REVISITING GENTLEMANLINESS IN 20TH CENTURY BRITAIN: KAZUO ISHIGURO'S *THE REMAINS OF THE DAY*[*]

KAZUO İŞİGURO'NUN GÜNDEN KALANLAR *ROMANI ÜZERİNDEN 20. YÜZYIL İNGİLTERE'SİNDE CENTİLMENLİK KAVRAMINA YENİDEN BAKIŞ*

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Abstract

New Historicism is a literary approach that came into prominence in the 1980s owing to Stephen Greenblatt's studies based on Renaissance works. Greenblatt treats a literary text as a product of the social and political setting from which it emerges. Conducting his studies primarily on Shakespeare's plays, the author illustrates how a literary text is affected by the interrelationship between history and literature. The new historicist approach shows that any literary text is shaped not only by the socio-political context of the author but is also largely determined by the critic's response to it. Accordingly, such a viewpoint affects the reader's conventional perception of time and history. The purpose of the present study is to perform a new historicist reading of Kazuo Ishiguro's The Remains of the Day (1989) with a particular focus on the representation of the concept of gentlemanliness to question the validity of its conventional perception. Given the theoretical framework, the study employs such concepts as self-fashioning, representation, persona, time, and history. The novel is based on the reminiscences of a former butler, Stevens, who has devoted his entire life to the service of an English gentleman and owner of a spectacular mansion near Oxford. Never being outside the boundaries of the estate and unaware of the rapid changes in the world, Stevens is determined to live by the conventional principles of gentlemanliness characterized by such values as dignity, loyalty, and modesty. The research argues that the perception of gentlemanliness has changed over the decades due to the subversive force of time undermining its validity in 20th-century Britain. Hence, a new historicist approach to Kazuo Ishiguro's The Remains of the Day focuses on the impact of various socio-political contexts on the conventional understanding of gentlemanliness.

Öz

Yeni Tarihselcilik, Stephen Greenblatt'ın Rönesans eserlerine dayanan çalışmaları sayesinde 1980'lerde öne çıkan edebi bir yaklaşımdır. Greenblatt, edebi bir metni, ortaya çıktığı sosyal ve politik ortamın bir ürünü olarak ele alır. Çalışmalarını özellikle Shakespeare'in oyunları üzerinde gerçekleştiren yazar, edebi bir metnin tarih ve edebiyat arasındaki ilişkiden nasıl etkilendiğini göstermektedir. Yeni tarihselci yaklaşım, herhangi bir edebi metnin yalnızca yazarın sosyo-politik bağlamıyla değil, aynı zamanda eleştirmenin ona verdiği yanıtla da büyük ölçüde belirlendiğini göstermektedir. Dolayısıyla, böyle bir bakış açısı okuyucunun geleneksel zaman ve tarih algısını etkiler. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Kazuo İşiguro'nun Günden Kalanlar (1989) adlı eserinin Yeni Tarihselcilik yaklaşımı bağlamında özellikle centilmenlik kavramının temsiline odaklanarak, kavramın geleneksel algısının geçerliliğini sorgulamaktır. Teorik çerçeve göz önüne alındığında, çalışma öz-biçimlendirme, temsil, kişilik, zaman ve tarih gibi kavramları kullanmaktadır. Roman, tüm hayatını İngiliz bir beyefendinin hizmetine ve Oxford yakınlarındaki muhteşem bir konağın sahibine adayan eski bir uşak olan Stevens'ın *anılarına dayanıyor. Mülkün sınırları dışına asla çıkmayan ve dünyadaki hızlı değişimlerden habersiz olan Stevens, haysiyet, sadakat ve alçakgönüllülük gibi değerlerle karakterize edilen geleneksel centilmenlik ilkelerine göre yaşamaya kararlıdır. Araştırma, beyefendi algısının, 20. yüzyıl İngilteresi'nde geçerliliğini baltalayan zamanın yıkıcı gücü nedeniyle yıllar içinde değiştiğini savunmaktadır. Bunun için, Kazuo İşiguro'nun Günden Kalanlar adlı eserine yönelik Yeni Tarihselci yaklaşım, çeşitli sosyo-politik bağlamların geleneksel centilmenlik anlayışı üzerindeki etkisine odaklanmaktadır.*

[1] This article is an extended version of the paper entitled "A New Historicist Reading of Gentlemanliness in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*" presented at the 14th International IDEA Conference, Studies in English, Trabzon, Turkey, 2021.

