Serving a New World Order: Postcolonial Politics in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*  

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In a 1994 article in *GQ* magazine entitled "Stick It Up Howard's End," English writer John Ash identifies a growing American fascination with sentimental representations of upper-class British life. A recent symptom of what Ash labels Merchant Ivory Syndrome (MIS) was the 1993 nomination of *The Remains of the Day*, the film adaptation of Kazuo Ishiguro's prize-winning novel, for five Oscars. The film is typical of Merchant Ivory productions in its recreation, in sumptuous (if not strictly accurate) period detail, of life within the upper echelons of English society before the Second World War. It may be read, Ash argues, as an example of what is called, in German, *edelkitsch*. Meaning, literally, "noble kitsch," the term describes "a form of cultural necrophilia, a slavering delectation of things we are (or should be) well rid of, such as dehumanizing class distinctions, rigid social codes and crippling repression" (43).

Speculating on the growth of the phenomenon in the U.S., Ash wonders whether it might be "the symptom of a lingering colonial mentality" (43) and concludes "surely, the nation that has given us (among other things) abstract expressionism, jazz and Wallace Stevens [End Page 787] has no reason to doff its collective baseball cap in the direction of perfidious Albion" (43).

If the significance of this American cultural sampler is not precisely defined, it is obviously meant to represent something explicitly opposed to class distinctions, rigid social codes, and repression. What Ash finds so inexplicable about Merchant Ivory Syndrome, then, is that it seems to have infected a culture whose very existence was founded in opposition to the stodginess of British tradition. It seems to me possible to argue, however, that the Merchant Ivory phenomenon has found a captive American audience not through the denial, but through the amplification of this mythic opposition. In other words, I would suggest that the significance of the colonial ambience described by Ash is defined largely by the extent to which it is constructed in explicit contrast to the image of a liberated, "postcolonial" America. This contrast is suggested most strongly in the novel which inspired one of Merchant Ivory's most recent box office successes--Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*--a novel whose "postcolonial" politics are the focus of this paper.

I want to look at *The Remains of the Day* in two ways: first, as a narrative which is thematically constructed around an opposition between what are commonly regarded as Victorian values--formality, repression, and self-effacement, summed up under the general heading of "dignity"--and those associated with an idea of "America" that has expanded, literally into a New World--freedom, nature, and individualism--and second, as a text which has come to occupy a significant place in global popular culture, not just as source material for Merchant Ivory, but, more significantly for the purposes of this paper, as an exemplary product of a burgeoning "world" fiction industry. Through this discussion, I will attempt to work through some of the different valencies of "postcoloniality" which this text seems to me to present, in order, at the risk of straining
further an already overworked term, to suggest ways in which the contradictory significations which have come to define the postcolonial can be productively deployed to illuminate the changing discursive structure of global power.

In a now infamous article in *Time* magazine, whose title--"The Empire Writes Back"--resonates throughout the history of postcolonial study, 4 Pico Iyer hails Ishiguro as "a paradigm of the polycultural order" (54). Ishiguro, Iyer explains, together with Salman Rushdie, occupies a privileged place "at the center of [a] new movement of 'World Fiction'" where he is surrounded by "a host of other constellations"--Ben Okri, Michael Ondaatje, Vikram Seth and Timothy Mo (54). All of these writers, Iyer notes, have "something in common. All are writers not of Anglo-Saxon ancestry, born more or less after the war, and choosing to write in English" (56). While a suspicious reader might demand to know why all of these writers are expatriate and male, this would be to miss Iyer's point, which is to establish their position as the vanguard of a new literary movement characterized most notably by its transgression of some of the traditional boundaries of "English" literature.

The transgressiveness of Ishiguro's text is suggested in a review by Salman Rushdie, which notes that *The Remains of the Day* is "a brilliant subversion of the fictional modes from which it at first seems to descend"; in particular, Rushdie is referring to the fiction of P. G. Wodehouse, to whose butler, Jeeves, Stevens, the narrator and protagonist of *The Remains of the Day*, bears a parodic resemblance. Ishiguro elaborates on this critical aspect of the text in an interview with Allan Vorda and Kim Herzinger, explaining "[w]hat I'm trying to do [in Remains] is to actually rework a particular myth about a certain kind of mythical England. . . . I've deliberately created a world which at first resembles that of those writers such as P. G. Wodehouse. I then start to undermine this myth and use it in a slightly twisted and different way" (140). 2 One significant strand of the myth which Ishiguro attempts to subvert is the notion of benevolent paternalism which was invoked to legitimate the deployment of power by the British ruling class, both at home and abroad. The coercive terms of this myth are exposed ironically through the narration of Stevens, whose failure to find personal fulfilment is directly proportional to his commitment to the ideal of the faithful servant. The absurdity of this role is emphasized through its incommensurability with the story Stevens is relating: against the progressive narrative forces of love and history, Stevens's insistence on the value of "dignity" seems, at best, irrelevant and, at worst, reactionary.

