the porters' actual working lives, clarifies the all-consuming nature of their work. Far from relaxing and unwinding, in their dance, the porters are simply re-confirming and even celebrating the pre-eminence of the values of their profession. Ensconced in the world of the porter, Gustav's profession has become an emblem of the struggles facing him in his life. These struggles are contained in the ambiguous way in which he addresses Boris. His statement that Boris should take his place has a double meaning evident in Gustav's own interpretation of his ability to hold the heavy bags as being equivalent to the moral strength required to 'keep the family strong'. That he should put pressure on Boris to inherit his role has, therefore, both a literal and an emotional dimension: emotional competence and the capacity to perform a job well are presented as one homogeneous entity to Boris, and as a pattern for his own future. His grandfather places him in a similar position to that of his own father, Ryder, who has seen his profession as a way of healing the emotional wounds of his family life. The point is that both Gustav and Ryder are wrong about this. Gustav has in fact failed to keep his own family together, as the fact that he and Sophie have not spoken for years testifies, while Ryder fails in his attempts to console anyone, except possibly Brodsky for the loss of his dog, Bruno. Boris is therefore in danger of making the same mistake as both his grandfather and his father by identifying professional competence with emotional intelligence.

It seems that the result of Ryder's relationship with his father has psychologically predisposed him to take responsibility for the emotional troubles of others. This confusing mixture of priorities is what drives Ryder's intensely anxious negotiation of the various requests for help that distract him from fulfilling his professional goal.

Ishiguro enhances this feeling of turmoil in the text by entrenching Ryder's experiences in a narrative structure that utilises the condensation of time and space so as to emphasise a frustrating and bewildering circularity. During his stay in the unnamed city, Ryder takes long journeys away from the city only to step through doorways which lead him straight back to the place he just left. For instance, at one point Ryder deposits his son, Boris, in a café while he meets with a couple of journalists in the courtyard outside. During the interview they persuade Ryder to have his photograph taken at the Sattler monument. Unknown to Ryder, this monument has deep symbolic significance for the local population in relation to a conflict over musical interpretation. Ryder leaves Boris in the café while, in the company of the two journalists, he takes a tram to the monument. The ticket inspector on the tram turns out to be Fiona Roberts, a childhood friend whom he had agreed to visit the previous evening only then to fail to turn up to the meeting. In the process of making his apologies, he recalls a childhood conversation about his parents that they once had in their hide-out under her parents' dining table. Fiona had attempted to encourage him to overcome his anxieties over his parents' quarrelsome relationship by saying, 'when *you* get married, it needn't be like it is with your mum and dad. It won't be like that at all. Husbands and wives don't always argue all the time. They only argue like that when…when special

things happen.' (*UN*, p.172) Although the specific nature of the 'special things' is never revealed, the recollection of this conversation re-affirms the notion that the roots of Ryder's attempts to console others can be found in his early exposure to parental conflict. Unfortunately his own relationship with his wife and son *did* turn out to be much the same. After arriving at the monument and having his photographs taken, he is met by Christoff, a failed musician, who takes him to a car and drives him to a lunch in a café where he is meant to discuss pressing musical issues with a group of the town's enthusiasts. As the discussion gets out of hand, Ryder remembers that this café is in the same building as the one in which he originally left Boris. After making enquiries, he is led by a member of staff on a short walk through a kitchen area, a door that looks like it belongs to a broom cupboard and down some steps only to meet up with his son once more. (*UN*, pp.165-205)

This circularity is typical of Ryder's experience, and it is also emphasised as a feature of his musical life. For example, the title of the piano piece that he recalls Stephan playing for his parents is *Epicycloid*. Further, one of the questions asked by a member of the town's enthusiasts in the above mentioned discussion is: 'Is Henry right in believing we can't at any cost abandon the circular dynamic in Kazan?' (*UN*, p.201) It seems as though Ryder himself is unable to abandon the circular dynamic of his own existence as, at the end of the novel, he finds himself on a tram circling the city. Flor's description of the dreamer as the centre of the text must be qualified by an acknowledgement of the fact that Ryder's existence is one of both perpetual dislocation and perpetual repetition accompanied by a relentless anxiety. A contributing factor to this sense of anxiety that permeates the text is the fact

that, no matter how hard Ryder tries, he cannot get hold of the schedule that he is meant to be following during his visit.

Ishiguro's construction of Ryder's dissociated state is, therefore, related to the way in which he is disconnected from his wider social context - to such an extent that he cannot properly identify his own part in it, and seems to be in a permanent state of cultural dislocation. This culturally disconnected and permanently harassed state can be read as Ishiguro's response to the contradictions of a supposedly globalised cultural milieu. As Bruce Robbins argues in his essay on the idea of harriedness in *The Unconsoled*, the novel 'seems to elevate harriedness into a sort of ontological principle, a description of Being itself.'[11] As an international individual, dissociation has become Ryder's ontological condition. In the same way that Ishiguro has displaced Ryder in terms of his personal relationships, he has disconnected him from his social context.

Furthermore, Ishiguro's interpretation of social change takes another twist in *The Unconsoled.* Although, generally, Ishiguro's works are anything but straightforward historical novels, they cannot function effectively without the reader having some grasp, even of the most tenuous kind, of the nature of the historical context. Added to this is the fact that, in his first three novels particularly, it is the shift in the historical context, rather than the transformation of the characters on their own account, that is the driving force behind many of the questions raised by Ishiguro's writing. Undoubtedly, *The Unconsoled* is a most difficult work to be dealt with from this perspective because, in it, Ishiguro attempts to avoid any recognisable historical reference

[11] Bruce Robbins, 'Very Busy Just Now: Globalisation and Harriedness in Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', *Comparative Literature*, 53/4 (2001), 426-441.

point whatsoever. Indeed, Ryder himself seems to be trapped in an endless cyclical process of historical transcendence, historically dislocated. However, despite the seemingly abstract nature of Ryder's historical situation, it seems to me that Ishiguro's use of the principle of hegemonic transition firmly connects *The Unconsoled* with his earlier novels. It is a thematic continuity that adds another dimension to the way in which Ishiguro manages the move from one hegemonic set of values to another in his writing.

In his first three novels, in which the narrators find themselves having to come to terms with a changing world, Ishiguro embodies social change in his narrators' relationships with those around them. In Etsuko's encounter with Sachiko's preference for life in America and her daughter Niki's aversion to marriage; in Ono's experiences with his grandson, who is obsessed with American icons such as Popeye and The Lone Ranger; and in Stevens's encounter with the democratic Harry Smith and their conflicting understanding of the idea of dignity, Ishiguro makes visible the dialectic tensions of a shifting hegemonic landscape. In a similar way, it is possible to view Ryder's destroyed family relationships and the background of the narrative in *The Unconsoled*, centred on a conflict over musical interpretation which seems to be resolved towards the end of the text, as an indication that Ishiguro has, in this instance, created an abstract narrative of hegemonic transition.

My argument is that this narrative of hegemonic transition, and Ryder's dislocated relationship to it, is the manifestation of a concern with the issue of the problematic relationship between localised conflicts and international politics. I suggest that the way in which Ishiguro engages with the complexities of this relationship corresponds closely to modern economic

theory. These complexities are most clearly evinced in the text in terms of the fact that Ryder's personal tendency towards grandiosity has been transformed into a public obsession with fulfilling his messianic mission as a great musician.

At first glance, it may seem that Ryder's difficulties are simply due to a lack of time. There are simply not enough hours in the day to allow Ryder to respond to the number of demands being placed on him. This impossible situation means that he can neither fulfil his professional duties nor placate the emotional anxieties that he feels as a result of his exaggerated sense of responsibility. This situation is highlighted during a conversation that Ryder has with Stephan Hoffman. Stephan, who is due to perform at the Thursday night concert, has decided to change his programme at the last minute. He has decided to perform a piece called *Glass Passions* by Kazan, a very challenging composition. He asks Ryder if he would listen to his playing and give an opinion as to whether this is a wise decision. However, as it is late, Stephan suggests that it would be better for Ryder if he stood outside the room listening, as this would allow him to leave whenever he had heard enough. After listening for long enough to be able to form an opinion, which is not very long, Ryder goes to bed. The next morning, Ryder discovers that Stephan, not realising that he had gone to bed, kept on playing all night. When Ryder delivers his opinion, he tells Stephan that 'with that piece there's little one can do but devote time. A *lot* of time...provided you have enough time, I'm certain you'll give a very fair account of even that difficult piece.' (*UN*, p.159) Thus, this lack of time is a general problem, and not something that only confronts Ryder himself as he is continually thwarted in his attempts to

rehearse for the concert. Indeed, the many personal favours asked of him seem to indicate a general disregard for the time constraints facing the individual subject.

Added to this limitation on time is the fact that the favours asked of Ryder require him to be in a diverse range of locations almost simultaneously, which exasperates the frustrating nature of his experience, and means that his consciousness of space is compressed severely. Such a time–space deficit is an aspect of the text that has suggested to some the possibility of reading Ryder as 'a hyperbolic fictional representative of the fragmented subject of postmodernity.'[12] It is indeed the case that Ryder's experience is representative of that of the individual caught up in the compression of space and time that is a typical feature of postmodern modes of production. In *The Condition of Postmodernity*, David Harvey has noted that the emphasis in postmodern modes of production has shifted from the centralised industrial processes of Fordism to what he calls the mode of 'flexible accumulation'. Flexible accumulation demands a much greater level of adaptability in terms of time, place and multiple work skills from workers. Ryder's position as a musician gives the reader a uniquely transparent view of the effects of this regime of flexible accumulation on the consciousness of the postmodern subject. His ontological condition, therefore, as an embodiment of the cultural aspects of late capitalism, can be read as indicative of what Frederic Jameson referred to as a process 'that involves our insertion as individual subjects into a multidimensional set of radically discontinuous realities, whose frames range from the still surviving spaces of bourgeois private life all the way to the

[12] Mike Petry, *Narratives of Memory and Identity: The Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1999), p.11.

unimaginable decentering of global capitalism itself.'[13] The increasing demands for flexibility, both in terms of location and working practices, that are a feature of the 'decentering of global capitalism' is the cultural milieu within which Ryder exists. Moreover, the art that he practices is unable to provide any consolation against the destructive tendencies of the system of which it is a part. Indeed, this system has itself changed the nature of the vocational imperative from one that, as in the case of Stevens, is able to provide some sense of satisfaction to one that is impossible to fulfil right from the very beginning.

The lethal combination of Ryder's compulsion to continue to try to repair his parents' relationship through music with the demands of the musical establishment surrounding him means that he experiences the full weight of this altered vocational imperative. The extent to which Ryder's existence is ruled by what he perceives to be his endless duties towards others, and his inability to identify his genuine professional duties from his own compulsive emotional needs, becomes clear in an exchange between himself and his wife, Sophie. Ryder recalls a phone call during which, in response to Sophie wondering how long he can continue in the same way, he stated that 'the fact is, people need me. I arrive in a place and more often than not find terrible problems. Deep-seated, seemingly intractable problems, and people are grateful I've come.' After pointing out that time is slipping away from their family life, Sophie argued that 'No one can expect you to keep on like this. And all these people, why can't they sort out their own problems? It might do them some good!'. Ryder response is telling. He explains that in

[13] Fredric Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', in *Marxism and The Interpretation of Culture*, eds. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p.351.

'Some of these places I visit, the people don't know a thing. They don't understand the first thing about modern music and if you leave them to themselves, it's obvious, they'll just get deeper and deeper into trouble. I'm needed, why can't you see that? I'm needed out here! You don't know what you're talking about! 'And it was then I had shouted at her: 'Such a small world! You live in such a small world!' (*UN*, p.37)

This exchange demonstrates the extent of the confused state into which Ryder has fallen. The continuation of his attempts to mend his parents' relationship has transformed into a compulsion to take responsibility for other people's emotional problems. This compulsion, as it is also linked to the fact that Ryder's ability to help his parents depended on his musical performance, has shaped his professional life. The result is that Ryder feels deeply that he is needed desperately by others and cannot, as Sophie suggests, leave them to sort out their own problems. The reason why Ryder cannot do this is because he can no longer tell the difference between professional musical issues and personal emotional ones. It seems that in Ryder's case, the vocational imperative is characterised by the fact that purely professional concerns have been swamped by personal needs. This mixture of exhausting professional dedication, the endless need to console others, and the inability to maintain close personal relationships is what has prompted Bruce Robbins to compare Ryder's condition with that of "compassion fatigue".

However, after having warned us about the danger of falling into the trap of thinking of Ishiguro's construction of Ryder's situation as an overly cynical view of the professionalisation of humanitarianism, such as that found in disaster relief organisations, Robbins suggests that the 'notion of a natural limit to compassion, an emotional exhaustion as absolutely predictable as the limits on the energy of human muscles or the 24-hour limit to the day, should I think be understood as one of the more successful ideological spin-offs of the myth of Globalisation.'[14] It seems to me that Ishiguro's stance in *The Unconsoled* is very much an exposé of the limits of what Robbins identifies as the 'myth of Globalisation'. Ishiguro undermines the myth of a universally viable mode of existence based on the basic tenets of laissez-faire capitalism by invoking the horrors of the living anxiety dream that is its cultural manifestation. The point that Robbins makes is that, in the time-honoured tradition of ideologies, this 'myth of Globalisation' works in a way that naturalises the conditions that are the effects of the hegemonic ambitions of its advocates. He argues that the so-called limit on compassion, known as 'compassion fatigue', is an unnatural experience that cannot be blamed only on a shortage of time. Rather, it is the misinterpretation of the social destruction wrought by the forces of global capitalism, which appear as natural time constraints on the individual subject, that disguises the fact that global anxiety is related to 'the uncertainty of borders and the social units and solidarities, the nations and the cities, they more or less roughly delineate.'[15] As I have already shown, Ryder is uncertain of the boundaries of his vocation.

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[14] Bruce Robbins, 'Very Busy Just Now: Globalisation and Harriedness in Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', *Comparative Literature*, 53/4 (2001), 436.
[15] Ibid. p.436.

It is this that makes it impossible for him to fulfil any of his responsibilities, not the fact that he has stopped caring.

Moreover, the randomness of the boundaries that *do* exist in the city that Ryder is visiting is exemplified in an episode in which his trip to view the concert hall in which he will perform is unexpectedly obstructed. While walking, Ryder becomes preoccupied with his own anxieties and loses sight of the domed roof of the concert hall, which he is using as his focus point for navigating his way through the city streets. After wandering around for a while, he eventually views the roof once more and heads in the right direction. However, just as he comes close to the concert hall, he is suddenly confronted by a brick wall. At first, Ryder does not perceive this wall as a problem; he simply assumes that there is a way around it. However, on closer inspection, he finds, to his dismay, that the 'pavements on both sides of the street simply came to a dead stop at the brickwork.' (*UN*, p.387) After questioning a local woman as to whether there is a way out, he is informed that there is not: the wall 'completely seals the street.' (*UN*, p.387) The woman also informs Ryder that the wall was built by 'some eccentric person at the end of the last century' (*UN*, p.388) and that it is a very popular sight for many Japanese and American tourists, who gather to take photographs of it in the summer. The fact that the wall is an unusual and fascinating sight for tourists confirms the fact that Ryder exists in a world of uncertain and unpredictable, boundaries. In his frustration, Ryder complains that, in the city, there are 'Utterly preposterous obstacles everywhere.'(*UN*, p.388)

This wall, too easily read as an allusion to the Cold War, coupled with Ishiguro's use of Germanic names in the novel, is undoubtedly a factor that

has led some critics to view *The Unconsoled* as 'a thinly veiled allegory about the collapse of communism.'[16] This is an interpretation which Ishiguro himself dismisses as evidence of the 'tendency to want to tie things down'[17] even when faced with such an abstract novel. Nevertheless, the European flavour that these elements add to the text, and the brief reference made to the American and Japanese tourists, are, as I will show, important elements in understanding Ryder as a character indicative of the condition of the postmodern subject.