Introduction

The concept of gentlemanliness, as part of cultural identity, has always been resistant to a clear-cut definition. It is not coincidental since gentlemanliness is traditionally associated with such values as loyalty, dignity, modesty, and courtesy. This issue has also been the focus of scrutiny in English literature and widely discussed throughout the Victorian era in such novels as *North and South* (1854), *Great Expectations* (1861) and *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892). However, with the long-term effects of both World Wars and the advent of 20th century modernism, the validity of gentlemanliness and the qualities ascribed to it have been revisited and questioned. Moreover, in the works of contemporary writers, it is observed that the obsolescence of this concept has become one of the much-discussed issues.[1] In this sense, the literary works produced by the Nobel prize-winning British author Kazuo Ishiguro particularly respond to the changes that take place in British society in the 1980s, when Thatcherism became a popular term to describe the ideology of the British government under the premiership of Margaret Thatcher. Ishiguro has also contributed to the literary tendency of the time known as the social novel which addresses the common issues of society such as gender, race, and class, and their effect on the characters in novels. *The Remains of the Day* (1989) was published by the end of the Thatcher years, which was a politico-historical phase leaving behind a long-lasting legacy. This is Ishiguro's third novel, the publication of which resonated throughout the English-speaking world and "won Britain's most prestigious literary award, the Booker Prize," as the best novel written in English (Parkes, 2001, p. 12). *The Remains of the Day* is narrated by the protagonist Stevens, a butler who has devoted most of his life to his employer Lord Darlington, the owner of a big estate near Oxford, England. The events in the novel are seen through Stevens's views and experiences only. Upon Lord Darlington's death, Stevens receives a letter from a former colleague, Miss Kenton, who, as he assumes, is going through an unhappy married life. Under the pretext of her reemployment at Darlington Hall, Stevens decides to visit her. His new employer, a rich American Mr Farraday, who has taken over the estate, also advises Stevens to take a leave and go somewhere for a few days. Throughout the journey, Stevens ponders on his relationship with the people surrounding him: his deceased employer Lord Darlington, his father, Miss Kenton, and his new employer Mr

[1] For the discussion of gentlemanliness in the 20th century, see Collins (2002), Berberich (2006) and Mason (1982).

Farraday. At the end of the novel, having revisited his past life and experiences, Stevens is considering amending his attitude towards the values he has held true for many years of his professional life.

The research performs a new historicist reading of the concept of gentlemanliness in twentieth-century England as depicted in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989) and deals with the problems posed by its representation considering both the historical milieu in the novel and the time within which it was produced. The reading of the novel considers three significant factors closely interwoven with each other. The story is retold in 1956 when the Suez Crisis threatening British national identity entailed the demise of the British Empire along with its long-standing values. The main character describes the events taking place in the 1920s and 1930s Britain, the decades notable for the Great Depression and many other significant events subsequently leading to the outbreak of WW2. On the other hand, the discussion of gentlemanly values is treated in parallel with the publication date of the book coinciding with Margaret Thatcher completing ten years as Prime Minister, which made her the first British Prime Minister of the 20th century to achieve this. A new historicist reading of the novel aims at revealing the impact of the above-mentioned social, political, and cultural contexts on the perception of gentlemanly values in 20th century British society. The importance of the research lies in revisiting the conventional understanding of gentlemanliness and the attributes ascribed to it to demonstrate how they have been undermined under the effect of significant historical events.

Stephen Greenblatt characterizes New Historicism as "a practice rather than a doctrine" (1989, p. 13). Historicism, which is based on the positivist historical approach, emphasizes solely observable facts thus excluding any statement or speculation that cannot be verified. The New Historicism, on the other hand, is distinguished by its "openness to the theoretical ferment of the last few years" (p. 13). The New Historicism, otherwise known as "poetics of culture," emerged as a reaction to the conventional form of historicism committed to a protective attitude of scholarship and regarded as a "trahison des clercs" (Veeser, 1989, p. 5). The advent of the New Historicism to the academic arena challenged "this quasi-monastic order" (p. 5). This approach has opened up new prospects for the development of multidisciplinary scholarship. In this regard, Veeser believes that this critical perspective "has given scholars new opportunities to cross the boundaries separating history, anthropology, art, politics, literature, and

economics" (p. 5). The emergence of the New Historicism made ineffective "the doctrine of noninterference that forbade humanists to intrude on questions of politics, power, indeed on all matters that deeply affect people's practical lives" (p. 5).

Most of the new concepts and ideas on New Historicism have emerged owing to Stephen Greenblatt's works on Renaissance studies. In his book titled *Renaissance, Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980), Greenblatt examines the works of prominent Renaissance scholars, philosophers, and writers ranging from Thomas More, William Tyndale, and Christopher Marlowe to William Shakespeare. As a result of this seminal work, he discovers the issues that have been disregarded and unstudied in literature. He points out that in sixteenth-century England, "there were both selves and a sense that they could be fashioned" (Greenblatt, 1980, p. 1). Greenblatt explains that this kind of public image is "a sense of personal order, a characteristic mode of address to the world, a structure of bounded desires – and always some elements of deliberate shaping in the formation and expression of identity" (p. 1). He defines this product of society as a "persona," which has "less autonomy in self-fashioning in the sixteenth century than before" because "family, state, and religious institutions impose a more rigid and far-reaching discipline upon their middle-class and aristocratic subjects" (p. 1). Greenblatt's observations show that "in the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process, which "had been widespread among the elite in the classical world" (p. 2). Hence, self-fashioning as an interpretive mode "acquires a new range of meanings: it describes the practice of parents and teachers; it is linked to manners or demeanour, particularly that of the elite; it may suggest hypocrisy or deception, an adherence to the mere outward ceremony; it suggests representation of one's nature or intention in speech or actions" (p. 3). This representation also suggests that literature is an inseparable part of society within which it is shaped by its social, political, and economic factors. Based on his studies of Shakespeare's characters, Greenblatt infers that self-fashioning is the conscious process of constructing one's persona by social norms and values of the time to achieve the ideal of a praised model in society.[2]

[2] Apart from Greenblatt's employment of the idea of self-fashioning in Renaissance studies, it has also been treated in postmodern works of various authors. For a more detailed discussion of this concept, see Kuhn (2005), Desai (2001) and Bock & Borland (2011).

