

# Representation of Englishness in the Narrative Structure of K. Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*

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**Abstract.** The article focuses on the narrative structure of K. Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*. The phenomenon of Englishness as an ambivalent category is described through the peculiarities of the narrative structure of the literary text. The linguistic study of chronotope in the text under analysis makes it possible to prove the impossibility of positive evaluation of the nostalgic cultural stereotypes associated with the idea of Englishness in the narrative. The ambivalent character of Englishness as an example of national identity crisis is revealed in the novel by Kazuo Ishiguro, a British Booker prize-winner of Japanese origin.

**Keywords –** Englishness, self-identity, narrative, literary text, chronotope, evaluation\*.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The crisis of British self-identification has traditionally been attributed to the end of the British Empire and an urgent need for the country to set new goals and priorities on the global arena. Britains' specific geopolitical position has always been regarded as a reason for so called "island psychology" and at the same time as a key factor in the country's development [5], [12], [8]. The British Empire as an embodiment of power and national identity determined the country's lifestyle and granted the British a sense of belonging to the great nation [5]. The end of the great Empire affected British national identity which stopped being consistent. In post-imperial times the intellectual climate in the UK, like in many other former empires, can be described as a crisis of national identity [8, p. 61].

One of the waves of the British self-identification crisis refers to the 80-90-s of the XX century when identity debates become especially hot and a splash of texts devoted to the problem of Britishness (Englishness) appear. Literary texts are among them. It can be explained by the fact that loss of self-identity as a fear of losing control over certain resources leads to aggravating value problems which are relevant for a specific language community. As a result, literary texts discussing such value problems are created. Chronologically Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* [7] (which was published in 1989 and was awarded the prestigious Booker prize) coincides with this phase of the British national identity crisis. In 1989 Kazuo Ishiguro, a Japanese living in

Britain since his early childhood, writes a novel revealing the phenomenon of Englishness.

The objective of this article is to address the phenomenon of Englishness through the linguistic analysis of the narrative structure of *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro [7]. The narrative structure of the text under analysis presents interest as, on the one hand, the text is written by a British author for the British audience and, on the other hand, Ishiguro's vision of the phenomenon is originally a view from the outside – it is how Englishness is viewed by a Japanese.

The hypothesis of the research is as follows: it is impossible to unambivalently positively assess the nostalgic cultural stereotypes "Englishness" / "real English gentleman" / "good old England" objectified in the text under study by a certain character (butler Stevens).

Such nostalgic cultural stereotypes as "Englishness" / "good old England" / "real English gentleman" possess a significant positive potential in the consciousness of contemporary English speakers who view themselves as true representatives of the British society. It can be proved by the data from British National Corpus [2], where examples of language usage from different genres indicate positive characteristics of the cultural stereotype discussed in this paper.

The ambivalence of the conflict represented in the text is determined, on the one hand, by the fact that the romantic ideal (expressed in the text by the nostalgic cultural stereotypes as "Englishness" / "good old England" / "real English gentleman") provides the character of the novel with a possibility for self-identification and, on the other, the romantic ideal is viewed as something absolutely inconsistent, leading to a loss of self-identification at the end of the book.

The ambivalence of the conflict is supported by the way the character is perceived by the reader of the novel. The reader sympathizes with Stevens, as the character explicates all the positive features of this cultural stereotype. Yet, simultaneously, the character is represented in the text as somebody miserable, whose commitment to the romantic ideal turns out to be absolutely senseless, which is expressed in the text by the elements of chronotope having negative evaluation.

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## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The range of perspectives on the main idea of K. Ishiguro's novel is wide enough. Notwithstanding the variety of interpretations of the message of the text that exist, we may point out that in the text the character's feelings, the crisis of his value ideals are closely connected with the social and political context of the epoch.

Analysing the text, researchers quite often place emphasis on the sphere of global, historical time rather than on the private sphere, pointing out the collapse of colonial ideology as one of the central motives in the book [15], [9]. A popular point of view on the novel is that it is a narrative about political and social contradictions Britain was experiencing in the beginning and the middle of the XX century, the most significant of which are the formation and the spread of fascism, World War II in Europe, the Suez crisis of 1956, increasing tensions in British-American relations and the beginning of America's cultural dominance [11], [9].

However, K. Ishiguro, commenting on the main idea of the novel in one of the interviews, mentions his "primary interest in personal aspects of the character's life rather than in the larger historical context of the XX<sup>th</sup> century" [6, p. 115].

