

The Progression of Regret in Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The winner of 2017 Nobel Prize for Literature, Kazuo Ishiguro, is without a doubt one among the most celebrated writers of contemporary fiction. This Japanese born Englishman has proved his skill as Novelist, Screenwriter and Short-story Writer. Born in Nagasaki, Ishiguro moved to England with his family in 1960. Ishiguro graduated from the University of Kent with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in English and Philosophy in 1978 and completed his Master of Arts in Creative Writing from the University of East Anglia in 1980. His most popular novels are *An Artist of the Floating World*, *The Remains of the Day*, *When We Were Orphans* and *Never Let Me Go*. Numerous awards and honours such as Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize (1982), Whitbread Prize (1986), Booker Prize (1989), Order of the British Empire (1995), Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (1998) Nobel Prize in Literature (2017) have been bestowed upon Ishiguro. The Swedish Academy said about that he was a novelist, "who, in novels of great emotional force, has uncovered the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world."

Postcolonialism, explained from a literary perspective, deals with the literature made in countries that were colonies and/or by the colonised people responding to the colonial inheritance by what the British-Indian author Salman Rushdie termed "writing back", and thus coping with colonial cultural attitudes through literature. However, it may further be seen as the literature written in different countries that takes as its subject-matter the concept or history of exploitation. Postcolonialism includes a huge array of writers and subjects. The horribly totally extraordinary geological, recorded, social, religious, and financial issues of the different some time ago colonized nations give a decent determination inside the nature and subject of most postcolonial composing.

"Postcolonial criticism" that, in a way, overlapped "postmodern criticism", is a product of Postcolonial literature, a class devised to exchange and expand upon what was once referred to as Commonwealth Literature, starting with the Nineteen Eighties. Postcolonial criticism is one that goes on the far side the border of civilization and investigates the non-Western merchandise of culture and traditions.

Postcolonialism literature often deals with loss - be it culture, language, or the very essence of people's life style. The most prominent meanings of regret, according to Oxford Dictionary, are – "a feeling of sadness, repentance, or disappointment over an occurrence or something that one has done or failed to do"; "to feel sad, repentant, or disappointed over (something that one has done or failed to do)"; and the archaic meaning, "to feel sorrow for the loss or absence of (something pleasant)". Regret is an inclination created by thinking back on our slip-ups, oversights, lost openings, and awful conduct, and since one may feel regret over something as paltry as buying a sweater, the individual without any regrets is either immaculate in each respect or has no inner voice.

Through the character Mr. Stevens, Ishiguro has explored a wide range of human regrets in his novel, *The Remains of The Day*. *The Remains of the Day* is generally marked as a post-colonialist work, as its hero holds wistfulness for the English lifestyle before World War II, when Britain still held states everywhere throughout the world. Be that as it may, this reality is simply distracting to the novel, which is principally an account of human—not political—regret. This paper aims to trace the progression of regret in this novel.

The Progression of Regret

The Remains of the Day is told in the principal individual portrayal of an English steward named Stevens. In July 1956, Stevens takes a six-day road trek toward the West Country of England—a territory toward the west of Darlington Hall, the house in which Stevens lives and has worked as a steward for thirty-four years. Despite the fact that the house was previously owned by the now-deceased Lord Darlington, by 1956, it has fallen into to the hands Farraday, an American respectable man. Stevens likes Mr. Farraday, yet neglects to connect well with him socially: Stevens is a vigilant, genuine individual and is not open to clowning around in the way Mr. Farraday inclines toward. Stevens terms this ability of easygoing discussion "bantering"; a few

times all through the novel Stevens declares his want to enhance his bantering expertise with the goal that he can better satisfy his present boss.

Although Stevens is efficient in his job and takes care to make sure that the household runs smoothly and without any incident, he is a loner who is “all work and no play”. This kind of behaviour is typical to English stewards. In the course of the novel, he comes to realise this and decides to take measures to correct it. Thus, the novel tells the story of late life regret of a steward.

Regret, by its exceptional nature, expects us to evaluate the past and our part in it. It is related with what therapists call “counterfactual” thought, or thinking about “what might have been” (Landman 37). This counterfactual reasoning associates regret with the scholarly procedure of decision making, separating it from different feelings, for example, trouble, joy, and love: These may all be securely established in the present and require just that we “feel” what is directly before us. Unadulterated feelings by and large come from a less subjective drive. Regardless of whether regret is a feeling at all is a wellspring of contradiction among researchers. In any case, the psychotherapist Janet Landman contends influentially that since regret is prone to have physiological impacts (some allude to sentiments of regret as an acute “ache”) and in light of the fact that it involves making judgments around oneself, it without a doubt qualifies as a feeling (37). Thomas Gilovich and Victoria Husted Medved reverberate Landman by calling regret an “intellectually decided feeling” (379).

