

Symbolism in "A Handful of Dust" & "The Remains of the Day"

In both A Handful of Dust by Evelyn Waugh and The Remains of the Day by Kazuo Ishiguro, symbolism plays an important role in conveying the novelists' ideas to the readers. On the one hand, Evelyn Waugh uses symbolism in order to depict the changes that have taken place in the English society and the lack of morality in the period between the Two World Wars. On the other hand, Kazuo Ishiguro uses symbolism in order to show the deterioration of the British Empire and the rise of the American one after the Two World Wars.

In A Handful of Dust, Evelyn Waugh uses symbolism in order to show the disintegration of the old morals and old traditions in the English society after the First World War. Waugh uses "Hetton" as a symbol of this disintegrating civilization and traditions. Its old Gothic style represents the grandeur of the past. Tony Last, his owner, considers Hetton to be a symbol of a certain tradition that he believes in and which no longer exists. Tony does not see Hetton as horrible and ugly as everybody else does. No one is interested in it anymore. Brenda does not appreciate it. Mrs. Beaver wants to use chromium plating to change its appearance into a modern one. Unlike Mrs. Beaver, Tony who loves and appreciates Hetton and he is so obsessed about it. Tony refuses to sell Hetton and give it up in order to pay Brenda the alimony, even though Reggie has told that it is not strange to sell it. Reggie himself has sold and has given up the family house. This shows that the houses that have been once symbols of old traditions and morals are becoming no longer important. Tony thinks that giving up Hetton means giving up the past with all its morals and traditions. This shows that he still lives in the past.

Tony goes in search of a city, after losing his own world with all it stands for and after opening his eyes to the ugliness of the world around him. Such a world lacks morals, principles and glamour. Tony's name is also quite symbolic. "Last" shows that he is the last one to believe in old morals and traditions. He is the only one who still cares about Hetton and what it stands for.

In The Remains of the Day, Kazuo Ishiguro also uses a house in representing the defects of the British society after the Two World Wars. Darlington Hall represents the British culture with all its traditions, customs and principles. After World War II, Mr Farraday, the American gentleman, has bought Darlington Hall from Lord Darlington. This shows that the old British traditions are replaced by the new American one. The deterioration of Darlington Hall represents the deterioration of the British Empire and the rise of the American one. The fact that Mr Farraday buys Darlington Hall shows that the American culture has destroyed the English one with all its old traditions and civilization.

Another symbol that shows the decay of the British civilization is the night and the electric light. On his way back to Darlington Hall and after his journey to visit Miss Kenton, Stevens finds a group of people waiting at the pier for the night to fall down and the electric light to be turned on. The night is a symbol for the old British civilization which is on its way to collapse and fade away. The electric light is a symbol for the new civilization which is going to rise. Stevens does not understand why they are so cheerful, because he knows nothing about the new civilization which all the people believe in.

In both novels, the writers succeed in conveying their ideas through symbolism. They are both affected by the world wars and their consequences. Both of them have used old house, which are symbols for old traditions and civilization in order to show the disintegration of the British civilization after the Two World Wars.