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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**Kiran Desai and Kazuo Ishiguro: Worlding Diasporic Literature between the Local and the Global in *The Inheritance of Loss* and *an Artist of The Floating World***

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**| ABSTRACT**

This paper offers an intertextual reading of Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of The Floating World* (1986) and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006). It explores how both texts manage the circuits of the international book market as commodities conscious of the stakes involved in addressing a global audience and cognizant of their translinguistic and transcultural vocations. The paper probes the discursive sites built by the two texts while oscillating between the will to defy the discourse of globalization and the urge to comply with the demand for exoticism in the Western mainstream literary market.

**| KEYWORDS**

Kiran Desai/ Kazuo Ishiguro/diasporic texts/ global audience/the discourse of globalization/literary market.

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**1. Introduction**

'Une Œuvre non traduite n'est lue qu'à moitié' (Ernest Renan qtd in Kilito 2013 :63)

If *An Artist of The Floating World*(1986) and *The Inheritance of Loss*(2006) can readily be categorized as diasporic texts, intertexting both narratives might nonetheless pose critical challenges which go well beyond generic and thematic considerations, on account not only of the synchronic distance separating the two works- two decades-, but more importantly on the way each work formulates and manages its worldliness on the international scene, while further anchoring its historicity within wider geopolitical scopes. If anything, it would be interesting to investigate how *AFW* and *IL* position themselves within a complex network of universal interconnectedness while maintaining a dissonance between the global and the local, thereby testing the limits of worldliness. At another level, this discursive resistance to the politics of globalization unsettles the hegemonic rhetoric of this latter and emphasizes the discontents of cosmopolitanism by maintaining postcolonial ambiguity and incidentally suggesting a genuine possibility of unmaking/remaking world structures along new paradigms. If it is equally true that both texts are literary products meant to survive the circuits of production, dissemination, consumption, and ultimately of collaboration, it is otherwise intriguing to register how each narrative manages its marketability and commodification within the international book market. Accordingly, the present paper will probe how *AFW* and *IL* chart respective trajectories in the international literary arena and examine the way both artefacts attempt to reformulate visible structures of the world while knowingly capitalizing on their cultural otherness in their race to ensure market valence and visibility, and strategically subverting Western assumptions about alterity.

**2. Literature Review**

If two decades separate the publication of *AFW* and *IL*, as mentioned above, one forcibly needs to halt at the significance of *AWF* in Ishiguro's literary career and reflect on the writer's authorial mobility from ' typical Japanese' to ' typical universal,' to borrow from critic Jane Hu who rightly wonders: 'How did Kazuo Ishiguro evolve from a celebrated novelist of the postwar Japanese experience to a universal paragon of so-called Anglophone literature' (Jane Hu,2021:23). This flexibility, or more accurately

aesthetic maturation, is perceived by Hu as indexical of a characteristic generic framework namely the Asian Anglophone historical novel which she contends underpins the sum total of Ishiguro's fiction :

Ishiguro's oeuvre thus models in condensed miniature the trajectory of the historical novel since Walter Scott's germinal *Waverley* (1814). Read in the continuum, Ishiguro's novels emphasize how novelistic representations of national histories are predicated on the genericness of British historical fiction. (Hu, 2021:25)

As early as *A Pale View of Hills* (1982) in which Ishiguro experiments with 'the tropes of the gothic novel'( Hu, 125), to flirting with 'the kunstlerroman'(Hu,125) in *AFW*, moving to the 'Manor house fiction'(Hu,125) in *The Remains of The Day* (1989), then trying his hand at 'Modernist surrealism'(Hu125) in *The Unconsoled* (1995), toying with ' the detective novel'(Hu125) in *When We Were Orphans*(2000), then science fiction and fantasy in *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and *The Buried Giant* (2015) respectively. According to Hu, this versatility and generic variety reveal if 'read in continuum' that 'Ishiguro's novels emphasize how novelistic representations of national histories are predicated on the genericness of British historical fiction. As Ishiguro has increasingly experimented with speculative genre fiction, we can see how stereotypes of Asian inscrutability in his early work are, in fact, part of a broader fiction about generic characters' (Hu,125). Hu documents how Ishiguro, in his preliminary drafts of *AFW*, had never contemplated setting it in Japan but more likely in '1980s England with a young Japanese employee at a British firm as its protagonist', and that albeit 'the novel is ultimately set in postwar Japan featuring the imperial apologist and former war propagandist, Masuji Ono, Ishiguro's initial blueprints reveal a rather different story that traffics far more in stereotypes about Britishness' (Hu,132). If anything, this initial sketch confirms once more Ishiguro's cosmopolitan ambitions in his early aesthetic choices and verifies anew that the scope and scape of his texts transcend local or parochial bearings.

