**A New Lens for *The Remains of the Day***

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"To recognize unhappiness would be to explore how the diversification of happiness does not and cannot eliminate antagonism from political memory, which is at once the present of national time. We would recognize the impossibility of putting certain histories behind us; these histories persist, and we must persist in declaring our unhappiness with their persistence."

- Sara Ahmed

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## Introduction

One of the central theories thoroughly analyzed and explored within this course was that of Ahmed's melancholic migrants. Through texts such as Smith's *Autumn* and Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, we have been presented with amazing examples through which we can apply and make sense of Ahmed's theory in conversation with contemporary issues of racism and tropes of English identity. Throughout this report, a close reading of *Remains* is called for through the lens of *Autumn* on account of Smith's ability to explore the sociopolitical crisis that has shaped English society since the late 1980s, with their unifying factor being Ahmed's theory.

While it may seem quite a stretch to analyze a piece of historical fiction like Ishiguro's *Remains* through the lens of a much more contemporary text like Smith's, I postulate that through *Autumn's* profound examination of the complexities of English identity and history paired with its explicit condemnation of cultural fantasies and the so-called glory days of Britain, it provides a space to explore aspects of Ishiguro's text that would be otherwise left in the dark. By first evaluating Ahmed's theory and later using it to put these novels in conversation with one another, we find that *Remains* is by no means a simple story about an emotionally traumatized and repressed butler, but a story reflective of a rich and controversial national history.

Before launching into the ways in which *Autumn* informs our reading of *Remains*, particularly in reference to Ahmed, I will first explore examples from both texts that parallel the melancholic migrant theory. These portions of the report will function to reveal what readers would find if they did not read Ishiguro through the lens of Smith, and offer in-depth analyses of portions of both texts which will later be tied together. Ultimately, the findings presented are meant to reflect that complex tropes of English identity and skewed perceptions of the country's

history presented in *Remains* are much more contemporary and relevant than one may notice upon reading the text without *Autumn*. If there is one thing to take away from this piece, it is how inescapable we are from history's cyclical nature.

## Ahmed's Melancholic Migrant

Sara Ahmed's theory of the melancholic migrant derives from the common idea that the problem with multiculturalism is that it makes people unhappy. In other words, when we are "in" multiculturalism, we are "out" of our comfort zone (Ahmed 121). Therefore, when migration enters the narrative as it does in texts like Ishiguro's or Smith's, it does so as an unhappiness cause, as it forces unalike people to live in proximity; it creates proximity of unlikeness which makes for an unhappy situation. This is what causes the issues that Ishiguro and Smith delved into within their respective novels, as this proximity of unlikeness feeds into racism, social injustices, and overall prevents the migrant from happily integrating into society.

Her definition of melancholia in relation to the migrant is a sort of Freudian one, as it deals with mourning and the ego. At its core, it is about getting stuck in bad feeling (138). This stuckness in bad feeling occurs as a result of the present being built into by the past. The contemporary situation she deals with is primarily in reference to the United Kingdom, and traces backwards to the colonial empire days as a way to explain how some of these ideas about the migrant have been developed and perpetuated throughout time. Ahmed describes colonialism as having a utilitarian viewpoint, justified as necessary to maximize happiness.

This, therefore, makes colonial rule benevolent, as if it is about helping other people. We still see versions of this rhetoric today when we consider needing to help civilize or protect a

group of people, and is most commonly referred to as the “white man’s burden”. Resultantly, natives are forced to follow the colonial happiness plans, which has led not to migrants having a duty, or social obligation, to be happy about imperial history. If you are now a migrant to the UK, for example, in order to be *fully British* you must determine that colonialism and empire was a great thing, agreeing that it helped your homeland and there is nothing bad or shameful about that past. In other words, colonialism and imperialism should be remembered as histories of happiness.

If you do not agree with that, then you would be seen as a melancholic migrant, as you refuse to remember the empire in the way people want, hold onto past racism, and believe that present racism as something rooted in the past. Contemporary race politics involve not only a direct inheritance of this history, but a social obligation to remember the history of empire as a history of happiness. Migrants are compelled to be happy with colonialism, and if they are not, there is something wrong with them; they are *affective aliens*.

To see happily is not to see the violence, asymmetry, and force that has occurred within history. Therefore, the migrant who has good feelings about their past that are not related to their arrival to the UK, or the immigrant who has bad feelings towards Britain's past, are judged as melancholic because they failed to give up on objects that were declared dead on their behalf. It has been announced that colonialism, history, and racism is dead, and if a migrant insists on holding on to these things, they are not only wrong, but melancholic. From this, the opinion is derived that if one is a migrant, they are likely to be melancholic simply because of their social status.