Dignity, according to Stevens, is an explicitly English quality, reflected not just in the truism that "butlers only . . . exist in England" (43), but in the countryside itself, in the "lack of obvious drama or spectacle that sets the beauty of our land apart" (28); specifically, Stevens [End Page 789] suggests, England's beauty is "set apart" from the "unseemly demonstrativeness" of places like Africa and America (29). Indeed it is suggested that England's ability to confer order on these more unruly parts of the world was strongly predicated on the dignity of its serving classes.

This dignity is illustrated, for Stevens, in an anecdote related by his father, about a butler who has gone with his employer to India. One day he finds a tiger under the dining room table, and, after discreetly shooting it, he informs his employer, who is entertaining guests, that "dinner will be served at the usual time and I am pleased to say there will be no discernible traces left of the recent occurrence by that time" (36). The
darker implications of this classic story of British dignity in the face of colonial disorder are brought out in another story Stevens tells about his father's own career as a butler. Shortly after the death of his elder son in the Anglo-Boer War during "a most un-British attack on civilian Boer settlements" (40), Stevens Sr. is forced to valet for the general who led the campaign, a job he carries out with, in Stevens's eyes, the utmost "dignity." The suggestion here, and throughout the rest of the novel, is that dignity, like the Empire it served, is predicated on surrendering the dictates of individual conscience and "natural" human feeling to the authority of a rigidly (if arbitrarily) stratified social hierarchy.

The sense of this opposition--between natural individualism and arbitrary hierarchy--is, of course, predicated partly on a forgetting of the naturalist logic by which hierarchies, both domestic and colonial, were traditionally legitimated. This logic is evident in Stevens's unquestioning submission to a social order which reflects and supports the model of filial devotion deployed by empire to mask the enforced servitude of its colonies; as Helen Tiffin has noted, "'I am your mother and father' was the missionary rhetoric whose standard slippage in India, Africa, and the Caribbean was from God to Queen Victoria and the British government" (7). The infantilism and dependence such a construction inculcated reflects the attitude of the loyal servant, which Stevens displays in his childlike devotion to his employer, Lord Darlington. The sinister, even pathological, power structure underlying this relationship is accentuated by Lord Darlington's World War II political activities. His conviction of the importance of "fair play" in the treatment of a defeated foe, combined with a fear of democracy, make Darlington, if not a Nazi supporter, then at least a sympathizer--a position which Stevens is bound by loyalty to defend. In the background of this picture of filial devotion, then, lurks the figure of the Führer, in whom the idea of political paternalism is taken to its logical and menacing conclusions.

In the foreground is the more mundane but still unsettling image of Stevens's strained relationship with his own father, whom he can only bring himself to address in the third person. At the same time, he insists that the highest respect be accorded Stevens Sr., who, due to increasing age and infirmity, is capable of working only as an under-butler at Darlington Hall. Eventually, Stevens's scrupulous observance of his filial responsibility leads to a lapse in his professional duty, as he colludes in the old man's attempts to conceal signs of increasing disability from his employer.

While Stevens's refusal to acknowledge the diminution of his father's powers may be partly attributable to an affection he cannot otherwise express, his attitude to his father is also consistent with his reliance on an anachronistic social order to provide him with a sense of self-definition. Ironically, the dissolution of that social order is legitimated in the novel according to what may be seen as the logical extension of the filial metaphor--the law of "natural" succession. Just as Stevens Sr. is eventually forced to surrender authority to his son, the global authority wielded by Lord Darlington as a representative of Britain is ceded to the empire's most promising offspring--the United States. The transferral of power is foreshadowed in a speech made by an American senator visiting Darlington Hall for an important conference on the war. Senator Lewis dismisses the notion of "dignity" as impractical and even dangerous; Lord Darlington, he explains to the group, is
"a classic English gentleman. Decent, honest, well-meaning. But his lordship here is an amateur. . . and international affairs today are no longer for gentlemen amateurs. The sooner you here in Europe realize that the better. All you decent, well-meaning gentlemen, let me ask you, have you any idea what sort of place the world is becoming all round you? The days when you could act out your noble instincts are over. . . . You here in Europe need professionals to run your affairs. If you don't realize that soon you're headed for disaster." (102)

