
Kazuo Ishiguro in a Global Context

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ASHGATE

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KAZUO ISHIGURO
IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT



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Preface: Global Ishiguro

Rebecca L. Walkowitz, Rutgers University, USA

What difference does global context make to the analysis of literature's global context? At first glance, this question may seem like a tautology or one of those self-deleting enterprises: a serpent biting its tail. But in fact, thinking about the transnational history and geographic diffusion of paradigms such as *global* and *world* has become crucial to the contemporary analysis of literature. Whereas late twentieth-century and even early twenty-first-century approaches to international writing focused on novelists' multilingual or migratory beginnings, and on themes of cosmopolitanism or anti-colonialism in their works,¹ literary critics today have begun to ask, in addition, how the project of drawing out global context has been shaped and attenuated by competing experiences of the globe. Of course, it may seem odd to imagine that conflicts and divisions can inhere in terms that seem, on the face of it, all-inclusive. Yet, as many scholars now acknowledge, *the world*, as we say in English, has a history in languages and in many intellectual traditions.² It is not the same everywhere.

The turn to the history and geography of global paradigms has been spurred by the revival of 'world literature' as a category of analysis, involving both the study of literature as it has traveled through the world and the study of the relationship among (all) literatures produced in different parts of the world. To register the history of world literature, David Damrosch has called for comparative approaches. These would show how the idea of world literature has developed across different territories and along different intellectual paths. Eric Hayot has observed that extending our analysis of aesthetic traditions to include not only more literary works (beyond those produced in Europe) but also more literary concepts (beyond those produced in Europe) may change both what counts as *world* and what counts as *literature*.³ We may need to consider global context in order to know which versions of global context we are considering.

But how does this matter to the 'global context' in which these essays place Kazuo Ishiguro's work? For starters, we can observe that Ishiguro's worldliness can be understood in a variety of ways. First, it can refer to his personal biography,

¹ I do not mean to suggest that this was merely a naïve moment. I include my own book, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism beyond the Nation*, within this trend.

² Barbara Cassin argues powerfully that philosophy is made of words, not concepts that exist apart from those words. For this reason, she argues, concepts have a history in languages.

³ Eric Hayot, *On Literary Worlds*, 35–6.

his birth in Japan and his family's migration, when he was 5, to the UK, where he was educated and has continued to make his home. Second, it can refer to the topics that he takes up and develops in his fiction, both the intellectual traditions in which he participates – and on which he draws – and the themes he introduces. Among these themes, we can include many of the topics addressed by the collected essays: the idea of 'Japaneseness', Western stereotypes about 'the East', the distinctive internationalism of cities such as Vienna and Shanghai and globalization at various scales. But Ishiguro's location can also refer to the circulation and reception of his works in various languages and editions throughout the world, and that includes, too, the locations of his interpreters. It is this third version of global context that I want to address here. I've argued elsewhere that Ishiguro's texts reflect, thematically and formally, on their own global itineraries as books.⁴ For the purposes of this preface, I will consider instead how the global circulation and reception of Ishiguro's novels make a difference to the critical perspectives we encounter in this volume.

Ishiguro's critics work in many different languages, nations, regions and institutional settings. WorldCat, a Web database that provides information about books held in libraries worldwide, lists about 100 critical books about Ishiguro published in print since 1986, including five biographies and a handful of interviews. Of those, about 78 are English-language books, while 22 are works in French, German, Japanese, Italian, Finnish, Slovenian and Spanish. While some of those books address multiple writers, many are focused exclusively on Ishiguro. WorldCat also lists 45 articles in nine languages, including, beyond the languages already mentioned, Chinese, Korean, Malay and Russian. There are additionally 55 MA and PhD dissertations, in five languages, to date. These numbers are not exhaustive, and some works may be represented in multiple formats (thus increasing 'books' without increasing 'works'), but they offer a broad-brush sense of Ishiguro's global distribution and reach. Not only do his books travel throughout the world, but they also become parts of other people's books in new languages and locations.

