

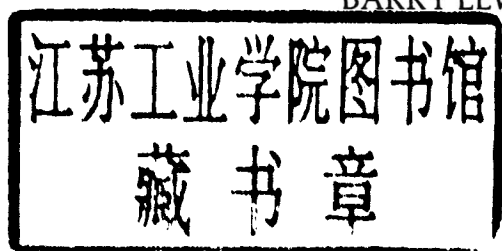
Kazuo Ishiguro

CONTEMPORARY WORLD WRITERS

BARRY LEWIS

Kazuo Ishiguro

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Kazuo Ishiguro

To the memory of my father,
Henry Lewis (1925–1996)

Series editor's foreword

Contemporary World Writers is an innovative series of authoritative introductions to a range of culturally diverse contemporary writers from outside Britain and the United States, or from 'minority' backgrounds within Britain or the United States. In addition to providing comprehensive general introductions, books in the series also argue stimulating original theses, often but not always related to contemporary debates in post-colonial studies.

The series locates individual writers within their specific cultural contexts, while recognising that such contexts are themselves invariably a complex mixture of hybridised influences. It aims to counter tendencies to appropriate the writers discussed into the canon of English or American literature or to regard them as 'other'.

Each volume includes a chronology of the writer's life, an introductory section on formative contexts and intertexts, discussion of all the writer's major works, a bibliography of primary and secondary works and an index. Issues of racial, national and cultural identity are explored, as are gender and sexuality. Books in the series also examine writers' use of genre, particularly ways in which Western genres are adapted or subverted and 'traditional' local forms are reworked in a contemporary context.

Contemporary World Writers aims to bring together the theoretical impulse which currently dominates post-colonial studies and closely argued readings of particular authors' works, and by so doing to avoid the danger of appropriating the specifics of particular texts into the hegemony of totalising theories.

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List of abbreviations

<i>AFW</i>	<i>An Artist of the Floating World</i>
<i>PVH</i>	<i>A Pale View of Hills</i>
<i>RD</i>	<i>The Remains of the Day</i>
<i>U</i>	<i>The Unconsoled</i>
<i>WWWO</i>	<i>When We Were Orphans</i>

Chronology

- 1954 Kazuo Ishiguro born (8 November) in Nagasaki, Japan. Son of Shigeo (an oceanographer) and Shizuko (maiden name, Michida).
- 1960 Family (including two sisters, Fumiko and Yoko) moves to Guildford, Surrey; father works on development of oil fields in the North Sea.
- 1960–66 Attends Stoughton Primary School.
- 1966–73 Attends Woking County Grammar School for Boys, Surrey.
- 1973 Grouse beater for Queen Mother at Balmoral Castle, Aberdeen, Scotland. Other sundry jobs.
- 1974 During 'gap year', travels in America and Canada, where he writes journal, and unsuccessfully hawks demo tapes around music companies.
- 1974–78 Attends University of Kent, Canterbury, where he graduates with a BA (Honours) in English and Philosophy.
- 1975 Suspends his studies for a year and writes fiction.
- 1976 Community worker at Renfrew Social Works Department, Renfrew, Scotland.
- 1979–80 Resettlement worker at West London Cyrenians, helping the homeless. Meets future wife, Lorna Anne MacDougal.
- 1979 Writes four short stories during the summer at a farmhouse in Cornwall.
- 1979–80 Attends University of East Anglia, where he completes an MA in Creative Writing. Tutors include Malcolm Bradbury and Angela Carter.

- 1980 Moves to a bed-sit in Cardiff, Wales. Bill Buford, editor of *Granta*, contacts him after submission of short story. 'A Strange and Sometimes Sadness' published in small journal *Bananas*.
- 1981 'A Strange and Sometimes Sadness', 'Getting Poisoned' and 'Waiting for J' published in *Introduction 7: Stories by New Writers*. Robert McCrum, editor at Faber & Faber, commissions him to write a novel. Settles in Sydenham, London, with Lorna.
- 1982 *A Pale View of Hills* published in UK and the US; becomes British citizen; included in 'Best of Young British Novelists' campaign.
- 1983 Awarded Winifred Holtby Prize from the Royal Society of Literature for *A Pale View of Hills*; 'A Family Supper' published in *Firebird 2*, edited by T. J. Binding. Included as one of twenty 'Best Young British Novelists' in Book Marketing Council campaign.
- 1984 *A Profile of Arthur J. Mason* broadcast on Channel 4 television; wins Golden Plaque for Best Short Film at Chicago Film Festival. Receives writer's bursary from the Arts Council of Great Britain.
- 1986 Publishes *An Artist of the Floating World* in UK and the US; wins Whitbread Book of the Year Award, and is shortlisted for Booker Prize. Marries Lorna Anne MacDougal (9 May). *The Gourmet* broadcast on Channel 4 television. Visits Singapore and Malaysia.
- 1987 'A Family Supper' appears in *The Penguin Book of Modern British Short Stories*, edited by Malcolm Bradbury.
- 1989 Publishes *The Remains of the Day* in UK and the US; awarded Booker Prize. Harold Pinter purchases the film rights. Returns to Japan for short visit in collaboration with the Japan Foundation.
- 1990 Awarded honorary D.Litt. by University of Kent, Canterbury. 'A Family Supper' published in *Esquire*. Guest at the Houston International Festival.
- 1992 Daughter, Naomi, born in March.
- 1993 *The Remains of the Day* feature film released by Merchant-