Gentlemanliness in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*

In *The Remains of the Day*, self-fashioning is manifested through the "elements of deliberate shaping in the formation and expression" of the main character's identity" (Greenblatt, 1980, p. 1). The entire novel is based upon the storytelling of the butler who attempts to form the impression of a persona with gentlemanly conduct. Ishiguro employs a style peculiar to the Victorian servant ironically exaggerating Stevens' status as a butler. Indeed, in 19th-century England, "the voice and manner of the butler" was not only part of the job but also "appear to have become part of the man himself" (Lethbridge, 2013, p. 57). It is observed that during the Victorian era, the model butler was the model gentleman, whose "life is given over to public service and his general demeanour both dignified and modest" (p. 57). The term gentleman itself is difficult to define since it is identified with several concepts and images simultaneously. This can be explained by the fact that the definition of gentlemanliness is primarily and mistakenly based on subjective models indicating the problem of representation. This kind of representation is directly related to class, by which the term gentleman is perceived and evaluated according to lineage, lifestyle, and wealth (Cannadine, 2000, p. 39). It is these main indicators of reputation based on status rather than any achievements or personality traits that characterize the British class system. On the other hand, according to Berberich, the idea of the gentleman encompasses many other characteristics ranging from "behaviour and morals to education, social background, the correct attire and table manners," which makes it impossible to "limit it to just one brief, defining sentence" (2007, p. 5). Berberich observes that this approach is also reflected in the presentation of the gentleman in twentieth-century literature offering that "it is up to the individual to take an abstract idea and turn it into an everyday reality" (p. 5). This kind of representation, as Greenblatt argues, is "a single, complex process of self-fashioning and, through this interpretation, [we] come closer to understanding how literary and social identities were formed in this culture" (Greenblatt, 1980, p. 6).

Since butlers are the most senior members of the staff with the virtues and values of an ideal gentleman, it is not surprising that "accounts of butlers by themselves and others" tend to show them not only as "his master's lieutenant," but also as an authorized person "bestowing his beneficent order on the household, on nature, on his country and, like ripples spreading outwards, on the subject peoples of the British Empire" (Lethbridge, 2013, p. 58). Similarly, in *The Remains of the*

Day (1989), the main character, Stevens, is depicted as a stereotypical English butler representing all the qualities and values expected of a servant. He works in a spectacular mansion near Oxford named after the owner, Darlington Hall, which is described as a traditional English mansion with large numbers of household staff. He is entrusted with all the duties and responsibilities in the estate such as arranging social occasions, greeting guests, and checking that the cooking, cleaning, security, and maintenance are all run properly. He models his life according to gentlemanly values based on loyalty, dignity and modesty and believes that by clinging to these ideals, he will live up to the name of the perfect butler. One of the remarkable modes of self-fashioning is Steven's jingoistic attitude reflected in various forms ranging from English nationalism to the sense of professional duty. When his American employer asks him how he finds the opportunity to travel his country, Stevens replies that "it has been [his] privilege to see the best of England over the years within these very [Darlington] walls" (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 6). His new employer Mr Farraday is unable to understand why "a man can't get to see around his own country" (6). As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that Stevens has hardly ever been outside the neighbourhood of Darlington Hall, let alone outside England. His knowledge of Great Britain and the world, in general, is only limited to the "breath-taking" photographs in encyclopaedias and the *National Geographic Magazine*, hence his claim that "to any objective observer," the English landscape is the most pleasurable one and it possesses a quality that the landscapes of other countries "inevitably fail to possess," which can be best defined by the term "greatness" (p. 22).

In one of his interviews, Ishiguro points out that Britain has been culturally marginalized by the rest of the world since the end of the British Empire and its writers are looking for ways to adapt to this new historical order (as cited in Parkes, 2001, p. 14). The events in *The Remains of the Day* are analysed in the light of this transitional phase, within which Ishiguro finds the issue of the representation of Englishness important for reconsideration. As an integral part of cultural identity, the idea of Englishness suggests significant implications underlying the text. According to Berberich, "the gentleman has always been considered a quintessentially English phenomenon" and as such Englishness is regarded as a complimentary attribute of gentlemanliness (2006, p. 195). Basing her studies on Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915), she explains that 20th century British novelists' preoccupation with the idea of Englishness and the English gentleman as well as their inability to define the term "gentleman" is "indicative of a changing

world where nothing seems certain anymore" (Berberich, 2006, p. 196). This also explains the significance of exploring how the notion of gentlemanliness is treated in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*. One may argue that the novel is a panoramic description of the socio-political atmosphere of Britain between the 1920s and 1950s, which makes it remarkable to examine how particular British values have been subject to changes during this time. In this respect, "Mr Stevens epitomises the ordinary witness to the great transitions in human history, along with their major political and socio-economic changes" (Calinescu, 2020, p. 54).