In this article, we are addressing *The Remains of the Day* as a literary text focusing on the main character's painful emotional life which is closely linked to the general context of the narrative and reveals itself in the verbal peculiarities of the narrative.

## III. METHODS AND MATERIALS

The linguistic analysis of the text is based on the assumption that *The Remains of the Day* [7] is an allegorical representation of a universal ambivalent value conflict, the essence of which is agony and hopelessness in the subject's search for self-realization and gaining inner freedom through his commitment to a particular romantic ideal associated in his mind with the idea of Englishness.

Since the novel manifests positive nostalgic stereotypes "Englishness" / "good old England" / "real English gentleman", we can hypothesize that the text explicates a certain conflict relevant for the British consciousness. In other words, it is a problem of national self-identification for the British as a community having historical, political, cultural and linguistic unity.

The first stage of the analysis is formulating the basic contrast which constitutes the main value conflict of the text. On the story level (the plot) the conflict manifests itself metaphorically through so called basic contrast represented in the text by two text paradigms "**romantic ideal**" vs. "**reality**". The contrast unfolds throughout the whole text by means of two opposing metaphorical fields "DIGNITY" and "BANTERING". There are two important observations concerning the metaphorical fields:

- 1) they play a key role in creating the meaning of the text and make it coherent;
- 2) they perform a compositional function in the text, as textual elements belonging to the above mentioned metaphorical fields can be found in so called strong positions and, being framing elements, accentuate the semantic connections within the text.

The second stage of the analysis is describing the narrative structure of the text in order to point out the peculiarities of the chronotope used in the text. At this stage elements of frame analysis are used. The ways of verbalising the conflict are revealed through the peculiarities of the narrative structure of the text. Traditionally narrative is defined as a chain of non-randomly connected events [16, p. 7], [13, p. 59–60].

*The Remains of the Day* is written in the form of the first-person narration ("intradiegetic" in G. Genette's terminology [4]), which also indicates the orientation of the text towards the inner world of the character. The story is told by the main character – Stevens who narrates about his service as a butler in Darlington Hall. The relationship between Stevens as narrator and Stevens as an object of narration is a question of importance in the narrative structure of the text. In 1956 Stevens sets on a car journey westwards and, at the same time, retrospectively, returns to the 30-s of the XX century. Consequently, two temporal planes representing two absolutely different periods in the character's life are found in the narrative.

The first plane is a time when Stevens is an impeccable butler of Lord Darlington at Darlington Hall before World War II. Darlington Hall is a symbol of good old England, Lord Darlington's authority in the sphere of foreign affairs is undeniable, and Stevens himself is an example of dignified English butler.

The second plane is set in the middle of the XX century – after World War II when Stevens continues his service as a butler at Darlington Hall which by this time is owned by Mr. Farraday, a rich American who bought the estate after Lord Darlington's death. By this time Lord Darlington's reputation is ruined due to the loyalty to fascism Lord Darlington demonstrated between World Wars I and II.

As it can be seen from the narration, these two time planes correlate with the opposition "DIGNITY" – "BANTERING" and mark Stevens as an object of narration (Stevens as a butler of Lord Darlington, before World War II) and Stevens as a narrator (Stevens as a butler of Mr. Farraday, Stevens in July, 1956). Fig. 1 represents the narrative structure of the text.

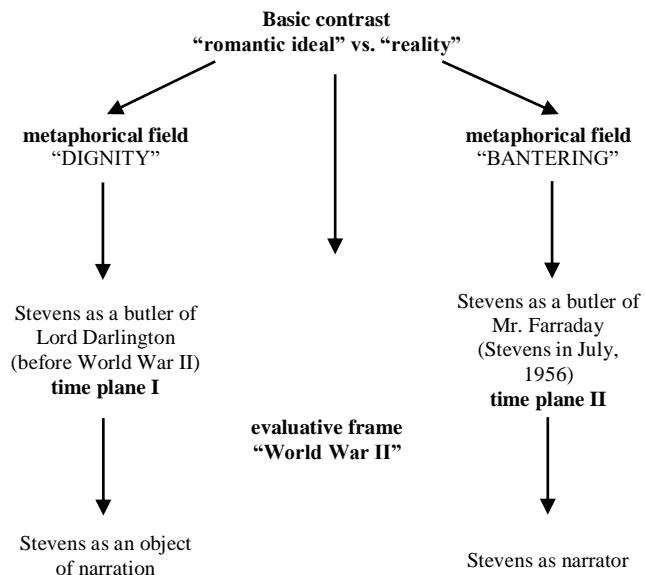


Fig. 1 NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT

As it can be seen from fig. 1, evaluative frame “World War II” is a border line which separates the time planes and introduces differentiation between Stevens as an object of narration and Stevens as a narrator. The conflict of the text is represented by means of modelling the basic contrast in a certain type of chronotope.