In this more general sense, Ryder's difficulties, and the impossibility of fulfilling the demands of his vocation, can also be read as an indication that the exhaustive aspects of the vocational imperative are a structural feature of the work culture of global capitalism. It is a work structure that, by destroying a sense of boundaries and identity, multiplies the sense of responsibility indefinitely. Such an impossibly grandiose sense of responsibility as that demonstrated by Ryder is bound to end in failure and is implicated in phenomena ranging from the inability to maintain family relationships to the collapse of social relations. Ryder's situation can therefore be seen to epitomise a globalised perspective and its troubled relationship to local events.

In his essay, however, Robbins reads the tension between Ryder's family responsibilities and his work commitments as representing not only the conflict between the domestic and the public but also that between the global and the local. He makes no mention of the significance of the activities of the members of the local community that Ryder is attempting to help. Despite the

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[16] Dylan Otto Krider, 'Rooted In A Small Space: An Interview With Kazuo Ishiguro', *Kenyon Review*, 20/2 (1998),151.
[17] Ibid. p,151.

fact that the exact nature of the troubles facing the local musical enthusiasts remains vague, this omission is important enough to warrant further discussion. It is important because Ryder's relationship with the local community can be read as Ishiguro's intuitive understanding of 'the enormous strategic difficulties of coordinating local and grassroots or neighbourhood political actions with national or international ones'. [18]

Ryder's attempt to fulfil his mission occurs against the background of an elusive and ill-defined local conflict over musical interpretation. According to Ryder, like Stephan's dysfunctional parents, the Hoffmans, the local music enthusiasts seem to believe that music has the power to solve all the personal and social crises that they face. He, therefore, sees himself as the person most ideally suited to rectify the situation despite the fact that, as Christoff points out, 'he doesn't yet know about our particular conditions!' (*UN*, p.199)

Ryder's lack of understanding is revealed in his ignorance of the obvious fact that the intention of the local journalist, who asks Ryder for an interview, is to use his celebrity to fuel an ongoing local conflict over musical issues by photographing him in front of a significant local building that symbolises the conflict, the Sattler monument. However, Ryder's egoism makes it impossible for him to recognise the fact that he is being used in this way, even though he overhears the following conversation between the journalist and his photographer:

[18] Fredric Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', in *Marxism and The Interpretation of Culture* , eds. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p.351.

'With these types, you just have to keep up the flattery. So all the time you snap, keep shouting "great". Keep exclaiming. Don't stop feeding his ego.'

'Okay, okay. No problem.'

'So I'll start with...' The journalist gave a weary sigh. 'I'll start talking about his performance in Vienna or something like that. I've got some notes on it here, I'll bluff my way. But let's not waste too much time. After a few minutes, you make out you've had this inspiration about going to the Sattler building. I'll make out I'm a bit annoyed at first, but then end up admitting it's a brilliant idea.'

'Okay, okay.'

'You're sure now. Let's have no mistakes. Remember he's a touchy bastard.'

'I understand.'

'Anything starts to go wrong, just say something flattering.' (*UN*, p.167)

The journalist's plan succeeds, and Ryder is photographed in front of the Sattler building with controversial consequences for everyone concerned. Indeed, in an argument that breaks out later between him and Christoff, Dr. Lubanski, a local expert, concludes that Ryder's gesture indicates that the city is in a state of crisis. Amazingly, Ryder uses this as an opportunity to rebuff Christoff's claims that he knows nothing about their particular conditions and responds by claiming that 'it was gratifying that Dr. Lubanski had immediately highlighted the preposterousness of Christoff's statement, at the same time

underlining the strong message I had wished to send out to the city.' (*UN*, p.200) Essentially, Ryder has no idea what the strong message that he had wished to send out to the city is. Drawn into a local conflict of which he understands next to nothing, Ryder's egoism not only makes it impossible for him to admit that he has been made use of by the reporters but also makes it hard for him to conceive that any local agenda exists at all. The fact that Ryder responds to such a bewildering situation by resorting to a controlling egoism, in an attempt to maintain a sense of integrity, also disguises the fact that he has no control over the way in which his professional image is used freely by others to enhance their own cause.

In his assessment of Ryder's situation, Mike Petry points out that the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman explains the condition of the 'contemporary postmodern subject as just another *floating signifier* in an "empire of signs" rather than things; an empty frame, (re)fillable with ever changing contents'; he emphasises that 'Ryder is no doubt uncertain about his own identity.'[19] Trapped in an empire of signs that defies any attempt at responsible agency, Ryder is doomed to spend his life attempting to perform in compliance with whatever qualities he believes make up the image that other people have of him. In this sense, he has indeed become a free-floating signifier available to all.

Ishiguro's construction of Ryder's condition is a continuation of his fascination with floating signifiers that can be viewed in his previous work. In what can be seen as an added twist to the similar conditions to be found in *An Artist of the Floating World*, in which Ono must negotiate with the changed

[19] Mike Petry, *Narratives of Memory and Identity: The Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1999), p.12.

definition of what it means to be a traitor, and also in *The Remains of the Day,* in which Stevens and Harry Smith contend for the correct definition of dignity, Ishiguro turns Ryder's own identity into the site of unstable signification. For instance, Ryder is unable to understand how the expression on his face in the newspaper photograph of him standing in front of the Sattler monument looks the way it does. He notes that

> More puzzlingly, my features bore an expression of unbridled ferocity. My fist was raised to the wind, and I appeared to be in the midst of producing some warrior-like roar. I could not for the life of me understand how such a pose had come about. The headline – there was no other text at all on the front page – proclaimed: 'RYDER'S RALLYING CALL'. (*UN*, p.267)

It is not simply that Ryder does not recognise himself; rather, he cannot understand the meaning of his own expression because it has been hijacked as the sign of a cause that he knows nothing about. Moreover, the use made of Ryder's association with the Sattler monument in the debate of the local music enthusiasts demonstrates the fact that they are not as in awe of Ryder's greatness as he has come to believe. In this sense, Ryder's failure to prevail in his attempts to inflict his own standards of musical interpretation on the city's enthusiasts, and the success of one faction among them in using his image to further their own ends, is important. His predicament characterises the inherent instabilities of postmodern existence, in which the proliferation of floating signifiers undermines any notion of unified meaning. Hence, the

cultural products of postmodern society can be used to serve almost any purpose, by anyone. In this sense, Ryder can be read as an embodiment of the self-disarming forces of cultural globalisation.

Ryder's concerns with disseminating the correct way to interpret pieces of music can, in the light of John Gray's assessment of the state of global capitalism, be read as a metaphor for the world-wide proliferation of *laissez-faire* capitalism and its attempt to globalise culture. In his *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism*, Gray emphasises the unlikely success of the global free-market economy promoted by the neo-conservative movement in its attempt to impose a universal set of values:

> Globalisation – the spread of new, distance-abolishing technologies throughout the world – does not make western values universal. It makes a plural world irreversible. Growing interconnection between the world's economies does not signify the growth of a single economic civilisation. It means that a *modus vivendi* will have to be found between economic cultures that will always remain different. [20]

Similarly, in his role as global mediator, Ryder's attempts to solve the conflict amongst the various factions in the local concert-going fraternity are, in the end, nothing but an illusion. The unexplained resolution of this conflict, after the disastrous concert, happens at a level on which he simply does not exist and ultimately leaves him isolated and irrelevant. Ironically, then, Ryder's efforts only lead to his own alienation. Gray argues that global *laissez-faire*

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[20] John Gray, 'Postscript' in *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism* (London: Granta, 1998), p. 235.

is a tragedy – one of several that have occurred in the twentieth century – in which an hubristic ideology runs aground on enduring human needs that it has failed to comprehend.

Amongst the human needs that free markets neglect are the needs for security and social identity that used to be met by the vocational structures of bourgeois societies.[21]

Ryder cannot change to encompass a new, clearly defined identity because he is stuck on the border between the destruction of European bourgeois vocational structures and the endless unfulfillable demands of global capital. His confused identity also provides another example of Ishiguro's use of floating signifiers as emblems of periods of hegemonic conflict.

Ryder is himself a victim of the changed vocational demands of global capitalism and its tendency to destroy the social structures on which it depends for its existence. His terminal politeness in dealing with all manner of requests is testament to the destructive and fragmented consequences of such an approach. Unfortunately for Ryder, he cannot perceive the falsity of his perspective and is caught in a cyclical existence as the rest of the world passes through phases of conflict and resolution regardless of his best efforts to exert an influence on his surroundings. In a sense, Ryder is the epitome of the almost psychotic levels of dissociation experienced in a world of global anxiety. Such an analysis of the role that the relationship between

[21] Ibid. p.217.

internationalism and localised conflicts plays in the structure of the novel shows how this narrative of historical transition in *The Unconsoled* encapsulates Ishiguro's abstracted response to his own historical period as a writer. In his next novel, Ishiguro continued to explore the maddening effects of displacement, dislocation and loss by turning to an apparently very different form and content.

Chapter 6

When We Were Orphans:

'My great vocation got in the way of quite a lot, all in all'

In the postscript of his book on Ishiguro, Barry Lewis notes that the fact that the narrator in *When We Were Orphans* is a detective should come as no surprise. According to Lewis, Christopher Banks has much in common with the narrators of Ishiguro's previous novels, who are all 'detectives of a kind, investigating their past lives with Holmes-like meticulousness.'[1] Lewis also notes that Banks's situation is more complicated than that of his predecessors because although he 'begins as a variant of Etsuko, Ono and Stevens, a mariner of memory, trawling for clues in his consciousness to help explain who he is', he ends up more like 'Ryder, a fragmented subject driven by forces he can scarcely identify let alone control.' [2] As with Ishiguro's previous narrators, the way in which Banks 'trawls for clues in his consciousness' is related in terms of his compulsive commitment to his vocation as a detective. Lewis is right to note that Banks's 'childhood obsession of solving the mystery of his parents' disappearance drives his adult enquiries, and brings him to the point of madness'.[3] However, there is more to be said about this 'point of madness'. It is not only something that surfaces towards the end of the narrative; rather, it is inherent in Banks's narrative right from the beginning.

Indeed, Banks, like Ryder, is caught in an impossible position: he struggles to hold together a potentially fragmentary psychological condition

[1] Barry Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.147.
[2] Ibid. p.148.
[3] Ibid. p.7.

through the conscious adherence to a vocational imperative which masks the true nature of the problems he wishes to solve. However, unlike Ryder, who remains impervious to the causes of his stressful existence, Banks's vocation does eventually help him to discover the truth. But, in typical Ishiguro fashion, he discovers this truth only when it is much too late, and in a way that offers little consolation, and leaves him shattered. My focus in this chapter will be on the extent to which Banks inadvertently reveals the nature of the forces that have driven him into such a bereft state of existence.

In his narrative, Banks recalls the early childhood experiences that gradually resulted in his deciding to pursue a career as a detective. These recollections give a far more direct account of his childhood experience than do the narratives of Ishiguro's other characters of theirs. Banks's narrative, therefore, gives a much clearer demonstration of Ishiguro's understanding of the impact of political conflict on the formation of subjectivity. In this regard, my consideration of the way in which Ishiguro has constructed the complex recursive narrative of the text follows a path set along the lines of R. D. Laing's understanding of the subjective embodiment of power relationships.

In *The Politics of Experience*, Laing notes that in order to understand why certain people become permanently labelled as 'schizophrenic' it is necessary to develop a

> further understanding, not only of the internal disturbed and disturbing patterns of communication within families, of the double-binding procedures, the pseudo mutuality, of what I have called the mystifications and the untenable positions, but also the meaning of all this within the larger context of the civic order of society – that is, of the

political order, of the ways persons exercise control and power over one another.[4]

According to Laing, the power relationships at work in society can reach such an intense pitch that they not only disrupt normal family relationships but have the capacity to pervert the whole course of human development. At first glance, *When We Were Orphans* may seem to be far removed from such concerns. However, as Banks's disconcerting account of his past life progresses, it discloses the role that the political order of society has played in setting the trajectory of his existence, and reveals the relevance of Laing's theories.

Banks, brought up in the International Settlement in Shanghai at the beginning of the twentieth century, where he would later experience the loss of his parents, recalls the house in which he lived with his family:

> If I close my eyes a moment, I am able to bring back that picture very vividly: the carefully tended 'English' lawn, the afternoon shadows cast by the row of elms separating my garden and Akira's; and the house itself, a huge white edifice with numerous wings and trellised balconies. I suspect this memory of the house is very much a child's vision, and that in reality it was nothing so grand. Certainly, even at the time, I was conscious that it hardly matched the splendour of the residences round the corner in Bubbling Well Road. But the house was certainly more than adequate for a household comprising simply my parents, myself, Mei Li and our servants. (*WO,* p.51)

[4] R.D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience* and *The Bird of Paradise* (1967; London: Penguin, 1990), p.101.

Despite Banks's uncertainty about the validity of his childhood memory, the picture painted here is one of colonial affluence. The large white house and its garden, situated in the exclusive International Settlement, isolated Banks from any contact with the impoverished local Chinese population. There, he would spend much of his time playing games in the company of a Japanese boy, Akira, who lived next door. Their childhood world seems to have been safely inoculated against the harsh reality that surrounded them.

But though at first it may seem as if the house belonged to the family and was an emblem of their own wealth, this illusion is soon shattered when Banks admits that it 'was the property of Morganbrook and Byatt, which meant that there were many ornaments and pictures around the place I was forbidden to touch.' (*WO*, p.51) This admission about the actual condition of the family's life somewhat undercuts the superficial image of affluent independence first presented in Banks's narrative. It seems that the family's status was dependent on the whims of the company for which Banks's father worked. His father was, in effect, a professional servant. In Ishiguro's construction of Banks's background, his continuing fascination with the problematic of professional identity is visible, and he plays out the repercussions of the invasion of company values into the realm of private life to their fullest in the narrative. The power relationships affecting Christopher's parents shape the relationships established within the family, and become the cultural backdrop ingested in the process of Christopher's personal development. Thus, Ishiguro subtly traces the emergent hegemony of imperialist global capital.

It emerges that the relationship of Morganbrook and Byatt to the local population was an exploitative one, which inflicted immense suffering due to the fact that the company was in the business of importing opium into Shanghai, with predictably catastrophic consequences. This fact, and the extent to which the concerns of the company interfered with family life, became clear during one of the many occasions on which a company health inspector called to check not only on the state of the house, but also the family and the domestic staff, all of whom seem to have been considered as the property of the company. On this particular occasion it seems that the health inspector recommended to Christopher's mother that they dismiss the servants who came from Shantung, not simply because of doubts about their hygiene and health, but more because of doubts about their honesty. When pressed by Christopher's mother for an explanation, the inspector gave the following reply:

> 'In a word, madam, opium. Opium addiction in Shantung has now advanced to such deplorable levels that entire villages are to be found enslaved to the pipe... And inevitably, those who come from Shantung...tend sooner or later to resort to thieving, for the sake of their parents, brothers, cousins, uncles, what have you, all of those cravings must somehow be pacified.' (*WO,* p.59)

This explanation exasperated Christopher's mother, who proceeded to point out the fact that this problem was being caused by the company itself: 'that the British in general, and the company of Morganbrook and Byatt

especially, by importing Indian opium into China in such massive quantities had brought untold misery and degradation to a whole nation.' (*WO*, p.60) Evidently, the relationship between Morganbrook and Byatt, as an arm of British imperialism, had set up a relationship with the local population that could be termed as an institutional double bind.

The theory of the double bind was first put forward by Gregory Bateson as a means of understanding the adverse impact of the communication of contradictory messages on the psychological state of individuals within the family.[5] However, since the main characteristics of the double bind can be defined briefly as 'social interactions in which the individual is repeatedly exposed to conflicting injunctions, without having the opportunity to adequately respond to those injunctions, or to ignore them (i.e., to escape the field)',[6] it is a theory which has much broader social implications. In this regard it is worthwhile considering the double bind as a feature of the way in which Ishiguro has represented the relationship between an imperial capitalist company, Morganbrook and Byatt, and the indigenous population of Shanghai.