In summation, the moral task that is put on the migrant is to get over it, where "it" refers to the horrific aspects of the past, as if to get over it is for it to be gone and permanently forgotten. They have a duty not to be hurt by any current attack on them, not even to notice it, but to let it pass them by as if it never happened. Even further, to speak with consciousness over any current racism is to become an affect alien, or one who is stuck and backwards through holding onto and being melancholic over things that are not even real. These are all notions explored within both of the novels analyzed in this essay, and by relating Ahmed's theory to them both, we are presented with guidelines on how to move on and heal from these injustices.

More specifically, the melancholia and alienness associated with the migrant can be used to do something productive. The way to move forward is to  hold on to unhappiness and expose what underlies the "happiness structures" within contemporary English society. Ahmed shows us that we must do something with this alienness. We need to recognize unhappiness and how the political memory of antagonism throughout history is very much rooted in the present, and simply pretending it is not is holding us back. Through *Remains* and *Autumn*, we are presented with examples of doing just what Ahmed suggests, and faced with the exigency behind delving into her theory.

## ***The Remains of the Day***

"One should not be looking back to the past so much," reasons Stevens (Ishiguro 139). Nevertheless, this is what he did for the duration of *The Remains of the Day* as he struggled to make sense of the emotionally traumatic events that dominated his life. There has been particular interest amongst scholars in recent years to study the correlation between emotional trauma and

contemporary tropes of English identity, which through a textual analysis of Ishiguro's *Remains*, we find directly ties into the country's imperialist past. The following section offers some of the most relevant examples and textual evidence of the novel exposing and confronting historical issues of prejudice and injustice in England, which ties directly into Ahmed's theory of the melancholic migrant.

**Colonial Travelogues**

As quoted from an interview in 2015, Ishiguro has stated that the kind of Britain he created in this novel was one that never quite existed. For him, the story was not so much about historical accuracy as it was *reworking a long-perpetuated myth* regarding the country's past, full of fantasies of Englishness. Ishiguro aimed to tackle the myth of the country's "glorious" past, which has been increasingly fictionalized and idealized since its imperial downfall. From the outset of the novel, this notion is most aptly portrayed through the scene in which Stevens discussed the road curving around the edge of the hill as he left Darlington Hall behind. He noted feeling a mixture of unease mixed with exhilaration as the surroundings grew increasingly strange around him, stating that "...I believe it was then, looking on that view, that I began for the first time to adopt a frame of mind appropriate for the journey before me" (Ishiguro 26).

This reaction elicits a strong sense of Burkian sublime, as Stevens seemed sort of paralyzed by the incomprehensibility of his surroundings, suggesting a gloriousness and greatness about the English countryside that was powerful enough to stop the car to capture the importance of this moment. As theorized by Burke, astonishment is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration, reverence, and respect (Burke, par. 130). I

argue here that this moment and the recurring moments in which Stevens' indulges in these fanciful descriptions of his surroundings reflect two central ideas of this text in conversation with Ahmed. These both stem from idealized tropes of Englishness and fantasies of its history being one of "happiness".

For the first of these ideas, it is useful to turn Emily Horton's article on nationalism and conservative politics in reference to Ishiguro's piece, in which she proposes that Stevens' character serves as a critique of historically damaging notions and beliefs in English nationalism. Reflecting on this notion, it is easy to conceptualize that these moments of description which elicit an extreme sense of pride and awe at the magnificence of England offer a sort of parody of colonial travelogues (Horton 14). The historical ideology of colonial conquest is littered with language of "greatness" that necessitates being vanquished and controlled. Stevens and his recorded thoughts of the beauty of old-world England over the course of his six-day trip offers a framework through which we can observe the myths of the landscape—*the nation*—and the attributes of "greatness" he places upon it.

This is exactly what Ishiguro sought to do, and it is made clear that he used Stevens' inflated tone in scenes such as his departure from Darlington Hall to highlight the prejudice and exclusivism of not only historical, but contemporary England. This is especially reinforced on page 28, in which Stevens noted that "We call this land *Great* Britain, and there may be those who believe this a somewhat immodest practice. Yet I would venture that the landscape of this country alone would justify the use of this lofty adjective". This old-fashioned patriotism put in conversation with colonial ideologies through Stevens' descriptions reinforces ideas that Ahemed poses about fantasies of dominance and damaging imperialist rhetoric. This is,

according to Horton, a common aesthetic practice that grants a space through which people become distanced and self-effaced from the shameful aspects of colonial and imperial history.