This technique is based on a fundamental thesis of the frame theory – every piece of experience can be represented in human consciousness as a verbal model having temporal and spatial characteristics [10], [3]. The notion of *literary chronotope* as “intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships” [1, p. 84] was introduced by M. Bakhtin as a formally constitutive category of literature [1, p. 84]. Time and space, being fundamental and universal categories of human experience, are a basis for building, or modelling, the plot structure of a literary text.

It seems obvious that the type of chronotope presented in *The Remains of the Day* [7] possesses a distinct evaluative meaning due to its connection to stable cultural stereotypes shared by both the author of the novel and its reader. For an English-speaking reader, British in particular, frame “World War II” has an explicit and unambiguous negative connotation, thus, making it an “evaluative filter” through which the reader perceives the storyline of *The Remains of the Day*.

The final stage of research is contextual and linguo-stylistic analysis with elements of componential analysis of text elements belonging to two different time planes aimed at finding out how Englishness is represented in the analysed text and, consequently, at proving the hypothesis of the research. The findings are presented in the Results and Discussion section.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The fact that K. Ishiguro sets the action of the book in late summer of 1956 acquires paramount importance for the representation of Englishness in the text. The reader of the book is well aware of the political context in which Britain appeared to be in the first after-war decades and, what is more, the reader is aware of the role of World War II in the world history. In other words, we can see that K. Ishiguro’s novel is targeted at a specific type of reader – the British, who undoubtedly share the negative evaluation of this frame.

It is important to underline that World War II is not explicitly expressed in the narrative, but serves a specific border line splitting the character’s life into two different periods. It is the war that influences Stevens’ life and leads to the change of Darlington Hall’s owner.

Before the war, Darlington Hall is owned by Lord Darlington who Stevens respects greatly and who is viewed by Stevens as a representative of true English aristocracy: “*a gentleman, a true old English gentleman*” [7, p. 234], as an outstanding political and social figure of the time: “*the prominent role* <...> *in great affairs*” [7, p. 64].

Similarly perceives Stevens Darlington Hall at pre-war time – it is a classical English estate: “*grand old English house*” [7, p. 6], “*a distinguished household*” [7, p. 133], *employing twenty-eight members of staff and where events of the world’s importance are taking place*” [7, p. 7].

Stevens describes his life at Darlington Hall and his service as the best period in his life: “<he was> one I am today *proud* to have given my *best years* of service to” [7, p. 64]; “during those years, one was, in the truest terms, ‘attached to a *distinguished household*’. I am today nothing but *proud* and *grateful* to have been given such a *privilege*” [7, p. 133]. As it follows from the text, this period of his life Stevens evaluates positively.

It is important, however, to compare this evaluation with the evaluative colouring Lord Darlington’s image has in the reader’s mind. Obviously, positive evaluation of Lord Darlington’s image contrasts with the stereotypical negative evaluation it possesses in the reader’s mind. It is determined by the presence in the text of such verbal elements as *anti-Semitism*, *blackshirts’ movement*, *The British Union of Fascists*, *receiving hospitality from the Nazis*, *the Nuremberg Rally* which expose Lord Darlington’s connection with fascism which is negatively coloured in the mind of a contemporary British reader.

Stevens is sure that Lord Darlington’s actions are aimed at bringing justice to Germany after World War I and improving the political climate in Europe after the war. Since the 20-s Darlington Hall is a venue for numerous international meetings and conferences: “Darlington Hall was to witness many more events of equal gravity over the fifteen or so years that followed” [7, p. 73]. In the narrative we come across a lot of verbal elements having strong evaluative colouring.

In this case we again see the incompatibility of positive evaluation of the analysed episode with the negative evaluation it gets in the reader’s mind. It is provided by the negative connotations such proper names as Lord Halifax, Ribbentrop possess. Conversely, Stevens uses positively marked predicates for describing people close to Hitler: “*Herr Ribbentrop – a certain distinguished personage*” [7, p. 143], “*a well-regarded figure, even a glamorous one*” [7, p. 144], *an honourable gentleman*” [7, p. 144].