It is clear that the imposition of the necessity for servile work on the poor people of Shanghai, combined with the importation of large quantities of opium, created the perfect conditions for mass addiction. At the same time this addictive condition was used as a criteria for the refusal to employ them, thus further increasing their poverty and the likelihood of dependence on opium; Morganbrook and Byatt imported huge amounts of opium and then

[5] Gregory Bateson, Don D.Jackson, Jay Haley, and John Weakland, 'Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia', *Behavioural Science*, 1 (1956), 251-264.
[6] Mathijs Koopmans, 'Schizophrenia and the Family: Double Bind Theory Revisited', York College/ City University of New York, 1997 at http://www.goertzel.org/dynapsyc/1997/Koopmans.html, 3.

refused to employ the local population on the grounds that they were ungrateful, dirty, thieving, drug-addicts. Ishiguro emphasises the inherent contradictions in the relationship of imperial capitalism to its victims, a relationship in which exploitation 'must not be seen as such. It must be seen as benevolence. Persecution preferably should not need to be invalidated as the figment of a paranoid imagination, it should be experienced as kindness.'[7] The insistence of Banks's mother in pointing out the contradictions inherent in the company's relationship with the people of Shanghai undermines this attempt to promote exploitation as benevolence and persecution as kindness.

Ishiguro has thus established this conflicting social situation as the backdrop to Banks's childhood experience. The fact that this argument over the opium trade is used as the general discourse surrounding Christopher as a boy reveals the way in which Ishiguro politicises childhood existence by placing it on the knife-point of conflicting political and commercial interests. Moreover, this impossible situation is the cause of the family conflicts that eventually deprive Banks of both parents. The devolution of this conflict in the social environment into a personal conflict between Banks's mother and father, and the impossibility of occupying such a space, ensure that the narrator is pushed out into a position of political, as well as personal, liminality from the outset. After being excluded from occupying a central space in the family by his parents' conflict, Christopher's development was arrested. His future shift from the family into society was diverted onto a course that was outside the usual dynamic of social integration and which doomed him to

[7] R.D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience* and *The Bird of Paradise* (1967; London: Penguin, 1990), p.49.

spend much of his adult life attempting to recover his lost parents in order to continue his growth.

The fact that Christopher's father was an employee of Morganbrook and Byatt, made the critical position of his mother, who was also living in the company house on company money, particularly difficult. Nevertheless, unperturbed by this circumstance, she continued to try to change the company's policies by holding luncheons, for the wives of other employees, at which she addressed the issue. Having successfully converted a few of these to her cause, she then proceeded to hold more serious meetings with them in the company of a clergyman or diplomat and Christopher's Uncle Philip, who was always present. These activities were in direct opposition to the activities of Christopher's father in his role as employee, and, sooner or later, the issue was bound to come to a head.

Banks recalls one particular occasion on which he overheard his parents arguing in the dining room:

> I could make out in my mother's angry voice the same righteous tone she had used that morning to the health inspector. I heard her repeat: 'A disgrace!' a number of times, and she referred often to what she called 'the sinful trade'. At one point she said: 'You're making us all party to it! All of us! It's a disgrace!' My father too sounded angry, though in a defensive, despairing sort of way. He kept saying things like: 'It's not so simple. It's not nearly so simple.'
>
> ...I heard my mother utter those words:

> 'Are you not ashamed to be in the service of such a company? How can your conscience rest while you owe your existence to such an ungodly wealth?' (*WO*, p.70)

Christopher admits that, although this was a more serious example, this kind of argument between his parents was a frequent occurrence. It is obvious that the fact that her livelihood is owed 'to such an ungodly wealth' is the source of the shame felt by Christopher's mother, while his father has, perhaps in a rather cowardly fashion, come to some kind of acceptance of his own complicity in the activities of the company.

Lisa Fluet has noted that 'the Victorian middle class's self-conception in terms of devotion to the 'idea of service' can correspond roughly to the rise of professionals and managers'[8] and that this

> emergent professional-managerial class of the early twentieth century can be characterized ... by an earnest, reforming conscience – one similar to the attitude of 'unselfish' devotion to the 'larger good' that characterizes the service professional.[9]

In the case of Christopher's father, this 'larger good' is evidently comprised of the increase in wealth of the company and the imperial interests that it supports. It is perhaps the fact that such a 'reforming conscience' towards the functioning of capital exists within the narrow limits of self-interest that explains Christopher's father's reluctance to quit Morganbrook and Byatt.

[8] Lisa Fluet, 'The Self-Loathing Class: Williams, Ishiguro and Barbara Ehrenreich on Service', *Keywords*, 4 (2003), 100-130.
[9] Ibid.

Fluet has also pointed out that the limited awareness of itself gained by this professional class distracts it 'from its inadvertent, large-scale complicity with the needs of monopoly capital'.[10] Indeed, the extent of Christopher's father's knowing complicity with company abuses of power is called into question in the narrative.

This section of the narrative highlights Ishiguro's recognition of another dimension of the hypocrisy of imperialism. As a good Christian, Banks's mother evidently considers the building of the British empire as an essentially civilising activity. Her criticism of the company's trade as 'sinful', and its profits as 'ungodly wealth' evidently issues from her religious conscience. Yet, her own material circumstances place her in a highly ambiguous relation to such wealth. Whether she likes it or not, as the wife of a company employee, she is part of the machinery of empire. This is an 'enormously complex machinery: a machinery dedicated to the continuance of European rule, the exploitation of natural resources, and the spread of European culture as an accompaniment to the continued subordination of native peoples.'[11] As an aspect of European culture, Diana Banks's Christian sensibilities are caught up in this process of subjugation. In fact, the sense of religious mission works as a supplement to the establishment and preservation of colonial power. This religious aspect of the structure of empire has been recognised not only as a means of subjugating others but also as the means by which the self-deception that is necessary for the perpetration of acts of exploitation is maintained. The

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[10] Ibid.

[11] David Punter, *Postcolonial Imaginings: Fictions of a New World Order* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), p.2.

colonists 'not only mystify the natives, ...they have to mystify themselves.'[12] This cultural process of self-deception is necessary because 'in order to sustain our amazing images of ourselves as God's gift to the vast majority of the starving human species, we have to interiorize our violence upon ourselves and our children and to employ the rhetoric of morality to describe this process.'[13] In other words, it is easier to justify imposing on others what one has already culturally enacted on oneself. Banks's mother is, therefore, caught in an impossible situation: the religious stance that she attempts to use as a support for her resistance to the activities of Morganbrook and Byatt is the very same one that is habitually used as a cover for the establishment of the brutal economic forces that she is attempting to fight. Thus, her beliefs are ineffectual and she is rendered powerless.

The option of leaving the company was not open to Banks's father. Christopher recalls having overheard part of a conversation between his parents that seems to have concerned the very issue of the possibility of leaving Shanghai and returning to England: his father said, 'We can't do it, Diana. It'll be the ruin of us. I've looked at everything. We'll never get back to England. We can't raise enough. Without the firm, we're simply stranded.' (*WO*, p.86) It is evident that Christopher's mother wanted to return home; however, the constraints of the family's economic situation prevented it. It seems that the whole family was literally 'shanghaied' into the service of imperialism at its most destructive and corrupt. In terms of double bind theory, the constraints of the family's economic situation can be seen as the

[12] R.D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience* and *The Bird of Paradise* (1967; London: Penguin, 1990), p.49.
[13] Ibid. p.49.

restrictions which did not allow them to leave the field of conflict. The arguments between Banks's parents, therefore, were repeated endlessly.

After each argument, his parents' communication with each other became, and remained, purely functional for some time. The fact that this was a repeated pattern in their relationship can be seen as Ishiguro's recognition of the plight of those caught in a power nexus in which they cannot address the systemic contradictions that lie at the root of their personal conflicts. The fact is that the internal contradictions of the company managed to find an outlet through the family life of at least one of its employees. This represents a serious incursion of socio-political discourse into the realm of family life. In whatever way Christopher's parents may have attempted to repair the damage caused by such an argument on a personal level, the wider cause of the issue remained completely unaffected. Therefore, the same unresolved socio-political problem, which ingressed into family life through the working conditions of Christopher's father, was bound to resurface in their relationship time and again.

Christopher claims to have been unaffected by his parents' arguments: 'I was well used to such periods and never concerned myself unduly with them. In any case, it was only in the smallest ways that they ever impinged upon my life.' (*WO*, p.71). But this is evidently not the case. In fact, one side-effect of being repeatedly exposed to a double bind situation is characterised by flattened affect, or an unwillingness to acknowledge the emotional upheaval experienced in a situation of conflict. However, not only does Banks himself admit it tacitly, but also his recollection of his personal development reveals that these arguments had a deep psychological impact.

By making Banks a witness to the arguments of his parents Ishiguro generates the sense of another layer of institutionalised violence. The narrative articulates the fact that this violence is then turned in on Banks himself in a very complex way. Bateson suggests that the double bind situation is one which generally involves

> Two or more persons. Of these we designate one, for purposes of definition, as the "victim". We do not assume that the double bind is inflicted by the mother alone, but that it may be done either by the mother alone or by some combination of mother, father, and/or siblings. [It] occurs in normal relationships. When a person is caught in a double bind situation, he will respond defensively in a manner similar to the schizophrenic.[14]

I suggest that Ishiguro's development of Banks's identity follows a path which elucidates this normal occurrence of the double bind. His construction of the double bind to be found in the situation of the Banks family goes beyond the parameters set by Bateson and puts forward a description of the family as part of the wider social network. In this regard, it is evident that the double bind experienced by Banks, rather than simply being confined to the nature of his relationship with his mother, begins at a level of interaction far removed from his personal childhood concerns. The conflicts in the family begin with the behaviour of Christopher's father as a functionary of the contradictory demands of the company for which he works. It is these

[14] Gregory Bateson, et al, 'Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia', *Behavioural Science*, 1 (1956), 251-253.

contradictions that are the source of the arguments between Christopher's parents.

A record of the anxiety that his parents' arguments created in Christopher can be found in a brief conversation that he had with his friend, Akira. During an afternoon of playing, Christopher became serious and asked Akira: 'Does your mother sometimes stop talking to your father?' After persevering in his attempts to get a serious reply, Christopher was finally furnished with what Akira considered to be the real reason for Diana Banks's silence: 'I know why they stop. I know why....Christopher. You not enough Englishman.' (*WO*, p.72) In this statement Christopher's fear that he is somehow responsible for his parents' quarrels is confirmed. His parents' relationship formed the bedrock of Christopher's own internal stability. The anxiety consequent on the disruption of that stability, caused by his parents' arguments, gave rise to a sense of responsibility and the urgent desire to correct the situation. Akira's statement not only confirmed Christopher's fears, but also provided him with the possibility of finding a solution: he simply needed to become properly English in order to prevent the further disintegration of his parents' relationship. Hence his observation of the young Englishmen who visited his home from time to time, and his attempt to emulate their behaviour. He notes that

> from time to time, we would have boarding with us a 'house guest' – some employee newly arrived in Shanghai who had yet to 'find his feet'. I do not know if my parents objected to this arrangement. I did not mind at all, since usually a house guest would be some young man

> who brought with him the air of the English lanes and meadows I knew from *The Wind in the Willows*, or else the foggy streets of the Conan Doyle mysteries. These young Englishmen, no doubt eager to create a good impression, were inclined to indulge my lengthy questions and sometimes unreasonable requests. Most of them, it occurs to me, were probably younger than I am today, and were probably at sea so far from their home. But to me at the time, they were all of them figures to study closely and emulate. (*WO*, p. 51-2)

Christopher could only attempt to find a solution to the problem of his parents' relationship based on the narrow parameters of his childhood world. This situation can be recognised as Ishiguro's negotiation of the political aspect of childhood experience. In this representation, Ishiguro investigates the child's desperate attempt to resolve parental conflicts in the aftermath of the entrance of a twofold political struggle into his microcosmic sphere of consciousness. Christopher was, within the confines of his relationship with his parents, attempting to resolve the impossible contradictory demands of the company of Morganbrook and Byatt while, at the same time, he was, in effect, a colonial subject attempting to acquire Englishness through emulation or mimesis. He even recalls a question that he once asked his Uncle Philip: 'Uncle Philip, I was just wondering. How do you suppose one might become more English?' (*WO*, p.76) It is evident from Banks's reflections that these forces were an integral part of his family's life, unconsciously mediated through his parents' quarrels and internalised as personal conflict by his childhood self.

The most painful moment in this whole nexus of conflict came when Christopher was placed in a position of having to choose between his parents. Banks recalls that he was placed in this impossible situation when Uncle Philip suggested that they all go to the racecourse for the afternoon. His father replied that he would excuse himself from this trip because he had a lot of work to do. At the same time, however, his mother expressed her enthusiasm for such a trip, saying that it would do them all some good. Christopher realised that he was in an impossible situation:

> And at that moment they all looked at me. Although I was only nine years old, I believe I read the situation with some accuracy. I knew of course that I was being offered a choice: to go out to the racecourse or to stay at home with my father. But I believe I grasped also the deeper implications: If I chose to stay in, then my mother would decline to go to the racecourse solely in Uncle Philip's company. In other words, the outing depended on my going with them. Moreover I knew – and I did so with a calm certainty - that at that moment my father was desperately wishing us not to go, that for us to do so would cause him huge pain. (*WO*, p.81)

This situation further reveals the depth of the impact of the family's difficult condition on their personal relationships. It is evident that the increasing strain of the different attitudes of Christopher's parents to their socio-economic situation was being increasingly ingested by Christopher as time went by. He makes this point himself when he describes the reason for his clear

recognition of the deeper dynamics of this situation and his father's true feelings: 'It was not anything in his manner that suggested this to me, but rather what I had – perhaps unwillingly – absorbed over the preceding weeks and months....at that instant, my father was entirely depending on me to save the situation.' (*WO*, p.81) Christopher's intense awareness of the conflicting emotional dynamic generated by his mother's wishing to go on the trip and his father's wishing to stay put him in a no-win situation. It has been noted that

> double bind interactions have a pathogenic effect only if they occur in a context where the accurate discrimination of messages is of vital importance for the participants, and in a relational context which is characterised by intense levels of involvement between the participants.[15]

The choice between his father and mother had evidently been an accumulating pressure in the background of Christopher's life for some time. The sense of the gradual accumulation of these arguments in the text is the means by which Ishiguro engineers the flow of the conflict from the socio-economic background, by means of the institutional double bind of the company, into the sphere of the family and, through family conflict, into the distressed emotional reality of Banks's childhood life. In his desperation to find a solution Banks again took it upon himself to save the situation. However, the fact of the matter is that, in reality, he was influenced by his fear of his mother;

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[15] Mathijs Koopmans, 'Schizophrenia and the Family: Double Bind Theory Revisited', York College/ City University of New York, 1997 at http://www.goertzel.org/dynapsyc/1997/Koopmans.html, 4.

he obeyed instantly, and with alacrity, when his mother instructed him to get his things. Ultimately the choice was not his own.

