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"A Genuine Old-Fashioned English Butler":  
Nationalism and Conservative Politics in  
*The Remains of the Day*

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**Abstract**

In the context of twenty-first century global conservatism, where anti-immigrant sentiment is everywhere apparent, the importance of Ishiguro's writing arguably lies in its on-going challenge to this perspective's faulty logic and its capacity to reveal the radical violence behind nationalist political attacks on minority and immigrant populations. In this article I explore this challenge explicitly through a politically-oriented reading of *The Remains of the Day* (1989), highlighting this novel's joint critique of Thatcherite nationalism and late twentieth century global entrepreneurialism. While this focus obviously represents a response to an earlier socio-political moment, defined by its own unique amalgam of ideological anxieties, nevertheless what emerges most prominently through this reading is the novel's topical condemnation of cultural essentialism and its attendant hierarchies, concerns which remain of utmost critical significance within the twenty-first century. Thus, by making this assessment explicit, highlighting British conservatism's devastating psychological and material implications for affected individuals, ranging from repressed and traumatised psychologies to radical economic precarity, this novel can be seen to register Thatcherite prejudice in a poignantly relevant manner. Indeed, the pseudo-respect granted to the 'genuine old-fashioned English butler' in this novel might also be seen as comparable to Trump's pseudo-populism or Brexit nostalgia, both of which likewise ignore the pressing reality of imperialism's historical violence.

**Keywords:** nationalism, tradition, Thatcher, New Right politics, heritage industry, imperialism, conservatism, entrepreneurialism, new world order, humanism, cosmopolitanism

Shane Meadows's 2007 film *This Is England*, which explores the skin-head culture of 1980s Britain, features a representative BNP member addressing his supporters with the following nationalist statement:

There is a forgotten word . . . no, a forbidden word. That word is 'England.' I want to rescue the word 'Englishman.' People call us racists. We're not racists, we're realists. Some people call us Nazis – we're not Nazis, we're nationalists.

As an example of the 'loyalist' thinking of 1980s politics, this form of expression is familiar. Thus, while the New Right was not always so direct in its racism – claiming likewise to reject the example of Nazi Germany – Thatcherite expressions such as "Britain's Great Again" and "This country might be rather swamped by people of a different culture" (qtd. in Stolcke 3) make clear an underlying assertion of nationalist prejudice. Commenting on this aggressive anti-immigrant vocabulary, Paul Gilroy writes, "The new racism is primarily concerned with the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. It specifies who may legitimately belong to the national community and simultaneously advances reasons for the segregation or banishment of those whose 'origin, sentiment or citizenship' assigns them elsewhere" (45).

In Ishiguro's previous novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, he arguably explores an authoritarian element of this 1980s socio-cultural discourse, where the search for "law and order" issues itself in calls for hard-work and a rejection of weakness and "decadence" (64). Examining a form of competitive ambition ultimately reflective of right-wing individualist dogma and comparable both in its repressed and neurotic elements, *An Artist of the Floating World* can be read as a parody of New Right moralism, where a narrow-sighted aspiration entails a prioritisation of personal success and national sovereignty over community well being and cross-cultural mixture.

The other side of this discourse, which emerges in *The Remains of the Day*, is more subtle in its ideological implications. It romanticises about the unique specificity of English culture, its unified identity and supposedly glorious past. In place of moralism, it encourages nostalgia and national feeling, exchanging didactic dogma for a calmer embrace of

memory and sentiment. Tom Nairn explains, "Divested of Empire and barred from Europe, Britain could still rejoice – indeed rejoice ever more fervently – in its own soul, in the brilliantly refurbished emblems of a phoenix-like civilization and the ample customs so reassuring to gentlemen toiling in the craft-workshops of old truth" (233-34). Despite its pose of innocence however, the implicit violence of this heritage 'traditionalism' is revealed in its invocation of Empire and/or 'pure Englishness' as the emblem of national glory. Summarising this 'Powellist' mentality, Patrick Wright remarks, "[It] stands close to pre-war anti-Semitism in its assertion of threatened tradition, valued geography and other incommunicable 'great simplicities' (Powell's redolent phrase) of nationhood" (126; qtd. also in Sim 127).