- Ivory Productions, starring Anthony Hopkins and Emma Thompson; film is nominated for eight Oscars. Included in second 'Best of Young British Novelists' campaign.
- 1994 Member of jury at Cannes Film Festival (other jurors include Catherine Deneuve and Clint Eastwood).
- 1995 Publishes *The Unconsoled*; wins Cheltenham Prize; is shortlisted for Booker Prize. Receives the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for services to literature; awarded Premio Scanno for literature, Italy.
- 1998 Attends State Banquet in May to mark visit of Emperor Akihito of Japan to England. Receives the Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et Lettres in France.
- 2000 Publishes *When We Were Orphans* in UK and US.

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Contexts and intertexts

'HOME' is a simple noun – with tentacles. Home is many different things to many different people. It is an origin, a base, a shelter, a returning point. It is a house, a town, a country, an ideology. You are 'at home' wherever you feel comfortable, and it is where you want to be when things go wrong. As a character says in a Robert Frost poem, 'Home is the place where, when you have to go there, / They have to take you in.'¹ Home is sweet, there is no place like it, it is where the heart is.

What is home to Kazuo Ishiguro? No doubt, in everyday terms, it is the house in London that he shares happily with his wife, Lorna Anne MacDougall, and his daughter, Naomi. But at a deeper level, down in the recesses of identity and belonging, where is his home? He was born in Nagasaki, Japan, in 1954, and came to England at the age of five with his oceanographer father, Shizuo; his mother, Shizuko Michida; and his two sisters. The move was only supposed to be for a short time, but Ishiguro has lived there ever since.

So Ishiguro's home is a halfway house, neither Japanese nor English, somewhere in-between departure and arrival, nostalgia and anticipation. He is, in short, a displaced person, one of the many in the twentieth century of exile and estrangement. Peter Berger would no doubt class him as one of those 'discontents [who] can be subsumed under the heading of "homelessness"' as the 'pluralistic structures of modern society have made the life of more and more individuals migratory, ever-changing, mobile.'² It is precisely because Ishiguro demonstrates such a 'homeless

mind' that it is therefore useful to examine his fictions through the optic of displacement, and its effect upon his themes, characters and style. There are, naturally, other ways of approaching his work, but the concepts of dislocation and homelessness and all that they imply are versatile tools for exploring the richness of Ishiguro's writings.

Homelessness appears only once as a literal, rather than as a figurative, motif in Ishiguro's work. In his play for television *The Gourmet* (1986), the central protagonist Manley Kingston – a rich food aficionado in search of the perfect meal – joins a queue of homeless people outside a church offering soup and shelter. He has not come to partake of the customary gruel doled out to the hapless down-and-outs. He is there for the altogether more exotic purpose of capturing and eating a ghost due to appear in the vestry that night. Although successful in his mission, he is violently ill the next day. As he staggers through an underpass where some other homeless people have made their cardboard abode, he is accused of having had too much to drink the night before. He rebuffs this suggestion:

Manley looks at the homeless man with disdain.

Then with dignity:

MANLEY: I was hungry. I ate. Now I am sick.³

Notice the script direction, 'with dignity'. Dignity is a keyword in Ishiguro's most famous novel, *The Remains of the Day* (1989). It is the opposite of displacement. To be dignified is to be 'at home' with oneself and one's circumstances. To have dignity is to be correctly placed *vis-à-vis* your self-demands and the expectations of others. The novel spotlights the predicament of the butler Stevens, who realises that his lifetime of stalwart service to Lord Darlington has been wasted, and has brought him little happiness. This is not the only feature of Ishiguro's other fictions to grace *The Gourmet*. The ghost motif is explored at length in *A Pale View of Hills* (1982). The connoisseurship of Manley is mirrored by the dedication of Masuji Ono and Ryder in their respective professions of painter and pianist in *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) and *The Unconsoled* (1995). And

the motif of homelessness in its wider, metaphorical aspects is sounded out through the character of Christopher Banks in *When We Were Orphans* (2000). Etsuko, Ono, Stevens, Ryder and Banks, like Manley, are no longer at home with themselves, as they strive to regain the dignity they have lost after being displaced from their natural surroundings.

