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Refiguring National Character: The Remains of the British Estate Novel

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MfS REFIGURING NATIONAL
CHARACTER: THE REMAINS
OF THE BRITISH ESTATE NOVEL

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The simultaneity of the Nation—its contemporaneity—can only be articulated in the language of archaism, as a ghostly repetition; a gothic production of past-presentness.

—Homi Bhabha, "A Question of Survival:
Nations and Psychic States"

The lesson of the Falklands is that Britain has not changed and that this nation still has those sterling qualities which shine through our history.

—Margaret Thatcher, Speech to Conservative
Rally at Cheltenham

The State of the Estate

The decay of the English country estate in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1944) and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Remains of the Day* (1989) evokes a powerful yearning for lost national glory. *Brideshead*, in Waugh's novel,

has been requisitioned as a temporary military barracks in preparation for the war against Hitler, all but the first floor sealed off, the estate fountain fenced in and filled with the cigarette butts of soldiers. Shortly following the war, Darlington Hall, in Ishiguro's novel, has been purchased by an American, Mr. Farraday, its staff cut from eighteen to four; the house itself is empty and hardly used, no longer the gathering place of the wealthy and influential. Indeed, the diminished condition of the estate is taken to be emblematic of the nation as a whole. The casual disdain for Brideshead and the general sense of purposelessness among the soldiers under the command of Captain Charles Ryder are of a piece. Ryder finds himself lamenting: "it was not as it had been" (5). Ishiguro's Mr. Stevens, butler of Darlington Hall, finds a similarly faltering commitment on the part of his younger colleagues, who lack the dignity appropriate to their stations. The English character, like the estates that are the definitive places of England for Ryder and Stevens, has been neglected, uncultivated, and left to decay in the postwar period.

The nostalgia in *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Remains of the Day* is so intriguing because both novels invoke a tradition within the English novel that had previously degenerated into satire: the "crisis of inheritance" narrative that reads the fate of the nation through the condition of the English country estate. Even by the 1920s, the linkage between nation and estate is ridiculed by novels like Aldous Huxley's *Crome Yellow* (1921) and D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928). Waugh himself satirizes the tradition in his earlier novel, *Handful of Dust* (1934). Yet, by 1944 he would insist that the English ancestral seats were "our chief national achievement," and he mourned their decay (qtd. in Gill 211). Ishiguro, too, makes a notable, though certainly less startling, departure from his earlier work in *Remains of the Day*. His interest in Darlington Hall and its butler Mr. Stevens bears little topical similarity to his previous explorations of Japanese immigrants in postwar England in *A Pale View of Hills* and the guilt experienced by postwar Japanese in *An Artist of the Floating World*.¹ *The Remains of the Day*, like *Brideshead Revisited*, appears to harken back to the novels of Jane Austen, Henry James, and E. M. Forster with its interest in the grand country estate and questions of what constitutes English character.

My question is why two authors writing forty-five years apart and with such different social, cultural, economic, and religious backgrounds

would both feel compelled to revive a dying genre. Particularly in Ishiguro's case, it is not obvious why a Japanese immigrant born long after the apex of the country house would revisit such a quintessentially English literary form. My question assumes greater significance in light of the immense popularity enjoyed by both *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Remains of the Day*, for their continuing success implies that they respond to a national longing in postimperial Great Britain. Both novels have inspired popular film and television adaptations; *Remains of the Day* captured the prestigious Booker Prize in 1989; and historical studies of the English country house cite Waugh over contemporaries like Henry Green or Elizabeth Bowen. Indeed, according to David Littlejohn, the "now standard image of the British country house is Brideshead Castle" (3). In this essay, then, I will not only trace the mutations of the estate novel in the twentieth century with reference to two of its most significant examples, I will also explore what about this dying genre proves so attractive to authors with very different beliefs and backgrounds.

To begin to answer this essay's question, we need to recognize that the country house represents a prominent object of nostalgia in both novels and postwar British society more generally because of its long-standing associations with continuity, tradition, and Englishness.² Since the eighteenth century, Virginia C. Kenny argues, the country house represents a metaphor for a good society (9). It becomes a central icon of British heritage in the postwar era because its presence belies the cultural turbulence caused by increasing emigration from the colonies, chronic unemployment and economic depression, and the resurgence of regionalism within Scotland, Ireland, and Wales.³ The restoration effort begun in the 1970s has seen large sums of public money devoted to reversing the decades-long decline of the estates; indeed, by the time *The Remains of the Day* is published in 1989, historian David Cannadine is lamenting the "cult of the country house" in Great Britain (100). Precisely when the nation's international stature is declining, the estate is proclaimed to be "one of the greatest British contributions to European civilization" (Cornforth 1).

As Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, and Homi Bhabha have taught us, assertions about national heritage are never ideologically neutral; nationalisms forge solidarity through "invented traditions" (Hobsbawm 1) that depend upon monuments like the English estates to function as sites for commemorating the putative national past.⁴ Within

this context, we can read Waugh and Ishiguro as participating in a national debate over the perceived legacy of Great Britain. Considerable attention has been devoted to the nostalgia employed by conservative politicians such as Margaret Thatcher, whose call for a return to "Victorian values" justified an array of political policies from tightening money supply to union busting to war over the Falkland Islands; numerous studies have demonstrated how her political ideology depended upon the reformulation of history.⁵ However, literary scholars of both Waugh and Ishiguro have been at pains to deny the nostalgia in their novels. Ian Littlewood, for example, insists that Waugh's "ultimate concern" in *Brideshead Revisited* is "not to indulge nostalgia but to transcend it" (qtd. in Carens 172). Likewise, readers of Ishiguro emphasize irony rather than nostalgia in *The Remains of the Day*.⁶ This tendency to downplay nostalgia in literary texts carries over into more general studies of literature and nationalism;⁷ even Homi Bhabha's work focuses on the ways in which literature challenges the nostalgia upon which nationalism depends. For Bhabha, literature opens up a "sepulchral, 'otherness' of national identity" (91) that disrupts efforts to establish "a settled and continuous national tradition" (93).

