



SEARCHING IDENTITY IN; THE REMAINS OF THE DAY AND A PALE VIEW OF HILLS BY KAZUO ISHIGURO

Bülent Cercis TANRITANIR*

Fatma KARAMAN**

Abstract

Mankind is always in a search process in the materialistic world that the search has not only advantages but also disadvantages for human and nature. In fact, this search enables a more facilitated life and also opens the doors of a modern world. On the other hand, power-holders become greedier, they want more power and attack each other applying to nonhuman ways and wars. These nonhuman deeds put the post-war and pre-war victims in a despair and confusion. The despair and confusion create a curiosity in the human mind and lead him to search his existence. In addition, significant Japanese writer in English literature, Kazuo Ishiguro handles the searching identity issue in his novels. His narrators in his works are in a search for existence and they experience different experiences in this way. The purpose of this paper, at first, is to provide a wide research on the existentialist search of Stevens in *The Remains of the Day*. Then, Stevens' search will be handled together with the struggle of Etsuko to live as a part of English society as a self in *A Pale View of Hills*.

Keywords: Identity, post-war and pre-war psychology, Kazuo Ishiguro, despair¹

Introduction

England has been one of the most powerful countries under the name of British Empire with its colonies and multi-cultural structure and her economic power. However, this economic power passes to America after World War I (West "The Effects of World War I" n.d. para. 1). America expands its economy and industry day by day while countries like England, Germany, France, Italy and Japan have been in a race of being the world power (West "The Effects of World War II" n.d. para. 4). This race gives way to World War II which has changed the balances of economics and caused numerous deaths. As a result of this war, England has been destroyed by bombings and lost its colonies one by one. In addition to that Japan has been bombed and destroyed with the nuclear weapons by the United States (West "The Effects of World War II" n.d. para. 3). This destruction causes a huge immigration of Japanese war-weary to England. Actually, some of these immigrants became very important figures in English literature and these men of letters have written many texts on the results and terrible outcomes of the post-war psychological effects. One of these writers is Kazuo Ishiguro who is a Japanese grown up in England. His writings which apply to and bound different cultures around common values are translated into twenty-eight languages which means he universalizes the local narrations (Walkowitz, 2007, p.218-219). As a Japan, Kazuo Ishiguro has not seen his own country while growing; therefore, he wants to fictionalize Japan depending it on memories and imagination (Ishiguro & Kenzaburo, 1991, p.110). Furthermore, Ishiguro defines himself as a 'homeless writer' because he has confusion about his identity that he does not feel either Japan or English (Ishiguro & Kenzaburo, 1991, p.115). Therefore, his works can represent a Japanese style but cannot serve as a total Japanese text (Fowler, 1992, p.10). Actually, he declares that he read from Western fiction more than Japan fiction and he has information on post-war Japan and Japanese people through the movies issuing these subjects (Mason & Ishiguro, 1989, p.336). As a result of that, the identity is among the most applied subjects by Kazuo Ishiguro. One of his novels in which he applies to these post-war topics and search of identity is *A Pale View of Hills* in which the journey through identity of Etsuko, a Japanese woman, has been fictionalized (Biwu, 2017, p.2), another one is *The Remains of the Day* in which the journey of Stevens, a middle-aged butler, to find the ex-housekeeper has been narrated. In fact, *A Pale View of Hills* is the first novel giving the opportunity to Ishiguro to move up quickly in literature after an experience of short writings and bringing Royal Society of Literature's Winifred Holtby Prize (Hutchings, 1990, p.464). On the other hand, *The Remains of the Day* is the book which has won the 1989 Booker Prize and becomes the script of the film; *The Remains Of The Day* in 1993 (Atkinson, 1995, p.179). In this paper, after brief information on the biography of Kazuo

*Doç. Dr., Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi, İDE Bölümü, bcercis@gail.com

**Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi, İDE Bölümü, MEB Yüksek Lisans Öğrencisi, karaman.fatma@hotmail.com



Ishiguro, the struggle of Etsuko to be accepted as a part of English society and Stevens' efforts on the way of the search of the identity as a working-class member will be handled and exemplified.