Encased in the upper-class context of inter-war England, this modern-day social concern is initially disguised in *The Remains of the Day*, hidden beneath a veneer of manor-house comedy and Victorian pastoral seemingly removed from present-day metropolitanism. Bumbling about in his daily routine, devising improved staff-plans, Stevens is a prototype manor-house butler, a paragon of repression and order re-enacting the 'upstairs-downstairs' hierarchy of imperial Britain.

Within this semi-comedic genre, Stevens's narrative is ostensibly one of repression and lost love: claiming to enjoy the English countryside, he sets out a memoir of past obedience unfailing in its commitment, but also thick with a sense of regret and missed opportunity. He writes, "The great butlers are great by virtue of their ability to inhabit their professional role and inhabit it to the utmost. [...They] will discard it when, and only when, [they are] entirely alone" (43-4). The irony of his statement as a description of Stevens's professional autonomy is implicit in its dependence upon a metaphor of disguise, where Stevens hides beneath a suit of professionalism (and denial) which obstructs his personal fulfilment.<sup>1</sup> The tragic consequences of this enactment are visible in Stevens's disillusioned conclusion, which eludes his wilful optimism. Confessing his longing for Miss Kenton, he laments, "There was surely nothing to indicate at the time that such evidently small incidents would render whole dreams forever irredeemable" (188-9). In other words, he quickly betrays his sense of remorse at what he has let escape him.

Read simply as a generic romance, of failed love and lost hope, this narrative is revealing, affectively illuminating Stevens's disillusionment in his professional pose. Commenting on this explicitly, Brian Shaffer remarks, "*The Remains of the Day* is one of the most profound novelistic representations of repression masquerading as professionalism"; through its "mock nostalgia," the "grandeur of Stevens's 'professional dignity'" is "[thrown] into question" (87-8). Here, in effect, Stevens's so-called English 'stiff-upper-lip' is read as betrayal of personal feeling and affective integrity. Nevertheless, in so far as Stevens's narrative also encompasses a history of political fascism – his master Lord Darlington ultimately revealed as a Nazi supporter – the larger concern in this novel is arguably not with repression or denial *per se*, but rather with the nationalist ideology of traditionalism itself. Adopting a historical mythology of 'Englishness' and national 'loyalty,' with Hitler at its core, *Remains* exposes the exclusivism of New Right nationalism; however ostensibly 'glorious' this discourse claims to be, its prejudice is here implicit.

One central mode by which this message is offered is through a parody of the colonial travelogue, the latter's ideology of conquest here made explicit through the language of "greatness" (28). Thus, having embarked on a six day road trip across the south of inter-war England – ostensibly with the purpose of refilling a depleted professional staff-plan – Stevens here records his daily thoughts on the beauty of old-world England, including its rolling fields, high church towers, and friendly villages (26). With this observatory framework in place, what is notable from the start is Stevens's inflated tone, which mythologises the landscape with attributes of "greatness" (29) and "dignity" (33) resonant of an earlier era. He writes, "We call this land *Great* Britain, and there may be those who believe this a somewhat immodest practice. Yet I would venture that the landscape of this country alone would justify the use of this lofty adjective" (29).

In one sense, as Wai-chew Sim notes, this description emerges as a typical old-fashioned patriotism, where in accordance with the tacit rules of the colonial travel-guide, the "sweeping" view from above, with its panoramic vista, reinforces a "fantasy of dominance" familiar to