In contrast to this tendency in criticism, I will argue that nostalgia is essential to the effort in both *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Remains of the Day* to reenvision what constitutes "genuine" Englishness. By contrasting memories of the estates in their glory with their present state of disrepair, Waugh and Ishiguro establish an "originary" set of national ideals whose betrayal is indicated by the condition of the estate. The betrayal of the nation, for both Waugh and Ishiguro, is specifically a moral failure because both authors cast national identity in ethical terms. The expression of disappointment thereby establishes an ethical critique that insists upon a return to the "true" *ethos* or spirit of nation.⁸ This *ethos*, however, is constituted in the process of remembering it. Hence, the novels intriguingly suggest that only in the midst of decline can the purportedly true ideals of Britain be recognized. Nostalgia in *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Remains of the Day* articulates a vision of nation couched in terms of restoration through imagery and language resembling that employed by British postwar politicians. Indeed, I will suggest that Waugh foreshadows the nostalgia of Prime Minister Thatcher; both ultimately depend upon constructing an essentialistic conception of national iden-

tity. In contrast, Ishiguro uses nostalgia to reject such essentialisms and to redefine key terms associated with national character: dignity and greatness. This refiguration of national character is mapped spatially as the novel ultimately associates British *ethos* with the pier at Weymouth rather than with the estate.

Fall of the House of England

At least since Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814), the English estate has been positioned both as a defining aspect of British *ethos* and as a crucial site of cultural debates about national identity.⁹ The physical structure of the estate suggests an inherited structure of society, morality, manners, and language, according to Alastair Duckworth (*Improvement* ix). The endurance of the estate creates the illusion of national continuity. And this illusion imagines that cultural changes modify the physical structure of the country house and the cultural inheritance it symbolizes without threatening key social continuity. Duckworth's analysis suggests that the estate novel tradition explores such "improvements" in order to distinguish proper and improper attitudes toward social change (ix). Proper social change, in this context, neither threatens to undo the status of the estate nor to change its essential character. The critique of the Crawfords in *Mansfield Park* comes from Austen's distrust of their attitude toward cultural heritage. The Crawfords represent improper agents of social change because of their wish to widen the gap between church and house (Duckworth 54), a connection that will also be essential to Waugh.

Hence the struggle over inheritance in later novels in this tradition, such as E. M. Forster's *Howards End*, is deeply rooted in cultural arguments about what embodies the national *ethos* and what direction the nation will take. Determining the appropriate heir of Howards End is important to its dying owner, Mrs. Wilcox, because the estate embodies the *ethos* of England: "to her it had been a spirit, for which she sought a spiritual heir," the narrator states (77). The novel imagines the conflicts between the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes over Howards End as a mini-drama of the social and ideological tensions of a national collectivity.¹⁰ Even though the novel leaves the question of the appropriate heir unsettled, it nonetheless concludes with an uneasy reconciliation between the two families. This reconciliation makes the restoration of the estate

possible, a restoration marked by the renewed fertility of the fields surrounding Howards End. And this revival is imagined to promise a more general revival of *ethos* against what Rae Harris Stoll refers to as "the dehumanizing social order" of mass culture and mass consumption (26). The house itself is cast as the site of resistance against the "craze for motion" sweeping England, a site that promises to maintain "civilization" itself (268). In the final pages of the novel, Margaret Schlegel asserts: "our house is the future as well as the past" of the nation (268).¹¹

Forster struggles to envision a cultural reconciliation simply not possible during either the wartime years that produced the sentiments of *Brideshead Revisited* or the Thatcherite years that gave us *The Remains of the Day*. Such reconciliation is possible only under conditions in which social change does not threaten to eradicate the estate space as the privileged marker of nation. Yet even within Forster this is a fragile, fleeting promise.¹² The Wilcoxes' willingness to cede their claim to Howards End suggests that for them the estate no longer signifies the *ethos* of the nation. This attitude shift foretells the decline of the estate. Helen Schlegel foresees this outcome and declares: "Life's going to be melted down, all over the world. [. . .] Howards End, Oniton, the Purbeck Downs, the Oderberge, were all survivals, and the melting-pot was being prepared for them" (268). Indeed, Forster's novel represents one of the final pre-war examples of a novel committed to imagining the destiny of the nation through the metaphor of the country house. By the time we get to D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the cultural reconciliation imagined by the estate novel is neither possible nor even desirable. World War I, changing attitudes towards modernization, economic difficulties, and the inevitability of another worldwide conflict increasingly undermine the estate as a symbol of nation. And if Waugh and Ishiguro revive the estate novel tradition, *Brideshead* and *Darlington Hall* nonetheless experience the decline foretold by Helen Schlegel. As a result, the vision of the estate as a model of society that reconciles conflicting ideals of nation into a unified spirit is rendered inescapably nostalgic.

Burning Anew among the Old Stones

Waugh counters Lawrence's formulation: if the estate is in decline, this is the fault of the nation for failing to preserve its greatest legacy. If

Britain is to have a future worth having, for Waugh, it can only come from restoring the estates and the spirit of nation they signify. No less than Lawrence, however, Waugh rejects Forster's dream of reconciliation between conflicting ideals of nation. The forces of modernization have produced a generation that is morally and culturally bankrupt, according to Waugh. This "age of Hooper," as it is referred to in *Brideshead Revisited*, has allowed the national spirit to be extinguished through neglect. Thus, a sense of disappointment becomes the dominant tone in *Brideshead Revisited*: even at the close of the novel, the estate fountain—the symbol of baptism and renewal—remains shut off and filled with the cigarette butts of soldiers listlessly waiting for the endlessly deferred struggle against Hitler's armies to begin.¹³ Witnessing this weariness and indolence among his men, Ryder laments his own lost commitment to the Army: "Here my last love died" (5). The image suggests the sloth that has come, for Waugh, to infect "our national virtues of magnanimity and good temper" (*Essays* 575).

The function of Catholicism in the novel needs to be read in the context of Waugh's search for a value system that could restore a declining nation. This reading will move us away from the tradition of reading *Brideshead Revisited* as a strictly Catholic novel; Catholicism in the novel, I want to suggest, is inseparable from Waugh's longing to restore a notion of Englishness.¹⁴ The inseparability of Englishness and Catholicism for Waugh becomes apparent in his assertions about England's past: "England was Catholic for nine hundred years, then Protestant for three hundred, then agnostic for a century. The Catholic structure still lies lightly buried beneath every phase of English life" (*Essays* 367). Catholicism is not opposed to Englishness here but central to it. Only the restoration of Catholicism can restore English heritage to the present, this passage suggests. The death of the English spirit that Waugh perceives in the military is the inevitable result of a nation that has "buried" the value system that sustained it for 900 years.¹⁵

It should come as little surprise, then, that the first scene Waugh wrote of *Brideshead Revisited* was the description of Lord Marchmain's deathbed repentance.¹⁶ If the estate itself is the physical marker of the national spirit or *ethos*, then its lord has a responsibility to be both guardian and representative of Englishness. Lord Marchmain's casual indifference to his responsibilities, his loathing of the English countryside, and his

unwillingness even to live in England demonstrate his failure to preserve the estate and national character. His ultimate return to England and penitence just prior to his death signify a longing to return to a religious tradition of his ancestors and a desire to repent from a life that neglected the religious and national ideals to which he was an heir. In this way Catholicism and Englishness become linked, and this redefines Lord Marchmain's life story so that prior events are retroactively understood to lead up to this "restored" connection to the estate and church.

