TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

The 'Insider Outsider' in Iris Murdoch's *Bruno's Dream* and Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*

Wendy Jones Nakanishi

This paper proposes to compare and contrast two novels that take as their theme the reflections and regrets of a lonely male protagonist. In the case of *Bruno's Dream* (1969), the main character is Bruno, a sick old man nearing death. In *The Remains of the Day* (1990), it is the butler Stevens who, preoccupied with his work, has always kept to himself and now discovers a longing to establish human contact with others. Bruno and Stevens are depicted as essentially alone. In the drama of life they are spectators rather than actors. They are 'insider outsiders.' Bruno inhabits a large household in London and Stevens heads the staff of an English country house, but both hold themselves aloof or apart from those around them. That the sense of alienation Bruno and Stevens experience is so acutely described may be attributed in part to the fact that they are the creation of authors who have acknowledged feelings of being 'insider outsiders' themselves: inhabiting England but not native to it. Iris Murdoch was born in Ireland and taken to England as a baby. Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Japan but has lived in Britain since he was six years old.

Whether or not they influenced each other as writers or on a more personal level, Murdoch and Ishiguro knew and respected each other's work. In an interview published in the *Paris Review* in the summer of 1990, Murdoch observed that she rarely read contemporary novelists but that she had enjoyed Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills*.[1] Ishiguro, on the other hand, has claimed in a recent interview that as a budding novelist, he aspired to emulate Ian McEwan, with Murdoch along with William Golding and Doris Lessing representing 'the Establishment'.[2] In another interview, he described her as one of a tiny respected elite of writers that he hoped he might one day join.[3]

Bruno's Dream is set in mid-century London and in a particular area of the city: the dwellings inhabited by the ill and dying Bruno and the other characters in the novel are located in a specific area bounded by Brompton Road cemetery and the Lots Road power station, with the former symbolising death and the latter, love, regarded by the writer as a form of energy.[4] The first section of *The Remains of the Day* is set in the summer of 1956 as Stevens, the butler at Darlington Hall, a country house near Oxford, embarks on a six-day journey to Weymouth. It is framed as an autobiographical memoir composed by Stevens. In retailing the first-hand memories of this elderly servant, the action of Ishiguro's novel stretches back over four decades, with Stevens's reminiscences of his first beginning work at the Hall and incidents he witnessed and participated in there.

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[1] Iris Murdoch, 'The Art of Fiction', *Paris Review* No. 115 (Summer 1990) 223.
[2] Gaby Wood's interview with Kazuo Ishiguro, *Telegraph* 27 February 2015.
[3] Cynthia F. Wong and Grace Crummett, 'A Conversation about Life and Art with Kazuo Ishiguro' [2006], *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro* edited by Brian W. Shaffer and Cynthia F. Wong (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2008) 206.
[4] Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001) 481. On page 596 Conradi observes of Murdoch that 'Being Irish – moreover *Protestant* Irish and relatively poor – made of her an outsider'.

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Again, Stevens and Bruno are both ‘insider outsiders’ like the authors who created them. Stevens is the butler at a large country estate. He is part of the household but not, of course, a member of the Darlington family. He discharges his duties at others’ direction. He is the head of a large network of servants but is at pains to keep his relationship with them always at an impersonal level. He is essentially an observer although one busily preoccupied with ensuring the smooth running of a large house. Similarly, through old age and infirmity, which have incapacitated and isolated him, Bruno is consigned to a peripheral role in his own house. Bruno’s world has dwindled to the compass of a small, dirty and smelly bedroom in an old house in south London. He is very old and has become like a baby again, completely dependent on the ministrations of the fellow inhabitants of his household. Immobile and infirm, he must rely on Danby, his son-in-law who is a hedonistic and happy-go-lucky soul, on Danby’s secret lover Adelaide, the slatternly housekeeper, and on Nigel, Adelaide’s cousin, who acts as Bruno’s nurse and spiritual guide. They occasionally visit him; they often talk about him; but he is essentially alone apart from the companionship offered by the spiders in his bedroom. A thwarted arachnologist, Bruno derives a curious amusement from the fact that he has come to resemble the spiders that have formed the subject of a lifetime’s passionate research. His head has become grotesquely large and wrinkled while his trunk and legs are shrivelled and wasted. Scarcely able to get out of bed, he is reduced in old age to a smelly, ugly and inert mass of flesh. Bruno thinks of his body as a kind of ugly tomb.