1. The Biography of the Writer and Its Effects on his Writings

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in 1954, in the post-war period, in Nagasaki as a child of a Japanese family. His father is an educated man who can move to England and work there as an oceanographer. Therefore, Ishiguro can reach a good education on literature and philosophy at the University of Kent. After graduation, he steps to writing process with short stories which would give way to a significant place in the contemporary writers in England. In addition to that, he goes beyond the boundaries and he can reach the audiences in twenty-eight languages with the help of translations. Moreover, he has been awarded the Booker Prize and recently Ishiguro has been writing not only books but also scenarios (Shaffer & Ishiguro, 2001, p.2). He indicates that his family is loyal to their roots, language, and culture; therefore, he wants to return to his country but he doesn't consider his Japanese is enough to have a conversation. The main reason behind this loss of language is his British education that he is more familiar with Western fiction than Japanese fiction. Furthermore, Ishiguro declares that his interest in Japanese movies gives him an opportunity to be able to illustrate post-war issues in his writings (Mason & Ishiguro, 1989, p.336). As it is understood, Ishiguro's life is only an example but it is clear that he is one of the lucky Japanese who has the chance of a good education and a prosperous life after post-war immigration. Another essential point is that Ishiguro reports Japanese people are keen on overly emotional and tragic narrations in which the characters put an end to their life. However, the prejudice about Japanese people, which puts forward that most of the Japanese people commit suicide, has no reality. Therefore, he constructs his stories on the daily life of Japanese people instead of the narrations which have suicides in the end (Mason & Ishiguro, 1989, p.343). It can be inferred that Ishiguro's main and the most significant aim is to demonstrate the reality of Japanese people who need to be accepted as ordinary as all the other nations. Similarly, Brian W. Shaffer evaluates Ishiguro's works as an "a vast web of personal and historical traumas" because Ishiguro creates his works with an amazing effort which include past and present on the same stage (Shaffer & Ishiguro, 2001, p.2). Shaffer's simile is a crucial point which digs out the literary value of Ishiguro as an important contemporary author who can identify the psychological effects of the war and bombing on people. However, Ishiguro states that his works are examined as "emotional repression" examples and he accepts this association to a certain extent. Whereas, the reason behind this association is the literary background of the author in which some fathers of the literature like Charlotte and Hemingway take place (Shaffer & Ishiguro, 2001, p.14). This emotional repression can be observed in *A Pale View of Hills* in which the main character Etsuko applies the memories and the story of Sachiko to be able to oppress the fear, the feeling of responsibility and guilt and most importantly the post-war trauma.

2. Searching Identity in; *The Remains of the Day*

Stevens, the main character of *The Remains of the Day* is a butler who serves in the house of Lord Darlington and then, serves as the new successor of the farm (Ishiguro, 1990b, p.6). Several days before his journey his employer Mr. Farraday asks him to have a rest and a short holiday to be able to spend time for him but he is so surprised to hear such a suggestion (Ishiguro, 1990b, p.5). The story begins with the six-day journey of Stevens from Darlington Hall to Weymouth and along the road of his journey, Stevens flashes back to his several experiences in his service process from 1922 to 1956.

In the summer of 1956, Stevens, an ageing butler, has embarked on a six-day motoring trip through the West Country. But this holiday is disturbed by the memories of his past service to the late Lord Darlington, and most of all by the painful recollections of his friendship with the housekeeper, Miss Kenton. For the first time in his life, Stevens is forced to wonder if all his actions were for the best after all ... A sad and humorous love story, and a witty meditation on the democratic responsibilities of the ordinary man. (Ishiguro, 1990b, p.2)

In fact, from the first sentences of the book until the end the protagonist of the novel Stevens is depicted by the author as a person who has no possibilities for any flaw in his personality and his job as a servant. It is observed that Stevens is addicted to his service and his job takes the highest position in his life and it becomes his only pleasure. Thus, he preferred his job upon his love to Miss Kenton who is the ex-housekeeper of Lord Darlington's estate. For instance; when he meets Miss. Kenton and tries to explain himself, Miss. Kenton blames him with these words: "Do you realize, Mr. Stevens, how much it would have meant to me if you had thought to share your feelings last year? You knew how upset I was when my girls were dismissed. Do you realize how much it would have helped me? Why, Mr. Stevens, why, why, why do you always have to pretend?" (Ishiguro, 1990b, p.110). This quotation puts forward the conflicts of the character of Stevens and how it is observed by Miss. Kenton. In addition, William Hutchings (1990) puts