imperialist rhetoric (135). Commenting on this common aesthetic practice, Mary Louise Pratt notes its "distanced and self-effaced stance", wherein the land itself 'commands' what falls within its gaze" (143). In effect, this language positions the colonizer's over-arching viewpoint as one of critical authority and political influence, rejecting the view-from-below (of the local/colonial resident) as necessarily limited. At the same time, the clear reference here to Thatcher's "Britain is Great Again" rhetoric (implicit in Stevens's suggestion that "we call this land *Great Britain*") establishes a contemporary association to present-day neo-nationalism within the New Right. Eric Evans explains, "The Conservative slogan was simple, mendacious and powerful: 'Britain's Great Again. Don't let Labour wreck it'" (25).<sup>2</sup> The demeaning ideological implications of this rhetoric for other, non-English cultures is implicit in Stevens's comparison of foreign landscapes, which he sees as interesting and exotic, but in the final count, "objectively" inferior. He writes, "In comparison [to England], the sorts of sights offered in such places as Africa and America, though undoubtedly very exciting, would . . . strike the objective viewer as inferior on account of their unseemly demonstrativeness" (29). In this passage Stevens inverts the exoticist characteristics he initially affords to colonial territories, investing these with impropriety as a means of upholding English cultural superiority. The implicit orientalist associations of this language reaffirm the violence of its aesthetic reflections, recalling Edward Said's assertion that what is circulated by cultural discourse "is not 'truth' but representations" (29) and that "the Orient was Orientalized . . . because it could be . . . submitted to being-made Oriental" (13-4).

As this opening section continues, Stevens's following commentary on the nature of "great" butlerhood works to develop this ideology of superiority even further, reinforcing the racist nature of Thatcher's nationalism. Rejecting the superficial elitism of the Hayes Society, an association of butlers which claims that only aristocrats are worthy masters, Stevens here initially commends himself before his reader by demanding a more egalitarian qualification, based on "dignity", rather than class. He argues, "If one looks at these persons we agree are 'great' butlers . . . it does seem to be that the factor which distinguishes them

from those butlers who are merely extremely competent is most closely captured by this word ‘dignity’” (33). Reverting to his collection of carefully amassed memorial narratives to develop this idea, he then recalls three anecdotes from his father’s experience to elucidate his meaning. Amongst these is the tale of a colonial servant who impresses his master by killing a loose tiger which has entered the estate dining room. Having requested the use of the “twelve-bore” rifle (37), the servant returns to his master after the job to assure him his dinner schedule remains unaltered. He proclaims, “[T]here will be no discernible traces left of the recent occurrence by that time” (37).

Here, notably, the revered butler deferentially humbles himself for the sake of servatile loyalty, allowing his master’s well being and safety to precede his own. In this way, in a typical pseudo-Victorian moralism, the story sets up a model of old-school humility, where devotion to a worthy cause replaces individualist opportunism. Despite this constructed ‘goodness’ however, the obvious mortification of this butler – which goes beyond the line of humility to self-abasement and violence, and which does so in a familiar colonial setting – contradicts this intention, instead foregrounding the classism and racism of imperial thinking. In this way, in the murdering compliance of Stevens’s ideal butler, the disguised cruelty of colonial decorum is revealed, also implicitly commenting on the violent prejudice inherent in Thatcher’s own repeated invocations of imperial grandeur.<sup>3</sup>

The full extent of this prejudice becomes clear as Stevens draws together his introductory comments in order to express succinctly what he sees as the true meaning of ‘dignity.’ He concludes, “It is sometimes said that butlers only truly exist in England. Other countries, whatever title is actually used, have only manservants. I believe this to be true. Continentals are unable to be butlers because they are as a breed incapable of the emotional restraint which only the English race is capable of” (44). Reiterating Stevens’s earlier idea of an inherent instability within foreign landscapes, the text’s concern here for the problem of cultural essentialism and discrimination within nationalist politics is clear. Commenting on the prevalence of this position within post-war Britain, Gilroy writes:

The idea that blacks are a high crime group and the related notion that their criminality is an expression of their distinctive culture have become integral to British racism in the period since the "rivers of blood" speech. ... Black transgressions [of the law] become further evidence of their alien character and their distance from the substantive historical forms of Britishness which are the property of white culture. (140-41)

In effect, black populations are deemed criminals in Britain, and therefore illegitimate citizens, precisely because they are black, these traits being considered inherent to their racial character. It is their colour which determines their cultural eccentricity, and therefore also their supposed alienness to 'real' British civilisation. On a similar note, Kobena Mercer registers the "proliferation of antagonistic struggles around the signifier of race" (9), where blacks are viewed as "an 'outside' force, an alien malaise afflicting British society" (8).<sup>4</sup> By making this derogatory sentiment clear here – a fixture of Stevens's loyalist thinking – the novel highlights the prejudice of essentialist nationalism, wherein 'Englishness' becomes a unified and exclusive cultural ideal, rather than something necessarily more complex and multifaceted due to layers and layers of global migrations.