Ishiguro and Murdoch are able to offer a particularly convincing portrayal of the ‘insider outsider’ because of personal acquaintance with this condition in their adopted country: England. On a number of occasions Ishiguro has admitted impatience with critics who try to identify him as a Japanese writer simply because he was born in Japan. At the same time, he has claimed that in *The Remains of the Day* he could write as an author ‘*more English than English*,’ able to produce a pastiche portrait of a ‘mythical England’ because of the ‘ironic distance’ he knew existed between him and native Englishmen.[5] Although Ishiguro was thoroughly immersed in English culture outside the family home from an early age, within it he was raised as a Japanese by parents who intended one day to return to their home country. This situation led to a sense of conflicted identity and provided Ishiguro a sense of detachment from both Japanese and English culture that would prove invaluable to him as a novelist.[6]

In the same way, Peter Conradi, Murdoch’s biographer, has argued that Murdoch also straddled two cultural heritages: ‘The Anglo-Irish are a peculiar people, from whose stock some most gifted writers have come, but also a people with a dual identity, seeing themselves in some sense as both the true Irish *and* the true English, while being regarded by everyone else as neither, and as outsiders.’[7] It has often been observed that nationality was a sensitive issue for Murdoch. She set two of her novels of the 1960s in Ireland, *The Unicorn* and *The Red and the Green*. She was so proud of her Irish heritage that A.N. Wilson calls a chapter in his memoir ‘Considers herself Irish’ and notes that it was on this very point that their relationship, personal and professional, began to unravel. Murdoch had originally appointed Wilson her official biographer but ended up choosing Peter J. Conradi instead. Wilson observes in his memoir, ‘When I came to attempt my biography of IM, it was over the Irish question that we began to

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[5] Allan Vorda and Kim Herzinger, ‘An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro’ [1990], *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro* 73.

[6] Ishiguro explains cultural differences between British and Japanese families in Christopher Bigsby, ‘In Conversation with Kazuo Ishiguro’ [1987] *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro* 16-17.

[7] Peter J. Conradi, *The Saint and the Artist* (London: HarperCollins, 1986) 12.

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come unstuck.'[8] Wilson was not alone in his doubts. Many thought Murdoch had no more valid claim to Irish nationality than Americans who had migrated from Ireland centuries earlier. In any case, it is how Murdoch thought of herself that is important: 'A sense of identity is a psychological fact, irrespective of passports, maternity wards and addresses.'[9]

Returning to Ishiguro, on the one hand, he didn't want to be labelled a Japanese writer. On the other, he benefited from his Japaneseness in his writing, acknowledging that his parents' insistence on his assimilating Japanese values led to his thinking differently from English compatriots.[10] Ishiguro came to public recognition and acclaim with his first two novels, both set in Japan, even though he had left the country in 1960 and didn't return until 1989, nearly thirty years later, on a visit, and he has admitted that his depiction of Japan in these works does not even pretend to be accurate. In an interview conducted in 1987 Ishiguro observed

> When I write about Japan I write about it as a kind of imaginary world. It's suitable for what I want to write about because it has the flexibility of an imaginary world ... There's a certain kind of freedom you get as a writer by setting things a) in the past and b) in a different country.[11]

In his two Japanese novels, Ishiguro could present the imagined world of another country ('b') and in *The Remains of the Day*, his imagination could be allowed full rein by his setting the novel in the past ('a'). In the latter work he presents an elaborate portrait of a peculiarly English institution: the country house in its last days of glory before the start of the Second World War would consign such places to the dustbin of history.