Kazuo Ishiguro in a Global Context is the first volume of critical essays devoted to Ishiguro's writing whose own global locations can be said to match the global locations of Ishiguro's fiction, both as a matter of theme (what the books say) and as a matter of production and ongoing reception (where the books begin and where they go). The range of contributors is genuinely planetary, extending far beyond the usual transatlantic or (former) Commonwealth distribution that appears in most international anthologies focused on British writers. The importance of this range to the project of the anthology is signaled by the attribution of place as well as institution next to the name of each contributor. Along with critics from Australia,

⁴ Ishiguro's novels are published and read in multiple English-language editions (UK, US, and Canadian, in several formats each) and in many translations throughout the world. He has incorporated the global circulation of his books into his practices of composition: as he has said now many times, he writes with translation in mind. On the translation and circulation of Ishiguro's novels and for his comments on writing for translation, see Walkowitz, 'Unimaginable Largeness.'

Canada, the US and the UK, there are also those from Germany, Turkey (three of which are based in Ankara and two in Istanbul), Russia and Taiwan. Many linguistic, national and regional contexts are represented.⁵ In fact, scholars who work in territories where English is *not* the principal language outnumber, by eight to five, scholars who work in territories that are chiefly or officially Anglophone.

Kazuo Ishiguro in a Global Context thus demonstrates the far-reaching geographies – in this case, five continents – in which global approaches to Ishiguro's work are being pursued. There have been other anthologies of Ishiguro criticism, but this is the first co-edited by scholars who are located outside of Britain: Cynthia F. Wong is based in the central US and Hülya Yıldız in central Turkey. It is therefore the first volume produced by scholars located outside of Europe, if we understand Ankara (the location of Middle East Technical University) as a city anchored geographically on the Asian side of Turkey's continental divide. Until now, the Ishiguro anthologies have been largely a British affair.⁶ To be sure, this book, too, is being published in Britain and its editors have chosen to standardize punctuation, as most publishers require. The punctuation of choice is British English, so even this preface, which I wrote in US English, appears here in a kind of translation. The editors report in their introduction that some of the contributors first read Ishiguro's novels in translation, and thus one could argue that the essays have been written about many different editions as well as about many different books. However, there are only two editions cited in the bibliography: the ones published by Vintage and the ones published by Faber and Faber, based in New York and London, respectively. This is understandable, since publishers prefer to have consistency across quotations and texts, but the contraction of editions may give readers the impression that Ishiguro's work functions internationally only in English or that these essays depend for their arguments on books that function only in one language.

The global dynamics of publishing and academic exchange, which favor English as the medium of writing and English-language editions as the media of citation, can have a localizing effect on the appearance of literary criticism in print and also on our sense of that criticism's objects. Yet, this volume's expansive geography and multilingual origins make their mark in other ways – and not always in the ways you would expect. Looking again at the volume's bibliography, we can observe that the references are surprisingly Anglophone, even beyond the editions of Ishiguro's novels. One contributor cites an essay published in German; another cites an essay in Japanese. Apart from these works, we find the ABCs of European theory and experimental narrative in translation: Althusser, Bachelard, Bakhtin, Benjamin and Calvino, as well as Derrida, Deleuze, Eco, Fanon, Foucault, Freud,

⁵ Each contributor is associated with a single national location, but the essays are not reducible to those spaces, and indeed the location of each contributor is rarely one, since many of the authors hail from one nation, were educated in a second nation and have taught in several others. Some may be parts of migrant communities. Some are citizens of the same nation but work in regions that are very different linguistically, politically and socially from the regions in which their compatriots are situated.

⁶ See Groes and Matthews (2009) and Groes and Lewis (2011).

Guattari, Heidegger and so forth. This list may suggest that the intellectual ambit of the volume is rather more European than global, and to some extent this is true. But, as we know, intellectual traditions, no matter what their origins, can have unpredictable futures in the hands of new readers and new critics.

