

International Themes in Kazuo Ishiguro's Novels

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Abstract

*Japanese-born British novelist Kazuo Ishiguro is a Nobel Prize winner of 2017. He is one of the most famous contemporary novelists today. He has so far produced seven highly regarded novels that have won him international acclaims and honors. Through the attentive and careful study, it has been observed that Ishiguro takes up some noteworthy international/universal issues during the course of his narration. Being a Japanese he writes about internationalism. This research paper aims to study certain major international themes from the novels, *A Pale View of Hills, An Artist of the Floating World, The Remains of the Day, When We Were Orphans, and Never Let Me Go.**

Reference to this paper should
be made as follows:

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Kazuo Ishiguro's Novels

Notions Dec. 2020,
Vol. XI, No. II,
Article No.28 pp. 153 - 158

Online available at :
[https://anubooks.com/
notions-vol-xi-no-2-july-dec-
2020/](https://anubooks.com/notions-vol-xi-no-2-july-dec-2020/)

Introduction

Ishiguro started his literary career as a novelist by writing on Japan and its people. But as he advanced considerably over the coming years. He began trying his hand at novels with international or universal appeal. He very well knew that he “had very little knowledge about Japan.” But still he “was writing books set in Japan.” His “lack of knowledge about Japan”, forced him to use “his imagination.” He always realized that he was a sort of “homeless writer” and wasn’t a very Englishman nor a very Japanese writer (Wai-Chew-19).

But in spite of all, this, Ishiguro is persistently endeavoring to explore his fictional caliber and talent. He has his own literary goals which not only denote his ethnicity, but also go to solidify a concept of what coasters an ‘an international writer’. He may be counted among such great novelists as Shiva Naipaul, Rushdie, and Buchi Emecheta ‘as the key figures of the new international.’

“Bruce King ‘distinguishes such writers from the commonwealth, third world, and other ethnic categories’ (Wai-Chew-8).

Ishiguro, that is why, always tries his level best, to create something “with the enduring perception of his audience from across cultures, particularly with the way they view his handling of important human themes” (Wai-Chew-9). He is not interested to write something related to day to day life, current affairs, or topical issues. Mark what he himself says. “I’m interested in writing things that will be of interest to people in fifty years times a hundred years’ time, and to people in lots of different cultures” (DOK-153)

Mark again, What he says about himself:

“I am a writer who wishes to write international novels. What is an ‘international’ novel? I believe it to be one, quite simply, that contains a vision of life that is of importance to people of varied backgrounds around the world. It may concern characters who jet across continents” (Wai-Chew-20).

Ishiguro thus writes about the matters which are certainly international in scope and content. He describes people with different cultures and with different traditions and conventions. Death and grief are the most prominent and most recurrent themes in his novels. People dying in war or dying from multiple organ donation or committing suicide or dying a natural death remains as axis or pivot of his novels. Almost all of Ishiguro’s novels turn or revolve around this global subject. Death remains the sword of Damocles on his characters. It haunts them day in and day out. The rituals of related to funeral, burial, or cemetery are performed discussed frequently by the characters in Ishiguro’s novels. Death, though rarely mentioned in

the novel, 'Never Let Me Go', the euphemism of completing is the substitute for it. It is ironic as well as sad. The dying from multiple organ donation is only completion in the sense it brings distress and discomfort to an end. Death becomes the end of a lack of fulfillment. Living in continuing denial that the clone children are as human or normal as those whose illness they will die to cure.

Even pregnant women who are going to give birth to a new life are unable to forget their children died earlier and continue to pay a visit to the cemetery to remember their dearly loved one buried there. They are not ashamed of their deed, though people ridicule such women. It is interesting to note the following lines in this respect.

"There's a young woman I see every week", Mrs. Fujiwara went on. "She must be six or seven months pregnant now. I see her every time I go to visit the cemetery. I've never spoken to her, but she looks so sad, standing there with her husband. It's a shame, a pregnant girl and her husband spending their Sundays thinking about the dead. I know they're being respectful, but all the same, I think it's a shame. They should be thinking about the future."

"I suppose she finds it hard to forget."

"I suppose so. I feel sorry for her. But they should be thinking ahead now. That's way to bring a child into the world, visiting the cemetery every week" (A.P.H.-25).

Grief overpowers the characters. Miss. Kenton reports abruptly her aunt's death after receiving a letter from her aunt's friend so Stevens while they are discussing some professional matter. In the midst of their talk she opens the letter and explains:

It is from Mrs. Johnson, a companion of my aunt. She says my aunt died the day before yesterday. She paused a moment, then said: "The funeral is to take place tomorrow. I wonder if it might be possible for me to take the day off" (R.D.-185).