forward that Stevens assesses his employer's political ideologies beside what has gone from his own self, life and existence during his long service years along his journey (p.464). His obscure self creates many questions in the mind of the reader on Steven's existence. In addition to that the work is evaluated by McPherson (1990) in these sentences: "Stevens speaks of uniquely Japanese themes within the context of a British upper-class household: the matter of personal honor; the necessity for determining the moral status of an employer; of a group named "the Hayes Society" which determines the standards for "great-ness" in a butler; of personal "smells"; of loyalty as a basic trait of character." (p.282). As it is understood from the sentences of McPherson Ishiguro tries to create the disadvantages of the perfection concept through working class. As Lilian R. Furst (2007) claims that there is a kind of memory and flashback technique used almost all the pages of the book which takes the reader into the core of the occasions (p.535). Regarding the usage of the flashback technique in the book the quotations by Stevens can be exemplified that "...and I am pleased to say there will be no discernible traces left of the recent occurrence by that time." (Ishiguro, 1990b, 28) / "As I recall, then, it was only an hour or so after being first entrusted with the mission..." (Ishiguro, 1990b, p.62). Moreover, Furst (2007) states that the intense usage of the memory needs to be accepted as normal for the narration of the search of identity by thirty years old man (p.536). Hence, this applying to memory technique in the narration of Kazuo Ishiguro provides a sort of suspense to the reader in order to help the identification of the search of Stevens' self. As well as, it gives the opportunity to the reader to go beyond the limits of the imagination through discovering Steven's real identity. This feature distinguishes the novel from the other works by the writer and it gives the clues of the search of a protagonist in the hard conditions of the working class. As a matter of fact, Stevens attempts to convince himself that being Englishman is a privilege in these sentences

It is sometimes said that butlers only truly exist in England. Other countries, whatever title is actually used, have only manservants. I tend to believe this is true. Continentals are unable to be butlers because they are as a breed incapable of the emotional restraint which only the English race are capable of. In a word, 'dignity' is beyond such persons. We English have an important advantage over foreigners in this respect and it is for this reason that when you think of a great butler, he is bound, almost by definition, to be an Englishman. (Ishiguro, 1990b, p.32-33)

It can be said that there is no clear reason to put Englishman upon the other nations contrary to what he declares in the quotation. In fact, Tamaya (1992) mentions that the reason behind the relationship between Stevens and his employer Lord Darlington is not different from the relationship between England and her colonies (p.46). In can be interpreted from the quotation; Stevens struggles to be accepted as the gentleman of the Gentleman. Above all, it can be discussed that Stevens feels and tastes the idea of freedom after his conversation with an ex-butler (Ishiguro, 1990b, p.67). The end of the book enables the reader predict the next step of Stevens which will be quitting his job and conclude his search of identity.

3. The Struggle for Acceptance in; A Pale View of Hills

Etsuko is a middle-aged woman who has undergone many hardships in Japan and England. She is a war-weary who has experienced two marriages and has one daughter from each marriage; Keiko and Niki. The elder daughter Keiko hangs herself and puts an end to her life because she cannot get over the trauma of immigrating to England with a step-father and she cannot accept the Englishness until her death. As the protagonist of the novel Etsuko states: "Keiko, unlike Niki was pure Japanese,..." and she continues to reveal the prejudices of English society on the death of her daughter Keiko with these words: "The English are fond of their idea that our race has an instinct for suicide, as if further explanations are unnecessary; for that was all they reported, that she was Japanese and that she had hung herself in her room." (Ishiguro, 1990a, p.3). As it can be inferred the first daughter has a totally Japanese identity with her name, with her psychology and even with her death. Actually, Etsuko feels guilty because she has forced Keiko to live in England but throughout the narration, she tries to justify herself (Ishiguro, 1990a, p.4). At the beginning of the book when Etsuko has been married to a Japanese man living in a town of Nagasaki, she meets a widow woman Sachiko who has dreams to marry to an American and live in America. However, her desires are so interesting to Etsuko that she cannot hide her astonishment in their conversation

"So you see, Etsuko,' she said, "I'll be leaving Japan very shortly. You don't seem very impressed."

"Of course I am. And I'm very pleased, if this is what you wished. But won't there be...various difficulties?"

"Difficulties?"

"I mean, moving to a different country, with a different language and foreign ways."