This seemingly childish tendency towards an overinflated sense of responsibility later became a dynamic aspect of Banks's adult life. It seems that, like Ryder, Banks's character incorporates an element of the grandiose. In Ryder's case, grandiosity appeared in his belief that his musical ability would satisfy the emotional needs of his parents and solve the social problems of the community that he was visiting. In the case of Banks, this tendency manifests both in his determination to acquire Englishness, as a solution to his parents' conflicts, and later, in the repeated intimations to be found in his narrative of his own importance for the global fight against evil. For example, Banks, during a conversation with a police inspector with whom he was working on a case, stated that 'those of us whose duty it is to combat evil' are 'like the twine that holds together the slats of a wooden blind. Should we fail to hold strong, then everything will scatter.' (*WO*, p.135) Also, he recalls an incident that occurred on the occasion of his visit to the Royal Geographical Society to hear a lecture. While there, he bumped into Canon Moorly, who had been of great help him on a recent case. During the conversation, Canon Moorly refers to the fact that he believes that the real origin of the world's current political anxieties is to be found in Shanghai, and that 'what was once just a local problem has been allowed to fester and grow. To spread its poison over the years ever further across the world, right through our civilisation. But I hardly need to remind *you* of this.' (*WO*, p.138) The inflection of the '*you*' in this statement seems to be a reflection of Christopher's predisposition to listen on the basis of this grandiose sense of

responsibility, regardless of the actual intention of the speaker. Not only this, but Banks talks of 'a vague feeling I would get from time to time; a feeling that someone or other disapproved of me, and was only just managing to conceal it.' (*WO*, p.133) Banks seems to regard these conversations and this vague feeling of disapproval as an indication that he is not fulfilling the expectations of those around him, and that they consider him to have a key role in solving the international crisis of the Sino-Japanese war. Christopher's egotistical interpretation of conversations and events are significant in this sense. Indeed, Bateson notes that an individual who has spent his life having to manage recurring double bind situations may find that his ability to interpret messages correctly becomes impaired:

> His metacommunicative system – the communications about communication – would have broken down, and he would not know what kind of message a message was...Given this inability to judge accurately what a person really means and an excessive concern with what is really meant, an individual might defend himself by choosing one or more of several alternatives...[He may become] excessively concerned with hidden meanings and determined to demonstrate that he could not be deceived – as he has been all his life. If he chooses this alternative, he will be continually searching for meanings behind what people say and behind chance occurrences in the environment.[16]

[16] Gregory Bateson, et al, 'Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia', *Behavioural Science*, 1 (1956), 256.

Ishiguro's construction of Banks's vocational imperative, originating in Banks's determination to acquire Englishness for the sake of his parents, and escalating into his later determination to save the world, is based on the premise of a psychological condition fraught with anxiety. Ishiguro consolidates the progress of this condition into a subjective vocational identity with one further twist in Banks's narrative, which both exacerbates his struggles and develops his deluded conviction in the redeeming powers of his chosen career.

Christopher recalls that, one day, on coming into the house from playing in the garden with Akira, he discovered his mother in conversation with Mr Simpson from the company, and two policemen. It transpired that his father had not turned up for work and had not been seen since he had left the house that morning. In the process of attempting to reassure her son, his mother said: '[w]hat we have to appreciate...is that the city's very best detectives have been assigned to the case...We have to be hopeful. We have to trust the detectives.' (*WO*, p.108) To this statement Christopher responded with the following question: 'But what if the detectives are too busy?' (WO, p.109) In this short exchange, Christopher was given an indication of the solution to the problem while, at the same time, his own sense of anxiety and responsibility would not allow him to simply leave the job to the detectives; he would have to become a detective himself in order to satisfy his own misgivings. His assumption of this responsibility was reflected in the games he played with Akira which began to follow a particular pattern: 'My father was held captive in a house somewhere beyond the Settlement boundaries. His captors were a gang intent on extorting a huge ransom.' (*WO*, p.110) In these

games Christopher would play the parts of both his captive father and one of the rescuing detectives.

The development of Banks's identity as a detective was further consolidated when his situation was compounded by the loss of his mother, despite the fact that Christopher kept a vigilant watch over her in order to prevent her from being abducted too. After being taken into Shanghai by Uncle Philip, under the pretence of going to buy a piano accordion, Christopher was abandoned there and left to find his own way home. By the time he returned, his mother had already disappeared. With no idea of the reality behind the disappearance of both his parents Christopher was placed in the care of an aunt, in England, and sent to boarding school. On his way there he recalls having talked to the colonel in whose charge he was, saying that he would rather stay in Shanghai: 'Because you see, sir, the detectives are working extremely hard to find my mother and father. And they're the very best detectives in Shanghai...I think my going to England won't be necessary after all.' (*WO*, p 25-29) However, his protest was to no avail and he was sent to England. His impression of the detectives as being 'the very best' went with him. In this context, Christopher's determination to become a great detective can be read as Ishiguro's construction of Banks's vocational aspiration on the foundation of a type of pathogenic effect induced by the conflicting and traumatic experiences of childhood.

This is the way in which Ishiguro has laid, retrospectively, the foundations of Banks's vocational identity within his narrative. However, Banks's account also contains an elucidation of the process by which his

early experiences affected the way in which he became integrated into society.

At the very beginning of *When We Were Orphans,* Ishiguro constructs the process of convergence of Banks's childhood experiences in Shanghai with the discourse of the detective within the broader social context of his new life in England. These aspects of the narrative emphasise Banks's awareness of his otherness and his attempt to integrate with his new environment on the basis of his already formed predispositions and cultural references. At the very beginning of his journey to England in the care of Colonel Chamberlain, Banks is presented with the notion that he is being taken home rather than that he is going there for the very first time: 'Look here, old fellow. You really ought to cheer up. After all, you're going to England. You're going home.' (*WO*, p.28) This perverse statement concealed the reality that Banks himself was in the position of a colonial subject whose only previous experiences of modes of Englishness were his parents, his Uncle Philip, the English house guests who visited his parents in Shanghai and whom he regarded as people to be emulated, and his reading of literature such as *The Wind in the Willows* and the Conan Doyle mysteries. The writings of Conan Doyle seem of particular importance in helping to fuse together the discourse of the detective and the discourse of Englishness in Banks's young mind. These literary references also maintain a sense of the fictional nature of Banks's identity and the consequent psychological fragility against which he must constantly defend himself. As part of his attempt to consolidate this fragile identity, Banks repeated the pattern of emulation by observing the manners of his school friends.

In England, Banks continued to play, on his own, the detective games he used to play with Akira, much to the consternation of his aunt who became convinced that he was not normal. Also, Banks reveals how his ambitions to become a detective became known to his school friends. He recalls two incidents in particular. The first was on the occasion of his fourteenth birthday, when he was presented with a magnifying glass, the second was being referred to as 'Sherlock' by his friend Roger Brenthurst when he was in the lower sixth form. (*WO*, pp. 9-10) Although placed at the beginning of the narrative, both these incidents represent a continuing deepening of his identity as a detective, and emphasise Ishiguro's structuring of his narrator's character around the unification of function and person, which remains the central cause of tension throughout the text. Christopher is left with little option but to generate his own sense of reality out of the painful family conflicts to which he is subjected: his entire career is a necessary delusion. Ishiguro's understanding of the effects of the contradictions inherent in the power relationships engendered by imperialist capitalism recognises the fact that, in order to survive in such a social milieu,

> It is not enough to destroy one's own and other people's experience. One must overlay this devastation by a false consciousness inured as Marcuse puts it, to its own falsity.[17]

[17] R.D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience* and *The Bird of Paradise* (1967; London: Penguin, 1990), p.49.

In *When We Were Orphans*, the effect of the institutional double-bind, encouraged by the deceptions practiced by Banks's Uncle Philip, who concealed the truth of the disappearance of his parents from him, launched Banks off into a false reality which he could not recognise as such until a series of uncovered betrayals eventually made the maintenance of his vocational imperative completely untenable. Christopher Banks's identification with the role of the great detective is stripped away when changing historical circumstances finally reveal the reality behind the loss of his parents that he experienced during childhood. Thus Ishiguro describes the processes by which the power constellation of society establishes itself in the minds of its members. In this sense, the obsessive adherence to a vocational identity could be seen as a kind of schizophrenic result of the institutional double bind spilling over into family life. This situation clearly shows Ishiguro's construction of the way in which contradictory and hypocritical activities, that are political and economic expedients for institutions occupying the dominant strata of the social order, are translated into internalised conflict for people at the everyday level of society. As Ishiguro himself has stated

> What I was trying to do is to paint a picture of what the world might look like if it ran according to the less rational emotional logic that we often carry within us...[for instance,] when Christopher Banks goes around declaring that his parents must be holed up somewhere, even after all these years, and he must free them, and this is the most important crucial thing in stopping the war, people don't do a double take. Because he still lives in the childhood vision of the world that's frozen

> since the time that he lost his parents when he was a little boy, it's remained arrested at that point and now it's applied to the adult world that he encounters.[18]

Banks's narrative indicates Ishiguro's contention that vast commercial institutions and their ruthless money-making practices maintain adults in an aggravated, childish mindset. It is evident that the conflict in his parents' relationship was bound up with their different stances towards the political order of which they were a part. This conflict inadvertently placed Christopher himself, as a child, in a complex double bind. The impossibility of finding a solution to a conflict that was not his own, and whose origins he could not possibly comprehend at the time, generated an intense sense of anxiety. The sudden disappearance of both his parents intensified this anxiety. The support of the 'mystifications' perpetrated by Uncle Philip concealed the real causes of his parents' disappearance from him. This mystification, combined with his childish determination to find a solution, was internalised by him as a vocational commitment bordering on the delusional.

The company Morganbrook and Byatt are representative of the way in which the work structures of global imperialist capitalism, by destroying family relationships, rob children of their would-be protective parents. In a sense, they are orphaned, and, just as Banks continues to live in accord with his deluded consciousness, such people never develop a broader awareness of their circumstances. This leaves them incapable of that kind of free criticism and assessment of their situation which is conspicuously absent in Ishiguro's

[18] Cynthia F. Wong, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Devon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 2005), p.89.

narrators generally. Indeed, Banks loses contact with his mother, who is the only one who even attempts this kind of criticism. Her efforts come to nothing as she herself is too involved in the system and vulnerable to it.

As with the narrators of his first three novels, Ishiguro situates Banks's experiences at a crucial historical moment. This pivotal moment is the outbreak of the Second World War. Like Etsuko, Ono and Stevens, Banks negotiates the hegemonic upheavals consequent on this period of political turmoil, and events of global significance are embodied in the personal recollections of a first-person narrator. Moreover, as David Punter notes in his account of postcolonial culture, 'during the course of the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, almost the whole of th[e] apparatus [of empire] fell apart....One factor universally recognised as of major significance [in this process] was the Second World War.'[19] Ishiguro's narrative suggests that the Second World War was itself an effect of the ongoing project of empire-building. During his return to Shanghai as an adult, after having been recovered from a war zone by Japanese soldiers, Banks was delivered to the British consulate by Colonel Hasegawa. On the way, Banks questioned the Colonel about the carnage caused by Japan's attack on China. The Colonel responded that it 'is regrettable, I agree. But if Japan is to become a great nation, like yours, Mr Banks, it is necessary. Just as it once was for England ...*The entire* globe, Mr Banks, the entire globe will before long be engaged in war.' (*WO*, p.278) More specifically, therefore, Ishiguro in effect uses Banks as a detective investigating both the causes and the after-effects of the hypocrisies, and eventual break up, of empire.

[19] David Punter, *Postcolonial Imaginings: Fictions of a New World Order* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), p.2.

In this context, the problem of the relationship between generations, a recurring theme in Ishiguro's writing, is addressed anew. The question raised by Banks's mother as to the immoral nature of the 'ungodly wealth' created by imperialist capitalism touches on the issue of the inheritance of the younger generation. When Banks, in adulthood, finally discovered the truth about his parents' disappearance, he also discovered the source of the money which had supported him throughout his entire life.

After eventually locating the informer known as Yellow Snake, whom he believed held the key to the discovery of the whereabouts of his missing parents, Banks managed to arrange an interview with him. Yellow Snake turned out to be his very own Uncle Philip. During the interview, Uncle Philip informed him about the reality behind his parents' disappearance. Banks discovered that his father had simply run away with a mistress. More distressing, however, was his discovery that his mother had been abducted by Wang Ku, a local warlord, and taken as one of his concubines on condition that financial support be given towards Christopher's schooling and upbringing. This action had been agreed to by Uncle Philip as the only way of circumventing any objections Banks's mother might have to paying the warlord to take possession of the opium imports of the many companies similar to Morganbrook and Byatt. At the same time it was both a way of satisfying Wang Ku's need for redress, after having been struck by Banks's mother during an argument, and protecting the boy's safety.

As Uncle Philip admits, to begin with those like himself and Banks's mother, who were attempting to stop the opium trade, naively believed that they were 'dealing with fellow Christians.' (*WO*, p.288) However, they soon

discovered that the many European companies importing opium into China 'not only liked the profits very much, they actually *wanted* the Chinese to be useless. They liked them to be in chaos, drug-addicted, unable to govern themselves properly. That way, the country could be run virtually like a colony, but with none of the usual obligations.' (*WO*, p.288) Ishiguro presents the double bind as a deliberate strategy of profit-making companies, and the situation of Banks's mother, therefore, becomes a metaphor for imperial capitalism's prostitution of Christian values in a grand act of self-deception. The source of Banks's wealth is revealed as the hypocrisy of the British empire. Moreover, rather than destroying the opium trade, the warlord Wang Ku simply took control of the business already set up by the likes of Morganbrook and Byatt. Uncle Philip admitted that 'The trade had simply changed hands, that was all. It was now run by Chiang's government. More addicts than ever, but now it was being peddled to pay for Chiang Kai-shek's army.' (*WO*, p.293) Viewing this section of the text in light of the recent rise of Chinese capital in the world economy confirms the proposition that the ruthless hegemonic, as well as financial, inheritance of global capitalism is built on the basis of the exploitative relationships of imperialism.

Christopher himself feels the tortured contradictions of his situation when the source of the money used to support his public school upbringing is revealed. Uncle Philip informed him, 'Your schooling. Your place in London society. The fact that you made of yourself what you have. You owe it to Wang Ku. Or rather, to your mother's sacrifice.' (*WO*, p.293) In other words, the inheritance of the younger generation is made up of the tangled, hypocritical, exploitative relations of the previous generation. Banks's life, and

indeed the lives of those like him, is haunted by the same question, 'How can your conscience rest while you owe your existence to such an ungodly wealth?' (*WO*, p.70) Banks, unable to change the circumstances that have made him what he is, cannot maintain the delusions of his career and must endure the contradictions inherent in his identity.

The compelling nature of Banks's vocational imperative meant that, like Stevens, in *The Remains of the Day*, he lost his opportunity for love. Banks's narrative reveals that, at one point, he intended to run away with Sarah Hemmings, the socialite with whom he had developed a relationship over several years. She was also an orphan and spent much of her time moving from one relationship to another depending on the prestige of the particular man she was chasing. As she put it, '"[w]hen I marry, it will be to someone who'll really *contribute*."' (*WO*, p.47) Eventually, she married Sir Cecil Medhurst, a man much older than herself, who had been involved in the establishment of The League of Nations in the aftermath of the First World War. Sir Cecil developed a taste for drinking and gambling and lost much of his fortune, at which point Sarah decided to leave and start a new life in Macao. Banks agreed to go with her, unknowingly following in his father's footsteps by intending to run away with a mistress. However, just before they were due to make their escape, Banks gained a new piece of information that might have proven to be a vital clue to the whereabouts of his missing parents, and could not resist the temptation to pursue it. This search took him on a journey into the war zone from which he would not return to Sarah. In a similar fashion, Banks's pursuit of his vocation interfered with his relationship with his adopted daughter Jennifer with whom he re-enacted his own

abandonment, sending her to public school while he, convinced that finding his parents was crucial to preventing the outbreak of war, returned to Shanghai to pursue his mission.

The reliability of memory is constantly under question. Banks is not fully convinced that what he remembers is actually what happened. Time and again he has reason to doubt himself, frequently seeking for reassurances or ways to reinforce the truth of what he thinks he recalls. The fact that memory is particularly susceptible to being usurped can be seen just as much in *what* is recalled as in *how* it is remembered. The point is that Christopher's memories are internally constructed on the basis of a false premise – that his parents were kidnapped – and can therefore reveal no secure truth to him. Only from outside the parameters of his discourse does the truth enter, with devastating consequences for his view of his entire life.