The misguidedness of Darlington's noble instincts is borne out, of course, by the disastrous consequences of the war. [End Page 791]

Historically, of course, Lewis's words can also be read as prophetic in another sense: the decade following the war saw Britain divest itself of most of its colonies, a tangible acknowledgement of its diminished role on the world stage. When Britain assumed its permanent seat on the newly formed United Nations Security Council in 1946, it was as a subordinate player on a newly configured international field, dominated by the USSR and the U.S. The accession of the United States to a position of dominance may be at least partly attributable to the value of the "professionalism" invoked by Lewis in the novel. Following the steady growth of monopoly capitalism in the U.S. between the wars, the nation's postwar role as global policy-maker tended to be dictated less by the formulas of state than by those of business. The coalescence of the two spheres of interest was clearly illustrated in the 1953 appointment of Charles Edwin ("Engine Charlie") Wilson, the president of General Motors, as Eisenhower's secretary of defense. On being asked whether any conflict of interest might inhibit the carrying out of his duties, Wilson offered the famous response: "I cannot conceive of one because for years I thought what was good for our country was good for General Motors, and vice versa" (qtd. in Reich 48). Wilson's (widely shared) conviction of the correlation between private profit and public interest can be read as an affirmation of the "natural" law of capital. Against the totalizing logic of this law, the idea of politics as a gentleman's game can only be read--as Senator Lewis reads it--as naïve and, finally, counter-productive.

Thus, the code of honor which had seemed essential to the successful running of Darlington Hall--and indeed, the England Stevens nostalgically remembers--gives way to a new professional ethic in which, as Stevens is bewildered to discover, the value of knowing one's place loses currency in a new emphasis on social and economic freedom. The shift in values affects Stevens quite trenchantly when, on Darlington's death, Darlington Hall is purchased by a genial American, Farraday, who introduces some--to Stevens, quite alarming--changes in the running of the house. Where dignity was the hallmark of his relationship with Lord Darlington, Stevens is now expected, much to his discomfiture, to respond to his employer's friendly bantering. With some anxiety, Stevens explains:

this business of bantering is not a duty I feel I can ever discharge with enthusiasm. It is all very well, in these changing [End Page 792] times, to adapt one's work to take in duties not traditionally within one's realm; but bantering is of another dimension altogether. For one thing, how would one know for sure that at any given moment a response of the bantering sort is truly what is expected? One need hardly dwell on the catastrophic possibility of uttering a bantering remark only to discover it wholly inappropriate. (16)
The point of this passage is clearly humor at Stevens's expense—at his insistence on seeing bantering as a "duty" instead of a natural mode of conversation or, as Stevens himself concludes, at the end of the novel, "the key to human warmth" (245). Pico Iyer goes farther in a review of *The Remains of the Day*, suggesting that Stevens's great tragedy lies in his inability to speak "the language of the world" (588). "World" in this context implicitly refers to the new world order represented by Farraday, which is, through its association with bantering, naturalized and even celebrated as a liberation from the tyranny of dignity.

Like dignity, however, bantering is subject to rules which serve to express or, more often, to conceal particular relations of power. If the rules of dignity kept Stevens in his place by conferring a kind of transcendent value on the self-effacement his job requires, Farraday's bantering achieves the same effect, simply by embarrassing him. In response to Stevens's question about whether a particular guest is likely to bring his wife to the house, Farraday says: "'God help us if she does come. . . Maybe you could keep her off our hands, Stevens. Maybe you could take her out to one of those stables around Mr Morgan's farm. Keep her entertained in all that hay. She may be just your type'" (15). The formula which describes bantering as the "language of the world" fails to take into account the almost invisible structures of class and gender privilege which allow Farraday to reduce Stevens and the guest's wife to stock characters in a bawdy comedy. These power structures remain concealed throughout much of the rest of the novel, which constructs bantering as a form of exchange that is both natural and worldly, in contrast to Stevens's repressed provincialism. One could alternatively read Stevens's inability to participate successfully in this kind of exchange as a function of his lack of a particular kind of cultural currency—a lack that can only be filled through the largesse of his employer.