### **3. Materials and Methods**

The choice of an anonymous Asian locale and Ishiguro's intent in not naming the setting substantiates the global vocation of *AFW*, premised, as it is, on the local/global dialectic, which suffuses the narrative with a universal dimension. Thus, *AFW* envisions a post-World War II locale, wherein disillusioned Ono revisits the past and unwittingly questions his life achievements with a rare complacency, complicated by a quasi-insular detachment from the rest of the world, in an inimical attitude towards the hegemony of American culture and politics. In shedding light on human and material desolations, the narrative condemns the American gung-hoo belligerence around the world, further magnified by the fake and facile discourse of globalization, a discourse gainsaid even further by *IL*.

Importantly, the flux from local to global spheres in Desai's text is confused by the imbrication of different rhetorics, namely postcolonialism, and globalization, which, when aligned together, foreground the economy of loss and emphasize the pernicious sequels of the neo-capitalism system worldwide. It is noteworthy that both *AFW* and *IL* share a concern with the individual agency when confronted with the sweeping dehumanization of neo-capitalism.

The present paper juxtaposes the fictional worlds of Ishiguro and Desai through an intertextual reading of their respective narratives, viz. *An Artist of The Floating* (1986) and *The Inheritance of* (2006). The mainstay objective is to uncover the global vocation of both texts through the verbal and non-verbal ingredients mobilized to enhance the marketability and valence of both works. Incidentally, the article offers a comparative approach to the paratextual devices deployed to confer the global stamp and flavour to both texts while bearing in mind that both Desai and Ishiguro detain a certain amount of resistance to the discourse of globalization.

### **4. Findings and discussion**

#### **4.1 *AFW* and *IL*: Worlding Diasporic Literature between the Local and the Global**

Pertinently, while Masuji Ono comes to realize, in narrative retrospection and with the clarity of hindsight, his enslavement by the mighty nationalist militarist ideology and the collapse of all his value system against the ethical codes of post-war times, Biju surrenders the global chase on account of his sentiments of alienation and estrangement and chooses instead to disengage himself from global pursuits, suggesting thus a dissonance within the global/local dialectic. Yet, the disenchantment with the discourse of globalization in *AFW* and *IL* takes different directions since Ishiguro's text seems to be more of an invitation to the reader to interrogate the new world system dominated by American values such as military might and consumerism, since America is apprehended as 'a parvenu' with no cultural capital or historical heritage, as opposed to Japan, whose ancestral culture is being dispossessed and denied ascendancy. This civilisational clash wherein Japan obviously plays the part of the vanquished rehearses a universal unevenness similarly brought under scrutiny in *IL*, which juxtaposes not only India to the US but all the Borgesian 'voices of poverty' to the signifiers of capitalist exploitation.