The irony is that none of these processes could occur without memory or, rather, the act of remembering. It is 'the link between past and present ... [without it] no responsible life would be possible.'[20] Ishiguro has added an extra twist to the problem of the unreliability of memory. Because of the internal hijacking of genuine experiences, the narrator encounters difficulties in attempting to disentangle genuine experience from constructed narrative. Indeed, Banks's intuitive understanding that this is the case is what undermines his own conviction as to the veracity of what he is saying. The result is that Banks's statement that his 'great vocation got in the way of quite a lot, all in all' (*WO*, p.309) has much deeper significance than simply being a gross understatement of the facts.

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[20] Gerhard Adler, *Dynamics of The Self* (London: Coventure,1979), p.121.

Christopher finally managed to locate his mother in a residential home in Hong Kong, called Rosedale Manor. On visiting her, he discovered that she was only known to the nuns who ran the home as Diana Roberts. He was also informed that she had 'come to them through a liaison organisation working with foreigners stranded in communist China' and that all the Chinese authorities had known of her previous history was that she had 'been living in an institution for the mentally ill in Chunking since the end of the war.' (*WO*, p.301) In the scene of their final meeting, Christopher is taken to where his mother is sitting in the garden, playing cards at a wrought-iron table. Christopher describes his mother as a decimated, crumpled figure: he says that she was smaller than he remembered and that 'there were two thick lines beneath her eyes that were so deep they looked almost like incisions. Her neck, perhaps owing to some injury or condition, had receded deep into her body so that when she gazed from side to side at her cards, she was obliged also to move her shoulders.' (*WO*, p.304) After offering his apologies for not giving her any warning of his arrival, Christopher is confronted by the fact that his mother does not recognise him as her son. Even when he attempts to prompt her memory by referring to himself as 'Puffin' (*WO*, p.305), her pet name for him, she does not make the connection between the child she remembers and the man standing before her. She only says, to Christopher, 'That boy. They say he's doing well. But you can never be sure with that one. Oh, he's such a worry to me. You've no idea.' (*WO*, p.305) The tragic decline of Christopher's mother is evidently a source of immense distress to him despite his later declaration that it was at this point that he realised that his mother had never stopped loving him through all her suffering (*WO*, p.306). At

the end of the novel, as Christopher reflects on how much he enjoys his retired life in London - walking in the parks and 'sifting through old newspaper reports of [his] cases in the Reading Room at the British Museum' (*WO*, p.313) - he notes that '[n]evertheless, there are those times when a sort of emptiness fills my hours'. (*WO*, p.313) Despite all that Christopher says about his success as a detective, the reader is left with a sense that he, as well as his mother, has become a hollowed shell; they have both been emptied of their humanity.

In Ishiguro's most recent novel, the narrator and her 'family' suffer a similar but more extreme fate. They lose not only their sense of who they are but also their rights over their basic biological selves, due to their role in, and indoctrination into, a destructive hegemony that does not recognise their humanity.

Chapter 7

Never Let Me Go:

Completing the Vocational Imperative

In *Empire*,[1] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri note that there has been a shift from what Foucault described as a disciplinary society, in which 'mechanisms of inclusion and/or exclusion are accomplished through disciplinary institutions'[2] such as the mental hospital and the school, to a society of control. This society of control is one in which

> mechanisms of command become ever more 'democratic', ever more immanent to the social field, distributed throughout the brains and bodies of the citizens. The behaviours of social integration and exclusion proper to rule are thus increasingly interiorized within the subjects themselves.[3]

According to Hardt and Negri, this interiorisation of the rules of integration and exclusion has reached a point at which, '[a]s Foucault says, "life has now become ...an object of power". The highest function of power is to invest life through and through, and its primary task is to administer life.'[4] They explain 'biopower', which is Foucault's term for the domination of social life by a

[1] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (London: Harvard University Press, 2001)
[2] Ibid. p.23.
[3] Ibid. p.23.
[4] Ibid. p.24.

proliferation of organising discourses, as referring 'to a situation in which what is directly at stake in power is the production and reproduction of life itself.'[5]

Although Hardt and Negri are, here, primarily referring to the internalisation of discourses concerning social and political behaviour, their use of Foucault's statement that life has become an object of power can also be read in a much more literal way. That is, not simply social life but life *itself* has become an object of power. In this context, it is informative to consider the way in which Ishiguro's assumptions concerning the nature of power can be seen as complimenting and continuing the course of Foucault's analysis of it.

In his lectures given at the College de France, and published in *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault uses war as an analyser of the relations of domination that underlie various political discourses. Part of this analysis involves a discussion of the progressive changes to be found in the nature of power from the seventeenth century onwards. At one point, he discusses the changes that occurred in the right of the sovereign during the nineteenth century. He states that

> one of the greatest transformations political right underwent in the nineteenth century was...that sovereignty's old right – to take life or let live – was...complimented by a new right which does not erase the old right but which does penetrate it, permeate it...It is the power to "make" live and "let" die.[6]

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[5] Ibid. p.24.
[6] Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (London: Penguin, 2004), p.241.

According to Foucault, the nature of the power of the sovereign changed in emphasis from the right to decide between letting live or taking life to the right to make live and let die. This change was a result of the dispersal of various discourses concerning the organisation of life, such as those concerned with public health or the regulation of the population, whose limitations were only found in the inability to control or standardise death. That is, the power of sovereignty was invested in discourse generally, and in medico-social discourse in particular. The consequence of this was a tendency towards the total administration of life in society. This total administration of life goes beyond what Foucault refers to as disciplinarity into a new form of power, in which the power of technologies becomes the technology of power that has universal application. Foucault notes that

> this new technique does not simply do away with the disciplinary technique, because it exists at a different level, on a different scale, and because it has a different bearing area, and makes use of very different instruments.....Unlike discipline, which is addressed to bodies, the new nondisciplinary power is applied not to man-as-body but to the living man, to man-as-living-being; ultimately, if you like, to man-as-species.[7]

This broadening of the right of the sovereign constitutes 'the emergence of something that is no longer an anatomo-politics of the human body, but what I

[7] Ibid. p.242.

would call a "biopolitics" of the human race.'[8] It seems to me that Ishiguro takes this biopolitics of the human race one step further in his most recent novel, *Never Let Me Go* (2005), in which he imagines the subjective experiences of humans cloned for the sole purpose of donating their organs, one by one. In this context, 'biopower' is read quite literally as power - particularly in the form of medico-social discourses - entering, controlling, administering and utilising 'the brains and bodies of the citizens.'

In the background of the novel, Ishiguro seems to postulate a society in which this proliferation of species-discourse described by Foucault, combined with medical, or genetic, technology has caused yet another change in the right of sovereignty. It is a society in which the right of sovereignty, invested in and expressed through discourse, has changed again from the right to 'make' live and 'let' die, as Foucault puts it, to the right to 'make' live and 'make' die.

The narrative is written from the perspective of Kathy H, a thirty-one-year-old clone, who recalls the course her life has taken up to the present. Kathy remembers her childhood experience as a student at Hailsham, a boarding school hidden in the depths of the English countryside, and the close friendship she developed there with fellow clones Ruth and Tommy. As the narrative unfolds, Kathy relates the history of their time at Hailsham and the consequent unfolding of their relationship and experiences. It becomes clear that Hailsham was no ordinary school.

Ishiguro never enters into a technical discussion of the creation of the Hailsham clones, or 'students' as they are referred to in the narrative, preferring to concentrate on their emotional experiences, experiences that,

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[8] Ibid. p.234.

according to the novel, were the consequences of a widespread donation programme started after the Second World War. Bereft of biological parents, the clones were raised in a special school instead of a family. The situation in which Ishiguro places his characters provides a critique of the way in which educational upbringing generates an acceptance of future roles through the subliminal establishment of a primary complex of relationships that can never be escaped. The life-long friendship that developed between Kathy, Ruth and Tommy came to be synonymous with the later, institutionally valued, caring roles they would fulfil towards one another as they became donors.

Ishiguro creates a system of education at Hailsham in a form comparable to that to be found in the ideal state of Plato's *Republic*, in which the entire society, including its guardians, are convinced of the truth of a myth about the nature of the human soul constructed in order to encourage acceptance of one's social position and function. An acceptance of their pre-ordained roles is created amongst the clones at Hailsham as the guardians drip-feed necessary information to them at the right time. This gradual discursive accumulation of the students' vocational identity is highlighted in the narrative by a sudden outburst from Miss Lucy, one of the guardians. She tells the clones that they have 'been told and not told. You've been told, but none of you really understand'. After dismissing their fantasies of going to America and becoming film-stars, she confronts them with the bleak reality of the life that awaits them: 'You'll become adults, then before you're old, before you're even middle-aged, you'll start to donate your vital organs.' (*NLMG*, p.72)

Contrary to expectations, this outburst provokes little response from the clones. The reason for this can be found in Tommy's attempt to explain the clones' sense of familiarity with, and uncritical acceptance of, the idea of donations. Tommy's suggestion is that, as part of the educative process, the guardians had 'timed very carefully and deliberately everything they told' them, ensuring that the clones were 'always just too young to understand properly the latest piece of information.' (*NLMG*, p.75) What Tommy recognises in this reflection is a gradual shaping of human consciousness through the piecemeal construction of a subjective identity centred around vocational discourse. The narrative reconstructs the process by which the values that shape behaviour and normalise functional roles as social discourse become instituted in the mind. This was an education that would ensure that the clones took in the necessary information, as Kathy states, 'at some level, so that before long all this stuff was there in our heads without us ever having examined it properly.' (*NMLG*, p.75)

This subtle process is barely recognisable by the clones on whom it has been practiced. As Kathy admits, 'Certainly, it feels like I *always* knew about donations in some vague way, even as early as six or seven.' She remembers the fact that when the clones started to have lessons about sex the guardians 'tended to run them together with talk about the donations'. It seems possible to her that the guardians also 'managed to smuggle into our heads a lot of the basic facts about our futures', including the 'whole business about our not being able to have babies.' (*NMLG*, p.75)

In *Never Let Me Go*, Ishiguro has evidently generated a representation of an educational institution as the direct mediator of power in its employment

of a deliberate strategy to attain the end of utilising the body. The clones will become donors in early adulthood. Each of their vital organs will be used with specific regard to its own particular function. In a very literal sense, the vocational identities of the clones represent the annihilation of each of them as human subjects.

Along with his use of the idea of subliminal education, Ishiguro utilises other aspects of the effects of institutional power which enforce a duplicitous and dehumanising conceptual hegemony. The narrative demonstrates a distorted use of language in which apparently bland concepts develop their own laden meanings. In a chapter on *Never Let Me Go*, recently added to her study of Ishiguro, Cynthia Wong lists some of these loaded terms:

> 'Students' are the clones who appear and act in recognizable human ways; 'possibles' are the idealized parents or human models that the students seek in order to understand their make-up; 'a dream future' is a heightened fantasy about occupations or careers that the students might seek if they were not already so fated; a 'deferral' is a hoped-for delay of their calculated responsibility to supply their organs; and, a 'completion' is death, or the final event of their abbreviated lives. Even literal terms, such as 'carer' and human 'donors,' carry a barrage of horrible implications.[9]

What is most horrible about such use of language is the fact that the clones themselves take no notice of it. Each clone thinks of himself or herself

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[9] Cynthia F. Wong, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (2000; Devon: Northcote House Publishers, 2005), p.97.

as a 'donor', and so on, quite naturally. Moreover, the clones' social relationships are framed by these same administrative requirements. The success of the Hailsham method, and the depth of the inscription of administrative language in the clones' minds, is evident. They have acquiesced blindly to the use of administrative concepts as the language of their mission. Through the clones' use of such language, it is evident that their knowledge and interpretation of their own existence and the lives of those around them is based on this ingested body of administered values. Ishiguro has generated a narrative of normalisation in which the everyday usage of ordinary words with distorted meanings is a chilling indication of both the coercive strategies of the powerful and the suggestive power of hegemony; they direct the naïve into a state of complicity with the forces that are enclosing them within the confines of their functionally administered identities. The 'students' are as much mental and emotional clones as they are physical ones.

The narrative suggests that the educationally ingrained hegemony of values that the clones received at Hailsham laid the foundation for their later vocational servitude to an inaccessible centre of power. Their entire lives are subject to an anonymous authority that not only created and educated them but will also decide when they will become carers and then donors, and complete their mission. The strangeness of their situation is reflected in the reaction of the few outsiders who come into contact with them.

Kathy recalls that, as part of their education, Hailsham's pupils were encouraged to participate in creative activities such as painting pictures and writing poems. The best of these were regularly collected and taken away to,

as rumour had it, a gallery. Kathy recalls that Ruth suspected that the woman known as Madame, who came to collect their works (and whose name is later revealed to be Marie-Claude), was afraid of them; on one occasion, Ruth encouraged the other children to put this to the test. The plan was that six of them 'would lie in wait for Madame somewhere, then 'swarm out' all around her, all at once.' While remaining civilised in their behaviour, the shock of their sudden appearance would enable them to 'see – Ruth insisted – that she really was afraid of us.' (*NLMG*, p.31)

The plan worked. Madame was taken by surprise and her reaction stunned the children. She simply froze where she was standing. Kathy recalls: 'I can still see it now, the shudder she seemed to be suppressing, the real dread that one of us would accidentally brush against her... Madame *was* afraid of us.' (NLMG, p.32) Madame was unable to speak when suddenly confronted with the reality of the children's humanity. Simultaneously confused, frightened and guilty, she could not respond when faced with the children she was involved in exploiting. The fact that, as Kathy and Tommy were to discover later, she was one of the few people attempting to secure a better existence for them made no difference. This experience of the children starved of human recognition by all but their immediate kind is the way in which Ishiguro constructs the reader's understanding of the condition of their relationship with the world beyond Hailsham, a condition of alienated subservience that lasts as long as their shortened lives.

In *Never let Me Go*, as in *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Unconsoled*, Ishiguro again addresses the question of the relationship between art and humanity, or art as an indication of humanity. Marie-Claude

(Madame) was working with Miss Emily, Hailsham's headmistress, in an attempt to prove to the authorities concerned that the clones were, after all, human. In an unguarded moment she let slip the real purpose for the collection of the children's art to a student named Roy. Tommy informed Kathy that 'she told Roy that things like pictures, poetry, all that kind of stuff, she said they *revealed what you were like inside.* She said *they revealed your soul.*' (NLMG, p.160; the text italicises) Later in the novel, when Kathy relates how she and Tommy, as adults, visited the retired Marie-Claude and Miss Emily, it becomes clear that they are still holding on to the same beliefs.

Kathy recalls that Tommy, after leaving school, had spent time drawing strange animals in order to show them to Miss Emily as proof of his soul in the hopes that this, along with the fact that they were in love, would enable him and Kathy to get a deferral of the starting date for their donations. During their encounter with Miss Emily, she does indeed confess that she and Marie-Claude collected the clones' artworks for exhibitions in order '"to *prove you had souls at all.*"' (*NLMG*, p.238; the text italicises)

The great irony is that Hailsham was meant to be a humane experiment in rearing and educating clones destined for donorship. However, this project did not last for very long. A scandal caused by a scientist by the name of James Morningdale, who offered people the possibility of having children with enhanced abilities, put an end to the endeavours of Miss Emily and those like her. Predictably, the reaction to the prospect of clones with enhanced abilities was negative: 'Children demonstrably *superior* to the rest of us? Oh no. That frightened people. They recoiled from that.' (*NLMG*, p.241) Ishiguro's narrative is very suggestive on this point and it is interesting to

consider what, given the awareness of the functioning of power and hegemony in the text, might lie behind such fear and revulsion. Ishiguro's writing appears to suggest that the consciousness of the fact that it is hegemonic forces that decide the desirability of personal characteristics raises anxieties concerning the development of a type of systemic eugenics. On a subliminal level, the general public have fears that they may themselves become defunct and be replaced by those who are engineered to fit social structures more precisely. This is another example of the full implications of Foucault's statements concerning the production of life quoted earlier. It is understandable then that, in the novel, the public's fear meant that, as Miss Emily states, '"the climate changed, we had no chance"'. Nobody wanted '"to think about you students, or about the conditions you were brought up in"'; they wanted the clones sent back to 'the shadows where you'd been before the likes of Marie-Claude and myself came along.' (NLMG, p.242)

As in Ishiguro's previous novels, particularly *The Unconsoled*, the question of art as a window to the soul and the source of hope for redemption is raised only to be dashed. The capacity to love as another possible source of redemption is dealt with in much the same way. The rumour that a demonstrable capacity to love might also postpone donorship, and hence save lives, which also circulated amongst the students at the Cottages (the residence of students who had left Hailsham and were preparing to begin their roles as carers and then donors) proved to be false. Neither art nor love are able to function as signs of humanity in a world that compels individuals towards an identification with function.