The Remains of the Day is narrated in 1956, the year which determined the subsequent course of Great Britain's status in international affairs. The setting of the novel against the dramatic backdrop of the Suez Crisis is one of the fundamental components of the text suggesting that the country was undergoing important historical changes. The Suez Crisis undermined Britain's internal respect and external reputation signifying the end of its position as one of the leading powers in the world. The influence of the British Empire was already declining before 1956 and the Suez Crisis only added to the weakening of power presaging its bitter end. The Prime Minister of that time Anthony Eden himself had to acknowledge that the outcome of the crisis revealed realities concerning the role of the United Kingdom in the global arena (Peden, 2012, p. 1074). In the novel, potential threats to Britain's stability, and the fear of losing control are implied through Stevens's contemplations when he tries to define "greatness" describing it as "the very lack of obvious drama or spectacle" and "the calmness of that beauty, its sense of restraint" as compared with "the sorts of sights offered in such places as Africa and America," which "strike the objective viewer as inferior on account of their unseemly demonstrativeness" (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 22).

The end of the "great" empire entailed a crisis of national identity, which explains Stevens's blind adherence to such nostalgic stereotypes as the "true gentleman" and "great butler." This is also illustrated in his conservative and reserved attitude towards his new employer Mr Farraday. Stevens finds it difficult to come to terms with the fact that traditional estates are no longer maintained but taken over by wealthy Americans. One of the modes of self-fashioning, "is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile" (Greenblatt, 1980, p. 9). In Stevens's case, "this threatening Other" is represented by the presence of alien influences in post-Imperial Britain (Greenblatt, 1980, p. 9). Hence, the sense of Englishness and ideal of gentlemanliness are threatened by foreigners'

"unfamiliarity with what [is] and what [is] not commonly done in England" (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 6).

Stevens believes that his new employer is completely ignorant of the cultural norms of British society, which is also demonstrated in his struggle to understand Mr Farraday's sense of humour. His bantering style, which stands as a leitmotif in the novel, initially appears very unusual for Stevens. He is not sure how to react to Mr Farraday's jokes whether to "laugh at them heartily" or reciprocate with his own remarks (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 14). Stevens infers that perhaps in American culture, it is considered part of good professional service that "an employee [also] provides entertaining banter" (p. 14). Nevertheless, Stevens's fear of embarrassment by an inappropriate bantering remark seems to constitute a barrier to communication with his new employer as he is unable to properly respond to Mr Farraday's bantering regarding it as "a duty [he] can [n]ever discharge with enthusiasm" (p. 14). Greenblatt describes this as "some experience of threat, some effacement or undermining, some loss of self" (Greenblatt, 1980, p. 9). Stevens considers Mr Faraday's bantering threatening to his representation of "the perfect gentleman." The sense of discomfort caused by the unfamiliar also hinders Stevens's ability to predict his employer's actions and behaviours by which he adjusts himself. Indeed, throughout his entire career, striving to achieve his ideal self, Stevens has tried to represent his profession in the best way possible.

It is noteworthy that Ishiguro's revisiting the 1920s and 1930s, commonly referred to as the Interwar period, is not coincidental. This period is notable for several social, political, and economic changes taking place in both Europe and the United States. On the one hand, the short-lived post-war economic growth of the 1920s accelerated upward mobility for the middle class making them richer; on the other, American influence in Europe, which began to be observed by the end of the nineteenth century, encroached upon all spheres of life. Its presence was so strong that "during the interwar period 'Americanization' and 'Americanism' became household terms" (Gassert, 2012, p. 183). The American influence on Britain played a significant role in the shaping of modern British society. Unsurprisingly, "Americanisation" was associated with "a shortcut for 'modernity', which can be defined as a social order that is built on mass production, mass consumption, mass culture, and mass politics" (p. 183). The introduction of "specific American products and forms of cultural expression into European contexts" undermined its deep-rooted cultural values and norms. In *The Remains of the Day*, the growing

Americanisation of British society serves as a foil for the concept of Englishness, which explains why Stevens finds it difficult to come to terms with the fact that his deceased employer's house has been taken over by an American businessman. The tendency for British businesses and properties to be purchased by American businessmen is generally interpreted as "the rise of the United States and the decline of Great Britain as the predominant economic, political and military power in the world" in the first half of the twentieth century; furthermore, "in the decade after the Great War, the United States bolstered its power at the expense of the United Kingdom by shaping international financial reconstruction on a basis more suited to American than British needs" (Costigliola, 1977, p. 911).