While the ageing Stevens is still employed as a butler at a stately home in the period described in the opening of the novel *The Remains of the Day*, his position is greatly different from that he held when he was Lord Darlington's butler and Darlington Hall was enjoying a heyday of influence and activity between the two world wars. In retrospect, Stevens feels that he achieved the greatest satisfaction of his life from those years of activity and importance, when he could bask in the reflected splendour of being attached to a distinguished household. Following the example of his father, also a professional butler, who always put his work before himself and his family, Stevens had entirely subsumed his personality, concentrating solely on ensuring the smooth running of Darlington Hall. This devotion to his work has come at a cost, but it is one Stevens is never able to acknowledge. He considers himself first and foremost as a professional butler. His work provides his personal sense of identity. It is symptomatic of this fact that we never even learn his first name.

There are curious echoes here of Ishiguro's own Japanese heritage. Japan's businessmen and salaried workers are expected to put the company first. They are not encouraged to show personal feelings and rarely are addressed by their given names. Ishiguro himself has drawn a comparison between Stevens's behaviour and character and the Japanese emphasis on the 'feeling of dignity, service, life as a kind of performance'.[12] In Japan, familial relations are often regarded as secondary to work considerations. When Stevens's father, grown feeble and ailing and no longer able to work as a head butler, joins the staff at Darlington Hall as an employee under his son's supervision, the two meet and interact only as co-workers. They rarely

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[8] A.N. Wilson, *Iris Murdoch As I Knew Her* (London: Hutchinson, 2003) 31-2, 123.

[9] Priscilla Martin and Anne Rowe, *Iris Murdoch: A Literary Life* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 59.

[10] Graham Swift, 'Shorts: Kazuo Ishiguro' [1989], *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro* 35.

[11] David Sexton, 'Interview: David Sexton meets Kazuo Ishiguro' [1987], *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro* 32.

[12] Graham Swift, 'Shorts: Kazuo Ishiguro, interviewed by Graham Swift [1989], *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro* 37.

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acknowledge the fact of their blood tie and are impatient when anyone points it out to them. This kind of estrangement between father and son comes to a head in late May 1923. Stevens's father suffers a series of strokes, but Stevens is so preoccupied with the arrangements for an important conference at the Hall that he feels unable to snatch more than a moment or two to spend at his father's bedside despite his father's urgent requests to speak to him. Why is the old man so anxious to see his son? It seems he wants to apologise. As he lies on his deathbed, he says he has been proud of his boy but that he supposes he hasn't been a good father to him. Lord Darlington notices tears on his butler's face, but Stevens pretends they are the result of tiredness. Later Stevens claims that he considers his managing to carry on his duties as his father lay dying and then to hide his grief at his death represented one of his greatest achievements and that it was even a kind of triumph.

But it is a hollow victory. The meaninglessness of Stevens's ambition to be a perfect butler is made apparent from the very beginning of the novel. The war has ended 11 years earlier, Lord Darlington is dead and his memory disgraced, and the Hall is in the possession of an American who has no conception of its former glory nor of the ramifications of the old English tradition of the professional butler. Stevens's attempt to continue to provide the devoted service that had characterised his relationship with Lord Darlington is not recognised by the new owner, Mr Farraday, who unwittingly insults Stevens by teasing him and by engaging in sexual innuendo. Possessing no awareness of or appreciation for the British class system, Mr Farraday even tries to establish a kind of matey camaraderie with his employee. Mr Farraday is kind but uncomprehending. He offers to lend his own car to Stevens for a week to take a holiday, a favour it is inconceivable to imagine Lord Darlington ever contemplating. In addition to the altered relationship with his employer, Stevens also must reconcile himself to the diminished role of managing a skeletal staff consisting of only a handful of servants. It is a source of keen regret for him that Darlington Hall, once a hub of activity, the focal point of gatherings of influential politicians and aristocrats especially in the 1920s and 1930s, now has few visitors and is even closed for much of the year. A new dispensation obtains. It is the modern age, the postwar world, in which heritage and tradition have lost their former importance and often their very significance. Darlington Hall had been the estate of the Darlingtons for two centuries but is now owned by someone who is not even English, who is desirous only of the prestige of owning what he crudely terms a 'grand old English house'.[13]

The action of the story is prompted by Stevens's desire to meet the former housekeeper of Darlington Hall, Miss Kenton. Like everything and everyone else in Stevens's life, she is altered. She left Darlington Hall 20 years earlier and is now a Mrs Benn, resident in Weymouth. Stevens has intuited marital unhappiness in her letters to him, and he wishes to persuade her to return to employment at Darlington Hall.