**Dignity and Restraint: A Recipe for Melancholia**

Circling back to the second central idea presented through scenes such as those previously mentioned, it is helpful to turn to Sianne Ngai's theory of animatedness, presented in her book titled *Ugly Feelings*. Throughout this book, Ngai explored states of negative feeling that are often ignored (in contrast to more powerful and dynamic emotions like anger) and associated with situations in which action is blocked or suspended. She, much like Ahmed, suggested that seemingly minor and politically ambiguous feelings are best suited to diagnose contemporary issues and cultural controversies. One such example of these emotions that gives rise to cultural form is that of "animatedness", which is described as a racialized "affect". She defines this feeling as "the process by which an object becomes imbued with life" (92).

Before launching into an analysis of Stevens through this lens, it is necessary to address the characteristics and beliefs he possessed that warrants such an analysis. Through a close reading of our protagonist's portrayal of Englishness, we can begin to understand current discourse on the novel stating that "Ishiguro has portrayed the protagonist in a way that conforms to the English identity; in particular, the emotionally repressed identity of the English" (Yusoff 174). Having a setting in post-World War I and II era Britain, this novel is rich with tropes of identity with origins dating back to the country's imperial history. Namely, this is portrayed through Stevens' disavowal of feeling, respect for social hierarchy, and stiff will to maintain dignified appearances, which are values associated with this period of history. His compliance, or

his façade as a dignified butler, directly reflect elements of Britain's imperial grandeur and notions of colonial decorum.

The grandeur of Stevens' professional dignity serves as some of the "...most profound novelistic representations of repression masquerading as professionalism" (Horton 14). His characteristically English 'stiff-upper-lip' can be read as a betrayal of personal feeling and affective integrity. In his efforts to play the part as the perfect butler that is propagated throughout tropes of English identity, he deprived himself of any chance of happiness or personal satisfaction. His emotional repression, then, is directly correlated with his English upbringing. It was not until he departed Darlington Hall that he was able to identify and work through the trauma that such a mechanized state of being imposed upon him.

This "mechanized state" plays directly into Ngai's theory, as Stevens embodies her very notion that "...the kind of exaggeration and emotional expressiveness I call animatedness seems to function as a marker of racial or ethnic otherness in general" (94). More specifically, Stevens' opinion of and reliance on dignity and restraint in efforts to maintain his austere butler façade directly plays into the idea that this type of emotional state is inherently racialized. Considering that he explained his view on dignity as being a type of emotional restraint "...which only the English race are capable of", and that the "... English have an important advantage over foreigners in this respect" (43), we see that the emotional values he holds dear go hand-in-hand with Ngai's concept of a racialized animatedess.

With this knowledge, it is easier to return to the scene in which Stevens departed on his journey through the English countryside and tie this back into Ahmed. To further my argument, I find it particularly useful to turn to Cathy Caruth's model of psychoanalytic trauma, which is

based off of Freudian theorization, much like Ahmed's does, of the Id, the Self, the Ego, and the SuperEgo. She argues within her book, *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history*, that latent tendencies after one experiences significant loss affect not only the progression of a character, but the plot of narration itself.

At the source of trauma, there is the initial event called “the accident”. After this occurs, due to the very nature of trauma, the reaction one may expect to follow—such as extreme expressions of anger or sadness of the Id—is delayed. This delay, as expected, is linked to one’s emotional repression. Ego and SuperEgo take over here in the rejection of showcasing emotions to avoid being seen as weak or undignified (Caruth 6). In Stevens' situation, Caruth’s theory can be aptly applied when we consider the traumatic situations that he experienced and how he deprived himself of any sort of emotional response or outburst for fear of being inappropriate and socially unacceptable.

Stevens’ journey to meet Ms. Kenton offered him a unique opportunity not only to escape the place of trauma that Darlington Hall represented, but gave him time to reflect on how misconstructed his life had been. It became a journey through his past and into his soul, through which he relented on missed opportunities, irreversible mistakes, and ultimately came to terms with his past. Through his recollections, he relived the pre-war decades at Darlington Hall, discussed his idolization of his father and Lord Darlington, and explained the eventual and *traumatic* downfall that his lifelong dedication to unfailing service resulted in.