The knowledge of the end of World War II the reader has functions as an “evaluative filter” and negates the positive potential of the nostalgic stereotypes “*Englishness*” / “*good old England*” / “*real English gentleman*” represented in the text under study.

One of such conferences is viewed by Stevens as a triumph of Lord Darlington’s political activity: “The conference <...> was *the culmination* of long planning on the part of Lord Darlington; <...> his lordship had been moving towards this point from three years or so before” [7, p. 74] and, at the same time, a crucial moment in his own life which determined his understanding what *great butler’s dignity* really is: “I … regard it <the conference of March 1923> as *a turning point in my life*. <...> I do regard it as *the moment in my career when I truly came of age as a butler*. <...> *I have attained at least a little of that crucial quality of ‘dignity’ in the course of my career ...*” [7, p. 73] and further in the text “the conference of 1923, and that night in particular, constituted *a turning point in my professional development* … For all its sad associations, whenever I recall that evening today, I find I do so with *a large sense of triumph*” [7, p. 114–115].

This episode brings irony in the text which serves as a verbal means of destroying the positive potential of the romantic ideal represented in the text. Irony is built as a result of incompatibility of two categories – high and significant (foreign policy) and trivial and insignificant (butler's service).

In the readers' consciousness the frame "World War II" provides negative evaluation of the conference of 1923, as a result, the readers interpret the episode differently, Lord Darlington's attempts are viewed as absurd and pointless.

In the text the reader comes across an opposite stereotypical evaluation of Lord Darlington's actions. The fact of mentioning Darlington Hall itself and its former owner causes associations with fascism and a negative response: "<...> you don't mean *Darlington Hall*, Lord Darlington's place? <...> You mean you actually used to work for that lord Darlington?" [7, p. 126]. Graphical means (italics) and using demonstrative pronoun "that" strengthen the evaluative meaning.

We can point out that the text contains numerous indications (the scope of the article does not allow to give more examples) of the fact that the past (time plane I, Stevens as an object of narration) is positively evaluated by Stevens.

Analysing the elements of time plane II (Stevens as an object of narration), we can state that the present is viewed as something new and unknown. Stevens associates himself with Darlington Hall and, setting on a six-day journey, he feels uncomfortable: "... I was very conscious <...> once I departed, Darlington Hall would stand *empty* for probably the first time this century <...>. It was *an odd feeling*" [7, p. 23].

The world outside Darlington Hall is viewed by Stevens as something unknown and dangerous, which is expressed in the text by means of the metaphorical model ***world outside Darlington Hall = desert***: "I was <...> speeding off in totally *the wrong direction into a wilderness*" [7, p. 24]. Leaving Darlington Hall, Stevens loses control over his typical surroundings and feels uneasy: "when setting sail in a ship, when one finally *loses sight of the land*", "the experience of *unease mixed with exhilaration*", [7, p. 24].

In other words, Darlington Hall is regarded as something stable, constant and orderly, thus, evaluated positively. While everything outside it is viewed as something chaotic, unknown and dangerous, thus, evaluated negatively.

It is significant that the analysed text predetermines the polar evaluation of these elements of the chronotope by the reader. Another important observation is that Stevens as the main protagonist of the book is not evaluated negatively by the reader. Taken together, these provide the basic conflict with its ambivalent character.

The usage of the adjective "*empty*" for describing Darlington Hall after the war presents interest and contributes to the negative evaluation of the present by Stevens. In the following example, the interaction of the meanings of several lexical-semantic variants becomes important: "Darlington Hall would stand *empty* for probably the first time this century" [7, p. 23]. Firstly, *empty* in the meaning of *having*

*nothing inside* [13]. Secondly, *empty* in the meaning of *having no value, without sense or purpose* [13].

The usage of the metaphor ***world outside Darlington Hall = desert*** is also aimed at creating contrast of the stereotypical evaluation by the character with the evaluation of chronotope by the reader.

Summarizing, we can point out that the positive evaluation of Darlington Hall as a typical English estate before the war logically and semantically contradicts the evaluation of this textual element in the mind of the contemporary British reader. It becomes possible due to the presence of the evaluative frame "World War II" in the consciousness of the reader.

At the same time we can conclude that chronotope found in the text by means of creating the opposition between time plane I (Stevens as an object of narration, Stevens as a butler of Lord Darlington, before World War II) and time plane II (Stevens as a narrator, Stevens as a butler of Mr. Farraday, Stevens in July, 1956) models the basic contrast represented in the text by two text paradigms "**romantic ideal**" vs. "**reality**". Textual elements representing this opposition are listed in table 1.