In contrast to this opening section, Stevens's subsequent memories of service under Lord Darlington appear, at first, as a welcome narrative alternative. Like his father, Stevens too is bound by ideas of servile duty and class decorum, the 'natural' inheritance of his working-class profession. But as this ideal is enacted here it appears initially more benign, involving comedy rather than unease – for example, when Stevens explains the birds and the bees to the young Lord Cardinal (86-88, 92-4), or when he ignores the misplacement of the Chinaman (59-63). In a very obvious way in this section, Stevens's experience incites humour and affection, invoking (deceptively) a "Why not?" sentiment towards traditionalism, where (as Nairn explains) old-school nostalgia is passed off as just "a piece of acceptable nonsense" (112). Nevertheless, the implicit references made in these passages to class pedigree and colonial hierarchy – seeing Asia as the now displaced 'Chinamen' of the British Empire – darken this comedic romance.

With the arrival of Darlington Hall's diplomatic conference of 1923 – a notable textual allusion to international governmental discussions

taking place in the aftermath of the Treaty of Versailles – this alternative, politicised reading of Stevens's personal narrative is forcibly reiterated, again reaffirming the violent prejudicial implications of traditionalist thinking. Here again, comedy is involved, as Stevens grossly overestimates the value of his service as a table-waiter, comparing this to a military battle for which he must be strategically prepared (81).<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the allusion here to a militarised socio-cultural outlook, reminiscent of Thatcher's language during the Falkland's war, combined with the seriousness of the conference events themselves, which involve Stevens's wilful misinterpretation of Darlington's Nazi sympathies, commands a more cynical analysis.

The first of these conference-related events involves the death of Stevens's father, to whom Stevens refuses to attend on the excuse that he is "extremely busy" (93). On a psychological level, this refusal suggests Stevens' emotional repression and cognitive denial, whereby his avowed professionalism refuses or conceals his personal disillusionment with his family situation. This is Shaffer's reading, which calls to attention Stevens's unwitting "emotional turmoil" (69) in the aftermath of the death-report, and which sees him insistent in carrying on as usual despite the obvious weight of what has happened personally. On a similar note, Adam Parkes argues that "Stevens's awkward relationship with his father is symptomatic of a more general sense of familial displacement, and a corresponding feeling of emotional deprivation, which may lie at the root of his character" (48).<sup>6</sup> In other words, Parkes reads Stevens's obstinance here as an effect of his father's own affective repression.

Nevertheless, given that Stevens inherits certain *values* from his father, the larger message here is not only psychological, but also political, relating to Stevens's mythologising of the concept of 'duty,' whereby tradition takes the place of care as the basis of social morality. Commenting on this understanding in relation to post-war traditionalist politics, Nairn reflects:

The inertia of this sedulously preserved estate mentality [lends] itself well to an informal corporatism of outlook. Working-class institutions [turn] into "estates of the realm," committed to cooperation with the State, even if they [retain] the customary habit of opposition to specific party



governments. But while the opposition [is] theatrical ("adversarial") and intermittent, the deeper will for consensus [is] tacit but continuing. (317)

In this way, Nairn concludes, "Estate-Royalism" becomes a "surrogate" or deviant kind of nationalism," which forges "consensus and solidarity" by means of nostalgic national symbols (317). Stevens's own notably nostalgic and uncritical commitment to nation over person, and to duty over desire, likewise reaffirms this anti-nationalist analysis, foregrounding the misconception of 'duty first' as a moral or cultural value.<sup>7</sup>

The other element of the 1923 conference which further highlights this error of thinking relates to the lie of Darlington's 'gentleman' politics, where a commitment to form over matter culminates in an uncritical affirmation of Nazi power. The practicalities of this event extend from a long-term friendship between Darlington and the German Lord Breman, the latter of whom is personally damaged by the penalties of the Versailles Treaty. For Darlington, devoted to the standards of European 'unity and goodwill,' this situation is an outrage, which it is his personal responsibility to right. He explains: "[T]his treaty is making a liar out of me. ... I fought that war to preserve justice in the world. ... I wasn't taking part in a vendetta against the German race" (76).