It is indeed through Farraday's generosity that Stevens is given a chance at initiation into worldly pursuits. Suggesting that Stevens take a holiday, Farraday remarks, "'You fellows, you're always locked up in these big houses helping out, how do you ever get to see around this beautiful country of yours?'' (4). Stevens is taken aback by Farraday's offer, which is based, it seems to him, partly on Farraday's failure to realize that: "those of our profession, although we did not see a great deal of the country in the sense of touring the countryside and visiting picturesque sites, did actually 'see' more of England than most, placed as we were in houses where the greatest ladies and gentlemen of the land gathered" (4). Stevens's reading of "country" is strikingly different from the image invoked by Farraday; while "country," for Stevens, signifies a socio-political construction, held together by the "great ladies and gentlemen of the land," Farraday seems to see it as synonymous with nature. Not surprisingly, then, Stevens and Farraday construct Stevens's prospective holiday in strikingly different terms: while Stevens suggests he might visit Miss Kenton, the former housekeeper, with the aim of persuading her to return to Darlington Hall to solve some staffing problems, Farraday immediately construes the real motive for the proposed visit, and teasingly observes, "'My, my, Stevens. A lady-friend. And at your age'" (14).

Stevens's refusal to acknowledge his "natural" feelings for Miss Kenton is at least partly attributable to his code of dignity, which cannot countenance the possibility of sex, as his earlier, disastrous attempt to explain the "facts of life" to a young guest reveals. Even the suggestion of leisure implied by the very idea of a holiday is inimical to the principle of self-abnegation to which Stevens has thus far unwaveringly adhered; thus
he embarks on the journey with what he describes as "a slight sense of alarm--a sense
aggravated by the feeling that I was perhaps not on the correct road at all, but speeding
off in totally the wrong direction into a wilderness" (24). Stevens's sense of an
approaching wilderness signals his fear not only of the consequences of unleashing long
suppressed sexual feelings but also of a change that constitutes a more devastating
threat to his identity. This threat is given palpable form in a conversation Stevens has,
shortly after his departure, with a man named Harry Smith, who holds forth with great
enthusiasm on the merits of democracy.

In the course of their conversation, Smith proposes a notion of dignity which is entirely
alien to Stevens's own model of self-effacement, arguing: [End Page 794]

"there's no dignity in being a slave. That's what we fought [Hitler] for and that's what
we won. We won the right to be free citizens. And it's one of the privileges of being
born English that no matter who you are, no matter if you're rich or poor, you're born
free and you're born so that you can express your opinion freely, and vote in your
member of parliament or vote him out. That's what dignity's really about, if you'll
excuse me, sir." (186)

While Stevens's life has thus far been dictated by his role in someone else's narrative,
Harry's democratic vision invokes the possibility, indeed the urgency, of speaking for
oneself.

Stevens, however, as we already know, is rendered incapable of speaking through his
ignorance of the "language of the world." While the terms of this language are never
precisely stated, Stevens's failure to grasp them is implied through his consistent
violation of the "natural" logic of the romance plot of the novel. For Stevens's narrative
is animated, ultimately, not by the achingly restrained prose in which he recounts what
happened but by the current of desire that flows beneath it, building up against the
words a pressure of meaning whose significance is all the more palpable for never
achieving release. In other words, if Stevens's narrative reads as an elegy for a dying
social order, the tale that it finally tells is a love story, by whose inexorable logic
Stevens--and the social order he represents--are judged and found wanting. But the
magnitude of Stevens's failure is even greater than this, for he violates the terms not
only of the narrative of romance, but also of the narrative of history, whose
consummation may be read in the vision of democracy described by Harry Smith.

Indeed, it is possible to argue that, to a certain extent, the progress of love is predicated
on the progress of history. During the tenure of Lord Darlington, romance is all but
forbidden to the loyal employee since, as Stevens explains, "such liaisons [constitute] a
serious threat to the order in a house" (51). Farraday's liberality, by contrast, is a
microcosmic reflection of the global democracy hailed by Harry Smith, which permits,
and even encourages, the pursuit of individual desire.