This, then, will be one of the key oppositions traced in this study: the struggle between displacement and dignity. Each chapter will look at an individual novel by Ishiguro, stressing particular aspects of the work: the representation of Japan and the atomic bomb in *A Pale View of Hills*; the issue of blame in *An Artist of the Floating World*, and the book's filmic structure; the conflict between personal and national identity in *The Remains of the Day*; the surreal world of *The Unconsoled*; and the strange amalgam of reality and dream in *When We Were Orphans*. Underlying all of these books is a tug-of-war between a sense of homelessness and being 'at home'.

Ishiguro worked with the homeless for a brief spell in the 1970s, as a member of the community group the Cyrenians who provide food, accommodation and welfare advice for itinerants. His then wife-to-be, Lorna, was also active in this organisation. Perhaps there is some truth in the idea that people are attracted by occupations answering some psychological need, and that this work helped Ishiguro wrestle with his own special form of homelessness. If so, then what can be made of the fact that in the summer of 1973 Ishiguro was employed as a member of the Queen Mother's Royal grousebeating party at Balmoral Castle?⁴ It is difficult to say, other than to note that this furnished him with some direct experience of life as a retainer for the English upper classes, a subject central to *The Remains of the Day*.

It may seem incongruous for a Japanese to have such familiarity with both ends of the English social ladder. Yet Ishiguro never particularly felt himself to be Japanese, or English either for that matter:

I was very aware that I had very little knowledge of modern Japan. But I was still writing books set in Japan, or supposedly set in Japan. My very lack of authority and

lack of knowledge about Japan, I think, forced me into a position of using my imagination, and also of thinking of myself as a kind of homeless writer. I had no obvious social role, because I wasn't a very English Englishman and I wasn't a very Japanese Japanese either.

And so I had no clear role, no society or country to speak for or write about. Nobody's history seemed to be my history.⁵

So added to Ishiguro's homelessness and classlessness is his lack of a country to call his own. Nationalised as a United Kingdom citizen in 1982, he thinks of himself as British rather than English,⁶ a passport distinction increasingly uncommon among the peoples of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Interestingly he prefers to live in big cities, with their mixtures of ethnic backgrounds. He feels quite at home in London, that most cosmopolitan of cities, where he has resided since the early 1980s. It is the perfect environment for someone who straddles different cultures. In those syncretic streets and suburbs, he can blend into the background. As Kate Kellaway puts it, 'Ishiguro is a chameleon. He's not quite at home anywhere, but can seem to be at ease everywhere. His placelessness gives him freedom and he has mastered the art of projection and protective coloration.'⁷

The twentieth century was the age of both exiles and chameleons, those displaced involuntarily and those who chose to drift and adapt. Two World Wars and hundreds of minor conflicts precipitated the mass movements of entire populations against their will. Forced relocation of large ethnic communities in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo blighted the end of the century during the Balkan conflicts. Yet there was also a more positive trend encouraging placelessness. Technological advancement and new forms of transport made travel easier and faster, and accelerated a globalisation of culture. Pico Iyer believes that this led to the formation of a new breed of displaced person, one who is proud not to feel affiliated to any specific country or culture. 'We pass', Iyer writes, 'through countries as through revolving doors, impermanent residents of nowhere. Nothing is strange to

us, and nowhere is foreign'; or, to put it the opposite way, 'If all the world is alien to us, all the world is home'.⁸

Iyer nominates Ishiguro as 'a great spokesman for the privileged homeless',⁹ because of his unusual mixed background. His departure from Japan was not his decision: small children are seldom captains of their fate. But immersion in the cultures of both East and West, and his fame as an international writer, enables Ishiguro to become rooted in his rootlessness. The phrase 'privileged homeless' is thus not necessarily an oxymoron in an era of displacement. It is a label which Salman Rushdie, another spokesman for the privileged homeless, might recognise. In an open letter to Rushdie during the crisis of *The Satanic Verses* (1988), Ishiguro referred to 'this age of migration and "multi-culturalism"'.¹⁰ Indeed it is, as the Rushdie case proves. At stake throughout the affair of *The Satanic Verses*, a book deemed to be a blasphemous attack on Islam, was the clash of two incompatible world views. Muslim fundamentalists sought to maintain the purity and integrity of their culture, whilst Western liberals encouraged the melting of old nationalistic boundaries and the development of a pluralist internationalism. Rushdie and his supporters wished to construct 'a vision of home where diversity is not calumny'.¹¹ But the surge towards diversity creates in its wake, inevitably, a sense of homelessness. This, in turn, can lead to an intense desire for home and stability. As Abdul R. JanMohamed suggests, 'the notion of exile always emphasises the absence of "home", of the cultural matrix that formed the individual subject; hence, it implies an involuntary or enforced rupture between the collective subject of the original culture and the individual subject'.¹²

It is arguably precisely because of such social and cultural ruptures that each of Ishiguro's novels is 'very rooted in a particular house or a particular place'.¹³ The fictions re-enact the struggles between the individual and the collective, the vision of home and the sense of homelessness, with settings that literally house these crucial themes.

In *A Pale View of Hills* the narrator is a middle-aged Japanese woman, Etsuko. She is finding her English country house