As an expression of good will for a conquered opponent, this assertion is commendable in its way, granting Darlington some semblance of generosity as a personal colleague. Despite this commendation however, Darlington's uncritical acceptance of Nazi power as a solution to Versailles's injustice reinforces the difficulty of his 'gentlemanly' thinking. As the American Senator Lewis explains, Darlington is "an amateur" (106); his trained "gentleman[liness]" obstructs any real political "professionalism" (107).

In relation to 1980s 'loyalty' politics, there is again here an important connection to New Right thinking, in particular with respect to the popular discourse which suggests that 'good form' involves a movement away from modern political ideals of regulated debate to a more simplistic ethic of personal common-sense and respect for power. Commenting on this traditionalist ideology, David Cannadine explains that Thatcher's government "continued to believe in ordered hierarchy .... [S]he had a deep respect for the institution of monarchy as the apex and

epitome of an established society: nobody could curtsy to the queen lower than she” (173). Darlington's reassertion of this philosophy, in the form of an uncritical support for *already established* Nazi power, takes this obeisance to another level, making respect for tradition a condition for resigned fascism.

As the narrative continues, Stevens's ties to Darlington make him an unlikely partner in this allegiance. Complementing Darlington's elitism with his own blind faith, Stevens works as a Nazi complicit, silently approving his master's racism through his refusal of condemnation. The climax of this partnership happens when Stevens dismisses the Jewish maids of the house, defending himself (to Miss Kenton) on a platform of servile ignorance: “There are many things you and I are simply not in a position to understand concerning, say, the nature of Jewry” (157-8). The irony of this expressed conviction, as an example of wilful quietism in the name of obedience, affirms Stevens's knowing (if also deferred) culpability: while he promises loyalty, he delivers collusion.

Elucidating this experience of institutionalised racism within modern Britain more generally, Anna Marie Smith highlights its effective centrality as a feature of New Right traditionalism. She explains, “Powell's anti-black immigration brought the nation together in a particularly effective manner because it drew upon the already normalized tradition of imperial racism and put that tradition to work in re-inscribing the national boundaries” (24). In this way, through the reformation of culture as an ‘essential’ national identity, the exclusion of the black or Asian immigrant becomes a strategic means by which an otherwise unpopular Right secures popular support.

For Smith, writing from the perspective of a Foucauldian critic, the answer to this essentialist understanding involves not the reformation of identity, under a different or ‘better’ set of moral values, but rather, more centrally, an acknowledgement of the fluidity and multiplicity of identity, wherein character is “endlessly shifting” and dependent upon context and history (rather than being “solid” or “natural”). She explains, “The insistence that – logically speaking – the possibilities of identity claims are infinite can be used to heighten our awareness of the contingent and historical character of even the most normalized identities and rules of

exclusion" (128).<sup>8</sup> In so far as *Remains* highlights the *fixedness* of Stevens's traditionalism, which refuses anything other than an unquestioning "trust" (256) in the given establishment, it tacitly reaffirms this message: it is only by acknowledging his context, and by consciously separating himself from this, the text suggests, that Stevens gains any meaningful awareness of his personal situation.

In the second half of the novel, wherein Stevens meets with two village men, Harry Smith and Dr. Carlisle, this message gathers new importance, illuminating a significant continuity between pre-war and post-war thinking. Responding to Stevens's comment on dignity as a quality pertaining only to gentlemen, Smith comments:

Dignity isn't just something gentlemen have. Dignity is something every man and women in this country can strive for and get. ... That's what we fought Hitler for, after all. If Hitler had had things his way, we'd just be slaves now. ... And I don't need to remind anyone here, there's no dignity to be had in being a slave. (196)

As a response to Stevens's quietism, this passage would seem, at first, to encapsulate the novel's humanist philosophy: where dignity is understood in democratic terms, as freedom and autonomy, rather than patriarchy and obedience. Highlighting the centrality of this idea to modern democratic institutions, Anthony Kwame Appiah writes:

The idea of the equal dignity of all persons . . . is what undergrids the attachment to a democracy of unlimited franchise; the renunciation of sexism and racism and heterosexism; the respect for the autonomy of individuals, which resists the state's desire to fit us to someone else's conception of what is good for us; the notion of human rights – rights being possessed by human beings as such – that is at the heart of liberal theory. (94)

By foregrounding this message in counter-position to Stevens' prejudice, the novel apparently legitimates post-war humanist thinking, granting it viability through the contrast between Stevens's and Harry Smith's positions. Nevertheless, against this reading, other elements of Smith's rhetoric suggest a more problematic complementarity between these outlooks, implying a comparable on-going prejudice between pre-

war and post-war perspectives. Indeed, the nationalist inflections of Smith's speech – which connect dignity to “being born English” (196), and which reject the idea of “all kinds of little countries going independent” (202) – suggest a crucial failure within the accepted humanist analysis: inflected with colonialist snobbery, this position authorises a continued imperialism on the back of (again) a supposed national superiority. In particular, in accordance with much nationalist humanism, Smith's ideology is shown to retain an essentialist conception of culture, wherein democracy is figured as a specific set of values, pertinent to only some national identities. The error of this conception is made clear in the novel by Dr Carlisle, who argues that Harry Smith is “all in a muddle. At times you'd think he was some sort of Communist, then he comes out with something that makes him sound true blue Tory. Truth is, he's all in a muddle” (219).<sup>9</sup>

This qualification, and its anti-nationalist significance, is again reinforced by reference to Appiah, who argues that democracy is better understood in accordance with cosmopolitan theory than with humanism. He explains, “It would be wrong . . . to conflate cosmopolitanism and humanism, because cosmopolitanism is not just the feeling that everybody matters. The cosmopolitan celebrates the fact that there are different local human ways of being, whereas humanism is consistent with the desire for global homogeneity” (94). In this way, in place of the humanist injunction to “put our differences aside,” and to “all get along” (111) in a facile manner, the cosmopolitan urges conversation across cultures, and a conscious respect for cultural heterogeneity. By rejecting Smith's idea of dignity as a specifically English-born virtue, and by instead affirming Carlisle's post-war / post-colonialist egalitarianism – involving “the best services for all the people” (220) – the novel reaffirms this cosmopolitan outlook in no uncertain terms.

The end of the story, where Stevens confesses his “mistake” (256) and then ironically pledges his devotion to Farraday, offers a dour comment on the modern-day applicability of this critical message. On the one hand, in this section there is a definite change in the character of Stevens's devotion: in place of his former repression and duty, he now embraces “banter” (15, 16, 257) and free expression: for the first time ever

he considers the virtue of travel and "human warmth" (258). In this sense, as Pico Iyer remarks, Farraday's establishment represents a turn toward a "new world order," based on "American" informality and entrepreneurship: the rule of "nature" (585-90). Even so, given the banal character of this expression as put forward here, which never questions the inequalities of the heritage industry itself – Farraday representing an American entrepreneurialism eager to maintain the illusion of old-world English tradition – it remains to question just how truly emancipatory Stevens's new situation is. As Susie O'Brien explains, "[n]o less than Stevens himself, Farraday would appear to have 'bought' the myth of grand old England. It is ultimately Farraday, however, who takes possession of this myth as a form of cultural capital to which Stevens, as its product, does not have the same access" (796-97). In other words, Farraday ultimately purchases Stevens along with the manor, as Farraday's loyal servant; the latter's supposed progressivism does not stop him from maintaining class hierarchy.

In fact, looked at holistically – in relation to the novel's larger pro-cosmopolitan theme – Stevens's service under Farraday can be seen as yet another variation on *Remain*'s counter-traditionalist concern, in this case, as it appears in the modern 'nostalgia industry' mould. Here, in spite of the fact that power becomes open to all classes, regardless of pedigree, Farraday still nourishes a reduced idea of culture, based on a commercialised image of old-world 'order' and 'authenticity.' In so far as this understanding reiterates Darlington's idea of an established hierarchy – wherein Stevens remains "part of the package" (255), a "genuine old-fashioned English butler" (131) – it reasserts the continued inequality of modern-day society: even now, where class has become mobile, capitalism maintains establishment divisions.