In other words, in scenes of such vivid, seemingly sublime, descriptions of the countryside, we are watching Stevens break away from his animated appearance. The separation from this place of trauma offered a breakthrough of sorts, yet anytime he got close to totally

giving in to this freedom, he reminisced on the "glory days" of butlering and circled back to being dignified—showing restraint. This is complicated even more at the end of the novel, as when it is clear he had realized how his character tropes had negatively affected him, he chose to apply what he learned through his experiences to *the art of butlering.* This is where the need is made clear to search for another way to read this text in efforts to understand why it is so easy to slip back into this automatized, mechanized state of being. *Autumn* provides the perfect lens through which to do so, as it makes clear why individuals like Stevens are so reluctant to change and more importantly, *how* they fall victim to these detrimental tropes of Englishness.

## ***Autumn***

Ali Smith's *Autumn* offers a unique angle through which *The Remains of the Day* can be read in relation to the melancholic migrant theory. Prior to engaging with this notion, however, it is necessary to highlight the ways through which Smith plays into Ahmed's theory. By doing so, it is made obvious how Smith's novel offers a new way through which Ishiguro's piece can be interpreted. To preface this section, the connections between Ahmed and the melancholic migrant are perhaps clearer to us, as they are much more contemporary in their application throughout the story. Therefore, it is easier for us to identify the message and the broader conversation at work in Smith's piece, which ultimately serves to make the less obvious aspects of *Remains* more relevant and identifiable if put in conversation with this novel.

### **A Country Divided in Feeling**

From the outset of *Autumn*, the reader is confronted by the stark divisions that plague post-Brexit England. From Smith's riffing off of Dickens, in which it was stated that "All across the country, people felt history at their shoulder. All across the country, people felt history meant nothing" (60). This tale of two sides is incredibly significant, as it gives palpability to the tumultuous time that is a direct result of stuckness in different feelings which has led to uncrossable divisions in contemporary English society. It is clear, then, from the beginning of Smith's novel the ways that it connects to Ahmed: it insists on naming history and proving that it is far from dead.

One of the most obvious instances of within this text of history being far from dead can be found during these recurring troubles that Elisabeth experiences at the post office. Through these scenes, Smith is directly confronting and exemplifying the issues regarding the immigration process and system currently set in place. First seen on page 20, then again on page 108, Elisabeth is denied her passport because her photographs fail to meet the necessary, *ultra-exact* stipulations. This specificity not only represents the demands society places on people to fulfill certain qualifications, specific here to what qualifies as Englishness, but also the frustration and powerlessness experienced by immigrants.

From Elisabeth's first experience at the post office, the communal seating area is symbolic of something being broken inside England's immigration system. The people being jerked around, up and down, in the air reflects how immigrants are treated as things that can be pushed and pulled in any direction. The frustrations she experienced reflects the many obstacles set in place in order to attain citizenship, how racialized and discriminatory the stipulations are, as well as how slow and ineffective that process is.

This contributes to extreme attempts to come into the country, such as something similar to Daniel's dream of dead bodies washed up on the beach while others farther up the shore continued on their holiday (12). Such occurrences, while presented in a fictional way, are very much real in contemporary England. The strict anti-immigration policies have resulted in desperation to the extreme of swimming here, like in the case of two- year-old Alan Kurdi, and risking one's life to seek refuge in the country.

Simultaneously, neglect of the broken system, or ignoring the dead as in Daniel's dream, reflects the implicit desire of people to ignore these harsh realities after Brexit. Consider how Kurdi's photograph appeared on the front pages of newspapers across Europe and around the world, fueling an upsurge in public sympathy and anger at the plight of refugees (Smith, "Alan Kurdi…"). On the other side of the divide, however, politicians were claiming the photo was fake, that the facts were skewed, and refused to acknowledge the discrimination at work within the immigration system.

Even further, the play Elisabeth is reading, *Brave New World*, can symbolize the current state of England and the way people perceive the changing political climate. The title represents possibility, transformation, and the hope for something new. The irony here is that Smith placed this in a setting that seeks to frustrate and hold people back, which furthers the overall message of these recurring scenes. The issues that are highlighted here set up the argument that this text applies to Ahmed's theory, as they call attention to stark differences in opinion that divide the country in relation to immigration, national identity, and most importantly, history.

Yet another part of the text that deals with how England's history of racism plays into the present is found on page 197 when Elisabeth thinks back to the group of thugs singing-shouting

“Britannia rules the waves. First we’ll get the Poles. And then we’ll get the Muslims. Then we’ll get the gyppos, then the gays. *You lot are on the run and we’re coming after you*” (197). This served as an explicit call back to one of the most historic anthems in England’s history: “Rule, Britannia!”. The song's lyrics are evocative of colonial and imperial rule within the country—packed full of pride and respect for these aspects of the past.