Regret is effortlessly mistaken for different feelings and examples of reasoning, for example, remorse and guilt. As a rule, researchers concur that these terms are connected yet unique. Remorse is ordinarily utilized while alluding just to one's own past demonstrations or disappointments to act, and just when these demonstrations were inside one's control. Regret is more extensive and signifies those sorts of circumstances, yet in addition to circumstances over which we have no control, for example, the death of summer (Landman 52). Likewise, we may feel regret for occasions or approaches in which we actually were not included, for example, the segregationist Jim Crow Laws that kept going in the United States from 1876 to 1965. Guilt, as well, is nearly connected with, despite the fact that not indistinguishable to, regret. Guilt, similar to regret, originates from musings and sentiments coming about because of one's own behaviour. While there is a well known thought of “collective guilt” over shocking occasions, for example, the Holocaust or servitude, the philosopher Hannah Arendt has contended that aggregate blame basically legitimizes the underhandedness done: if everybody is blameworthy, at that point nobody is (Landman 55).

According to Bronnie Ware's, memoir of her life as a palliative care nurse, *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying – A Life Transformed by the Dearly Departing*, the greatest regret of people are listed as follows –

i. I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me; ii. I wish I hadn't worked so hard; iii. I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings; iv. I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends; v. I wish that I had let myself be happier. (Ware, 2009)

A reading of the novel would prove that Stevens is the personification of all the aforementioned regrets of modern life. The road-trip suggestion from Farraday, though it was at first rejected by Stevens, was rekindled by a letter from Miss. Kenton, the former house-keeper at Darlington Hall, to which Stevens succumbs. Miss. Kenton had left Darlington Hall twenty years ago to get married. She had been in touch with Stevens through occasional letters. Both had secretly harboured romantic feelings for each other, but had never revealed. Stevens shows the first sign of regret in this aspect.

Stevens' most prominent relationship by a wide margin, nonetheless, is his long haul working association with Miss Kenton. Despite the fact that Stevens never says so out and out, it creates the impression that he entertained romantic affections for Miss Kenton. In spite of the way that the two oftentimes differ over different family unit undertakings when they co-operate, the contradictions are silly in nature and for the most part serve to delineate the way that the two watch over each other. Toward the finish of the novel, Miss Kenton admits to Stevens that her life may have turned out better in the event that she had hitched him.

But that doesn't mean to say, of course, there aren't occasions now and then- extremely desolate occasions—when you think to yourself: ‘What a terrible mistake I've made with my life’. And you get to thinking about a different life, a better life you might have had. For instance, I get to thinking about a life I may have had with you, Mr. Stevens. And I suppose that's when I get angry about some trivial little thing and leave. But each time I do, I realize before long—my rightful place is with my husband. After all, there's no turning back the clock now. One can't be forever dwelling on what might have been. (Ishiguro, 251)

Miss Kenton, speaks this words the “Day Six—Evening/Weymouth” section of the novel. Miss Kenton, similar to Stevens, is not satisfied with the choices she has made throughout life. She discloses that she was unable to love her husband until long after their marriage. After she makes the above confession, Stevens says that his “heart is breaking”. It is an awful minute in the novel, for Stevens neglects to reveal to Miss Kenton that he too had—and still has—profound affection for her. The point that neither his, nor her regret is ever calmed makes the closure of *The Remains of the Day* haunting, poignant, and tragic.

All his life, Stevens had worked hard in his assigned role as a butler. He has been the stereotypical English butler throughout his life. At the beginning of the novel, Stevens is nearing the dusk of his life and looks back at his life to find only regret. He then wishes that he had lived a life true to himself and that he had not

worked so hard. He finds it inappropriate when his current employer suggests that he take some time off and travel the countryside. He feels that Farraday is not familiar with the English ways and it was a misjudgement from his side to ask such a thing.

At various stages of the narrative, the reader is made aware of his inner conflicts about having worked too hard for someone with a besmirched reputation. His previous employer, Lord Darlington is known by many as a Nazi sympathizer. Hence, he feels that he has wasted his life in the service of someone unworthy. He later finds solace in his own explanation that the Lord's inclination towards the German's was due to his misunderstanding of their true ulterior motives.

How can one possibly be held to blame in any sense because, say, the passage of time has shown that Lord Darlington's efforts were misguided, even foolish? Throughout the years I served him, it was he and he alone who weighed up evidence and judged it best to proceed in the way he did, while I simply confined myself, quite properly, to affairs within my own professional realm. And as far as I am concerned, I carried out my duties to the best of my abilities, indeed to a standard which many may consider 'first-rate.' It is hardly my fault is his lordship's life and work have turned out today to look, at best, a sad waste-and it is quite illogical that I should feel any regret or shame on my own account. (Ishiguro, 211)

A kind of self-assurance can be seen in these lines. He has made an attempt to convince himself that neither he nor Lord Darlington has done anything wrong to feel remorseful about. When he says that it is 'illogical' to feel regret, it can be taken as a confession that he did indeed feel regret.

The novel ends, when Stevens and Miss Kenton part, and Stevens comes back to Darlington Hall, his lone new purpose being to culminate the specialty of bantering to satisfy his new employer. His inability to involve in "bantering" is brought out multiple times during the course of the novel. But, his decision, towards the end, to master this skill shows that deep inside he regretted this incapability.

II. CONCLUSION

As Salman Rushdie remarks, *The Remains of the Day* is "a story both beautiful and cruel." It is a story fundamentally about regret: for the duration of his life. Stevens puts his total trust and commitment in a man who commits extraordinary errors. In the totality of his expert responsibility, Stevens neglects to go after the one lady with whom he could have had a satisfying and cherishing relationship. His prim veil of convention cuts him off from closeness, brotherhood, and comprehension.

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