We learn in the course of reading Stevens's reminiscences that he has deluded himself all along in his relations with Miss Kenton when she was working at the Hall as its housekeeper. She was attracted to him and he to her but, for Stevens, those emotions could never be acknowledged. They had to be hidden or ridiculed. When they were working together, he allowed himself to consider Miss Kenton only as a valued colleague despite the various bids she made for his sympathy and understanding.

If Stevens has rejected his humanity in favour of the sort of emphasis on robotic perfectionism and obsessiveness about work that we might associate with the Japanese *sarariman*, Bruno,

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[13] Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990) 6. Subsequent references to this work are included in the text as marked RD.

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the protagonist of Murdoch's novel, has been too self-indulgent, engaging in love affairs without concern for the hurt they might cause his family. *Bruno's Dream* centers on the decaying, decrepit figure of Bruno Greensleave – bed-ridden, tormented by guilt and fear – as he struggles to come to terms with the fact of his impending death. In both cases – in Stevens's dedication to his work and in Bruno's selfish gratification of his own desires – the result has been the same: Stevens and Bruno have isolated themselves from others; they cannot meaningfully connect with anyone around them. In their final years, they are reduced to the role of lonely spectators who observe the full, busy lives of those around them.

In the isolation of old age, Bruno is consumed by regret. It has been argued that Murdoch's emphasis in *Bruno's Dream* on fruitless feelings of remorse was partly inspired by personal circumstances. Carolyn Ste Croix, the daughter of some friends, had committed suicide in January 1964 and Murdoch reportedly was 'haunted by guilt that she had not paid enough attention to her'.[14] The 1960s were a time when Murdoch was brooding on 'personal losses': grieving for friends and acquaintances lost either through estrangement or death, worrying that she had squandered her love on people who did not really care for her, and feeling hurt by those who said her two novels set in Ireland, published in that decade, revealed her lack of understanding of Irish history and culture.[15] Like her protagonist, Bruno, she seems sometimes to have felt herself unwanted and unloved.

Murdoch's and Ishiguro's protagonists live only peripherally in the present. Bruno and Stevens are mainly preoccupied with memories of times past and of family and friends who are dead or simply absent. Murdoch and Ishiguro both present life as a dream from which these two protagonists struggle to awaken as they realise they are approaching their end. A.S. Byatt describes the predicament in her study of Murdoch's novels, *Degrees of Freedom*,

> What [Bruno] meets is the common metaphysical bewilderment we all feel, that life is slipping by, unrealized, like a dream – it is 'too *hard*' to realize, except when confronted by the urgency of imminent death when it is too late.[16]

In this sense, both *The Remains of the Day* and *Bruno's Dream* take as one of their themes the question of what one is to do about the past.[17] Ishiguro uses English historical events as a springboard for reflections on personal and national identity. Murdoch writes a book exemplifying her belief that ordinary private events are more important than political ones.[18] What this translates into in both novels is the prominent role accorded to memory. Just as Stevens endlessly replays events of long ago in which Lord Darlington and Miss Kenton figure large, Bruno is preoccupied by reminiscences of the dead: his mother; Janie, the wife with whom he quarrelled and who cursed him for his infidelity; Maureen, the mistress with whom he found a happiness he could never enjoy with Janie; and Gwen, the daughter who died in her youth trying to save a child she thought was drowning. He also thinks often of his only surviving child, Miles, from whom he has long been estranged. Bruno had deplored Miles's decision to marry a woman from India, Parvati, who happened to die shortly afterwards in a plane crash.