There are debates currently circulating throughout the country that this anthem should no longer be performed, listened to, or honored because it offers a space through which the rhetoric surrounding colonial and imperial rule can be twisted into something good (Service, “Rule Britannia). Created in a period of unrest in 1745, “Rule, Britannia!” became the song that defined a new spirit of Britishness and how people ought to feel as British citizens; it celebrated an aspirational naval dominance and Imperial confidence. Currently, those who push the idealized rhetoric behind the anthem reveal opinions of the endangerment of Englishness, which serves them justification in misconstruing the country’s past through contemporary racism and the rejection of foreigners.

This is the very issue that the radio spokesperson earlier in the text had hinted towards when they stated “...We’ve been rhetorically and practically encouraging ourselves not to integrate. We’ve been doing this as a matter of self-policing since Thatcher…” (111). Smith seems to suggest that this perpetuated notion of Englishness endorsed by idolizing eras of imperialism, colonialism, and now *Thatcherism*, are not only dangerous for the consequent suppression of emotional responses to issues like immigration, but also on account of how extremist mindsets can so quickly perpetuate nationalized prejudice.

Considering now the callout of Thatcherism, it is vital to reflect on her coined expressions like “Brittain’s Great Again", which although took place decades ago, still play into contemporary notions of inclusion and exclusion, as well as new forms of racism, especially when thinking about who belongs to the national community. This directly parallels Ahmed's theory in the sense that during these periods of history in England, inflated descriptions and myths surrounding the greatness of the country became ingrained in the cultural consciousness that persist today.

Therefore, false perceptions of history generating happiness affect the present as people enforce a sort of social obligation to respect these eras in contemporary society. The bullying and racist language, such as “go home” or “we’re coming after you”, that we see in this portion of the text represent the resurgence of such rhetoric. Those seen as melancholic migrants are refusing to fall into line and “correctly" remember this history or relish in the current, “happy” state of England. Consequently, they are deemed affective aliens, inferior, and cast out of society.

**The Scars that Never Heal**

While Smith’s close attention to the ways in which migrants are viewed as an unhappiness cause by those in the narrative who respect England’s history of colonialism and imperialism is undoubtedly crucial in putting *Autumn* in conversation with *Remains*, there is another unifying aspect of this novel that must be addressed in tying the two together. This aspect is that of Smith’s insistence on calling attention to the historical atrocities committed against the melancholic migrant, as well as how holding onto this history of trauma and unhappiness can be used as a means of healing.

Perhaps one of the most prominent examples of the ways through which migrants can use their melancholia as a means of healing can be found through the arc of the cottage presented within the novel. Several times throughout *Autumn*, Elisabeth comes to a cottage in her mother's village that first had been painted with the words "GO and HOME" (53). It was noted before she first stumbled upon it that it had been just a week since the Brexit vote, and that the village had been in a sullen state after the fact—a result of divided feelings over the outcome. Later, someone added "WE ARE ALREADY HOME THANK YOU" with a painted tree and flowers (138). By the end of the novel, these were painted over, as if "...nothing ever happened, unless you [knew] to look a little more closely to make out the outline of the word HOME under the layer of blue" (253).

The initial painting was clearly an act of racism, reflective of the belief that migrants must be nostalgic or melancholic for some home that they have come from, but the second instance marked a clear desire to integrate and reject that notion. The last instance in which everything was painted over is outwardly indicative of the slow, painful process of healing that migrants experience in circumstances such as those presented in this novel. The fact that home was a barely visible outline is suggestive of healing, but that the consequences of the struggle to integrate left a scar that will never heal completely. This plays into Ahmed's belief that we should never forget, put aside, or dismiss past transgressions such as this; the scar is a permanent reminder of the past.

In a similar vein, perhaps the most obvious portion of the novel that parallels directly with Ahmed's theory of using stuckness in bad feeling as a way of moving forward lies within the description of Elisabeth and Daniels trip to the theater. The way that Elisabeth recounted the

play starting on page 207 reflects the past and present situation of the country, especially when she stated that it was "...about fairness and unfairness, and people getting hypnotized on an island and hatching plots against each other to see who could take control of the island, and some characters were meant to be the slaves and other characters got to be freed" (207-208). Smith highlights here the political and racial antagonisms that have split the country from this colonial and imperialist part of history up to contemporary times, and she refuses to remember it in the "right", or "happy", sort of way.