Indeed, one of the signal characteristics of the new political order is its amplification of
individual freedom to such a degree that the [End Page 795] operation of politics is all
but elided. Accordingly, it may be argued that Stevens's (albeit misguided) political
consciousness is represented as one of the main obstacles to his romantic success.
During the period of his association with Miss Kenton at Darlington Hall, romance is
endlessly deferred, as he repeatedly rebuffs her advances with the reminder that "there
are matters of global significance taking place upstairs" (218, 219, 226). The principal effect of these rebuffs, of course, is to enhance the reader's desire that these global matters might be quickly dispensed with so that matters of great personal significance can occur—in other words, so that Stevens and Miss Kenton can consummate their relationship. Thus the goals of freedom and individual fulfillment, invoked as political no less than personal ideals, ultimately converge on a single romantic image against which the political recedes from view.

Notwithstanding Harry Smith's idealism, then, the democratic new world order associated with Farraday seems, finally, to be characterized not by universal participation in history but by the end of history as symbolized by the unlimited play (or banter) of human desire. The potentially coercive terms of this new political order are finally subordinated to and concealed within the universalist logic of a love story, resistance to which can only be construed as unworldly and finally unnatural. Thus, in the context of the overwhelming pathos of Stevens's lost romantic opportunities, it seems more than a little churlish to point out that, while his employer has changed, he remains a butler, bound to serve the interests of a new global power.

Curiously, one of most significant ways in which Stevens serves the new order is simply through playing the role of the English butler to the hilt. The value of Stevens—like that of Darlington Hall itself—is measured by Farraday according to stereotypical notions of authentic Englishness. When he is seized, momentarily, by doubt, Farraday seeks assurance from Stevens, asking him: "I mean to say, Stevens, this is a genuine grand old English house, isn't it? That's what I paid for. And you're a genuine old-fashioned English butler, not just some waiter pretending to be one. You're the real thing, aren't you? That's what I wanted, isn't that what I have?" (124). No 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 the myth as a form of cultural capital to which Stevens, as its product, does not have the same access.

The commodification of Stevens as a "genuine old-fashioned English butler" may be compared with the commodification, in different terms, of Ishiguro as a genuine new-world "international" writer. Like the narrative I have just described, the story of world literature related by Pico Iyer, which claims Ishiguro as one of its protagonists, can be read as a romance with a bit of politics thrown in for color. Or, conversely, it can be read as a narrative whose imperialist politics are mediated through the transcendent rhetoric of the love story. That writers like Ishiguro have recently gained prominence is partly due, Iyer's article suggests, to the erotics of multinational publishing. Ballantine's One World series is typical of the American publishing industry's quest for, in the words of editor Joelle Delbourgo, "works where we [can] feel a bridge between other worlds and our own, but in an idiom that is fresh and different" (qtd. in Iyer 58). Thus, the rhetoric of hybridity and polyculturality mediates a narrative of desire as obvious as that which Stevens attempts to conceal under his mask of old world dignity. What remains concealed in the story of World Fiction is the continuation, in the realm of American publishing, of a colonial narrative of desire for an exotic other to satisfy a jaded empire's craving for novelty. Thus, in Iyer's words "hot spices are entering English, and tropical birds and sorcerers" (56). More prosaically, he notes that "previously unknown. . . writers are among One World's discoveries" (58), interpolating the rhetoric of exploration so smoothly into publishing discourse that it seems almost perverse to ask "unknown to whom?"
Here the identity politics of World Fiction get a little fuzzy. The marketing success of publishers like One World depend on the continued existence of other worlds from which to constantly replenish its stock of "fresh" and "different" voices. Sharing in the celebration of cultural miscegenation, reviews of The Remains of the Day from both sides of the Atlantic tend to discuss Ishiguro primarily in racial terms, remarking with approval, or at least prurient fascination, on his successful penetration of the English psyche. A review in the Atlantic, for instance, notes, rather primly, that "unquestioning devotion to duty is hardly an unlikely theme for a Japanese novelist, but that Mr. Ishiguro should embody it in an English butler is a piquant surprise." Paul Gray [End Page 797] in Time goes farther to suggest that Ishiguro's mastery of his material is "uncanny," given that England's culture has been "notoriously impervious to outsiders and immigrants" (81). Iyer, in his review, ventures the clever, if somewhat fatuous, comment that The Remains of the Day is "a perfectly English novel that could have been written only by a Japanese" ("Waiting" 588). A muted note of objection to the general effusion is sounded in Francis King's review in The Spectator, cautioning that "it is a difficult undertaking for someone born in Nagasaki in 1960 to attempt to impersonate an English butler in 1956," and going on to point out, a little smugly, that "there are times when, inevitably and excusably, Ishiguro gets things wrong" (31).