Because Bruno likens his life to a dream, as an old man in failing health he dreads the night because of the nightmares it may bring. In a lengthy soliloquy Bruno muses on life's fundamental incomprehensibility:

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[14] Martin and Rowe 89-91.
[15] Martin and Rowe 89-91.
[16] A.S. Byatt, *Degrees of Freedom* (London: Vintage, 1994) 264-5.
[17] Conradi, *Saint* 182.
[18] Martin and Rowe 89.

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> What had happened to him and what was it all about and did it matter now that it was practically all over, he wondered. It's all a dream, he thought, one goes through life in a dream, it's all too *hard*. Death refutes induction. There is no "it" for it to be all about. There is just the dream, its texture, its essence, and in our last things we subsist only in the dream of another, a shade within a shade, fading, fading, fading.[19]

It is not only Bruno whose perception of the world resembles a dreamlike state. As in most of Murdoch's novels, the characters are self-absorbed, so preoccupied with their own thoughts and feelings that they recognise anybody else's existence only as it impinges directly on their own. Their relations with each other are characterised by secrets and lies, by couplings and un-couplings, by the unexpected and improbable *coup de foudre*. Adelaide and Danby, for example, are secret lovers, but then Danby embarks on an affair with Diana and subsequently falls for Diana's sister Lisa. Even when they fall in love, these are individuals who remain fundamentally obsessed with themselves.

The imminence of death has drawn Bruno out of his self-absorption sufficiently that he exerts himself to establish contact with the son he hasn't met for ten years. The reunion proves disastrous, but he has at least tried. Other characters in the book are granted this release from the prison of egoism through the sudden, passionate and sometimes even violent love affairs that are a common feature of Murdoch's novels. These are experiences that inflict themselves on her characters 'like a vision of necessity and meaningful reality' and serve to awaken them, however temporarily, from their dreams.[20] In other words, it is love, even if it takes the form only of a brief affair, that offers a kind of salvation.

Stevens also want to achieve a kind of reconciliation with an absent loved one, and it goes only marginally more successfully than Bruno's attempt. Although Stevens is unable to acknowledge he has ever experienced romantic feelings about Miss Kenton, he is aware that he has always liked and admired her. Again, from hints dropped in her letters to him, Stevens surmises that Miss Kenton is unhappy in her marriage, and the plot of *The Remains of the Day* springs from his urge to meet her again and try to persuade her to return to service in Darlington Hall.

Much of the power and poignancy of *The Remains of the Day* derives from Stevens's inability to comprehend Miss Kenton despite their long history of close companionship. He faithfully records past conversations and actions in his memoir while failing to appreciate their significance. Through his descriptions of their encounters and conversations, the reader can trace the trajectory of Miss Kenton's feelings from admiration to a kind of love. But as Stevens forfeits her respect by his seemingly callous behaviour towards his dying father and his dismissal of the two Jewish maids at Lord Darlington's request, acceding to the anti-Semitism of his German friends, these emotions are succeeded by anger and then by a weary puzzlement. She gives Stevens one last chance to declare his feelings on informing him of the proposal of marriage she has received. When he characteristically fails to rise to the challenge, she must give up on him and move on. The irony is that we, the readers of the novel, can understand Miss Kenton, but Stevens cannot.

Stevens and Bruno both suffer from a kind of acquired blindness. In the case of Stevens, it is apparent that he is upset when he realises Miss Kenton proposes to leave Darlington Hall and marry. But he cannot admit the true reason for his distress even to himself. He guesses that Miss

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[19] Iris Murdoch, *Bruno's Dream* (New York: The Viking Press, 1969), 9-10. Subsequent references to this work are included in the text as marked BD.
[20] Byatt 265.

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Kenton is weeping in her parlour because of his noncommittal reaction to her announcement that she has accepted the marriage proposal, but he busies himself with his professional duties and resists the opportunity to knock on her door and establish relations on a new footing with her himself.