Through her contrasting descriptions of fairness and unfairness, the "hypnotization" of the inferior culture in order to gain power, as well as the distinctions between who deserves freedom, the two chief viewpoints at work within the novel are made clear: migrants versus the portion of the English population that associate nothing bad or shameful about the past and present state of the country. This parallels Ahmed's theory when we consider the idea that past racism is directly related to contemporary race politics, and this is reflected as Elisabeth described the distinctions between those who belong to today's national community and those who do not. Without acknowledging that the colonial and imperial ideologies of superiority and other toxic tropes of Englishness are present today, there is no way that we can ever hope for peaceful integration or equality for migrants.

Overall, these instances in the novel confirm the ways history informs and impacts the present, and calls attention to parallels between *the not-so-distant-then* and *now*. While it may be tempting to take the path of least resistance and let national pride sway one's opinion over the true effects of colonialism, imperialism, and Thatcherism, buying into this "happiness" narrative and fictionalized past has detrimental effects on contemporary society. If we declare that the

effects of racism and colonial rule are dead, tell people to get over past antagonisms against them, and alienate them for not doing so, then we fail to learn from our past by holding onto this unhappiness. We must use it, Smith shows us, to expose the bad in order to move forward and repair the damage that has been done.

## The New Lens for *Remains of the Day*

While I have made clear the connections between Ishiguro and Smith's novels to Ahmed's theory of the melancholic migrant, this is the point where I examine *Remains* through the lens of *Autumn* as a way to most effectively analyze its references towards the toxic tropes of Englishness and myths of the country's "greatness". In doing so, I open up a new conversation and bring something new to discover about Ishiguro's piece that, without Smith's perspective, would be otherwise impossible to identify. *Autumn* gives a broader scope to political and racial antagonisms that are present within *Remains*, and through analyzing these texts in conversation with one another, I posit that the exigency of Ahmed's theory is furthered in tandem.

### Parodies of the "Glory" Days

Reflecting on the aforementioned notion of Stevens' descriptions of the countryside parodying colonial travelogues, we see direct parallels with *Autumn*, especially when Smith's reference to Thatcherism is presented alongside it. Through Stevens saying that "we call this land *Great* Britain", it is implied that Ishiguro was calling attention to how getting lost in these ideological fantasies fosters mindsets that other nations, cultures, *people* are inherently inferior.

The radio spokesperson who referenced Thatcher paired with the call back in *Autumn* to "Rule, Britannia!" serves as a primary example of such rhetoric, as it highlights how and why Stevens fell victim to such hateful and harmful social constructs.

Considering how the language of colonialism and imperialism is rhetorically structured to justify and necessitate conquest, it is clear that Ishiguro was using Stevens' descriptions of the countryside to highlight the damaging fantasies of dominance and nationalism that blind people to the truth of these eras in history. As previously established, Stevens' emphasis on the "greatness" of England and the sense of pride he attributed to the country is reflective of old-fashioned patriotism that perpetuates the myth of England that Ishiguro sought to expose.

Through the lens of *Autumn*, we see Stevens as nothing more than a product of his environment. He was unable to escape the cycle of repeating history because he was raised to respect and honor his country. Revisiting this element of *Remains* and examining it through contemporary instances mentioned in Smith's text in which the same damaging rhetoric is being circulated, we see that it is not easy to escape the common aesthetic practice of falsely glorifying the shameful aspects of colonial and imperial history. This grants a space through which people become distanced and self-effaced from cultural essentialism and hierarchies.

To prove what I posit about *Autumn* being an essential tool in order to most effectively read *The Remains of the Day* as a piece that navigates how difficult it is to escape from the grasp of history, it is helpful to turn to Emily Horton's article on nationalism and conservative politics in Ishiguro's piece for some context. Horton discusses at length her theory that Stevens' character serves as a critique of Thatcherite nationalism and late twentieth century issues of

cultural essentialism and hierarchies. The pseudo-respect granted to the genuine old-fashioned English butler, she states, might also be seen as comparable to "Brexit nostalgia" (Horton 11).

Horton is by no means far off in her thoughts here. It is as though Ishiguro was using Stevens' lofty and idealized descriptions of England to highlight the tensions of the late 1980s and Thatcherism, during which loyalist thinking was taking its hold over England. Thatcher was promoting ideas of "Britain's Great Again", with clear underlying assertions of national prejudice that led to favoring personal success and national sovereignty over community well-being and cross-cultural integration (Horton 12). While those in favor of loyalist thinking were not always so direct in their racism, there were parallels drawn between tropes of Englishness and Nazism, though these were dismissed by claims that they were "nationalists" who rejected the example of Nazi Germany.