It is worth considering that in *The Remains of the Day*, the idealistic and traditional perceptions peculiar to Victorian England are deliberately brought up to the agenda in the light of 1980s Britain. The radical changes in the socio-political and economic spheres of the country were taking place under the umbrella of "Thatcherism." Margaret Thatcher, who was credited for coining the term, argued that she based her policies exclusively on conservative views derived from Victorian England. Initially, the term "Thatcherism" was defined as "a potent combination" of "the political backlash and the economic analysis" and propagated "quintessentially Victorian" values since "its mindset was cast in the nineteenth century" (Campbell, 2011, p. 68; Evans, 1997, p. 601). Moreover, "the word 'Victorian' was also used as a term of abuse by those, within and without the Conservative Party, who detested Thatcher and all she stood for" (Evans, 1997, p. 601). Nevertheless, "the selectivity of Thatcher's Victorian vision and its innate ambiguities cannot be overlooked; and the fact that the character of the 1980s was fundamentally different from that of Victorian times has to be remembered" (Evans, 1997, p. 602). At the heart of the difficulty, as Sutcliffe-Braithwaite argues, lies the tension between traditional, conservative values and neo-liberal free markets (2012, p. 498). On the other hand, "the New Left painted Thatcherism as an unholy alliance of neo-liberal economics with resurgent Conservative rhetoric in a power-grabbing project with hegemonic pretensions" (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2012, p. 498). Ultimately, "modern" laissez-faire economics echoing Thatcherite policies failed to justify itself. The Guardian columnist and Thatcher biographer Hugo Young wrote an article for the prime minister before he died in 2003. He calls what is left after Margaret Thatcher "a dark legacy that, like her successes, has still not disappeared behind the historical horizon" (Young, 2013). He believes that she is credited for changing "the temper of

Britain and the British" holding her accountable for "what happened at the hands of [her] indifference to sentiment and good sense in the early 1980s" (Young, 2013).

Unavoidably, Thatcher's "economic successesö" eponymously defined as "Thatcherism," have also affected the views and beliefs of 20th-century British society. In *The Remains of the Day*, Stevens, revisiting gentlemanly qualities on his journey across the country, resists recognising the simplest truth that it is not because Mr Farraday is an American gentleman that makes his ways "often very different" but that his American employer represents the characteristics of a 20th century gentleman (Ishiguro, 1990, pp. 12-13). Indeed, Thatcher's alleged Victorian vision confused British society since the prime minister's conservatism guided by pragmatic and neoliberal views gave precedence to such modern values as privatisation and individualism. The implementation of these two concepts that were foreign to the public at that time led to the losses of state-owned enterprises and assets, which, in its turn, entailed the loss of cherished traditions and values. Within this context, Stevens's fear of "being molded by forces outside [his] control" prevents him from "shaping his own identity" within "the cultural system of meanings" in line with the demands of the time "that creates specific individuals" (Greenblatt, 1980, p. 3). It is within this context that the contemplation on "what is a great butler?" reveals Stevens's contradictory views regarding the valid description of the gentleman and great butler (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 24). Stevens admits that within his profession there have been very few attempts to characterize the notion of the great butler (p. 24). The only attempt that seems close to a particular definition for him is the criteria for membership set by the Hayes Society, which requires "only the very first rank" and the attachment to "a distinguished household" (p. 24). Ishiguro ironically describes Stevens's views of the gentlemanly ideals based on the regulations of the butler club that endorses social standing as a primary criterion for "a perfect butler." This approach resonates with the idea that "in spite of the strenuous efforts of early-twentieth-century Britons to throw off the shackles of the past, the nineteenth century continued to cast a long shadow" (Carnevali et al., 2014, p. 26).

Greenblatt's concept of self-fashioning characterizes power as a control mechanism by which a persona "impose[s] a shape upon oneself" (Greenblatt, 1980, p. 1). Steven's self-fashioning based on gentlemanly qualities may be interpreted as an attempt to construct his own identity to achieve perfection in his professional career. For him, dignity, loyalty, and self-restraint are indispensable values of a

"great butler." This deliberate seasoned-with-sarcasm exaggeration serves as a foil to the political atmosphere of the 1980s agitated by Thatcher's return to Victorian values, which is aptly described as "more a matter of style than of substance" (Samuel, 1992, p. 10). Instead of the recovery of "lost stability" and revival of "old-fashioned laissez-faire," privatisation was introduced as "hard-nosed realism" (p. 10). The validity of Victorian values comes into question when Stevens's sense of professionalism clashes with his values causing an irreconcilable dilemma between his duties as a butler and a son. Undoubtedly, the reconstruction of the past demonstrates that Stevens puts his duty above his private life. He describes the conference of March 1923 held at Darling Hall as a "turning point in [his] life" and attainment of the "crucial quality of 'dignity' in the course of [his] career" when he "truly came of age as a butler" (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 52). However, remembering that big conference, he also tries to justify himself as if he has done something wrong. His defensive manner of speaking and timidity in tone permeates the narrative. On the one hand, Stevens strives to create an impression of an ideal butler; on the other, his accounts of the past events cast doubt on whether this is the story he wants to tell.