It is coincidentally that same night that Lord Darlington's godson, Mr Cardinal, accuses Stevens of demonstrating a fatal lack of curiosity in failing to understand that, for the past four or five years, Herr Ribbentrop has been manoeuvering Lord Darlington like a pawn on Hitler's behalf. Lord Darlington's friendship with such senior Nazis has been a valuable propaganda weapon for the Germans. But Stevens is oblivious to any such ramifications of the international gatherings his employer has arranged, content in the knowledge that he has been able to offer impeccable service. He exculpates himself with the defence that he was only doing his job:

> How can one possibly be held to blame in any sense because, say, the passage of time has shown that Lord Darlington's efforts were misguided, even foolish? Throughout the years I served him, it was he and he alone who weighed up the evidence and judged it best to proceed in the way he did, while I simply confined myself, quite properly, to affairs within my own professional realm (RD 201).

Ishiguro may be ironically echoing, in Stevens's words, the very defence routinely trotted out by rank-and-file Nazis accused of war crimes, that they were only obeying orders. In any case, his novel depicts Lord Darlington and Stevens as perfectly suited. Master and servant in these prewar years each adopt a wilful blindness.

When Stevens finally arrives in Weymouth and meets Miss Kenton again, she confesses that on that dramatic night in May 1923 when Stevens's father lay dying upstairs and Lord Darlington was hosting his important political conference, she had initially decided to accept Mr Benn's proposal simply as a ruse to annoy Stevens. We readers intuit her words to mean that she hoped such a drastic step finally would force Stevens to declare his own feelings for her. But he failed to do so, and whether or not Miss Kenton really wanted to leave Stevens and her employment at Darlington Hall, she felt she had no choice.

This admission succeeds in breaking through the armour of Stevens's self-imposed isolation. He feels his heart is 'breaking' as he digests the implications of what she has told him (RD 239). In Ishiguro's own words, this is the point at which 'his rigid defence would crack, and a hitherto concealed tragic romanticism would be glimpsed'.[21] But it is too late for him to achieve any sort of meaningful *éclaircissement* with Miss Kenton. Stevens has held himself aloof from her for too long and lied too successfully to himself as well as to her about his deepest needs. He is not an individual who can cope with too much reality. He can't bear to think of what he has lost. He manages to conceal his sadness. He only weeps later, during a chance encounter with a stranger, when he finds himself talking about his past. In letting Miss Kenton go, he had lost his only chance of romantic happiness. In trusting so blindly in Lord Darlington, ultimately denounced as a Nazi dupe, his triumphs as a butler at Darlington Hall in the days of its apparent glory have been fatally tainted.

Ishiguro concludes *The Remains of the Day* on a note of hope. The kind stranger who witnesses Stevens's tears consoles the ageing butler with these words:

> You've got to enjoy yourself. The evening's the best part of the day. You've done your day's work. Now you can put your feet up and enjoy it (RD 244).

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[21] Kazuo Ishiguro, interview in *The Guardian* newspaper, 6 December 2014.

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The reader feels there's a chance that Stevens may find a kind of peace and happiness in his final years. As he walks along the pier in the early evening, Stevens is able to detach himself from his misery sufficiently to observe passersby and to feel interested in and attracted by them. He has awoken from his self-absorbed dream. Stevens resolves to try harder to master the technique of bantering as a means of establishing human warmth and contact between himself and others. In an interview Ishiguro gave in 1990, the author admitted that this was his intent in describing Stevens's growing preoccupation with being able successfully to engage in light-hearted raillery:

> The role of the butler is to serve inconspicuously while creating the illusion of absence and at the same time being physically on hand to do these things. It seemed to me appropriate to have somebody who wants to be this perfect butler because that seems to be a powerful metaphor for someone who is trying to actually erase the emotional part of him that may be dangerous and that could really hurt him in his professional area. Yet he doesn't succeed because these kinds of human needs, the longings for warmth and love and friendship, are things that just don't go away. This is what Stevens probably realizes at the end of the novel when he starts to get an inkling about this question of bantering. He starts to read more and more into why he can't banter and this is an indication of the fact that he's somehow cut off from other people. He can't even make the first steps in forming relationships with people. [22]

Bruno comes to recognise he is the prisoner of his own thoughts. On his deathbed, Bruno envisages himself as a spider caught in a web:

> I am at the centre of the great orb of my life, thought Bruno, until some blind hand snaps the thread. I have lived for nearly ninety years and I know nothing … The spider spins his web, it can no other. I spin out my consciousness, this compulsive chatterer, this idle rambling voice that will so soon be mute. But it's all a dream. Reality is too hard. I have lived my life in a dream and now it is too late to wake up (BD 303-4).