Fittingly, both narratives tease out the complexity of post-independence/post-war malaise while exploring how the confrontation between local and global might result in postcolonial cynicism or ethical evacuation. If Ono reluctantly comes to acknowledge the inadequacy and anachronism of his belief system in post-war Japan, Judge Pattel is likewise befuddled by his identity slippages and his perplexed attitude towards his very own culture, people, and self. Indeed, both men stand for vestigial or antiquated modes of thinking that have failed to address purposefully occluded realities, such as historical factuality and identity trouble, in typical self-denial. Yet, while *AWF* de-emphasizes the validity of the nation state as a suitable framework for understanding the complexity of modern plight, it otherwise invites reflection on the actual world system governed by market logic and economic supremacy, which in turn gestures towards the imbalances in the new world order. On the other hand, *IL* reconstructs cognition of the world along an epistemic reconfiguration that attempts to offer new paradigms in comprehending worldliness as a reality, as a process, but certainly as no panacea to the world's ills. It is indeed under the 'messy' sky of Mahattan that Biju is seized by fear of losing his soul and identity :

And if he continued on here? What would happen? Would he, like Harish-Harry, manufacture a fake version of himself and using what he had created as clues, understand himself backward? Life was not about life for him anymore, and death-whatwould even that mean to him? it would have nothing to do with death. (*IL*,268)

If the absurdity of life in exile and the longing for his homeland convince Biju to return to Kalimpong only to be robbed and dispossessed of all his belongings exactly as Mr. Kakkar, the proprietor of the newly opened Shangri-la Travel in New York, had warned him :

'You are sure you want to go back ??' he said, alarmed. (.....) 'You're making a big mistake(....) Don't be completely crazy- all those relatives asking for money! Even strangers are asking for money- maybe they just try, you know, maybe you shit and dollars just come out. I'm telling you, my friend, they will get you; if they don't, the robbers will; if the robbers won't, some disease will; if not some disease, the heat will; if not the heat, those mad Sardarjis will bring down your plane before you even arrive.' While Biju had been away, Indira Gandhi had been assassinated by the Sikhs in the name of their homeland; Rajiv Gandhi had taken over- (*IL*,268/ 269)

Such a bleak picture counterbalances Biju's imagined and romanticized idea of home, for once back home, Biju 'felt himself shrink back to size, the enormous anxiety of being a foreigner ebbing- that unbearable arrogance and shame of the immigrant. Nobody paid attention to him here, and if they said anything at all, their words were easy, unconcerned. He looked about for the first time. God knows how long his vision has been unblurred, and he found that he could see clearly.' (*IL*,300). Yet, soon after the robbers deprived him of all his properties 'Darkness fell, and he sat right in the middle of the path- without his baggage, without his savings, and worst of all, without his pride. Back from America with far less than he had ever had.'(*IL*,317), only to wonder, ' Why had he left? Why had he left? He'd been a fool. He thought of Harish-Harry- ' Go for a rest and then return.' Mr Kakkar, the travel agent, warned him, ' My friend, I'm telling you, you are making a big mistake'(*IL*,318). Architected along geographical and spatial binarisms, Desai's narrative oscillates between a constructed image of the West- America in this occurrence- and home epitomized by India and Kalimpong in particular. This duality between the imaginary and material realities involved in conceptualizing space not only upsets/capsizes any a-priori assumptions about locale but, more importantly, disturbs the bifold contrast between local/global by further rejecting any monolithic conceptualizations. Such a vision heightens the vulnerability of modern subjectivities caught between national/local uniqueness and the lure of cosmopolitan membership, which is shortly jettisoned by the ideological crisis of neo-capitalism and globalization. Significantly, the weight of global structures on individual entities can be perceived in more obvious ways in *IL*, which prioritizes the hegemony of global systems over subjective agency, than in *AFW*, which envisages the individual in his conflictual relationship with his environment, manipulated by political and ideological agendas, as he stands, yet in total harmony with his local anxieties couched in a typically post-war 'naivety.' In reality, Ono's failure and refusal to acknowledge the impact of the new world order is counter argued in the narrative by the evidence that Japan is part of the international community and is subjected to the influence of global flows. The postcolonial malaise driving Judge Pattel, Biju, and the rest of the characters in *IL* finds no echo in *AFW* in which the real plight resides in challenging microscopic personal history with macroscopic national agendas.