The deathbed scene establishes a narrative paradigm whereby the estate *ethos* is itself revised through a process of retrospection that casts change as "restoration." For the majority of the novel, Ryder's nostalgia takes the form of a longing to return to the Brideshead associated with the drawing room: "But as the years passed I began to mourn the loss of something I had known in the drawing room of Marchmain House and once or twice since," he recalls (227). Shortly following Ryder's recollection of Lord Marchmain's affirmation of faith, however, the estate becomes associated with the chapel rather than the drawing room. Indeed, the re-opening of the chapel at the end of the novel leads Ryder to revise his earlier conclusion that the estate space and its spirit have been lost: "the place was desolate and the work all brought to nothing," as he puts it (351). Rather, Ryder perceives that the true spirit of the place lives on in its chapel. For here he witnesses "the flame which the old knights saw from their tombs, which they saw put out [...] I found it this morning, burning anew among the old stones" (351). Ryder's discovery of the chapel as the true heart of the estate allows him to merge Catholicism and Englishness; this in turn makes it possible for Ryder to recommit himself to a floundering military and to rejoin his compatriots and face the tasks at hand, even if this means working with men who share his commanding officer's contempt for Brideshead (345). Here Ryder becomes the spiritual heir of the estate, the one man to retain memories of its past.¹⁷

More than simply driving individuals like Ryder to recall the past, nostalgia is essential to *Brideshead Revisited* because the full significance of events can only be perceived retrospectively. Ryder suggests as much when he describes his own maturation: "again and again a new truth is revealed to us in whose light all our previous knowledge must be rearranged" (79). Within his own life, this becomes a gloss for understanding his changing associations with Brideshead and, by extension, England.

This conception suggests that the Brideshead associated with the drawing room and that associated with the chapel are not conflicting notions of the estate; the latter is truer, if less obvious. But this reality cannot be appreciated in the moment because only a maturity born of a sense of loss can establish the insight necessary. Hence the failure of Hooper and the "Young England" that he symbolizes. Their cultural amnesia and lack of respect for the past guarantee that they never experience the nostalgia that is the precondition of perceiving the true English *ethos*.

Intriguingly, Waugh does not conceive of a Britain that reverses the sense of decline that has defined its history, according to Andrew Gamble, for more than a century. Ryder's nostalgia engages him in a process of retrospection that depends upon decline. He cannot witness the flame burning anew until he has already concluded that the estate is in disrepair. For this initial recognition leads him to question his own associations with the estate and the centrality of the drawing room to his memories of it. His final recognition insists that the spirit of England is not limited to the physical structure of the estate; the image of the flame suggests an essential spirit that endures. Hence, Ryder can recognize the true *ethos* of England only after its apparent loss.

Notice that nostalgia does not function here primarily to lament past grandeur; rather, it allows Waugh to transform what memories the estate evokes. Nostalgia, I have been arguing, enables the novel to shift the primary associations of Brideshead from the drawing room to the chapel. This shift can occur only retrospectively and in the face of loss; as long as the estate retains its status and prestige, it is inescapably associated with aristocracy, leisure, and high culture. Against a backdrop of wartime rationing and privation, these associations limit the ability of the estate to function as a representative *national* space. After its transformation into a military barracks, however, Brideshead becomes emblematic of a national commitment to the war effort and the sacrifice across all social classes that this commitment necessitates. Putting this in more theoretical terms, nostalgia in *Brideshead Revisited* resolves tensions between conflicting images of the estate (and the national traditions that they evoke) through an act of narrative synecdoche: one part is cast as the remnant of the estate in its totality. By marking the chapel as this final fragment untouched by the "age of Hooper," Waugh claims the heritage of the estate in its entirety and subordinates aspects that

do not correspond to his vision of Catholic Englishness. Hence, Ryder mourns the loss of the drawing room and its aristocratic cultural ideals *in order* to establish the primacy of the spirit associated with the chapel. His lament that "all is vanity" is immediately corrected, and Ryder quickly concludes that the flame that burns within the chapel "could not have been lit but for the builders" (351). Even if the estate as a physical structure lies in ruin, the novel implies, Ryder nonetheless "inherits" its spirit and retains it within his memory.

This analysis provides an interesting counterpoint to David Rothstein's argument that collective memory in *Brideshead Revisited* is maintained by individuals living in a society unsympathetic to and uninterested in the past (329). The novel also assures this situation by reading the past of the nation with respect to the decayed estate. For, among the soldiers camped at Brideshead, only Ryder has memories of it. This not only makes Ryder the sole and uncontestable spiritual heir to the estate but also to the past itself because, as we noted, Waugh casts the national past through the story of the estate. Hence the estate provides a unified vision of nation in ways it did not for Forster; where the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes each represented a long tradition of how the nation might be defined, no tradition exists within *Brideshead Revisited* to stand as a legitimate contrast to the one embodied by Ryder. Retrospection in *Brideshead Revisited* allows Waugh to depict the crisis of the estate as the culmination of a struggle to preserve an essential national spirit precisely because he occludes questions of class, race, and the Protestant tradition. Rather than serving as the space for contesting visions of nation to be played out, the estate, in Waugh, stands as the last bastion against "false" visions of England.

Waugh's efforts to "restore" the true spirit of England anticipate the nostalgic politics of postwar Britain. Repeatedly, British politicians have invoked a nostalgic vision of national unity in order to establish a moral ground for their policies. Prime Minister Eden justified his efforts to retain the Suez Canal by casting Nasser alternately as the reincarnation of Hitler and Mussolini. Enoch Powell sought to build a politics of racial hatred through claiming a putative unified national spirit that had become polluted. And, as I noted earlier, Margaret Thatcher invoked a moral framework of "Victorian values" in order to justify a host of economic, social, and military policies. Indeed, in the aftermath of the Falklands

Islands conflict, Thatcher's imagery hearkens back to Waugh's vision of the flame "burning anew among the old stones": "[Britain has] rekindled that spirit which has fired her for generations past and which today has begun to burn as brightly as before" (qtd. in Evans 96). Like Waugh, Thatcher invokes a national spirit that burns again in the face of adversity. Indeed, the restoration of *ethos* only becomes possible through the very obvious and inescapable reality of the decay of the Empire.¹⁸ As Patrick Brantlinger suggests, the nostalgic politics of Thatcherism depended upon a myth of national origins constituted in the purported struggle to "reclaim" Britishness (242). The apparent failures of Britain and the British only clarify that the nation possesses an essential and unchanging character, which Thatcher claimed to have personally renewed (Morgan 489).