Similarly, Masuji Ono is so grief-stricken when he hears the news of the demise of his son, Kenji, in Manchuria as he is charged across a minefield.

"...that evening after the ceremony for the burying of Kenji's ashes."

"It had taken more than a year for my son's ashes to arrive from Manchuria. The communists, we were constantly told, had made everything difficult there. Then when his ashes finally came, along with those of the twenty-three other young men who had died attempting that hopeless charge across the minefield..." (A.F.W.-56-57).

People also commit suicide for the sake of their country's honor and respect. Yukio Noguchi, a famous composer of patriotic songs, commits suicide as an act of

atonement on his part for encouraging his countrymen to involve in the great world war:

“A conversation concerning the composer who recently committed suicide.”

“Yukio Naguchi? Ah yes, I remember that conversation. Now let me see, I believe Taro was suggesting the man’s suicide was pointless” (A.F.W.-192).

Friendship and love the matters of grand human concerns are very wisely and properly dealt with by the novelist. Childhood or school days friendship is most remarkable and noteworthy in his novels. There is a very close relationship among the students of Hailsham. They argue with one another, fight with one another. Make groups amongst themselves and sometimes change them. So is the condition between Kathy and Ruth. Note – to Miss. Jody. They often have silly quarrels with each other.

“Ruth, incidentally, was only the third or fourth donor I got to choose. She already had a carer assigned to her at the time, and I remember it taking a bit of nerve on my part. But in the end, I managed it, and the instant I saw her again, at that recovery center in Dover, all our differences – while they didn’t exactly vanish – seemed not nearly as important as all the other things: like the fact that we’d grown up together at Hailsham, the fact that we knew and remembered things no one else did” (N.L.G-4).

Kathy also recalls her relationship with Tommy in the following lines:

“...I have to be honest: at that instant, I wasn’t really thinking about Ruth. My heart had done a little leap, because in a single stroke, with that little laugh of agreement, it felt as though Tommy and I had come close together again after all the years” (N.L.G-21-27).

Likewise, schooldays’ friendship is quiet worth noticing. Ryder and Geoffrey Saunders have been friends right since their school days. They remember how they used to participate in the school games and sports. They exactly keep the memories fresh in their mind:

“Remembering about our schooldays and all that. This morning, for instance, I woke up thinking about that time, you probably don’t remember it, that time the two of us were marking a cross-country run for some younger boys. Must have been the lower sixth, I suppose. You probably don’t remember, but I was thinking about it, this morning, lying in bed” (T.U.-43-47)

‘Love’ and sex are too widely evident in Ishiguro’s novels. Love among the married couples as seen between the aging Axl and Beatrice and Mr. Harold and Diana and there is also love between the same sex, better termed as a lesbian.

Madame and Miss. Emily is the same-sex couple who share a vision or mission and understand each other. Both occupy the same house and their relationship is quite tolerant and relaxed.

Last, but not least, the issue of international problems and the menace of drugs and drug-trafficking has been raised and taken up with a view to dealing with it sternly and stopping it from further damage to the world in general and the addicts in particular by Ishiguro in his novels. In ‘When We Were Orphans’ for example, he treats this matter at length. This trade takes a serious turn in the towns like Shantung in Shanghai in China. People are not provided in these towns with the bare necessities of life. They are living in unhealthy conditions. Mark what the health inspector has to say in this respect to Mrs. Banks:

“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. Hence, Mrs. Banks, the low standards of hygiene, the high incidence of contagion, and inevitably, those who come from Shantung to work in Shanghai, even if essentially of an honest disposition, tend sooner or later to resort to thieving, for the sake of their parents, brothers, cousins, uncles, what have you, all of whose cravings must somehow be pacified...Good gracious, madam! I’m simply trying to make my point...” (W.W.W.O.-59).

Again note the following:

“In those days, my correspondent points out, any shipments of opium – or of any other desirable goods – traveling along the Yangtze through Human would have been vulnerable to raids from the bandits and pirates who terrorized the region” (W.W.W.O.-114).

But this the novelist gives a serious thought to this problem and shows his characters studying and gathering material on it so that it may be stopped from further harm and damage.

“In any case, as I say, I spent a good many hours in the British Museum a few years ago gathering material on the history of the opium trade in China, on the affairs of Morganbrook and Byatt, on the complex political situation in Shanghai at that time. I did also, at various points, write off letters to China seeking information unavailable to me in London. So it was that I received one day a yellowed cutting taken from the North China Daily News dated some three years after my departure from Shanghai. My correspondent had sent me an article about changes to trading regulations in the concession ports – which no doubt I had requested...” (W.W.W.O.-113).

The preceding discussion clearly reveals that the novels of Ishiguro present a universal and international appeal and concern.

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