On the whole, though, it would seem that Ishiguro has got things right, not by his conformity to, but rather by his visible difference from, the dominant construction of Britain which King reads his novel as wistfully attempting to reproduce. While he insists on the mythological status of that construction, Ishiguro also concedes its practical role in his success. "I tend to think," he acknowledges, "that if I didn't have a Japanese name and if I hadn't written books. . . set in Japan, it would have taken me years longer to get the kind of attention and sales that I got in England with my first two books" (Interview with Mason 133). He goes on to explain: "the big milestone was the Booker Prize going to Salman Rushdie in 1981 for Midnight's Children. He had previously been a completely unknown writer. That was a really symbolic moment and then everyone was suddenly looking for other Rushdies" (134-35). If Ishiguro does not explain--indeed, clearly feels he does not need to explain--in what sense he is "another Rushdie," at least a partial explanation of the significance of their affinity is contained in the "symbolic moment" of Rushdie's Booker Prize win, a moment which tends to be read as both emblem and catalyst of the happy demise of the British literary empire.

In the eleven years since Rushdie's win, Iyer points out, the Booker Prize has gone to: "two Australians, a part Maori, a South African, a woman of Polish descent, a Nigerian and an exile from Japan. Runners-up have featured such redoubtably English names as Mo and Mistry and Achebe; when a traditional English name takes the prize--A.S. Byatt, say, or Kingsley Amis--it seems almost anomalous" ("The Empire Writes Back" 54). Indeed the empire's decline can be traced [End Page 798] not only through the surnames of the prize's winners, but in the history of the prize itself. Booker McConnell, the food conglomerate which sponsors the £20,000 award, began 160 years ago in Demerara, now Guyana, where it operated sugar plantations. Forced back home after Guyana's independence, Booker is now the UK's leading food wholesaler, with franchises and joint ventures in thirty different countries. The company became involved in the literary world as a result of a tax loophole which allowed successful writers such as Agatha Christie and Ian Fleming to "invest" their royalties in large companies and thereby to avoid paying taxes (see Davies). Part of the profits thus gained were used to establish, in 1969, a prize which has come to be regarded, as Iyer
puts it, as "the closest thing in writing to the movies' Academy Award" ("The Empire Writes Back" 54). Pointing out that Booker derives no (direct) financial benefit from the prize, the chairman, Jonathan Taylor, explains that "within the company the prize is of inestimable value. It is a prize for excellence. And throughout the company the Booker Prize spreads the message of the pursuit of excellence" (qtd. in Reenen). If Taylor's pronouncement does not shed any light on the standards according to which Booker committees measure literary excellence, his words may at least be read as a reassurance to consumers that the standards of professionalism espoused in Ishiguro's novel by the American Senator, Lewis, are now being met in the British literary industry. No longer an old boys' club whose discriminatory admission policies are concealed in the rhetoric of dignity and tradition, English literature has expanded, along with Booker Inc., into the global marketplace. If some of the racial and cultural barriers of the old colonial order have been maintained, it is only so that they can be triumphantly transgressed by the liberationist forces of the new world literary order.

Rushdie's induction into the Booker Hall of Fame can be read as a symbolic instance of such a transgression. Commenting on the significance of Rushdie's winning the "Booker of Bookers" over William Golding in 1986, former judge David Holloway observes, with a slight note of regret, that "the new order must triumph over the old." Another former judge, Victoria Glendinning, confirms the role of the Booker Prize in that triumph. The award, she suggests, "transcends the London literary scene. It is important in the history of British fiction, in that it celebrates and embraces what was the shock of the new" (2). Rushdie has been thus celebrated and embraced, and if a bit of his newness has been rubbed off, there are, as Ishiguro reminds us, plenty of "other Rushdies" where he came from.

As immigrant and visible minority, not to mention victim of fundamentalist persecution, Rushdie is clearly marked as a representative of a new world order. As the progenitor of a title--"The Empire Writes Back"--which, thanks to Iyer, has come to have popular as well as academic significance, Rushdie also clearly occupies another symbolic position, as a paradigmatically "postcolonial" writer. To be defined as "another Rushdie," then, is immediately to be granted certain, albeit vaguely defined, cultural and political authority, regardless of actual affiliation or commitment. This authority is invoked to support the idea of "World Fiction" advanced in Time magazine, as well as such academic designations as the "New Internationalism," described in a recent essay by Bruce King. Focusing on Shiva Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Buchi Emecheta, Timothy Mo, and Kazuo Ishiguro (all resident in England), King suggests that "although [these writers] are concerned with cultural and racial dignity, and although at times they find themselves torn between their two cultures, they seem to criticise the Third World both as insiders and as Westerners" (209). While the pattern of binary tension set up here might work on a rhetorical level, its effectiveness is ultimately strained, for this reader anyway, by the extraordinary imaginative effort required to figure out how Ishiguro might be considered a Third World writer.