Murdoch and Ishiguro accord love the utmost importance as the only means of alleviating the misery that arises from selfish egotism; only love brings clear-sightedness. Stevens is blinded by his obsession with his work and unable to *see* what is directly in front of him: the deteriorating political situation, his father, Miss Kenton. Similarly, when Bruno agonises that he cannot rewind his past and redeem his mistakes he reflects that they arose primarily from a kind of self-centered blindness:

> He had loved only a few people and loved them so badly, so selfishly. He had made a muddle of everything. Was it only in the presence of death that one could see so clearly what love ought to be like? (BD 305)

In *The Bell* Murdoch observes that all failures are failure of love:

> Love, in its many guises, is Murdoch's major theme. She sees falling in love, although so often powered by fantasy and projection, as revelatory, one of life's most intense experiences and granting the rare sense of another person's existence and value.[23]

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[22] Vorda and Herzinger 87.
[23] Martin and Rowe 41.

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Bruno's epiphany at the novel's close is that his betrayed wife would have wished to forgive rather than curse him. This recognition of the redeeming power of love is a note of hope that finds an echo in the story of Diana, Bruno's daughter-in-law, who, at the beginning of the novel, is a shallow, self-satisfied individual but goes on to find enlightenment through pain and suffering and self-sacrifice: through having her husband fall in love with her sister and then through nursing the dying old man. In his final moments, she reflects on the insubstantiality of human personality, feeling that the individual self is a kind of myth:

> She tried to think about herself but there seemed to be nothing there. Things can't matter very much, she thought, because one isn't anything. Yet one loves people, this matters … The helplessness of human stuff in the grip of death was something which Diana now felt in her own body. She lived the reality of death and felt herself made nothing by it and denuded of desire. Yet love still existed and it was the only thing that existed (BD 310-11).

Bruno is consoled in his final days by Diana's self-sacrificing care, comforted by the knowledge that she genuinely loves him.

In their novels Ishiguro and Murdoch depict lonely male protagonists or 'insider outsiders' whose egotism has condemned them to isolation and whose only salvation lies in love. Arguably personal considerations came into play in the composition of these books. Ishiguro has admitted that before writing *The Remains of the Day* he had made a 'conscious decision to do the next book away from Japan' because he wanted to be a writer who tackled universal themes, not just Japanese subjects although, ironically, in Stevens he depicts a character who bears many hallmarks of a Japanese.[24] When she was writing *Bruno's Web*, Murdoch was sometimes beset by unhappiness and futile regrets and wished to transcend her own rat-runs of memory by depicting a character saved by love. Murdoch and Ishiguro may have felt real life 'insider outsiders' in England, but in two of their most memorable protagonists, Bruno and Stevens, they depict fictional 'insider outsiders' capable of being released from the prison of self to the wider community of the world, awakening to life's potentialities through acceding to the demands of love.

Wendy Jones Nakanishi, *an American, is a Professor of English at Shikoku Gakuin University in Japan, having earned a doctorate in eighteenth-century English literature at Edinburgh University in Scotland. She has published widely on eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first-century English and Japanese literature and, in recent years, has begun writing short stories about her 30 years' residence in Japan as an academic, the wife of a Japanese farmer, and the mother of three sons. Her first novel,* Imperfect Strangers*, is to be published by Endeavour Press this year under the pen name of Lea O'Harra.*

[24] Dylan Otto Krider, 'Rooted in a Small Space: an Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro' [1998], *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro* 129. In this interview, Ishiguro observes 'I wanted to see if people could appreciate me purely as a novelist as opposed to a Japanese novelist'.

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