All through the conference, Stevens is struggling to maintain his professional competence instead of spending the last hours with his dying father. Miss Kenton informs him about the worsening of his father's health condition and says that he must visit him or else he "may deeply regret it later," to which Stevens coldly replies that he will come when "the gentlemen retire to the smoking room" (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 77). On his deathbed, as if to make up for missed opportunities, Stevens's father expresses his regret for not being a good father to his son. Hiding behind his stoic conduct, Stevens responds that "[he] [is] glad Father is feeling so much better" and that "[he]'d best be getting back" to work (p. 72). Stevens's stoicism is due to the fear that if he succumbs to his feelings, he may lose trust in the eyes of his employer, which may also lead to the loss of dignity in the eyes of other employees. Torn between filial and professional duties, he ultimately prefers to preserve his self-possession and put his professional duties above all else. Nevertheless, after more than thirty years, whenever he recalls that evening, Stevens feels the need to justify his choice believing that "[his] father would have wished [him] to carry on just now" (p. 80). He tries to convince himself that by acting calmly in such a predicament, he has managed to maintain his professional standing and has done it with such mastery that even his father would have been proud of him.

Monologuing to the reader, Stevens justifies his decisions by explaining that they have been prompted purely by a sense of duty and loyalty to his master. It becomes obvious from his narrative that throughout his service to Lord Darlington, Stevens has been exposed to the circumstances where his personal history is intermingled with the important historical events taking place at Darlington Hall, which corroborates Greenblatt's argument that "there is no such thing as a single 'history of the self'" (Greenblatt, 1980, p. 9).

Ishiguro's protagonist fashions himself as a loyal and dignified servant, whose preoccupation with a "prerequisite of greatness" consists in "his years of service" and "his talents to serving a great gentleman" (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 86). This conception makes Stevens blind to the truth that, ironically, his master whose integrity he has never questioned, becomes an ardent supporter of the British Union of Fascists. Stevens is yet to realize that the romantic ideals to which he remained faithful throughout his professional career could not stand the test of time and that even his lordship, whom he considered a "gentleman through and through" with a "deep sense of moral duty" has failed to stay loyal to these principles (p. 45). Lord Darlington's integrity is once again intimidated when he insists on the dismissal of two Jewish housemaids. Antisemitism in 1920s and 1930s Britain is closely associated with the policy of appeasement of the then British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. Chamberlain's "map of world power" considers that in "applied power Britain [is] still the dominant force" thereby "dismiss[ing] the United States as a factor in the solution of the problems Britain faced" (Goldstein, 1999, p. 280). As a result, acting on his behalf with his notorious Munich agreement, he makes political and territorial concessions to Germany. Subsequently, Chamberlain enters history as a politician who irreversibly damaged Britain's reputation worldwide. His appeasement policy also considerably affects the attitude of the pro-Nazi British aristocracy toward the Jews. In *The Remains of the Day*, after joining the Blackshirts, aristocratic Lord Darlington's "developing concern for the poor" and effort to "preserve justice in this world" turns to hatred and discrimination, which Stevens prefers to identify as "untypical incidents" (Ishiguro, 1990, pp. 54, 104). Nevertheless, Stevens admits that these behaviours "surprised [him] at the time" since "his lordship has never previously shown any antagonism whatsoever towards the Jewish race" (p. 105).

Stevens's constant attempts to idealize his master and justify his actions are derived from the fear of failure in achieving a state of perfection and self-fulfilment. He chooses to take refuge in Lord Darlington's shadow and fashion himself as a persona with a sense of duty and dignity. In Greenblatt's sense, this mode of self-fashioning operates as a "version of control mechanisms" of society consisting of institutions determining and shaping one's public image (Greenblatt, 1980, p. 3). However, this representation is not even valid within the compound of Darlington Hall. It appears that Lord Darlington is not a "courageous man" with "a deep sense of moral duty" as Stevens describes (Ishiguro, 1990, pp. 176, 45). Ironically, this truth is exposed by one of the closest family friends, Mr Cardinal, who tries to open Stevens's eyes to the harsh reality of the events taking place at Darlington Hall. He warns Stevens that by offering "generosity and friendship to a defeated foe," his lordship deludes himself into believing that this sincerity is mutual, whereas his lordly stance is due to his instincts simply because Lord Darlington is "a true old English gentleman" (p. 163). Nevertheless, Stevens prefers to stay ignorant of these remarks and when Mr Cardinal asks him if he realizes the significance of all the secret talks and meetings held in the house, he gives an indifferent response that "it is not [his] place to be curious about such matters" (p. 162).