Ishiguro has inscribed the problem of functional identity not just as an individual idiosyncrasy but also a self-perpetuating cultural dynamic that permeates all those who work in institutions of power. The staff at Hailsham failed to question the fact that the donations programme was running at all. Instead, the concern of guardians such as Miss Lucy, Marie-Claude and Miss Emily was to make the programme function more humanely from within. Their resistance is illusory because they were not really able to challenge the fundamental issues in a culture in which '"people preferred to believe these organs appeared from nowhere."' (*NLMG*, p.240) Miss Emily confessed to Kathy and Tommy that although there '"*were* arguments"', by the time people became concerned '"about *students*, by the time they came to consider just how you were reared, whether you should have been brought into existence at all, well by then it was too late."' (*NLMG*, p.240) This enforced lacuna in the approach of the guardians and subsequently the approach of the students to their roles as carers and donors can be characterised as an attempt to carry out ethical practice in a moral void.

Typically, Ishiguro renders his characters unable to question fundamental issues because of their limited position within a historically generated power network over which they have no control. Or that, at least, is the excuse offered: as Miss Emily says, '[b]ut you must try and see it historically. After the war, in the early fifties, when the great breakthroughs in science followed one after the other so rapidly, there wasn't time to take stock, to ask the sensible questions.' (*NLMG*, p.240) The guardians, themselves enveloped in their own vocational imperatives, were unable to 'ask the sensible questions' and, consequently, the clones became trapped in

a sub-human existence. Indeed, this inability of the guardians to critically reflect on their own endeavours suggests the increasing power of discourse over individual sovereignty in the conduct of ordinary life. Again, Ishiguro raises, and extends the scope of a similar question posed by Foucault concerning the way in which regulatory power overtook the traditional role of sovereignty in society as the nineteenth century progressed. Foucault asks,

> If it is true that the power of sovereignty is increasingly on the retreat and that disciplinary or regulatory disciplinary power is on the advance, how will the power to kill and the function of murder operate in this technology of power, which takes life as both its object and its objective? How can a power such as this kill, if it is true that its basic function is to improve life, to prolong its duration, to improve its chances, to avoid accidents, and to compensate for failings?[10]

Foucault's answer to this question is to describe the genesis of racism and the notion of a hierarchy of races, which he refers to as 'primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power's control; the break between what must live and what must die.'[11] This transformation in the nature of power has obvious connections with the later rise of Nazi ideology and its systematic use of mass modern bureaucracy and medical discourse. By addressing such issues in his fiction, Ishiguro establishes a continuation of the ideological legacy of the Second World War as an implicit part of the knowledge that comes with the technological advances that developed shortly

[10] Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (London: Penguin, 2004), p.254.
[11] Ibid. p.254.

after. In other words, Ishiguro's implicit answer to the question raised by Foucault as to how the right to kill manifests itself in a society shot through with regulatory discourses that are meant to improve life: the answer is to be found in the clones/normals dichotomy.

This dichotomy is parallel to Foucault's definition of a race war. Ishiguro's construction of the world of the clones demonstrates that there is another way of utilising this break between those who must live and those who must die in a more technologically advanced society. The need to utilise the bodies of the populace, while simultaneously maintaining the function of the state to protect and advance life in the make live, make die society of *Never Let Me Go*, leads to the creation of an under-race. This biological racism, which in the novel is, in fact, based on nothing more than a difference in social function, is expressed in the make live and make die society which creates, excludes and biologically exploits an under-race. Thus, in Ishiguro's rendition of the problem, the clones are born, educated and die on the basis of an identification with a defined position within the whole network of regulative discourses that permeate their social context.

As in his previous novels, Ishiguro's characters remain trapped in a childhood state throughout their entire lives. In a similar way to that in which Christopher Banks, in *When We Were Orphans*, retains his raw childish identity and carries his unresolved anxieties with him, so the clones continue as parentless, institutionalised, children throughout their lives. This is evident from Kathy's description of the room to which Tommy was moved just after his third donation: 'The room was L-shaped, which meant they could get in, as well as the usual bed, chair and wardrobe, a little school desk with a lift-up lid.'

(*NLMG*, p.217) This room is like a classroom. Later on, Kathy describes their interview with Marie-Claude in the same manner, 'like we were in a class and she was a teacher.' (*NLMG* pp.229-30) Hailsham clones, it seems, remain trapped in a childhood condition because the power of hegemony has had the effect of arresting their development into rounded human beings by diverting their potential into an identification with their functions as carers and donors. Kathy's narrative describes some of the classes that performed such a function as having the Orwellian sounding title of 'Culture Briefing. These were classes where we had to role play various people we'd find out there – waiters in cafes, policemen and so on.' (*NLMG*, p.101) These classes had the effect of normalising the clones; in his representation of them Ishiguro establishes the fact that it is this power of hegemony that never lets them go.

Nevertheless, at the Cottages, Hailsham clones were assumed to have advantages not available to those that were raised in other schools. Clones from other schools developed the idea 'that there were all kinds of possibilities open to us Hailsham students that weren't open to them. I remember thinking then how different they actually were, Chrissie and Rodney, from the three of us.' (*NLMG*, p.151) The peripheral world of the clones, within which Chrissie and Rodney occupied a less privileged position, internally generated its own elites. The clones recognise the advantages, or disadvantages, of other clones only in relation to their own situation within the same system. Thus Ishiguro's narrative recognises the totalitarian aspect of hegemony which results in the propagation of a mentality that encourages the perverse development of elites within it.

The clones struggle to escape from their enclosed existence and arrested state of development by attempting to recover that which has been lost, and Ishiguro inscribes this sense of loss and the unspoken desire to recover lost possibilities in the text by means of the searches that the clones undertake. At one point, the narrative tells of a 'lost corner' at Hailsham, in which all the clones' lost property was collected and how this became a running joke amongst them as the result of a throwaway comment, made by Miss Emily, to the effect that Norfolk was a lost corner of England. This comment was interpreted by the children to mean 'that Norfolk was England's "lost corner", where all the lost property found in the country ended up.' (*NLMG*, p.60) Later on, while Kathy, Ruth and Tommy were living at the Cottages, this joke came to have deeper significance.

When Ruth told Kathy that two fellow students living at the Cottages, Chrissie and Rodney, had taken a trip to Cromer, a town on the north Norfolk coast, and claimed to have seen there someone who might be 'a *possible*' (*NLMG*, p.126; the text italicises) for her, the three friends decided to go to Norfolk to investigate. In Ruth's case, the suspected possible was an office worker. However, after following the woman through the town to an art gallery, Kathy, Ruth and Tommy eventually got close enough to see that the woman was nothing like Ruth and could not be her original model. This episode in the text provides the most graphic illustration of the clones' permanently alienated condition. The search for the real life 'possible', the person from whom a clone might have been copied, symbolises the desperate nature of their existence. The term 'possibles' encourages the projection of unlived possibilities of life onto another, and can, therefore, be seen as another

example of the redefining effect of vocational concerns on language. In Ishiguro's text, vocational hegemony enforces an interpretation of others that is consonant with its own values. This process, which I have previously termed interpretive consonance, in *Never Let Me Go* results in a recognition of others that, as Kath explains, defines them as "possibles' – the people who might have been the models for you and your friends.' (*NLMG*, P.127) The clones' relationship with other people is dominated by a desire to discover their own origins. However, because of the restrictions of their function in life, this desire cannot be stated openly; rather, the term 'possible' must both sublimate, and alienate them from, their desire for 'a normal parent' (*NLMG*, p.127).

Ishiguro even extends the framework of the search for identity under the rubric of 'possibles' to include an episode in which Kathy, in response to her own feelings of sexual desire, searches for a 'possible' in pornographic magazines (*NLMG*, p.123). Her desperate attempt is summarised later by Ruth's despondent comment, in relation to her own failed attempt to find her 'possible' in Norfolk, that she thinks that the clones were 'modelled from trash' (NLMG, p.152). As with art, the point of this search was to 'get *some* insight into who you were deep down, and maybe too you'd see something of what your life held in store' (*NLMG*, P.127). The clones' attempts to discover their identities, however, resulted in no such insight.

In fact, Ishiguro's writing blends the structure of the education of the students with a critique of the influence of popular TV culture and advertising, the mimetic effect of which can be seen as an extension of Ishiguro's stance on art. Unable to console, redeem or liberate, art provides merely the illusion

of the possibility of such things. In a similar fashion, the clones look to television as a way of understanding 'normal' behaviour. Much of the way they lived their lives at the Cottages was the result of copying mannerisms from the television and unconscious role-playing. Despite the sophistication of the formal education they received at Hailsham and its continuance at the Cottages, where they had 'meandering discussions around the table about Kafka or Picasso' (*NLMG*, P.109), a more subtle form of assimilation, subliminally generated by cultural discourse, is shown encouraging the clones to conform to normalised standards of behaviour - copying the very people in society from whom they were alienated by their function as donors. Kathy's narrative describes 'things the veteran couples [that is, amongst the clones] had taken from TV programmes: the way they gestured to each other, sat together on sofas, even the way they argued and stormed out of rooms.' (*NLMG*, P.110) Ishiguro constructs his characters on the basis of an extreme sense of psychological enclosure in which the capacity for generating a discriminating assessment of life-experiences is shaped entirely within the confines of already established discursive structures. In this sense, Ishiguro's writing describes an effect of contemporary popular cultural productions which is in accord with Adorno's analysis of the influence of film on human behaviour: 'That, among its functions, film provides models for collective behaviour is not just an additional imposition of ideology....The movements which the film presents are mimetic impulses which, prior to all content and meaning, incite the viewers and listeners to fall into step as if in a parade.'[12] Such a compelling and subconscious effect is hard to resist. Reduced to such

[12] Theodor Adorno, 'Transparencies on Film', in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 2003), p.183.

a parade, the clones' search for origins and identities constricts their consideration of future possibilities.

Ishiguro ascribes a similar effect to advertisements, as the narrative describes how, while at the Cottages, the students, forgetting the warning they had received from Miss Lucy about the foolishness of fantasising about their futures, spent a considerable amount of time thinking about the careers they would like to pursue. Although these considerations revolved around ordinary jobs, such as lorry driving or becoming a postman, one particular instance reveals the origin and effect of such ideas quite starkly.

In this episode, Kathy recalls how Ruth's attention was arrested by an advert in a magazine she saw lying on the ground while they were walking to the local village to get winter fuel. Ruth's reaction to the picture of an office shown there was summed up in her statement: 'now *that* would be a *proper* place to work.' (*NLMG,* p.131) However, Ruth's subsequent description of the kind of office in which she would like to work is presented as if it were a product of her own imagination: 'She went into all the details – the plants, the gleaming equipment, the chairs with their swivels and castors – and it was so vivid everyone let her talk uninterrupted for ages.' (*NLMG*, p.132) Tommy and Kath's later attempts to revive Ruth's fascination with the roadside posters similar to the advert in the magazine, fuelled by the fact that her 'possible' was also an office worker, demonstrate the ways in which Ishiguro has used the discourse of advertising to hedge in the possibilities open to the clones on all sides. This 'educative' effect of hegemony is the reason why the office worker is able to become an image of happiness and successful integration into society. Ishiguro's writing raises questions concerning the way in which

images and information transmute into states of individual consciousness, and how hegemony's creation of life-images and its subsequent generation of desires are an aspect of its forward projection.

The implications of this stance are more clearly revealed when contrasted with the kind of situation suggested by Marcuse as the ideal scenario for genuine self-discovery, free from the influence of advertising and the ingestion of social values as one's own:

> The mere absence of all advertising and of all indoctrinating media of information and entertainment would plunge the individual into a traumatic void where he would have the chance to wonder and to think, to know himself (or rather the negative of himself) and his society. Deprived of his false fathers, leaders, friends, and representatives, he would have to learn his ABC's again. But the words and sentences which he would form might come out very differently, and so might his aspirations and fears.[13]

Ishiguro does not provide his own unfortunate creations with such an opportunity, restricting their search for origins and possibilities to the wrong place: they carry out their attempts to discover themselves within the products of the hegemony that is already dominating their existence. As Adorno notes, the 'automatic self reproduction of the status quo in its established forms is itself an expression of domination.'[14] Ironically, the clones' attempts to liberate themselves through mimesis only deepened their collusion with the

[13] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (1964; London: Routldge, 2002), p.250.
[14] Ibid. p.185.

hegemonic system that made them. The reality behind this mimetic behaviour is a deep sense of fear caused by their alienated condition: 'fearful of the world around us, and – no matter how much we despised ourselves for it – unable quite to let each other go.' (*NLMG*, p.109)

In his structuring of the clones' existence, Ishiguro has shown how the force of hegemony is able to render as futile the search for a meaning beyond the definition of life given by vocational discourse. The clones cannot get to their origins no matter where they look because the term 'possibles' does not signify any link with the real; it simply hides the fact that they don't have any origins. The clones are, quite literally, reproductions. Therefore, it is possible to read Ishiguro's use of the socio-historical aspect of the word 'clone', as an expansion of its technical, scientific, meaning, to refer to the fact that his characters have no connection with the reality around them because their entire existence is the product of hegemonic forces that emphasise the value of functionalism and reproducibility.

All this searching raises the question of copies and originals, simulacra, authenticity and the reproducibility of human beings. As Baudrillard pointed out in his critique of Disneyland in its relation to the rest of American society, 'Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the "real country", all of "real" America, which is Disneyland (just as prisons are there to conceal the fact that it is the social in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence, which is carceral).'[15] The existence of the clones and, more importantly, their status as alienated sub-humans serves as a means to mask the effects of hegemony in society generally. Vocational language, and the term 'possibles', is part of the

[15] Jean Baudrillard, *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (1988; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p.175.

way in which the clones negotiate a system of signs imposed on them that proposes a *difference in the function* of the lives of the clones from that of the lives of others within the same hegemonic system, while simultaneously denying any discussion of the fact that there may be *no difference* between them and other human beings regardless of their origins; a possibility which, considering their fate, others would find uncomfortable to say the least.

Another aspect of Ishiguro's awareness of the seductive infiltration of power into the mind is exemplified in his construction of the aspect of the clones' education which prepares them to fulfil the role of 'carer' later on in their lives. At Hailsham the clones were surreptitiously trained to be carers by being encouraged to care for one another in various ways. For instance, four times a year the clones would take part in 'Exchanges' at which they would each put into a general pot items they had made, such as sculptures, drawings and poetry, and be paid for them with tokens. They could then use these tokens to purchase items made by others. This creation of a miniature economic system has obvious connections with the 'Cultural Briefing' lessons that the clones attended. Both existed for the purposes of normalisation and habituation to the society that they would eventually inhabit. Kathy's recognition that 'being dependent on each other to produce the stuff that might become your private treasures – that's bound to do things to your relationships', and that people were liked according to the quality of the work they produced, extends Ishiguro's comment from art to the culture industry in general.