It would be a mistake, however, to cast Waugh simply as a "fore-runner" to Thatcherism. The nostalgic essentialism of the latter represented a ploy calculated to draw electoral support. In contrast, Waugh accepted and even embraced the inevitable unpopularity of his vision of Catholic Englishness. The irony is that *Brideshead Revisited* nonetheless gained immense international popularity because it answered a nostalgic longing among British and American audiences for a "simpler" time; Waugh's effort to articulate a viable essentialistic national identity that established Englishness in moral terms went largely unnoticed. Similarly, the tendency in criticism to read *Brideshead Revisited* as a Catholic novel has not drawn sufficient attention to his efforts to refigure national character, in spite of the fact that the image of the flame "burning anew" in the final pages of the novel is as much nationalist as religious. Indeed, the novel bends Catholicism to the needs of the nation. The flame, Ryder tells us, was first witnessed by the Crusaders and now it "burns again for other soldiers" (351). The choice of imagery here is telling—Christianity offers a host of images that could have justified Ryder's repudiation of the Army. But he chooses to link the flame to a Christian image explicitly associated with political and military commitment—and by casting himself as a latter-day crusader, Ryder recommitments himself to a nation at war.

That's What We Fought Hitler For

If Ishiguro also revives the estate novel tradition, he rejects the essentialism that for Waugh defines national identity. As we saw with

Brideshead Revisited, *The Remains of the Day* links the crises of estate and nation: the sale of Darlington Hall to an American comes at the moment of Great Britain's eclipse as a world power.¹⁹ The decline of the estate in *The Remains of the Day* mirrors the decay of the British Empire—at a time when ever larger sections of Darlington Hall are being closed off and dust-sheeted, Great Britain finds itself shedding its colonies. Stevens undertakes an expedition to the West Country in hopes of enticing the former housekeeper, Miss Kenton, to return to Darlington Hall just months before Great Britain embarks upon a disastrous military expedition to reclaim the Suez Canal. And like Ryder before him, Stevens experiences a profound disappointment with the condition of the estate and his countrymen, a disappointment that initiates a series of nostalgic reflections on individual ethics that ultimately revises national ideals. Ishiguro's novel differs from Waugh's, however, in a fundamental way: the restoration of the "original" promise of a national *ethos* is not found in the return to the English estate. Whereas Ryder ultimately returns both physically and mentally to the estate, Stevens stands at the pier at Weymouth at the end of his narrative quest.

The shift in physical space from estate to the pier, I will ultimately suggest, is matched by a corresponding shift in the moral order of the novel. This shift is necessitated by Ishiguro's distrust of the nostalgia that Waugh endorses and which dominates the postwar political scene. In an interview with Allan Vorda and Kim Herzinger, Ishiguro notes that he writes against the "enormous nostalgia industry" going on in Britain (139). While much of it is "harmless," nostalgia has also been used as a "political tool," according to Ishiguro. He notes: "This [nostalgia] can be brought out by the left or right, but usually it is the political right who say England was this beautiful place before the trade unions tried to make it more egalitarian or before the immigrants started to come or before the promiscuous age of the '60s came and ruined everything" (139). Implicit in his statement is a recognition that the myth of England was invoked to justify the Falklands Islands conflict, union busting, and immigration quotas during the years leading up to the publication of *The Remains of the Day*.²⁰ Particularly during her 1979 campaign, Margaret Thatcher invoked imperialistic nostalgia and the subliminal racism that it implies, historian Joel Krieger suggests (77–78). Her evocations of national "greatness"—the very term that Ishiguro makes central to *The Remains of the Day*—represented a tacit but widely recognized code for white England.

Hence, the novel's formulation of national identity based upon the category of "greatness" is both nostalgic and ironic. In a speech resonating with Thatcher's own rhetoric, Stevens links landscape to national character early on in the novel: "the English landscape at its finest," he declares, "possesses a quality that the landscapes of other nations, however more superficially dramatic, inevitably fail to possess. [...]his quality is probably best summed up by the term 'greatness'" (28).²¹ The greatness of the land and its people are of one kind, even if such landscapes are becoming increasingly rare. Thus Stevens declares his merit in speaking of "Great Britain" (28). However, greatness is revealed to be an empty term when Stevens attempts to characterize it. He suggests that "it is the very *lack* of obvious drama or spectacle that sets the beauty of our land apart" (28). In an unconsciously ironic deflation of Thatcherite rhetoric, Stevens defines greatness as a purely negative quality, a "lack."

This definition of greatness undermines a notion that national identity can be cast in essentialistic terms. By refusing to take for granted the basis of national identity, Ishiguro foregrounds the fact that the significance of greatness is constituted by those who employ the term; the national spirit or *ethos* does not preexist the attempts to formulate or define it. Stevens's inability to formulate a positive definition of nation suggests that the essentialisms of Waugh and Thatcher depend upon a tacit understanding that race, class, and religion define a set of unchanging characteristics. Much as Slavoj Žižek has suggested in his own analysis of Thatcherite Britain, *The Remains of the Day* suggests that "Englishness" is an empty signifier deployed to legitimate particular ideological positions.²² Precisely because the term does not signify anything specific, it can be used to justify any number of unrelated goals, much as Thatcher used the term to defend her domestic and foreign policy.

In the context of the novel, greatness is understood to reproduce and enforce class hierarchies. The notion of greatness, of course, does not have consistent characteristics across social, sexual, and ethnic lines. Stevens's aspirations for greatness foreground the ways that national character is construed vis-à-vis class position, for he does not ask what constitutes a "great" Englishman but "what is a 'great' butler?" (29) Social position determines for Stevens the ways in which he can be "great." He takes for granted that the call to greatness makes very different demands upon Lord Darlington and himself. Stevens's own definition of

greatness endorses class stratification. From the outset, he defines moral virtue in terms of inhabiting one's social role successfully—the primary duty of the average citizen is to serve gentlemen who are "furthering the progress of humanity" (114). In other words, virtue comes from serving the virtuous. This vision, of course, depends upon the ethical expertise of the "great gentlemen," creating a social hierarchy of experts and nonexperts, where the latter are understood to be dependent upon the former for ethical insight. The failure of experts, then, necessarily leads to the failure of their servants, and the shame of Lord Darlington's activities on behalf of the Third Reich haunts Stevens years after his employer's death. But Stevens insists upon the ethical expertise of great men and the inadequacy of judgment on the part of "normal" citizens like himself and the implied reader: "One is simply accepting an inescapable truth: that the likes of you and I will never be in a position to comprehend the great affairs of today's world, and our best course will always be to put our trust in an employer we judge to be wise and honorable, and to devote our energies to the task of serving him to the best of our ability" (201). The *ethos* embodied by the estate presupposes a hierarchy in which only one individual, the lord or spiritual heir (in the case of Ryder), is capable of ethical judgment. However, the ethical failures of the experts suggest that Stevens's plea of ignorance conceals a desire to exonerate himself retroactively of his own culpability. Hence, Stevens can carry out Lord Darlington's wish to fire his Jewish employees without perceiving himself to be performing a racist action: "There are many things you and I are simply not in a position to understand," Stevens rationalizes to Miss Kenton, "concerning, say, the nature of Jewry. Whereas his lordship, I might venture, is somewhat better placed to judge what is for the best" (149). Linking expertise and ethics frees Stevens from having to assume responsibility for his own actions.