In this book, contributors working at the edges of Europe and in fact well beyond Europe are using European literary theory to brush against the grain of Anglo-American literary criticism. In the two prior anthologies, whose editors and most of whose contributors are located in the UK, literary predecessors are cited far more than Continental theorists. In the Bloomsbury edition, published in 2009, we find a few references to Barthes, Calvino and Derrida, but critics such as F.R. Leavis and Wayne Booth are invoked as guiding spirits in the essays that frame the book. Emphasizing the universal 'art of Ishiguro', editors Sebastian Groes and Sean Matthews argue that Ishiguro's writing 'reaches beyond national and linguistic boundaries. His work celebrates openness and tolerance, addressing readers of all places and times without falling into cultural relativity' (2). While the volume you are now holding also analyzes Ishiguro's literary strategies and traces them, chronologically, through his career, its essays have been grouped to emphasize the literary, political and linguistic 'borders' that Ishiguro's work both identifies and has helped to challenge. Noting that 'his readers come from all over the globe' (2), the editors of *Kazuo Ishiguro in a Global Context* encourage us to ask what difference the globe has made to reading.⁷ The global context for Ishiguro's novels, it turns out, follows – as well as precedes – their production. That context is unfinished. It is, right now, being made.

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⁷ Indeed, fascinating essays on the translation and reception of Ishiguro's novels in Japan, featured in both prior anthologies, show in dramatic ways that Ishiguro's art has operated differently in different spaces and languages.

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Cynthia F. Wong has taught Kazuo Ishiguro's novels to her students of contemporary world literature at the University of Colorado Denver for over two decades, and she thanks them for their insights into his writing and world of ideas. She thanks Kazuo Ishiguro for his inspiration; Chair Nancy Ciccone and the Department of English at UCD for travel and research support; the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at UCD for a Dissemination Grant and the Dean's Fund for Excellence Grant to deliver the keynote speech at METU; Thomas M. Long for his research assistance; and, the METU faculty, research assistants, students, and fellow Ishiguro scholars for stimulating conversations and discussions. She dedicates this book to Grace A. Crummett, who travelled with her to interview Ishiguro in London and to Ankara for the METU conference.

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Introduction: Ishiguro and His Worlds in Literature

Cynthia F. Wong and Hülya Yıldız

Early on in his writing career, during the 1980s when British literature was emphatically characterized by its multicultural attributes, Kazuo Ishiguro self-identified as a ‘writer who wants to write international novels’ but also expressed his uneasiness at being grouped together with the most gifted British novelists of his generation.¹ While he admired and praised the works of notable contemporary authors such as Ian McEwan and Salman Rushdie, Ishiguro felt that each of these distinct, talented writers deserved to articulate their unique style and visionary fiction on their own terms. Such tactful consideration of personal artistry in contrast to a communal branding among national authors only strengthened Ishiguro’s resolve to envision his novels and short stories being read by a broad world audience. Indeed, his readers come from all over the globe, they continue to grow in numbers, and they eagerly await the arrival of each of his new, uniquely perceived and persistently evolving fiction. Our volume addresses these evolutions: the author’s identity and craft, his fascinating fiction, and the far-ranging critical reception for his compelling literature.

Literary criticism of Ishiguro’s texts reflects a similar, heightened excitement about the author’s intelligent art, as evidenced at the 19th British Novelists Conference held in Ankara, Turkey in December 2011, where several of these essays were first presented by scholars from Australia, Canada, England, Hungary, Iran, Italy, Poland, Turkey, and the United States.² Many of the scholars had read Ishiguro’s writings in the original English but some also read the works in translation. The fact that such diverse scholars from all over the world homed in on the relatively slender body of work by a Japanese-born, British-affiliated fiction and screen writer provoked our interest in gathering essays for this volume that reflected the allure of Ishiguro and his works upon an international audience in the twenty-first century. The circulation of Ishiguro’s literature and the ensuing literary criticism reflect the admiration of his works by an academic community, but Ishiguro’s work is unique in that its canon also has entered the consciousness

¹ See the British Council’s website at <http://literature.britishcouncil.org/kazuo-ishiguro> for the author page with this declaration.

² Hülya Yıldız-Bağçe, Özlem Türe Abacı, Şule Akdoğan, and Şermin Sezer, eds. *Kazuo Ishiguro and His Work: Proceedings of the 19th METU British Novelists Conference*. Ankara, Turkey: Dept. of Foreign Language Education, Faculty of Education, Middle East Technical University, 2012.