Even further, when we reflect on the trauma Stevens experienced when he discovered that Lord Darlington shared sympathies with the Nazi Party, it seems to strengthen this notion that Ishiguro used Stevens' blind loyalty and faith to reflect how easy it is to become complicit in ignoring the pressing reality of the contemporary impacts of England's imperial and colonial history and the violence, injustice, hatred, it fosters. He went so far as to fire the Jewish maids, for example, even though he knew it was wrong, because he did not want to go against the hierarchy and prioritized notions of self-policing to preserve his professional appearances. Through his loyalty, he became distant from the truth and refused to acknowledge anything but the "happy" history that he had been fed for his entire life.

Therefore, Stevens' travelogues warrant a deeper and more thorough investigation that *Autumn* sets up quite nicely. From references to "Rule, Britannia!" and the horrors of

Thatcherism, we are shown how paralleling themes within Ishiguro's novel seemed to expose the late toxic foundations of English identity of the late 1980s through the lens of World War I and World War II era Britain. This provides a lens of viewing *Remains* that is not initially apparent, as it shows how this text that seems to be simple historical fiction communicated with the present when it was published in 1989, just as *Autumn* communicates issues of the past with contemporary issues of Brexit and immigration. Through this lens, the exigency behind Ahmed's insistence on the cyclical and inescapable nature of history is made even more prominent.

**English Tropes and the Repression of Self**

Another interesting way that *Autumn* serves as a lens through which *Remains* can be analyzed is made obvious through its deliberate work to contradict characters like Stevens, as it shows the dangers of romanticizing the specificity of English culture and glorifying its supposedly happy history. Rather than encouraging feelings of nostalgia in favor of dogma that perpetuates such idealized memories and sentiments, there is a push to name the past as Ahmed encourages us, because it is far from dead.

Circling back to the application of animatedness to Stevens' character and how notions of imperial grandeur and colonial decorum played directly into his idolization of dignity and restraint, it is obvious that Ishiguro used our protagonist as a means of confronting the emotionally repressed identity of the English. Stevens' disavowal of feeling, respect for social hierarchy, and stiff will to maintain dignified appearances speaks directly to historical and political movements within the country that function as markers of racial or ethnic otherness. This notion is proven when we reflect on his statement that dignity is a type of emotional

restraint "...which only the English race are capable of", and that the "... English have an important advantage over foreigners in this respect" (43).

The scene from the post office in Smith's novel provides an interesting way to read Stevens' perspective on how the English race is superior to foreigners. During Elisabeth's recurring troubles in obtaining a passport, the novel confronts and exemplifies the demands of English society that forces people to fulfill certain qualifications in order to be welcome into the country. These stipulations, paired with the symbolism of the communal seating area, clearly supports the idea that the obstacles set in place for immigrants to attain citizenship are based off of these racially discriminatory tropes of English identity and how they function to see the "other" as inferior. This is where instances from *Autumn* such as Elisabeth and Daniel's trip to the theater become relevant in analyzing *Remains*, as Stevens' values of national exclusivism and his feelings of superiority reflect the toxic tropes of Englishness that were present throughout the play.

Furthermore, Steven's refusal to acknowledge the flaws in his English, "stiff-upper-lip" attitude can be read, then, as reflective of how characters similar to him in contemporary society neglect the broken immigration system and often implicitly find ways to ignore the harsh realities of past antagonisms repeating themselves after Brexit. Just as Stevens refused to allow himself to *feel* the undignified losses of his father and Lord Darlington, as well as rejected his emotions as a means of saving face and preserving his austere appearance, politicians who claim instances like the death of Alan Kurdi are fake or skewed by the news use such rationalizations as a means of preserving their nationalism, their pride, and their belief in the "happy" state of the country.

Continuing on this scene in the post office, Elisabeth's reading of *Brand New World* seems to prove how impossible it is to escape the ways in which the country's past influences the present. The title, through its suggestion of hope and transformation, and the juxtaposition with the setting which seeks to frustrate and hold individuals back, leaves an undeniable trace of irony. When put in conversation with how Stevens, through leaving his place of trauma, was going towards change but was still held back and subjected to these repressive tropes of Englishness in the end, we see how Ahmed's warnings against falling into the social obligation of honoring the societal constructs leaves a repressed and mechanized character like Stevens in a state of permanent limbo. Anytime he came close to freeing himself of his emotional restraints, he returned to being dignified—showing restraint. This is where the final, and perhaps most bold, theory of how Smith's novel provides a lens to analyze *Remains* comes into play.