"I understand your concern, Etsuko. But really, I don't think there's much for me to worry about. You see, I've heard so much about America, it won't be like an entirely foreign country. And as for the language, I already speak it to a certain extent. Frank-San and I, we always talk in English. Once I've been in America for a little while, I should speak it like an American woman. I really don't see there's any cause for me to be worrying. I know I'll manage." (Ishiguro, 1990a, p.23)

As it can be implied from this dialogue it can be claimed that going to a foreign country and leaving the Japanese identity behind is a common desire of Japanese people. This can be accepted as one of the results of the World War I and II which create a traumatic psychology and make people escape from post-war Japan. Furthermore, this conversation can be seen as a foreshadowing of the future experiences of Etsuko. More importantly, it is blurred whether Sachiko who is introduced as a reckless mother is a real character in Etsuko's past or she is a product of Etsuko's imagination to purify her guilty soul. The main problem in Etsuko's life in England is that she cannot get a real identity and her daughters cannot get well because Niki is the representation of English society while Keiko is the representation of Japanese nation. In that respect, it is obvious Etsuko experiences a struggle for identity in England not only by her own but also with her daughters.

Conclusion

To sum up, it is clear that Kazuo Ishiguro's biography has affected his writing that he applies to identity issue through his characters. Actually, acceptance by society not only for Etsuko but also for Stevens is a very significant issue that it leads their whole life. In this sense, it can be claimed that obsessiveness of Stevens and Etsuko's obsession with past affect their manner toward life and their lifestyle. For example; Stevens cannot admit his love to Miss. Kenton because of his fear of being an unprofessional servant. On the other hand, Etsuko tries to justify herself about their immigration and the death of her daughter. What is observed in *A Pale View of the Hills* is that all the characters are living in a conflict of identity as well as they cannot adapt to their new life in England. In particular, the conflict of identity is mainly observed with the personality of Keiko. This conflict leads her to commit suicide while her step-sister Niki has no relation with the Japanese traditions and identity because she accepts herself as a totally English person. Yet, Keiko sacrifices her life which is destroyed by her mother's dreams of a better life in another country, culture, and nation which has a totally different language and socio-cultural lifestyle. Likewise, in *The Remains of the Day*, the author exposes the same issue of the identity. The trouble of identity presented through the character of the protagonist Stevens in another sort. Stevens's identical issue is with his obsession with his career as a member of working class. More importantly, the perfection concept in his life is the most significant obstacle in front of his search of the identity. In contrast to Etsuko's suffer from identity that she could not achieve at the end of the book, the reader understands that Stevens comes to the realization of his self and takes a step.

REFERENCES

- Atkinson, R. (1995). How the Butler Was Made to Do It: The Perverted Professionalism of *The Remains of the Day*. *The Yale Law Journal*, 105(1), 177-220. doi:10.2307/797142
- Biwu Shang. (2017) The Maze of Shanghai Memory in Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans* *Comparative Literature and Culture* 19(3). Retrieved from <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol19/iss3/7>
- Fowler, E. (1992). Rendering Words, Traversing Cultures: On the Art and Politics of Translating Modern Japanese Fiction. *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 18(1), 1-44. doi:10.2307/132706
- Furst, L. (2007). Memory's Fragile Power in Kazuo Ishiguro's "Remains of the Day" and W. G. Sebald's "Max Ferber". *Contemporary Literature*, 48(4), 530-553. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27563769>
- Hutchings, William. (1990). World Literature Today. *World Literature Today*, 64 (3), 463-464. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/40146696.
- Ishiguro, K., & Kenzaburo, O. (1991). The Novelist in Today's World: A Conversation. *Boundary 2*, 18(3), 109-122. doi:10.2307/303205
- Ishiguro, Kazuo. (1990a). *A Pale View of Hills*. Vintage Books.
- Ishiguro, Kazuo. (1990b) *Remains of the Day*. London : Faber and Faber.
- Mason, G., & Ishiguro, K. (1989). An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro. *Contemporary Literature*, 30(3), 335-347. doi:10.2307/1208408
- McPherson, James Alan. (1990). Ploughshares. *Ploughshares*, 16 (4), 282-283. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/40350524.
- Shaffer, B., & Ishiguro, K. (2001). An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro. *Contemporary Literature*, 42(1), 1-14. doi:10.2307/1209082
- Tamaya, Meera. (1992). Ishiguro's 'Remains of the Day': The Empire Strikes Back. *Modern Language Studies*, 22 (2), 45-56. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3195017.
- Walkowitz, Rebecca L. (2007). Unimaginable Largeness: Kazuo Ishiguro, Translation, and the New World Literature. *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 40 (3), 216-239. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/40267701.
- West, Norman R. (n.d.) The Effects of World War I. *Sunysuffolk*, Web. www.sunysuffolk.edu/westn/effectww1.html.
- West, Norman R. (n.d.) The Effects of World War II. *Sunysuffolk*, Web. www.sunysuffolk.edu/westn/effectwwII.html.