As it can be seen from table 1, in the text we can find verbal means modeling the main value conflict of the text. In particular, the basic contrast "**romantic ideal**" vs. "**reality**" is represented in the text by means of verbal elements belonging to the temporal planes mentioned above such as verbal forms, vocabulary with temporal semantics, lexical units with spatial reference which are elements of the narrative structure of the text.

TABLE 1. TEXTUAL ELEMENTS REPRESENTING THE BASIC CONTRAST

Textual elements	Time plane I (Stevens as a butler of Lord Darlington before World War II)	Time plane II (Stevens as a butler of Mr. Farraday in July, 1956)
<b>Verbal elements forming temporal and local characteristics of the basic contrast</b>	<i>those days</i> <i>old ways</i> <i>Darlington Hall in former days</i> <i>those big houses</i> <i>when there were great gatherings and &lt;...&gt;</i> <i>distinguished visitors</i> <i>before the war</i> <i>a generation ago</i> <i>butlers of our generation</i> <i>looking back to the past</i>	<i>today</i> <i>under my present employer</i> <i>Darlington Hall of today</i> <i>in this age of electricity and modern heating systems</i> <i>these days</i> <i>in recent years</i> <i>over the years</i> <i>great affairs of today's world</i>
<b>Verbal elements highlighting the evaluative meaning of the basic contrast</b>	<i>grand old English house</i> <i>the houses of <i>true</i> ladies and gentlemen</i> <i>was attached to a distinguished household</i> <i>a staff of which he had heard high praise</i> <i>those great gentlemen at the hub of this world</i> <i>gentlemen of indisputable moral statue</i>	<i>more and more errors</i> <i>small errors of recent months</i> <i>a number of small errors have surfaced of late</i> <i>a bad staff plan</i> <i>faulty staff plan</i> <i>a moment of genuine embarrassment</i> <i>it's no use</i> <i>insinuations</i> <i>absurd allegations</i> <i>allegation</i> <i>many of Lord</i>

Textual elements	Time plane I (Stevens as a butler of Lord Darlington before World War II)	Time plane II (Stevens as a butler of Mr. Farraday in July, 1956)
	to come as close to the hub of this world's wheel my privilege to see the best of England close to the great hub of things a turning point in my life that sense of triumph I came to be uplifted by I gave my best to Lord Darlington diplomats and political persons of high rank the renowned playwright a well-regarded glamorous figure to serve humanity great affairs	Darlington's ideas <...> rather odd – even <...> unattractive some truly terrible things about his lordship his lordship's good name was destroyed forever misguided idealism misguided thinking misguided, foolish efforts misguided generosity

**"Romantic ideal"** is represented in the text through descriptions of Darlington Hall before the war as a classical English estate by means of lexical units with positive evaluative meaning. It is aimed at supporting the positive evaluative potential of nostalgic cultural stereotypes "Englishness" / "good old England" / "real English gentleman".

On the other hand, in representing the opposite textual paradigm "**reality**" lexemes with the semantics of motion and metaphors of direction become significant (*not at the correct road at all* [7, p. 24], *speeding off in totally the wrong direction* [7, p. 24], *misguided efforts* [7, p. 211], *misguided thinking* [7, p. 210], *misguided idealism* [7, p. 210]).

To conclude, we can observe that Stevens's commitment to the romantic ideal turns out to be "misguided idealism" and leads to the crisis of his self-identify as a *great English butler* at the end of the book. Still, the nostalgic cultural stereotype "Englishness" preserves its positive potential in the analysed text, thus, accentuating the ambivalent character of the main conflict of the text.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

The linguo-stylistic and frame analysis of the narrative structure of *The Remains of the Day* indicates that the phenomenon of Englishness objectified in the text by means of the main character of the novel – butler Stevens – is represented as an ambivalent category. It is achieved by the peculiarities of the narrative structure of the text which is split into two different temporal planes. The main conflict of the text is represented by verbal elements forming temporal and local characteristics of the basic contrast.

The evaluative frame "World War II" as a border line between the temporal planes "reality and "good old England" fixes the ambivalent character of the main conflict and proves the hypothesis of the research. Including the idea of fascism into the structure of the romantic ideal leads to accentuating the main value conflict of the text and results in

impossibility of unambivalently positive evaluation of the nostalgic cultural stereotype "Englishness" represented in the analysed text.

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