Stevens tries to reassure himself and the readers that he is not embarrassed to have worked for Lord Darlington. Nevertheless, reading between the lines, it becomes obvious that he feels ashamed of being associated with his employer's crimes. One of the significant displays of self-fashioning is that it is "always, though not exclusively, in language" (Greenblatt, 1980, p. 9). Stevens's recourse to such phrases as "let me clear up," "I should say," "let me say," "as you might expect," "why should I hide it?", "all I can say is that" and "I am afraid" illustrates that, as an unreliable narrator, he undermines the conventional representation of an ideal gentleman and perfect butler (Ishiguro, 1990, pp. 6, 37, 104, 149). Throughout his narrative, Stevens is also trying to persuade himself that "there is no virtue at all in clinging as some do to tradition merely for its own sake" and that "one should not be looking back to the past so much" (pp. 8, 102). Nevertheless, by romanticizing the past, he is unable to come to terms with reality and acknowledge the consequences of his own mistakes, which distinguishes him from his employer. Unlike Lord Darlington, who openly admits to his own faults, Stevens exaggerates his employer's worth and follows him blindly. Stevens's self-confession takes place by the end of the novel when he finally realizes that while he was doing something worthwhile by serving Lord Darlington and trusting in his lordship's wisdom, he

had not been able to say that he had made his *own* mistakes, hence his question: "what dignity is there in that?" (p. 176). This epiphany serves as an eye-opening realization to which Stevens preferred to stay blind for his entire professional career. Stevens's understanding of such gentlemanly values as dignity and loyalty, meaning unconditional devotion to his lordship, failed him. In hindsight, he should have opposed the dismissal of the Jewish employees to rescue his master's endangered reputation and claim to gentlemanliness; instead, he preferred not to question his lordship's "greatness" and remain passive. Stevens's claim for self-fashioning is correlated with Greenblatt's reading of *Utopia,* whereby the author infers that Thomas More's "self-fashioning rests upon his perception of all that it excludes," "all that is known only as absence" (Greenblatt, 1980, p. 58). Likewise, Stevens's adherence to the gentlemanly principles is of no avail since they have long lost their validity. Moreover, his belief in the political influence of his lordship and assumptions that crucial political decisions are made in Darlington Hall are also mistaken since most of the assembled delegates are trying to interfere in world affairs with their outdated views being unaware of the changes taking place in the contemporary world.

The Remains of the Day (1989) is permeated with Stevens's constant reference to Miss Kenton's letter, which he initially interprets as a plea to return to Darlington Hall, later, as it turns out, expressing only "a deep nostalgia for her days at Darlington Hall" (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 35). Stevens's misinterpretation of Miss Kenton's words is based on the fear of emotional exposure, which is unacceptable to him since he is strongly convinced that he can perform his duty professionally only by repressing his emotions. According to Greenblatt, "self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile;" in Stevens's case, self-fashioning is achieved by keeping personal feelings at bay for the sake of professionalism and devotion to gentlemanly principles (Greenblatt, 1980, p. 9). This avoidance makes him feel insecure and emotionally vulnerable to the events happening in Darlington Hall, particularly concerning his relationship with Miss Kenton, whom he never reveals the true nature of his feelings. Only by the end of the novel, when Miss Kenton wonders about the kind of life she may have had with Stevens, he finally admits that "at that moment, [his] heart was breaking" (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 173).

Stevens's attempts at self-fashioning are repeatedly failing him. Apart from the personal and political perceptions of gentlemanly ideals, there is also a public perspective explored in the novel. Misguided by his own conceptions of a "great butler" and a "true gentleman," Stevens is once again exposed to the harsh reality illustrated in another incident taking place on his visit to the villages across the country. Judging by his speech, appearance and vintage car, the villagers immediately assume Stevens to be a gentleman. Their prejudiced views on gentlemanliness ironically provide a perfect foil to Stevens's shortcomings since he has adhered to the same principles and beliefs throughout his life. For Stevens, the gentleman is associated with two major qualities: clothing and character, as Smith argues, "these two criteria are, ultimately, the most crucial as the figure of gentleman/gentry rests upon a claim to social pedigree, distinction and high station where appearances and demeanour establish key performative devices to 'prove' identity claims" (2014, p. 394).

Conclusion

Obviously, Stevens's lifelong commitment to the gentlemanly ideal based on the pretentious language and manners of Victorian England does not reflect the requirements and expectations of 20th century British society. He realizes that the whole idea of self-fashioning upon which he has constructed his persona is ironically drawn to self-cancellation. Ishiguro draws special attention to the fact that in 20th century Britain there is no space for old-fashioned views and beliefs, hence the death of Lord Darlington presaging the beginning of a new era. This is also implied in Stevens's desire to change his outdated professional attitude when he decides to develop his bantering skills. Moreover, he sees bantering as part of his duty to add to his profession realizing that it is "hardly an unreasonable duty for an employer to expect a professional to perform" (Ishiguro, 1990, p. 166). The recognition of bantering as "the way many people like to proceed" and that "in bantering lies the key to human warmth" is a significant step toward Stevens's desire for change and subsequent improvement (p. 166). Referring to his future service with his new master, Stevens intends to acquire the skill of bantering with the hope that "by the time of [his] employer's return, [he] [will] be in a position to pleasantly surprise him" (p. 166).