The sense that the legitimate representative of the estate possesses a special ethical expertise lies at the heart of the British estate novel. In *Brideshead Revisited*, for example, the burden to restore *ethos* falls upon Ryder's shoulders exclusively. Although the "flame" witnessed by Ryder in the chapel represents the spirit of the nation, his moral quest is independent of the soldiers under his command. He tells them nothing about the history of Brideshead and reveals only to Corporal Hooper that he had stayed there previously. To the extent that the novel

envisions a community that takes Brideshead as the embodiment of the English *ethos*, it is defined exclusively by the unitary prophetic voice of Ryder. Difference or dissent from the representative figure results from a poverty of vision. Lord Darlington, in *The Remains of the Day*, echoes these same sentiments. He claims to speak on behalf of the nation, "We English" (87), and even claims to know (better than the other "We English") what is best for it: "Democracy is something for a bygone era. [. . .] The few people *qualified to know* what's what are talked to a standstill by ignorant people all around them" (198; emphasis added). For Lord Darlington, those who lack expertise, those not "qualified to know," hinder ethics. Both Lord Darlington and Ryder endorse ethical positions that reinforce class hierarchies in an age when they are threatening to collapse. Both men claim to possess ethical expertise—an expertise that has no obvious mechanism for acquisition by the working class. Thus, ethics becomes the final ground from which the privileged lay claim to their "entitlement" and assert their right to govern the nation.

The Remains of the Day, however, challenges the viability of such claims to ethical expertise. Lord Darlington, for all his worldliness, remains blind to his promotion of the totalitarian regime in Nazi Germany. Mr. Lewis, senator from Pennsylvania, fails to provide a viable alternative vision, although he has the courage to challenge Lord Darlington publicly. Lewis's own bungled and heavy-handed attempts to disrupt Lord Darlington's conference, however, undermine his own claims to expertise. Expertise proves disappointing on more mundane levels as well in the novel. Stevens's aging father, whom the son holds to be a paragon of a "great" butler, increasingly fails to perform his duties to the standards of perfection to which he once aspired. Likewise, the definition of a "great butler" put forward by the Hayes Society (a society that claims to admit butlers of "only the very first rank") does not establish clear criteria but only vague principles. Even the guidebook that Stevens intends to follow on his trip to visit Mrs. Benn (the former Miss Kenton) proves disappointing. The most beautiful and moving sites that Stevens comes across are those pointed out by locals, not by experts.

Stevens's deference to and ultimate disappointment with Lord Darlington reflects an attitude toward the English *ethos* as embodied by the estate. The blind presumption of expertise by men like Lord Darlington led them to tolerate and even aid the Nazi regime in Germany. Stevens,

like many of his countrymen, loyally served the "great gentlemen" of the nation, confident that their service and their trust were being put to good ends. However, the absolute disregard for the majority of the British population demonstrated by Lord Darlington and his peers suggests that this trust was misplaced. Darlington remains from beginning to end aloof, isolated, and even parochial. He believes that occupying the representative space of *ethos*, the estate, grants him not only the right to represent the entire nation but also an inherent knowledge about the concerns of its people. Such disregard is not exclusive to Lord Darlington but continues to be the predominant attitude of the postwar British government. While Stevens undertakes his journey to visit Mrs. Benn (formerly Miss Kenton), the government under Prime Minister Eden is leading the nation toward a conflict over Suez without consulting the general population or even the majority of the parliament. In the name of protecting a colonial empire, upon which the estate depends for economic support, the government disregards the desires of its own populace.²³

The movement away from the estate to the space of the pier in the novel, then, suggests an attempt on Ishiguro's part to relocate the *ethos* of England and to challenge the primacy of the estate as its representation. As Stevens progresses toward the pier at Weymouth, he finds himself increasingly revising his vision of the past and particularly his blind faith in the moral authority of the "great gentleman." His physical movement away from the estate mirrors the novel's move away from an "ethics of expertise" exemplified by Lord Darlington.

The revision of *ethos* depends upon the narration of personal disappointment much as it does in the earlier estate novels we have examined, for the betrayal of trust drives Stevens to question ethical identity and thereby national identity. Initially, these revisions concern his father as a role model. Stevens likes to repeat a story that his father, himself a lifelong butler, was also fond of repeating. The story concerns a butler who remained unperturbed in his role when a tiger entered the dining room. It is important not for the truth of actions related but for its ethics, "what it reveals concerning my father's ideals" (37). In fact, the story concretely embodies virtues that Stevens's father strives for but fails to attain, and he tells the story in order that others might recognize what he hopes to become.

The effort by Stevens's father to convey desired virtues in narrative points to the novel's shift away from ethical principles based upon expertise to a notion that they are a product of conversation. The absence of an essentialized ethical foundation or national character denies the basis of expertise—principles, such as national character, are *constituted* not given. Hence a story such as the one that Stevens's father tells acts as a proposition regarding the defining terms of moral and national character, a proposition that is subject to scrutiny, debate, and revision. In this sense, storytelling opens up the conversation about Englishness, freeing it from the provenance of "experts." Without abandoning the terms "greatness" and "dignity," Ishiguro nonetheless shifts their significance: they become thick ethical concepts that provide a common vocabulary for debating and envisioning ethical action.²⁴ They remain crucial to a conception of *ethos* because they provide a basic vocabulary for conversations about ethics. Thus, as Stevens revises his understanding of greatness and dignity, his vision of ethical duties changes. He gains ethical insight by retelling the story his father told him so many times because it forces him to cast his story with an audience in mind and to anticipate their questions.²⁵ In fact, only after he retells the story does he recognize that his father tells it in order to represent the character he longs to possess. The nostalgia for ideal butlers felt by both Stevens and his father represents neither an unguarded praise of the past nor an unqualified sense of present decline; it seeks to project into the past particular characteristics that are longed for in the present. To say they once existed suggests that they could exist again, perhaps in an even better form. By retelling the story, Stevens learns to praise the good qualities of his father and yet distinguish himself and the ideals of his generation from those of his father, something he could not do while he understood ethics in terms of expertise. Stevens's story opens a conversation in which he redefines the role inhabited by his father and himself.