**Stevens as the Colonized**

Most of the readings and analyses of Stevens provided thus far are reflective of how he fell victim to the toxicity of Englishness, suggesting that he himself had little to no choice in how his life was to be from the first day he worked as a butler. He was, it seems, forced into an existence in which he had to respect social hierarchies, deprive himself of experiencing basic human emotions, and honor his cultural heritage at whatever cost. As stated in the previous section which discussed his racialized animatedness, his journey to meet Ms. Kenton offered him a unique opportunity not only to escape the place of trauma that Darlington Hall represented, but gave him time to reflect on how misconstructed his life had been.

Perhaps the most disappointing aspect of his journey is that after all of his reflections on how his idolization of his father and Lord Darlington led to intense self-denial and mortification, he turned back and applied all he had learned up to the end of the novel to *the art of butlering*. This ending, as touched on in the preceding section, is reflective of the difficulty faced by characters like Stevens who try to break away from toxic tropes of Englishness and are pulled back in as a result of their mechanized state.

Referring back to the arc of the cottage in *Autumn*, we are presented with an interesting lens through which Stevens' final actions can be explained. From the insistence that the migrants had towards integrating into society, as demonstrated through their spiteful jest that they were already home, it is easy to see how such courage in the face of present racism and attacks upon them would leave a sort of scar. As earlier proposed in an analysis of this story arc, the struggle to integrate leaves a permanent scar on the individual, represented literally in this case through the barely recognizable word "home" after the cottage was painted over.

This struggle to integrate is oddly reminiscent of Stevens and his relationship with Mr. Farraday throughout the text. Stevens himself experienced struggles that are shared with Ahmed's description of the melancholic migrant, in the sense that throughout the entire novel he struggled to cope with the way Mr. Farraday, who is the colonizer in this scenario, had changed the home he was so accustomed to. Through his recollections, he relived the glorious pre-war decades at Darlington Hall, discussed his idolization of his father and Lord Darlington, and the "glory days" of butlering. His struggle to adjust to the new rule of Mr. Farraday was a direct result of his melancholic hold on his past at the manor.

Stevens became open to integrating into Mr. Farraday's vision of the new Darlington Hall only after his life-changing journey away from the site of his trauma, as he was able to identify the ways he was holding himself back from recovering. His relenting over missed opportunities and irreversible mistakes, allowed him to ultimately come to terms with his past, allowed him to expose how the antagonisms of his past affected his present, and healed through this process. Although the scar will always be there that reminds him of past trauma and the bittersweet times he so long held on to, the catharsis of his journey put him in the headspace through which he could finally find peace, though it was ironically achieved by integrating into yet another set of colonial rules.

Just as the house analogy within *Autumn* proved that it is never truly possible to erase feelings of trauma and melancholy as a migrant on account of integrating into an environment that goes against your own culture or set of beliefs, Stevens final action in *Remains* proves that there is still a benefit in putting up the fight to fit in. This is perhaps the most unifying aspect that each of these novels share in reference to Ahmed's theory, as their ultimate message is reflective of her belief that we must use the notion of alienness and melancholy—of being stuck in bad feeling—as a way to move forward. Through holding on to unhappiness, we can expose the bad and how antagonisms from political memory are just as present today as they were in the past. To pretend otherwise is to go back, not to heal.

## Conclusion

Just when we thought we had handled Ishiguro's groundbreaking *The Remains of the Day*, we were introduced to the contemporary realism presented through Smith's *Autumn* that helped us call attention to an angle of analysis we had missed. While both pieces clearly reflect how history informs and impacts the present through the lens of Ahmed, by reading *Remains* through the perspective of *Autumn*, we were shown that his novel is by no means a simple piece of historical fiction, but one that ties into contemporary aspects and conflicts of Englishness that would otherwise easily be ignored. Even more, the broad political and racial scope of *Autumn* provides an opportunity to further observe these antagonisms as they appear in *Remains.*

Ishiguro seemed to be leading up to the very events that Smith discussed, as though he could predict that the national turmoil he presented through his novel would someday lead to the contemporary British situation. By performing this reading of the text through the lens of the other, we are not only presented with the impossibility of putting certain histories behind us, but also with the reality that these histories persist, and that we must persist in declaring our unhappiness with their persistence.

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