In *The Remains of the Day* (1989), the main character, Stevens is portrayed as the last representative of his kind presaging the end of the era of the Victorian gentleman. Kazuo Ishiguro presents an ironic representation of the long-lost values

in the views and actions of the ageing servant who lags behind time and rapidly changing society. The author focuses on the conventional understanding of gentlemanliness based on the model butler of the 19th century portraying a person who, being stuck in time and shutting himself off from the outside world, is unable to move forward due to the outdated beliefs to which he has dedicated his entire professional life. Ishiguro's character is clinging to the past so tightly that he loses touch with presence missing the chance to live life to the fullest. A new historicist reading of the text makes it possible to closely examine the impact of the socio-political contexts on the perception of gentlemanliness to reveal how it has changed over the decades. This approach problematizes its conventional validity within the British culture through the main character's time travel. Stevens's physical and spiritual journey enables him to reflect on his past experiences and mistakes. It stands for self-discovery, which makes him realize that, as a subjectively perceived notion, there may be different manifestations of the gentlemanly ideal and with each added attribute, its conventional perception is prone to change. Within this context, Ishiguro underscores the significance of time as a major subversive force attacking the familiar and undermining its existence. At the end of the day, having lived a life full of irreversible mistakes, misapplied notions and missed opportunities, Ishiguro's "great butler" and "perfect gentleman" prepares himself for "the remains of the day."

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Summary

The concept of gentlemanliness has always been one of the most discussed topics in English literature. Victorian writers were particularly preoccupied with the idea of a genuine gentleman trying to define it based on various qualities ranging from nobility and good manners to integrity. However, with the advent of modernism, the validity of gentlemanliness and the values ascribed to it became debatable and problematic. This approach has also been conveyed in the works of postmodern writers among whom is Kazuo Ishiguro, the Nobel prize-winning British author who reacts to the changes in British society by revisiting certain traditional values and questioning their validity in the contemporary world.

The present paper performs a new historicist reading of gentlemanliness based on Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989). The reading of the novel is particularly focused on the problems posed by the representation of gentlemanly values in twentieth-century England considering the historical milieu of both the novel and the time when it was published. The new historicist approach aims to reveal how the changes taking place in various socio-political contexts in 20th-century Britain have had an impact on the conventional perception of gentlemanliness and the attributes ascribed to it.

New Historicism emerged as a reaction to the strict deterministic stance of historicism disallowing any kind of approach that would offer new prospects for the development of multidisciplinary scholarship. The advent of this critical approach was necessary since it "has given scholars new opportunities to cross the boundaries separating history, anthropology, art, politics, literature, and economics" (Veeser, 1989, p. 5). New Historicism made ineffective "the doctrine of noninterference" of traditional historicism that "forbade humanists to intrude on questions of politics, power" and "on all matters that deeply affect people's practical lives" (p. 5).

The study employs the concept of self-fashioning extensively discussed in Stephen Greenblatt's book titled *Renaissance, Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980). The author explains that self-fashioning dates to the sixteenth century when "there were both selves and a sense that they could be fashioned" (Greenblatt, 1980, p. 1). Greenblatt defines this kind of public image as "a sense of personal order, a characteristic mode of address to the world, a structure of bounded desires" that also involves "some elements of deliberately shaping in the formation and expression of identity" (p. 1). He infers that self-fashioning is the conscious process of constructing one's persona by social norms and values of the time to achieve the ideal of a praised model in society.

In *The Remains of the Day* (1989), self-fashioning is manifested through gentlemanly values represented by the main character, Stevens, who attempts to form the impression of an ideal persona. He is described as a stereotypical butler adopting a style peculiar to the Victorian servant working in a traditional English mansion with large numbers of household staff. His self-fashioning is expressed in his blind adherence to such values as loyalty, dignity and modesty, which, as he believes, constitute the basic qualities of gentlemanliness. Stevens even avoids performing his filial responsibilities for the sake of

maintaining his professional competence. All his life has been spent clinging to the ideals of the perfect butler. However, they prove to be false assumptions since they do not justify themselves, especially in his relationship with his deceased employer Lord Darlington. As the novel proceeds, it turns out that Lord Darlington, whom Stevens has considered "a courageous man" with "a deep sense of moral duty" is not "a true English gentleman" at all (Ishiguro, 1990, pp. 176, 45, 163). Nevertheless, instead of facing reality, Stevens prefers to stay in the shadow of his employer and fashion himself as a loyal servant of his.

A new historicist reading of the text underscores the significance of time as a major subversive force undermining the conventional perception of gentlemanliness and problematizing its validity in the contemporary world. One of the significant displays of self-fashioning is that it is "always, though not exclusively, in language", which is in line with Stevens's constant references to various sources and careful choice of words (Greenblatt, 1980, p. 9). This attitude demonstrates his insecurity and unreliability regarding his own beliefs and views. Misguided by his own conceptions of "a great butler" and "a true gentleman", Stevens ultimately realizes that the entire idea of self-fashioning upon which he has built his persona has failed to live up to the name of the perfect butler. The long-lost values represented in the views and actions of the ageing butler give way to frustrations and implied regrets.