By opening a conversation, however, Stevens unwittingly destabilizes his own claims to expertise. As his journey progresses, Stevens's narrative recalls not only his own vision but that of the deceived working class. Running out of gas during his road trip, he is forced to spend the night in a small rural village where, although he is mistaken for a wealthy gentleman, his own definitions of *ethos* are challenged by the local activist, Harry Smith, who believes that dignity is "something every

man and women in this country can strive for and get" (186). For Smith, dignity comes from service, and his village, he points out, gave more than their share to the war effort. By right of birth each English man and woman can claim dignity, for all alike fought for their country: "That's what we fought Hitler for," he says. In making this assertion, Smith argues for a different understanding of the nation itself, not only his own community. He lays claim to the legacy of *ethos* on behalf of all English, although his notion of freedom does not extend to those living in the colonies.²⁶

The moral force of Harry Smith's claim for "universal" dignity is based upon the sacrifices made by the working class in the name of defending the nation. Men and women who never experienced the privileges of the estate life were called upon to defend England against Hitler's armies. To claim subsequently some share in the privilege enjoyed by men like Lord Darlington asserts that service represents the original spirit of *ethos* more than the material trappings of its representative space, the estate. By accepting the call to fight against Hitler, Smith declares, the working class defends a dignity that they were never offered.

This challenge to the fundamental assumptions and claims of the estate can only come from *outside* of it because the social space of the estate itself does not permit such challenges to class hierarchy. Within Darlington Hall, we see all manners of requests, demands, and inquiries made, but little conversation. The few genuine moments of conversation are quickly interrupted by the social pressures and expectations everyone feels within the house—pressures that even Lord Darlington's godson feels whenever he comes. And Miss Kenton's protests operate within the social hierarchy without ever threatening it. She questions the butler Stevens, never Lord Darlington. Hence conversation itself is structured and delimited so that it challenges neither the authority of nor the terms associated with *ethos*. It is only when Stevens steps outside of the estate space that his foundational premises are questioned and his own actions made to appear suspect.

Stevens does not return from his nostalgic quest as the spiritual heir of *ethos*, as Ryder does. *The Remains of the Day* refuses to declare national character as the special provenance of a prophetic figure or expert. Rather, it is the product of an ongoing conversation. And despite his unwillingness to heed the voices of working-class people, Stevens

finds that his conversations with them alter his experience and understanding.²⁷ His recognition that he has ignored a "whole dimension to the question" of dignity represents only one moment of insight resulting from conversation with real and imagined others (116). These conversations lead Stevens to reinterpret the past, to recognize that Lord Darlington has no inherent claim to dignity or expertise, and to recognize the complicity in his lifelong silence concerning Darlington's progression toward Nazism. Nostalgia guides Stevens to redefine his ethical concepts, for the act of concretely representing these concepts through stories begins a communicative circuit with an imagined audience that resists foreclosure by the teller. Stevens begins a story in which his own dignity is implicitly guaranteed but nonetheless finally must confront his own moral failure.²⁸ He fails to live up to his own ideal of dignity and greatness because he has chosen not to choose, relying entirely upon Lord Darlington's "expertise." Stevens thereby fails to defend *ethos*, and if he continues to occupy the estate of England, it will be an empty and haunting place that has lost its definitive character: "what dignity is there in that?" he laments (243).

I am not suggesting that Ishiguro's work represents an unqualified endorsement of a national character produced by unending conversation. Ishiguro recognizes that conversations often reproduce hierarchies of power—the bantering that Stevens comes to admire in Mr. Farraday and the people at the pier at Weymouth is not a wholly innocent example of open interaction. As Susie O'Brien points out, bantering is subject to rules that frequently conceal particular relations of power (793). And if the novel wrestles with conflicting notions of dignity, the centrality of the concept to a British *ethos* is never disputed. Even Harry Smith does not offer a vision to replace the estate *ethos*. For better or for worse, he is enamored of it himself. However, he does demand a notion of Englishness that accommodates a wider class spectrum: individuals outside of the estate have a legitimate, if not privileged, claim to national character because they have acted ethically. Implicitly, Smith's demand for a more inclusive *ethos* envisions a future that would have a place for difference and marginality in ways excluded by earlier estate novels like *Brideshead Revisited* and by Smith himself, who remains blind to his own racism toward colonized subjects. Within the novel, such blindness is only ever revealed and challenged through conversation, and the pier

becomes the space most associated with the open interactions necessary for genuine conversation. Ending the novel with Stevens residing at the pier recognizes the need for and inevitability of a shift in representative national spaces and welcomes it, even if Stevens himself will probably return to the emptiness of Darlington Hall.

If postwar British novelists such as Ishiguro have been critical of the nationalism that culminated in the Thatcher years, many have been unwilling to abandon the concept of a British character altogether. It is certainly true that nostalgic appeals to a concept of nation have been met with suspicion after Nazism. Despite misgivings about many of its manifestations, however, the notion of a national character maintains a powerful appeal. Even in the work of an immigrant writer like Ishiguro, the examination of thick ethical concepts like "loyalty" and "dignity" is not independent of conceptions of a national character.²⁹ For both Ishiguro and Waugh, the wounds of national loss provide the means to imagine not the types of political agency sought by nationalism but an ethical character. These moral explorations are central to *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Remains of the Day*. The linking of ethical and national character stems from the fact that the nation has become one of the central grounds for envisioning moral duties. In a certain sense, ethics and morals can no longer be thought of except in relationship to some concept of nation. Nationalisms depend upon the ability to merge nation and *ethos* in the collective imaginations of their putative communities; thus national character and ethics have become intimately linked in modernity. This remains true even if we are moving toward a postnational era, a period defined by what Tom Nairn refers to as the "break-up of Britain."

In terms of his ethical vision, Ishiguro appeals to a national character although it is defined in opposition to the Englishness that embodied the Empire. The image of people collected together on the pier waiting for the lights to come on represents an imagined national community that preserves the incompatibilities and conflicts that are effaced or willfully forgotten in nationalistic narratives. This Britain might accommodate those who, like Ishiguro, sense themselves outside history: "Nobody's history seemed to be my history," he notes in an interview ("Wave Patterns" 83). The reconfiguration of British identity is mapped out in spatial terms: the final pages concern not the English estate but the pier.

