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

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This article compares two novels whose theme is the reflections and regrets of a lonely male protagonist. In *Bruno's Dream* (1969), it 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. Both are depicted as essentially alone. In the drama of life they are spectators rather than actors. They are 'insider outsiders'.

The sense of alienation Bruno and Stevens experience is so acutely described because they are the creation of authors who were '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.

Ishiguro has often 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 'mythic England' because of the 'ironic distance' he knew existed between him and native Englishmen.

Similarly, it has been suggested that Murdoch also straddled two cultural heritages as an Anglo-Irish writer: 'a people with a dual identity, seeing themselves in some sense as both the true Irish *and* the true English, while being regarded as neither, and as outsiders'. Nationality was a sensitive issue for Murdoch. She set two of her novels of the '60s in Ireland and always professed herself proud to be Irish. But many thought Murdoch had no more valid claim to Irish nationality than Americans who had migrated from Ireland centuries earlier. It may be that it is how Murdoch thought of herself that is important.

In writing *The Remains of the Day* Ishiguro has said he made a conscious decision to do a book set outside 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. When she was writing *Bruno's Web*, Murdoch was mired in 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.