What King's argument and popular constructions of world fiction have in common is their invocation of a monolithic colonial Britain against which visions of a "noisy and polyglot and many-hued" global village have powerful graphic and, for many critics, political appeal (Iyer, "The Empire Writes Back" 54). As Frederick Buell notes in his recent book, National Culture and the New Global System, such celebratory visions of hybridity signal a significant change in the way global relationships have come to be
configured in the postcolonial world. As Buell notes (with almost unqualified approval): "Horror at impurity and sober social analysis have metamorphosed into stylistic virtuosity, riffled lists of startling examples, not of assimilation--the subjection of one culture to another--but of postmodern boundary violating and syncretistic cultural intersections. Increasingly, stylistic performance is foregrounded and enjoyed for its own sake" (5). What Buell fails to point out is the extent to which the virtuosity of such stylistic performances is predicated, not on the elimination, but on the maintenance of boundaries by whose repeated transcendence the liberatory mode is endlessly validated.

The kind of performance celebrated by Buell is finally both as aesthetically evocative, and as politically empty, as the closing scene of Merchant Ivory's adaptation of Ishiguro's novel, in which Stevens releases a dove that has become trapped inside Darlington Hall. In this scene (which does not appear in the novel), Stevens's romantic and historical failure are mitigated by what seems to be a message of hope. If there is nothing inherently political about this image, it clearly works, in this context, according to the same "language of the world" which is deployed in GQ magazine to equate abstract expressionism and baseball with democratic freedom, to provide symbolic assurance that, in the new world order, liberty will come to those who wait.

The message of Ishiguro's novel is not, of course, quite that simple. While the audience of the Merchant Ivory film clearly views the character of Stevens from an ironic distance, the narration of the novel does not permit such a comfortable separation between imperial apologist and new world critic: both are conveyed through the same voice of Stevens's first person account, a voice which ironically comments on the pathology of colonial nostalgia without ever completely disavowing it. It is perhaps through this enunciatory disjunction, this narrative ambivalence, that Ishiguro's novel can most clearly be read as a comment on the postcolonial condition.

In Homi Bhabha's often cited formulation, ambivalence is a constitutive aspect of colonial discourse: the articulation of colonial power, in its attempt to re-present the imaginary integrity of the colonial subject, ends up exposing its radical dividedness. By demonstrating that the ideal of colonial power is heterogeneous with its operation, Bhabha's theory has contributed significantly to the deconstruction of the founding principles of that ideal. At the same time, ironically, the critical acceptance of Bhabha's arguments has been accompanied by the reification of its central precepts of ambivalence and heterogeneity to the point that, rather than being understood in terms of a fundamental crisis within colonial authority--and, by extension, within postcolonial authority--they have been taken up as slogans for the new multiculturalism, symbolizing the positive diversity of what Pico Iyer giddily describes as "our increasingly small, increasingly mongrel, increasingly mobile global village" ("The Empire Writes Back" 56). Conveniently ignored in the celebration is the effective dominance of the ambivalently constituted force of capitalism, whose "increasingly mongrel, increasingly mobile" operation ensures its increasingly powerful hold over the global village.

Living in that village has some obvious benefits, of course, not least for postcolonial writers and critics. Indeed, as Arif Dirlik has pointed out, the proliferation of postcolonial criticism, which can be traced to the growing movement of Third World intellectuals into the Anglo-American academy, is directly predicated on the expansion
of a global knowledge market and the diversification of both its products and its human resource requirements. Recognition of this relationship does not logically lead to a celebration of the emancipatory splendor of globalization; nor should it mean the automatic rejection of all gestures of anticolonial resistance as contaminated at source.

Most usefully, perhaps, it illuminates a position of postcolonial contradiction which might be read as the flip side of Bhabha's colonial ambivalence. In Gayatri Spivak's words: "the impossible 'no' to a structure, which one critiques, yet inhabits intimately, is the deconstructive philosophical position, and the everyday here and now named 'post-coloniality' is a case of it" (225).