Ruth's memory reveals yet another aspect of the effect of the Exchanges. According to her, the Exchanges meant that the clones 'were

encouraged to value each other's work' (*NLMG*, p.15), thus making clear that the emotional dimension of the Exchanges was about giving of oneself and valuing the contributions of others. Thus the responsibility for caring for each other, in conditions created for them by others, is placed on the clones' shoulders at a young age. The system made them responsible for the suffering that it generated and was accompanied by the clones' own unconscious complicity in avoiding a confrontation with the reality of what they were being taught.

The clones' unconscious complicity was spontaneously transformed into a tacit agreement not to mention difficult issues associated with the courses for becoming 'carers' which they began to attend after they had left Hailsham and were living in the Cottages. Veterans, or older clones, would never mention those who had left in order to become donors, and there was also 'the hush that would descend around certain veterans when they went off on "courses" – which even we knew had to do with becoming carers.' (NLMG, p.120)

The narrative gradually reveals that being a carer means enduring the encroaching isolation caused by the sudden change in the clones' lifestyle and the loss of friends and contemporaries as they become donors and 'complete' their missions. This alienated state is characterised by 'solitude.' Kathy complains that after growing up surrounded by people, she suddenly found herself spending hour after hour on her 'own, driving across the country, centre to centre, hospital to hospital, sleeping in overnights, no one to talk to about your worries, no one to have a laugh with.' (*NLMG*, p.189)

Ishiguro situates his characters on the periphery, both emotional and geographical, of the society which exploits them. Tommy and Kathy's return journey from their visit to Marie-Claude and Miss Emily exemplifies the shadowy nature of the existence of both carer and donor on the borders of society: 'that night, it seems to me these dark byways of the country existed just for the likes of us, while the big glittering motorways with their huge signs and super cafes were for everyone else.' (NLMG, p.249) Despite this Kathy still claims that 'for the most part being a carer's suited me fine.' (*NLMG*, p.189) The ridiculousness of this statement, and her evident exhaustion, causes Tommy to wonder why she doesn't 'wish they'd tell you you can stop.' (*NLMG*, p.358) However, it seems that an existence on the periphery is preferable to no existence at all. Kathy's hesitancy can be put down to the fact that stopping being a carer for others means turning to face the inevitable for herself: the 'completion' of her vocational imperative.

Ishiguro's use of the term 'completion' to express the boundaries of the vocational imperative underlines his emphasis on the overpowering effect of hegemony in the text. The redirecting force of this hegemonically generated vocational language is demonstrated in the fact that the term 'completion' refers to the formation of, and entrance into, a community of the dying. At some point after serving time as a carer, each clone requests, or is ordered, to begin their donorship. The narrative recounts how, as Tommy's donations progressed, his allegiance changed from his relationship with Kathy to his tie with the other donors. He spent more time talking with other donors in conversations about their experiences that they could understand only between themselves. Tommy was evidently giving up on his relationship with

Kathy because he knew that it was not going to develop further. However, even in turning towards his own destruction, Tommy made it clear that he was becoming part of a community of which she understood nothing: 'Kath, sometimes you just don't see it. You don't see it because you're not a donor.' (*NLMG*, p.257)

Tommy's hardened attitude masked the hopelessness engendered by a type of pre-destination and the inability to escape the inevitability of death. However, in Tommy's case, as in that of all the clones, it is important to wonder whether Tommy would have felt the same if he had fulfilled his life instead of the dictates of his vocation. This is particularly so in Tommy's case, as the reader has witnessed his earlier struggle to break through this vicious confinement with all the means that Hailsham did put at his disposal. The force of hegemony engenders a fear of resistance to the extent that it diverts the individual's capacity from the full realisation of human potential. The perverse irony is that the clones' fear makes them comply with the demands of the power that kills them. Ishiguro's writing implicitly draws attention to the contorted relationship between society, hegemony and the individual's fear of death.

In a sense, what is lamentable about the artificially manufactured life of the clones is the fact that, through the force of their education, they have been indoctrinated to seek what is in fact a manufactured premature death. The perverse nature of the vocational imperative and its effect on the meaning of words culminates in the vocationalisation of death.

In the make live, let die society referred to by Foucault,

> power has no control over death, but it can control mortality....In the right of sovereignty, death was the moment of the most obvious and spectacular manifestation of the absolute power of the sovereign; death now becomes, in contrast, the moment when the individual escapes all power, falls back on himself and retreats, so to speak, into his own privacy. Power no longer recognizes death. Power literally ignores death.[16]

Ishiguro, once again, utilises the notion of a society permeated by discourse to extend the boundaries of the type of power relations described by Foucault. In the make live, make die society of the novel, the clones' deaths are not simply ignored by power, but are re-codified as 'completion' within the discourse of total administration. The text depicts the drive to positively assimilate death into the hegemonic values of society. This is a stark rendition of what Ishiguro has shown in his previous novels. This time the link between vocation and death is quite literal rather than, for instance, being represented by the metaphorical living death of Stevens. To 'complete' is to die. To make one's identification with one's vocation complete is to die. In what could be seen as the ultimate double bind, scientific technology's attempt to create wellbeing demands that the clones complete their vocations - demands that they fulfil their purpose in life by seeking their own deaths.

The most poignant comment on this situation appears in the text in Kathy's recollection of a trip taken by Ruth, Tommy and herself to see an old boat, half-sunk in marshland. As they made their way to where the boat lay,

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[16] Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (London: Penguin, 2004), p.248.

they 'could see here and there ghostly dead trunks poking out of the soil, most of them broken off only a few feet up. And beyond the dead trunks, maybe sixty yards away, was the boat, sitting beached in the marshes under the weak sun.' (*NLMG*, p.204) In a symbolic gesture, Ishiguro's use of the boat conjures images of the river Styx, and the passage over the river of death. The clones will see their world and their bodies disintegrate as they undergo the process of donation, their shortened lives and their organless bodies becoming hollow and emaciated like the tree trunks 'broken off only a few feet up'. As the experience of the clones' trip to see the boat demonstrates, the attitude engendered in them towards their own destruction is one of timid, almost complacent, curiosity. Such a passive acceptance of an intolerable dilemma speaks volumes about the nature of the fear that lies beneath.

In his explication of the emotional dynamics of conformity Ishiguro exploits the aspect of the mental instillation of hegemony that depends on fear. Kathy's narrative tells of the spread of frightening stories amongst the 'students' about the woods at the top of the hill above Hailsham House. The first was the story of the boy who, having had a row with his friends, ran off into the woods above the house and whose body was 'found two days later, up in those woods, tied to a tree with the hands and feet chopped off.' The second was that about the ghost of the girl who had climbed over the fence 'just to see what it was like outside' and had died because the guardians would not let her back in (*NLMG*, p.46). Ishiguro's use of these stories demonstrates the way in which, by engendering a pacifying fear, hegemony appropriates the fear of death as a means of demarcating its own boundary; a

boundary beyond which the clones dared not stray. Paradoxically, then, the clones' own fear of death has trapped them within the boundaries of a hegemony which will cost them their lives anyway and which has simultaneously made challenging the artificial borders of power quite literally unthinkable.

One of the most disturbing elements in the novel is the fact that Ishiguro never offers his characters any means for autonomous resistance to their manufactured destiny. His characters are literally driven helplessly towards tragedy by forces over which they have absolutely no influence. There seems to be little or no questioning of the purpose of the clones' existence, nor any critical self-reflection that might make the clones themselves aware of the forces at work in their lives, the relentless silent authority that will never let them go. According to Ishiguro, it seems that questioning the dominant forces of social organisation does not even present itself as a possibility to ordinary people destined for lives of servitude that are circumscribed by the power of fear.

The only relief Ishiguro allows his characters from the relentless pressure of this unseen power is the futile expression of rage. In the narrative, Tommy's venting of his frustration at failing to obtain a deferral takes place at night in an open field, in the middle of nowhere. Kathy reports how 'The moon wasn't quite full, but it was bright enough, and I could make out in the mid-distance, near where the field began to fall away, Tommy's figure, raging, shouting, flinging his fists and kicking out.' (*NLMG*, p.250)

In this episode, Ishiguro breaks down emotional barriers only in order to emphasise the crushing disempowerment of the clones. The same temper

Tommy was famous for as a child re-emerges as the rage of frustration, fear and anger of an adult whose life has been contorted by inhibiting education, the power of hegemony and his own fear. The life-long continuance of such behaviour is explained by his always having known 'somewhere deep down. Something the rest of you didn't' (*NLMG*, p.252), always having felt the hopelessness and futility of his existence and the inescapable impact of a system of hegemonically driven educational forces on his life. Miss Emily's reply to Tommy's questions about the possibility of deferral reconfirmed the fatalistic inscription of the vocational imperative on the clones' very being: 'There's nothing like that. Your life must now run the course that's been set for it.' (*NLMG*, p.243)

Ishiguro's use of the futile gesture emphasises the irresistible force of the vocational imperative and extends to his representation of the body. In one telling scene, just after Tommy's third donation, Kathy and he start a sexual relationship. In the same way in which Tommy's fit of rage is an expression of his disempowered condition, so the irony of the fact that his sexual relationship with Kathy begins at the moment when his body is being dismantled is unmissable. The atmosphere of physical and sexual repression that Ishiguro rigidly maintains in his previous work is shattered and he liberates physical desire at the same time as he destroys the body. Ishiguro, then, uses sexual release only to emphasise its ultimate pointlessness: 'Yes, we're doing this now and I'm glad we're doing it now. But what a pity we left it so late.' (*NLMG*, p.218)

This painful 'too-lateness' of their relationship puts the clones in an impossible position in which it is clear that sex can supply only temporary

emotional comfort that cannot compensate for the fate that awaits them, the hopelessness of which is further deepened by the fact that their ability to have children has also already been denied. In this sense, Ishiguro's representation of sex as both emotionally inconsequential, because of its too-lateness, and as bereft of any reproductive force, goes beyond any sense of sex as a last ditch attempt to survive a personal apocalypse. Such a situation may be read as a regularization of sex and its functions within the lives of the clones. Their identification with their role is so strong that they perform sex within the limited sphere that is allowed to them on the basis of their usefulness to others. As Foucault comments, '[m]edicine is a power-knowledge that can be applied to both the body and the population, both organism and biological processes, and it will therefore have both disciplinary and regulatory effects.'[17] Just as the clones' bodies are emptied of organs, so are their lives, useful for others, emptied of meaning for themselves. Thus, the idea of one's usefulness as a measure of one's value, engendered by the vocational imperative, deprives the clones' lives of personal significance. Once again, Ishiguro laments over the ignorance of ordinary people in the face of the life-destroying coerciveness of power.

As in Ishiguro's previous works, his sophisticated use of memory can be seen as an implicit reference to the effects of this coercive power. The clones' inability to face their circumstances squarely means that they develop memory as a strategy for resisting reality. This type of self-deception bears the footprint of vocational indoctrination, as Ruth's pretending not to remember her hopes of working in an office, on the clones' return journey

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[17] Ibid. p.252.

from seeing the boat, demonstrates. Ruth's evasive attitude on being shown a road-side poster which showed the picture of an open-plan office, full of smart smiling people, similar to the one in the magazine which had inspired her, displays a deliberate forgetfulness that seeks to deny the painful loss of the life of which she had dreamt. When set beside her earlier reflections on her reasons for stopping being a carer and becoming a donor it becomes clear that there is much more to it than simple denial. Ruth's statement that donating their organs is 'what we're *supposed* to be doing' (*NLMG*, p.207) indicates the irresistible internal pressure to conform to expectations.

By contrast, Kathy's use of memory is a nostalgic hanging-on to what was, in fact, a past filled with delusion and is an attempt to defy change. For instance, on bumping into an old fellow 'student', Laura, she states that she 'was tempted to ignore her and keep walking' (*NLMG*, p.190) In the event, she did not keep walking. However, both she and Laura used their conversation as a way of resisting a confrontation with the reality of caring; both reaffirmed their vocational identities and hugged 'as a way of affirming Hailsham, the fact that it was still there in both our memories.' (NLMG, p.193)

The desperation of such a state of mind is belied by Kathy's repeated re-iteration of the same sentiments 'I lost Ruth, then I lost Tommy, but I won't lose my memories of them. I suppose I lost Hailsham too.' (*NLMG*, p.262) In the wake of this loss, memory becomes a way of holding on to, rather than a questioning of, the past, and Kathy consoles herself with the thought that she will 'have Hailsham with me, safely in my head.' (*NLMG*, p.262) Kathy's determination to remember Tommy, Ruth and Hailsham is not only her reaction to the loss of her friends but also to the encroaching loss of her own

life. Moreover, the end of Hailsham signifies a failure to sustain the set of values that made of its students what they were and Miss Emily's ominous statement that 'there's hardly a trace left of the work we did' (*NLMG*, p.242) refers as much to the declining numbers of remaining Hailsham clones as it does to any sentimental attachment to her own achievements as an educator, however bizarre these may have been.

This is memory as the last resistance to changing hegemony. As the clones who embody the values of Hailsham are reduced in number, the false security provided by Kathy's sense of belonging is stripped away and she is exposed to the vicissitudes of the underlying network of power that was always there, and which demands the completion of her vocation. Exactly which changes Kathy's memories are resisting is shown in Marie-Claude's interpretation of the time she witnessed Kathy as a girl dancing to the song 'Never Let Me Go'. Kathy tells of the moment when, during one of her visits to Hailsham, Marie-Claude accidentally saw her in her room 'swaying about slowly in time to the song, holding an imaginary baby to my breast.' (*NLMG*, p.64) Later, Marie-Claude's own recollection of this moment provides a clearer explanation of what Kathy may be avoiding. Marie-Claude states that, when she watched Kathy dancing, she

> saw a new world coming rapidly. More scientific, efficient, yes. More cures for the old sicknesses. Very good. But a harsh, cruel world. And I saw a little girl, her eyes tightly closed, holding to her breast the old kind world, one that she knew in her heart could not remain, and she was holding it and pleading, never to let her go. That is what I saw. It

wasn't really you, what you were doing, I know that. But I saw you and it broke my heart. And I've never forgotten. (*NLMG*, p.249)

As in *The Remains of the Day*, in a moment of personal relationship there is also the heart-breaking recognition of the passing of an age. Memory, for Marie-Claude, is about recognising the changing world in which she lives. Marie-Claude's memory, then, functions in a way that is the opposite of Kathy's. Ishiguro has set these two uses of memory in stark contrast. Kathy's use of memory is an attempt to evade consciousness of the reality of one's life driven by the urge to maintain hegemony and resist change. It is about the eliding of consciousness and the denial of pain and loss in order to avoid realisation. Marie-Claude's use of memory is the consequence of the impact of a momentary forceful awareness of change on consciousness.

In this sense, *Never Let Me Go* can be understood as a highly ambivalent text written in a society entering on another phase in the interminable flow of hegemonic change. Ishiguro's characters' conflicting uses of memory is typical of those who must face the decline of the values that have shaped their lives. With Kathy's completion of her vocational imperative the destructive weight of the values that she has come to embody reach their gruesome fulfilment. The ambivalent attitude towards change demonstrated in the conflict between Kathy's foolish nostalgia and Marie-Claude's troubled withdrawal from her consciousness of it can be seen as Ishiguro's response to the times. The fascination with this point of conflict between outgoing and incoming worlds suspends any sense of direction and is indicative of a stalled

mentality. Kathy's inability to let go of her vocational identity will destroy her, and leave the likes of Marie-Claude and Miss Emily struggling to recover a sense of purpose.

Ishiguro's implicitly extreme representation of the particularising, individualising, divisive tendencies of power, even to the point of the quite literal division of the body into its separate organs, contrasts strongly with his own statements concerning the aims of the novel. In an interview with Cynthia F. Wong, he comments on the novel thus: 'Although it's a story about mortality, I wanted it to be a quite positive story. By having this rather negative, bleak scenario, I thought it might highlight what is actually quite positive about being alive'[18]. What Ishiguro means by this is that he sees the capacity of the clones to maintain a caring attitude to one another in such bleak circumstances as encapsulating something about the human condition that is to be celebrated. One must, however, have some sympathy with Cynthia Wong, when she replies that, 'Still, I have to re-think "cheerfulness" in the context of your remarks and my own reading, because the book offers a rather sobering view of life.'[19]

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[18] Brian W. Shaffer and Cynthia F. Wong, eds., *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), p.220.
[19] Ibid. p.220.