In its final summary, *Remains* offers little escape from this reality. Under the guise of renewed commitment, Stevens returns to Farraday with a renewed passivism, refusing to question his new master's corporate traditionalist post-war mentality. Meanwhile, his beloved Miss Kenton (later Mrs Benn) remains tied up in a loveless relationship, which, apart from granting her grandchildren, affords little personal happiness. Commenting on this explicitly, Stevens notes her "weariness with life; the

spark which had once made her such a lively, and at times volatile person seemed now to have gone” (245). Indeed, following Dr. Carlisle’s analysis – which states that “[p]eople here want to be left alone to lead their quiet little lives” (220) – it would seem that England itself has adopted a stalwart political quietism, preferring stasis to uncertainty and global engagement. Even so, if there is one positive message to be gained from *Remains*, it is that the novel itself registers this error, refusing to be duped by popular modern ‘new world’ banter, as Thatcher presents it. In this critical persistence, *Remains* demonstrates its continuing importance as response to conservative politics: in place of both nationism and consumer libertarianism, it affirms critical cosmopolitanism’s centrality as the basis for present-day democracy. As a pledge for respect before innate authenticity, the integrity of this expression is unmistakable and unmistakably relevant.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> For Shaffer, this device offers “one of the novel’s chief concerns and controlling metaphors: the literal and figurative ways by which the butler clothes his private self from his own understanding and from the ‘public gaze’” (65).

<sup>2</sup> Sim also recognises a connection here: “[G]iven the semantic loading of the term ‘Great,’ what is striking is to find it so doggedly anatomised in *Remains*. ... [I]t asks whether those ideologies and political processes that seek to put the ‘Great’ back into Britain entail just the kind of rabid Othering that Stevens undertakes here” (122). My reading agrees with this analysis in principle, but rather than focusing on New Right conservatism *per se*, I look at Thatcher’s nationalism more specifically, and the racist idea of culture this implies.

<sup>3</sup> On a similar note, Head argues, “The need to let off twelve-bores in the dining room neatly figures the violence that underpins ‘civilized’ order” (157).

<sup>4</sup> Mercer is drawing here on the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies.

<sup>5</sup> Here too there is a clear connection to Thatcherite discourse. Commenting on her military vocabulary, Gilroy notes, “Imperial propaganda helped to reconstitute the relationship between soldiery and citizenry in a new pattern that abrogated the political codes and moral duties of the past. It reinvented the idea of military adventure as a potent source of romance, pleasure and fantasy even while administrations of the colonies were rewriting the rules of practical soldiery” (141).

<sup>6</sup> In its emphasis on Stevens’s childhood experience, this reading offers an interesting connection to *An Artist of the Floating World*. Again here, there is a clear sense in which the narrator’s parent’s values inform his own choices and determine his demise.

<sup>7</sup> For more comments on Thatcher's lack of compassion to the working classes see Young, 108, 115-16, 127; and Cannadine, 177.

<sup>8</sup> On a similar note, Sen argues, "The hope of harmony in the contemporary world lies to a great extent in a clearer understanding of the pluralities of human identity, and in the appreciation that they cut across each other and work against a sharp separation along one single hardened line of impenetrable division" (xiv).

<sup>9</sup> Sim (2006) also signals this disavowal of Smith's politics, but he reads it in a slightly different way than I do, focusing instead on the contrast between Smith's "restrictive political universalism" and Carlisle's "idealist commitment to 'socialism'" (145-46), which foregrounds the more genuinely egalitarian nature of post-war consensus politics when compared to New Right doctrine. In its emphasis on the implicit prejudice of New Right thinking, this argument seems to me aptly stated, rightly underlining *Remains's* anti-essentialist message. Nevertheless, in opposition to Sim's materialist focus, contrasting socialism to democracy, I would stress that Ishiguro's concern here is not only economic but also cultural, relaying the importance of cross-cultural respect within the contemporary cosmopolitan world. In this way, Sim's scepticism about post-colonialism and cosmopolitanism more generally seems to me problematic.

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