Implicitly, Ishiguro suggests that if Britain is to have a future it must embrace what it meets on the pier—the old English estate is no longer sustainable in elitist isolation. Perhaps this vision lacks grandeur but offers some future for a nation preoccupied with its own recent decline and concerned for what might constitute its own "remains of the day."

Notes

An earlier version of this paper was presented at a panel entitled "Engaging Ishiguro" at the 1997 meeting of the Midwest Modern Language Association. I would like to thank the members of the panel and the audience, particularly Brian Shaffer and Jo Ellyn Clarey, for their suggestions. I would also like to thank Tobin Siebers, Simon Gikandi, Betty Louise Bell, Cynthia Petrites, and James Lang for their helpful comments on previous versions of this essay. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the anonymous referee for his/her thoughtful suggestions.

1. If *Remains of the Day* bears little topical similarity to Ishiguro's previous novels, it does bear a great deal of thematic similarity. Ishiguro's first three novels share an interest in unreliable narration, memory, and characters who are unable either to forget the past or to confront their guilt for past actions.
2. The middle-class longing for the grand estates is perhaps best captured by E. M. Forster. "The class which strangled the aristocracy [...] has been haunted ever since by the ghost of its victim," he writes, "It has come into power consequent on the Industrial Revolution and Reform Bills and the Death Duties. But it has never been able to build itself an appropriate home, and when it asserts that an Englishman's home is his castle, it reveals the precise nature of its failure. We who belong to it still copy the past. [...] Our minds still hanker after the feudal stronghold which we condemned as uninhabitable" ("Mrs. Miniver" 299).
3. For an excellent analysis of the heritage industry in postwar Britain, see David Lowenthal's *Possessed by the Past*. Two other edited collections, Michael Hunter's *Preserving the Past* and John Corner and Sylvia Harvey's *Enterprise and Heritage*, are also very useful.
4. I take the phrase "invented traditions" from Eric Hobsbawm; for Hobsbawm, nineteenth-century European nationalism was so unprecedented "that even historical continuity had to be invented" (7). While Hobsbawm does not directly treat the English estate in this context, he does analyze the

efforts by nationalist movements to restore architectural sites. One of the first examples of an invented tradition he explores is the rebuilding of the British Parliament chamber (1–2).

5. For an excellent synthesis of Thatcherism and its efforts to reformulate the past, see Peter Clarke's *A Question of Leadership* 291–324 and *Hope and Glory* 367–79. See also Childs; Evans; Krieger; Morgan.
6. Mike Petry, in particular, finds irony to be a primary trait of Ishiguro's work, although most studies of Ishiguro invoke the notion (102). Brian Shaffer argues that we understand "representations of oppression masquerading as professionalism" in *The Remains of the Day* through Stevens's ironic narrative (87). And the sense that Ishiguro's work subverts dominant fictional modes or the "coercive terms" underlying the supposedly benevolent paternalism of colonial Britain depends upon attuning ourselves to Ishiguro's irony (O'Brien 789; see also Rushdie 244). Even readings that focus on Ishiguro's East Asian influences perceive that his literary contribution depends upon an ironic mode of narration; John Rothfork's argument, for example, asserts that Ishiguro provides a Buddhist critique of Confucian ethics through the use of what he calls "Zen comedy" (82). And while I follow this assessment that irony plays a role in Ishiguro's writing, I am suggesting that irony and nostalgia are not opposed but inseparable in *The Remains of the Day*.
7. Higdon's well-known study of contemporary British literature exemplifies the critical trend that rejects the presence of nostalgia in the work of contemporary literary authors. Higdon argues that these authors reject nostalgia rather than seek escapism (20). My own analysis differs from Higdon's in that I read nostalgia as central to Waugh's and Ishiguro's efforts to imagine Britain rather than as a trait associated with escapism.
8. I use the term *ethos* to convey the putative spirit or character associated with a particular place. The linkage between place and character can be traced back to Homer's *Iliad*, where the term *ethea* refers to the beloved habitats of animals. Charles Chamberlain's excellent article "From 'Haunts' to 'Character': The Meaning of the *Ethos* and Its Relation to Ethics" provides a history of the term and its usage by Aristotle within the discourse of ethics.
9. The connection between the English estate and an ethical, if not national, character has precedents in prenovelistic forms, most notably the early modern "estate poem." Ben Jonson's poem "To Penshurst" (1616), for example, praises the estate in order to assert the virtue and character of its lord. Indeed, the imagery used to describe the estate emphasizes the *ethos* of hospitality and charity (qualities important in a patron), and what

finally distinguishes Penshurst from other edifices, those "proud, ambitious heaps," is that it is inhabited by a lord who embodies its *ethos*: other estates "may say their lords have built, but thy lord dwells," Jonson declares (60). Brian Patton makes a similar claim with respect to Andrew Marvell's "Upon Appleton House," arguing that it seeks to reconcile tradition and social stability with social and economic change (836–37). Kenny argues that such country house poems achieve this reconciliation by depicting the lord as master of self and metaphor for the state (3; see also Fowler 3). In so doing, such poems anticipate the novels of Austen and Forster in that they seek to reconcile national divisions by fusing past, present, and future values. See also Kenny 204. Richard Gill makes a similar argument regarding the cultural function of the country house within the novel. "As an institution representing the structure and traditions of English society," Gill writes, "it is a microcosm which has the advantage of being public and familiar, yet malleable enough to serve the protean interests of individual novelists" (14).

10. According to Heggland, the English estate remains the quintessential icon of nation for Forster despite his commitment to liberal humanism because its existence opposes the threat of mass culture.
11. Forster's apparent faith in progress should not be equated with a sense of satisfaction with the present. To the contrary, Forster expresses a radical dissatisfaction with society, according to F. R. Leavis (35). Philip Gardner makes a similar claim, reading Forster's fiction as an exploration of whether a homosexual could comfortably identify with a notion of Englishness or, in Gardner's terms, come to "possess England." *Howards End*, on this reading, finds "a kind of sexual compromise by means of multiple possession" of the estate at the end of the novel (176).
12. Alan Sinfield argues that the dependence of the Schlegels upon the monetary resources of the Wilcoxes means that their "attempt to 'connect' succeeds only by way of the fantasy collapse of Wilcox resistance" (41). Likewise, Alistair Duckworth's reading of the novel's epigraph, "Only connect . . .," implies that Forster recognized the profound difficulty of achieving national reconciliation. The epigraph, Duckworth writes, "might well have been addressed to a whole society in which unionists and nationalists, management and labor, men and women, English and Germans, seemed incapable of reconciliation" (*Howards End* 4).
13. McCartney argues that Waugh differs from modernists like Virginia Woolf in that the collapse of traditional structures, for Waugh, leads not to self-discovery but to the shallowness of character (74).