Conclusion

Commenting on Ishiguro's first four novels, Brian Shaffer notes that for 'all their differences,' they 'share enough similarities – unreliable first-person narrators, protagonists who remake themselves by "mixing memory and desire," and emotional and psychological emphasis – to suggest a coherence and integrity to the author's aesthetic vision.'[1] This view of the consistency of Ishiguro's writing has been borne out by his latest two novels, in which many of the themes and aesthetic tendencies noted above reappear. The aim of this thesis, however, has been to show that the profundity and coherence of Ishiguro's works originate at a much deeper level than that indicated by comments like Shaffer's.

Indeed, the international appeal of Ishiguro's novels is an indication of the functioning of this deeper strata of concerns. The narrators in his works are not simply particularised variations on recurring themes; rather, each narrator works as a metaphor for the more general relationship between ordinary people and the power structures of the globalised world in which Ishiguro writes. In an interview with Don Swaim, in 1990, Ishiguro explained his understanding of the relationship between metaphor and the politics of the present.[2] With regards to Stevens, in *The Remains of the Day*, Ishiguro stated that he is not primarily concerned with historical accuracy or the representation of particular historical events, but rather that he has 'chosen

[1] Brian Shaffer, *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), p.120.
[2] Brian W. Shaffer and Cynthia F. Wong, eds., *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), pp.100-101.

the figure of the butler for metaphorical reasons. I'm trying to say various things that concern me as a person living in the 1990s, or the 1980s'. He refers to feelings of frustration that he experienced 'as somebody who had grown up in an idealistic time in the late '60s and early '70s,' when the idealistic younger generation thought that they were going to change the world, that they 'had a duty to change the world.' However, such idealism was doomed from the start as the world changed and became more and more complicated, while still demanding that ordinary people fulfil their responsibilities by making decisions 'on the big questions, how the country is run, the decisions the government makes – because this is what it means to be a citizen in a democratic country'. Fulfilling the role of a responsible citizen, while possessing only limited knowledge of such things as economics and social policy, is something that Ishiguro feels 'is very much a burden on many of us'. The result is that ordinary people 'don't head governments or lead coup d'etats. What we do is we do a job, we work for an employer or organisation or maybe some cause – and we just do a little thing. We hope somebody up there, upstairs uses our little contribution in a good way.'

This metaphorical approach to the relationship of ordinary people to power is very much extended and deepened in the novels that follow *The Remains of the Day*. One of the main effects of it in Ishiguro's writing is to expose the way in which the prevalence of particular hegemonies shapes perception and the consequent interpretation of events, as in the phenomenon that I have labelled interpretive consonance. In spite of the fact that hegemonies change, the narrators' mindset does not; or, rather, their

narratives themselves could be interpreted as symptomatic of the attempt to maintain a certain identity in the face of a declining hegemony.

This unstable world of rapidly changing history and fluctuating hegemonies disrupts any traditional notion of identity, such as nationality or ethnicity. Ishiguro's response to this is to structure the identities of his narrators around the notion of a functional role, or vocational imperative. The causes and effects of this identification in the case of each narrator are both different and similar. The differences can be found in Ishiguro's construction of their personal histories: Etsuko, Ono, Stevens, Ryder, Banks, and Kathy have all come to their vocational identities via different routes. However, each narrative leaves the reader with a similar sense of waste, a sense that the mechanics of power, combined with the narrators' own moral and psychological ordinariness, is enough to inhibit their capacity for liberated self-consciousness and free action at that time in their lives when it would matter most. This is so, whether the narrators are reflecting on lives already lived, as are Etsuko, Ono, Stevens and Banks, or whether there still seems to be time left for accomplishing a possible if improbable change, as with Ryder and Kathy. The question, then, is whether or not Ishiguro suggests to the reader any possibility of resistance to these forces. In discussing this issue it is useful to compare Ishiguro's approach to questions raised by the critical theorist, Theodor Adorno.

In his essay 'How to Look at Television', Adorno stated that

> In order to deal with the impact of totalitarian systems, it would be more commendable to show how the life of ordinary people is affected by

> terror and impotence than to cope with the phoney psychology of the big-shots, whose heroic role is silently endorsed by such a treatment even if they are pictured as villains.[3]

It seems appropriate to regard Ishiguro's work as 'commendable' in the sense noted by Adorno. In his own unique, complex, way, Ishiguro engages with several elements of what Adorno is concerned with in the above quotation. His novels do not concentrate on the 'big-shots' in Adorno's sense of the term. Those of Ishiguro's characters who believe themselves to be important in some way only succeed in producing a narrative that underlines their delusions, delusions which originate in the denial of the complex reality of which their own narratives speak. Moreover, Ishiguro's writing redefines 'totalitarian' as the 'totalising' tendencies of modern society and its networks of discursive power, which can be said to be the forces that affect ordinary people with a particular type of 'terror and impotence'. This is the terror of straying too far from one's designated role in life, or failing to fulfil what one sees as one's social mission. In this sense, Ishiguro's narratives play on the insidious terror inherent in what Foucault describes as disciplinary power, rather than simply outright oppression. In a similar way, the impotence engendered in ordinary people by both hegemony and disciplinary power is the inability to see and act beyond the limits of a prescribed identity.

Ishiguro's approach takes for granted the notion that the contemporary world is one in which human behaviour is indivisible from the performance of some sort of social function, even to the extent of not being able to divest

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[3] Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry* (London: Routldge, 2001), p.173.

itself of that role in the privacy of its own space, as is the case with Stevens in *The Remains of the Day*. In this sense, Ishiguro's understanding of the contemporary condition clearly parallels ideas explored in another of Adorno's essays, entitled 'Free Time'. Adorno notes that

> Of course one should not attempt to make a simple distinction between people as they are in themselves and their so-called social roles. These roles affect the innermost articulation of human characteristics, to such an extent that in the age of truly unparalleled social integration, it is hard to ascertain anything in human beings which is not functionally determined.[4]

As I have argued in this thesis, Ishiguro's texts are centrally concerned with precisely this implicit conception of functional identities. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that all of his narrators are in some way encased in a social function within the boundaries of which they must struggle with the remnants of their humanity. The effect of this encasement is to hinder the possibility of any genuinely transformative dialectic between the demands of power and the humanity of the individual in the social sphere. This is particularly clear in the case of Kathy and her friends in *Never let Me Go*, who can only discuss their fate with one another. When they attempt to negotiate on behalf of their humanity with the powers that be, they are simply told that they must complete the mission that has been assigned to them.

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[4] Ibid. p.188.

Why these concerns so strongly dominate Ishiguro's imagination must have something to do with his own historical situation. Central to five of the six novels, the historical event overshadowing all that happens, is the Second World War and its aftermath. For Stevens, Ono, Etsuko and Banks, the war is recollected as the source of the uncontrollable, dynamic changes occurring all around them and affecting the ground beneath their feet - something over which they have no control. Kathy and her fellow clones must live in the shadow of the war's ideological and technological inheritance. For Ryder, war has been translated metaphorically into the local conflict over musical concerns. Although the characters themselves are hardly directly responsible for the conflicted world that they must inhabit, there is an uneasy sense that they are in some ways culpable through a combination of complicity with the narrow roles that have been allotted to them and the fact of their sheer ignorance of the implications and consequences of their compliant actions that results from this. Ishiguro's novels offer an antidote to such ignorance that follows a similar line of approach to that to be found in Adorno's cultural criticisms.

In 'How to Look at Television' Adorno sets out his basic propositions for an analytic critique of the broader cultural effects of the medium. He states that

> We propose to concentrate on issues of which we are vaguely but uncomfortably aware, even at the expense of our discomfort's mounting, the further and more systematically our studies proceed. The effort here required is of a moral nature itself: knowingly to face

> psychological mechanisms operating on various levels in order not to become blind and passive victims.[5]

In a sense, Ishiguro has a parallel emotional and moral aim to that of Adorno. In his novels, he endeavours to remind the reader of the broader implications of the seemingly mundane routine of the everyday: he is proposing a way to look at the ordinary. An important part of this approach is his implicit sense of the relational effects of mechanisms of power. Ishiguro's narrators embody mechanisms of power that seem to characterise the conditions in which the type of narrative typically found in the novels is constructed. For example, Kathy's narrative, in *Never Let Me Go*, could only be that of a clone who was created in a society in which power is invested in genetic technology and medico-social discourses. The narrators also seek a resolution to their sad condition by means of a probing narrative that will both return them to the source of their troubles and shield them from it, and that both denies the importance of, and provides a means of finally coming to terms with, the difficult and painful issues that permeate their lives. They go through this process with varying success.

Their increasingly alienated condition has created a gap between themselves and their environments through which everything that has been repressed or denied in the pursuit of their vocations returns to haunt them. The sense of anxiety over this potential loss of identity, caused by the unwanted confrontation with both the past and the present, is the trigger for the narrators' attempts to reassert the values of their vocational imperatives.

[5] Ibid. p.176.

Vocational narrative then re-frames experience in its own terms, constructing, maintaining and concealing identities.

Freud, in his *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, refers to screen memories as evidence of the simultaneous desire to both remember and forget.[6] Vocational narration is also one in which the conflict inherent in the desire to both remember and forget produces the reflective content of a seamless narrative line founded on a functional identity rather than on a personal confrontation with the truth. This is also a narrative in which the tension between this need for reflection and the forward momentum of the narrators' changing circumstances generates a recursive narrative structure. *The Remains of the Day, An Artist of the Floating World* and *When We Were Orphans* are conspicuously structured in this way, with the narratives being organised into sections labelled progressively with particular dates or days, which themselves contain reflections on past events. However, in *A Pale View of Hills, The Unconsoled* and *Never Let Me Go*, the recursiveness simply occurs as part of the narrative, while the texts themselves are separated straightforwardly into sections and chapters. Despite these differences in presentation, there is a continuity of the sense of anxiety engendered by such a recursive structure - a sense that the narrators are attempting to hold on to their own already established versions of events. This anxiety is not simply an effect of the narrators' personal delusions but is also a reaction to their cultural context. The insecurity in each narrative is a symptom of the widening gap between the vocational imperative and its historical environment which is constantly changing. This is also why the reflections in the novels take place

[6] Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, ed. Adam Phillips, trans. Anthea Bell (1901; London: Penguin, 2002), p.45.

over a period of time: each time they come across a gap, the narrators have to go back to restructure the past in an attempt to hide the gaping chasm into which they are on the verge of falling. This process gets harder as time goes by, and the narrative either collapses, or simply carries the past forward as nostalgia.

Indeed, it is clear that, in these texts, Ishiguro's understanding of power infuses his concern with the ways in which language can be used simultaneously to create and conceal identities. In their zeal to deny the reality of their lives, the narrators inadvertently give voice to that which they would deny. They do this because the repressed elements come back to face them in the surrounding world. Therefore, when they describe that world in their narratives, it represents an appropriation of their vocabulary by those very same repressed elements, which then enter into the mainstream of discourse. Part of what is revealed goes beyond the personal conflicts of the protagonists of the texts and enters into the realm of the personal embodiment of historical forces in each individual. This personal embodiment of the historical, or more specifically hegemonic, condition of society is not only redolent of Ishiguro's understanding of the transformation of memory into history as time passes but, conversely, it is his narrators' maintenance of history as memory that underlies his complicated and understated sense of the historical agency of ordinary people.

In this sense, Ishiguro has constructed first-person narratives that are emblematic of the disruption of relationships of power that underlie them. The fact that the narratives are symptomatic of hegemonic shifts accords well with

Foucault's concept of the 'event' within historical discourse. According to Foucault,

> An event ... is not a decision, a treaty, a reign, or a battle, but the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, a feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a masked 'other'.[7]

In the narratives we can see clearly Ishiguro's representation of these historical and cultural processes of change. Although the narrators may not fully articulate the tensions they experience, the fact of the narratives themselves demonstrate that there is an encroaching awareness of the 'masked other'. Indeed, these tensions are an implicit part of their narratives and cannot be otherwise. Also, in four of the novels, the gap between the generations provides a barrier over which Ishiguro's narrators look into the future. It is this twofold tension - between cultures and generations - that creates the uniquely privileged space occupied by Etsuko, Ono, Stevens and Banks. Ryder, and Kathy are challenged with the task of facing their own futures. But, as we have seen, what the narrators make of their positions is another matter.

The relationship with which Ishiguro is concerned is that between past, present and future: the past inhabits the present, but the present re-structures and colonises the past, which shapes the future. Shifts in historical context

[7] Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), p.154.

highlight the movement of floating signifiers and the accompanying shift in the meaning of words across generational/cultural boundaries. This shift destabilises the discourse of power and the power of discourse, and engenders a sense of crisis on the level of personal identity. The battle between these forces becomes more unsustainable as history progresses beneath the surface of the texts and as the narrators reflect on their lives in the mode of their vocational imperatives. The historical loosening of floating signifiers makes it inevitable that the narrators will, in some way, be faced with the boundaries of the psychological confinement of their own perspectives. This difficult change of perspectives signals the subtle introduction of a broadened concept of responsibility by the processes of historical change. Destabilising the narrators' perspective in this way also destabilizes the reader's comfortable identification with them.

Despite the fact that their outlooks are tightly circumscribed by hegemonic and vocational boundaries, the narrators occupy a liminal position in their societies. That is, they find themselves on the edge between two different cultures/times/borders of historical moments. In *A Pale View of Hills*, *An Artist of the Floating World*, *The Remains of the Day*, and *When We Were Orphans*, the narrators are in the same position chronologically. Their advanced age puts them at the edge of the generation gap. In this respect they hold privileged positions that means that their narratives are bound to contain a realisation of the relationship between these differing elements, if only partially on the part of themselves and more completely on the part of the reader. Ishiguro enables the reader to see the force with which the historical context, with its play of hegemonies and discourses, shapes our perceptions

of the world while at the same time raising the uncomfortable question of responsibility and the ways in which it is often eluded. In some senses, Ishiguro's vision of the potential for change offered by this process is darker in the other two novels. Ryder, in *The Unconsoled*, does not seem to achieve any level of self-consciousness that could result in a change of direction for him, and is left at the close only with the hope offered by the fact that he has a little more time left to live than most of Ishiguro's other narrators in which he might still develop. Kathy and her fellow clones, despite having some sense of their predicament, are simply unable even to begin to combat the forces that have created them. The horrifying burden of awareness of the clones' condition, because it is given no resolution in the text, falls on the reader.

The questions raised by Ishiguro's depiction of the link between social forces and the state of individuals go to the very core of the way in which we organise society. His concerns focus on familiar ground, given the fact that those who read his novels must inevitably fulfil some type of role in some type of social context. Consequently, his work is in danger of seeming to collapse to a level of banal moralising on the difficulties raised by vocations. In this context, it is worthwhile remembering Adorno's warning that

> We know from psychoanalysis that the reasoning, 'But we know all this!' is often a defence. This defence is made in order to dismiss insights as irrelevant because they are actually uncomfortable and make life more difficult for us than it already is by shaking our

conscience when we are supposed to enjoy the 'simple pleasures of life'.[8]

Whether we like it or not, the organisation of society cannot be seen as independent of the people who embody its values. In this thesis, through a detailed investigation of each of his novels to date, I have argued that, in Ishiguro's writing, the lamentable state of ordinary people directly indicates the inhuman conditions that have been institutionalised in our contemporary globalised society. Ishiguro's response to these conditions invites us to participate, as ordinary people, in a process of serious self-reflection in a way that upsets our basic complacency about the wider significance of our actions in work and daily life – to consider, in a rather uncomfortable way, what else we were doing while we were doing our good work.

[8] Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry* (London: Routldge, 2001), p.175.

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