Both in its thematic concerns and in its popular reception, *The Remains of the Day* reflects the here and now of a postcoloniality which triumphantly announces that "the empire has gone" (Interview with Vorda and Herzinger 136). To take up the deconstructive imperative of Spivak's comments is to acknowledge the extent to which such postcolonial confidence is enabled by the continuation of empire in different form. It is to ask what function Merchant Ivory Syndrome, or what Meaghan Morris has described in a different context as our "obsessive resuscitation of yesterday's bogeys" (476), serves in the consolidation of new forms of dominance. Only through engaging with these awkward issues can we hope to gain a critical understanding not just of the "remains" of British hegemony, but also of the differently articulated forms of postcolonial imperialism that persist today.

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Notes

1. This paper was completed with the aid of a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

2. Indeed, one might argue that the title of the publication for which Ash is writing-- *Gentleman's Quarterly*--conveys exactly the kind of reverence for nineteenth-century British gentility that Ash is describing.


4. The resonances are implicit, since Iyer does not acknowledge the genealogy of his title: in 1982 Salman Rushdie wrote an article, entitled (playing on the title of the *Star Wars* sequel *The Empire Strikes Back*) "The Empire Writes Back With a Vengeance." Rushdie's title has subsequently become a kind of catch phrase in postcolonial literary studies, whose most familiar borrowing occurs in the Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin volume *The Empire Writes Back*, which acknowledges Rushdie as the source of its title. For a cogent critique of Iyer's article, see Brydon 108-10.
5. Reinforcing Ishiguro's assertion of the novel's subversive aim, Homi K. Bhabha cited *The Remains of the Day* in a recent conference paper on postnational configurations of culture, as a testimony to the discursive dissolution of the borders of the English nation.

6. In "Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value," Gayatri Spivak extends Tim Mitchell's characterization of colonial "Orientalism" as a vision of "the world as exhibition" into the realm of a "new orientalism," which views "the world as immigrant" (228).

7. Ishiguro's first novel, *A Pale View of the Hills*, was awarded the Winifred Holtby Prize by the Royal Society of Literature in 1982; his second novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and won the Whitbread Book of the Year award in 1986. Notwithstanding the Japanese setting of these two novels, Ishiguro ultimately rejects the label of "Japanese writer," commenting, "I feel that I'm very much of the Western tradition. And I'm quite often amused when reviewers make a lot of my being Japanese and try to mention the two or three authors they've vaguely heard of, comparing me to Mishima or something. It seems highly inappropriate" (Interview with Mason 336).

8. An early example of what is now called "vertical integration," the company also owned the ships on which the sugar was transported back to England, and shops in which the foods manufactured with it were eventually sold (van Reenen 5).

9. W. L. Webb adds that initially it was hoped "that the prize would be a way of finding and 'laying down' more of those manageable best-sellers for the future. Booker wanted prestige, but commercial advantages too" (3).

10. Ishiguro could, of course, equally be read as "another Naipaul," a writer who, as Rob Nixon has noted, has been invoked as both Third World insider and exile--and is fairly disingenuous about the privilege such labels carry. Where Ishiguro goes some way toward acknowledging his complicity with the world fiction market, Naipaul defines his own position as one of absolute exile, claiming "Because one doesn't have a side, doesn't have a country, doesn't have a community; one is entirely an individual" (Naipaul 59).

11. Not everyone regards "Third World" credentials as the most desirable; commenting on remarks Ishiguro made in his acceptance speech of the Booker Prize in support of Rushdie, Oe Kenzaburo notes: "There were many people who were moved by those remarks, including myself. We felt that this person was a genuinely European personality, that this was real European intelligence" (Ishiguro and Kenzaburo 114). Ishiguro may derive some consolation from the fact that, if he can't be English, he can at least be European.

12. While the ambivalent logic of colonial discourse (which Bhabha describes in greatest detail in "Of Mimicry and Man" and "The Other Question") informs Stevens's worldview in an indirect way, his narration is more explicitly predicated on a particular ideology of class. Being mindful of the dangers of converting the deliberate and necessary specificity of Bhabha's argument about race into an argument about class, it is possible to see the fundamental principle of ambivalence at work in Stevens's rationalization of his social identity; through playing the role of the (domestic) Other
according to the accepted script, Stevens exposes the emptiness of the ideal of "dignity" which his master supposedly embodies and which he seeks to emulate, and thus ironically enacts a kind of resistance.

**Works Cited**


Reenen, Maggie van. "What's In It For Booker?" May 5.