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14. For a synopsis of Catholic readings of *Brideshead Revisited* dating back to Edmund Wilson, see Kennedy 24.
 15. Walter Allen makes a similar argument regarding Waugh's nostalgic vision of Catholicism: "for Waugh, Catholicism is a profoundly romantic thing, the core of a nostalgic dream of an ideal past by which the present is judged and found wanting" (qtd. in Wirth 97). This valorization of the past, according to John Howard Wilson, allows Waugh to cast history as a process of decline in which the present is condemned for failing to live up to the ideals of the past (171). This vision of history as decline guarantees Waugh's abiding disappointment with Britain, a disappointment that is only exacerbated by his experience in the military during World War II. Indeed, he was notoriously loathed by the men under his command; his superiors granted him leave to write *Brideshead Revisited* because he was considered such a liability that he needed to be removed from active military service. For more details of Waugh's life in the military service, see Wykes; Carpenter 333–53. For a more flattering report of Waugh's service, see Patey 182–83.
 16. Waugh describes how *Brideshead Revisited* was inspired by witnessing the deathbed conversion of his friend Hubert Duggan: "It was, of course, all about the death bed," Waugh writes to Ronald Knox in a letter dated 14 May 1945 (qtd. in Wirth 17).
 17. Intriguingly, Ryder becomes the spiritual heir of the estate only after he loses his opportunity to become the material heir. Shortly before his death, Lord Marchmain rejects his eldest son as heir and names Julia instead. Had Ryder and Julia subsequently married, then Ryder would have become the owner of the estate. When Julia breaks off her engagement with Ryder after Marchmain's demise, Ryder loses this opportunity. However, he begins a process of inner reflection that ultimately leads to his own conversion to Catholicism, which enables him to link Catholicism and Englishness at the end of the novel. The implication seems to be that Waugh envisions Catholicism to be a necessary but not itself sufficient aspect of national character; Marchmain rejects out of hand the claim to the estate of his eldest son, who is the most orthodox Catholic of his generation.
 18. Simon Gikandi's recent book, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism*, traces how Englishness itself was a product of colonial culture. For Gikandi, Englishness only comes into being in relation to its colonies, and the crisis of identity that increasingly marks Great Britain in the twentieth century is the result of the nation's difficulty in constructing a postimperial identity. From Gikandi's perspective, the preva-

lent nostalgia within British politics and cultural life reflects an effort to preserve the coherence of national identity even after the loss of its defining aspect, the Empire.

19. Although the events of *The Remains of the Day* occur at the nadir of the English estate, Ishiguro writes the novel from the vantage point of its restored fortunes. Indeed, one can speak of the opposite extreme in the past two decades—the heritage industry of Great Britain since the 1970s and the formation of the Historic Houses Association during the same period have guaranteed the preservation of the estate as tourist attraction. The welfare of the estate has changed so radically that Waugh himself noted in the 1959 edition of *Brideshead Revisited* that his novel might have been a "panegyric preached over an empty coffin" (Preface 2). For further information on the state of the estate in the twentieth century, see Mandler, *Fall and Rise*.
20. In a recent interview with Brian Shaffer coming after the formulation of my own argument, Ishiguro articulates a more concrete vision of what nostalgia can accomplish. Even though nostalgia has been "a bad political force" in Britain that "promotes our forgetting the suffering and exploitation of colonial times," Ishiguro asserts that it can also act as an "emotional equivalent to idealism." This assertion takes a rather different perspective on nostalgia in *The Remains of the Day* than I am presenting, for Ishiguro's understanding suggests that it inspires us "emotionally to a sense that things should and can be repaired" (7).
21. The struggle to restore national "greatness" became a key theme of Thatcher's election campaign, and the term would still have had wide circulation as Ishiguro was writing *The Remains of the Day*. "Somewhere ahead lies greatness for the country again," Thatcher states 30 April 1978. "Let us make it a country safe to grow old in. [...] May this land of ours, which we love so much, find dignity and greatness and peace again" (qtd. in Krieger 77).
22. Žižek similarly argues that Thatcher's government effects "a shift in the center of gravity of 'the real Englishness'" (110). Žižek reads the function of Englishness in somewhat different terms from my own analysis, however. His psychoanalytic focus argues that national identity formation inevitably depends upon fetishism of terms like Englishness that are ultimately empty: "the final answer is of course that *nobody* is fully English, that every empirical Englishman contains something non-English" (110). See also Brantlinger 241.
23. The negative consequences of the Suez crisis on Britain remain a debated topic. Childs points to the profound economic effects it had on the coun-

try (112). Morgan argues that it had powerful but brief social consequences, except upon writers like John Osborne and Kingsley Amis, for whom the event becomes a defining moment of governmental betrayal (156).

24. Here I am drawing upon the work of Karl Kroeber, who argues that narrative allows a community to test its ethics within the imagination of its members (9). Kroeber argues that stories provide a community the means to discover, express, and debate moral commitments by evoking terms or images that have widely understood connotations (189). Following the work of Gilbert Ryle and Clifford Geertz, Kroeber labels such terms "thick concepts."
25. Bakhtin argues that understanding depends upon casting one's story *for another*, that the process of anticipating the listener's response structures the meaning of the story as it is composed: "Understanding comes to fruition only in the response. Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other [. . .]. The speaker strives to get a reading on his own word, and on his own conceptual system that determines this word, within the alien conceptual system of the understanding receiver" (282).
26. Interestingly, Harry Smith defers to the perceived expertise of Stevens to counter Dr. Carlisle's argument for granting the colonies independence: "Our doctor here's for all kinds of little countries going independent. *I don't have the learning to prove him wrong*, though I know he is. But I'd have been interested to hear what the likes of yourself would have to say to him on the subject, sir" (192; emphasis added).
27. Stevens occupies a highly fraught class position in the novel. Although his status as a servant would incline him to identify with the working class, his efforts at mimicry (when he travels to see Mrs. Benn, for example, he wears Lord Darlington's old clothing) combined with his sense that he is upholding tradition actually place him in a situation where he identifies himself in opposition to the working class.
28. Here I seek to qualify Brian Shaffer's assessment that Stevens returns to his old mentality at the end of the novel (87). My analysis more closely resembles that of Kathleen Wall, who argues that although Stevens shrouds threatening moments "in layers of more comfortable memory," Stevens himself "unwinds these shrouds" (29).
29. In arguing that Ishiguro's narratives connect thick ethical concepts with a concept of nation, I am resisting the critical tendency, identified by Steven Connor, to deny that Englishness is a serious concern in his work (107).

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