#### **4.2 *AFW* and *IL*: Two Narratives navigating their way through the global market**

In one of her interviews, Kiran Desai confessed that 'no one wanted (her) book' as it was turning into a monster, growing out of control'(rediff. com/news/2006/oct/15kiran.htm), yet the truth is, it sold more than 2,396 copies immediately after it was long-listed for the Booker, and witnessed a sales boost with an average of five hundred copies a week after she was short-listed for the ditto. Correspondingly, the critical accolade received by *AFW* rests in large part on its short-listing for the 1986 Booker Prize and its subsequent nomination for the Whitbread Book of the Year Award (1986). Without ever intending to question the aesthetic quality nor the literary merit of both texts, it strikes us as obvious that the Booker Prize is undeniably a much coveted 'holy grail' for most if not all writers- to borrow from Aravind Adiga, and apart from the financial appeal it surely operates on the community

of contemporary novelists worldwide- 50,000 & cash award- the impetus it represents for their careers is much more far-reaching and consequential. Pertinently, Rebecca Walkowitz notes that: 'Since winning The Booker Prize in 1989, (Ishiguro) has been an avid participant in international book tours, which he says have made him more self-conscious about the cultural and the linguistic diversity of his readers' (Walkowitz,2015:219), a consciousness which actively translates in his fiction offering 'compelling examples of the new World Literature' according to Walkowitz or what she chooses to label 'comparison literature.' She further maintains that 'this emerging genre of World Literature for which global comparison is as formal as well as a thematic preoccupation' (Walkowitz,2015:218) does not only allow new ways of thinking but, most importantly, furnishes us with novel global paradigms whereby it becomes possible to invoke absent structures such as nation, culture, and English. If such categories are admittedly occulted in literature, Simon Gikandi wonders: 'What are we going to do with these other categories-nation, culture, and English- which function as the absent structure that shapes and yet haunts global culture and the idea of literature itself ' ( qtd in Walkowitz,218), it is only fair to acknowledge that Ishiguro's fiction ' forces us to see that a new conception of ' global culture' if it is to be something other than an enlargement of national culture, will require a new idea of literature itself' (Walkowitz,2015:219). This destabilization of the very notion of the literary is, in reality, an urge to reformulate visible structures of the world by rethinking long-held assumptions of alterity. In both *AFW* and *IL*, the Western reader is summoned to flexibly reconsider her Western-centric monolithic version of history and the grand narrative of the nation by claiming a global sense of history and moving- as discussed in earlier chapters- from championing national allegories to transnational or global ones. Thus, Japanese and Indian narratives are envisaged in their complex interconnectedness to international history, calling for a reconfiguration of world systems and arguably for a new understanding of literature. The complexity reaches its finest when the reader learns that Gyan's-Sai's lover- great grandfather ' swore allegiance' to the British crown, and ' off he went, the beginning of over a hundred years of family commitment to the wars of the English'(IL,142). The account unfolds as follows :

At the beginning, the promise had held true-all. Gyan's great grandfather did was march for many prosperous years, and he acquired a wife and three sons. But then they sent him to Mesopotamia, where Turkish bullets made a sieve of his heart, and he leaked to death on the battlefield. As a kindness to the family, that they might not lose their income, the army employed his eldest son, although the famous buffalo, by now, was dead, and the new recruit was spindly. Indian soldiers fought in Burma, in Gibraltar, in Egypt, in Italy. Two months short of(.....), the spindly soldier was killed in Burma, shakily defending the British against the Japanese(.....). ( *IL*,142)

This re-reading of contemporary history operates a rehabilitation of the marginalized and establishes explicit correlations between the atrocities perpetrated by colonialism and the legitimate feelings of resentment among postcolonial subjects such as Biju and his fellow dishwasher Achootan, who have to cope with the white man's arrogance in locations of power, where pauperism and destitution have cornered them :

'These white people,' Said Achootan. (...) 'Shit! But at least this country is better than England,' he said. ' At least they have some hypocrisy here. They believe they are good people and you get some relief. There, they shout at you openly on the street, 'Go back to where you came from.' He had spent eight years in Canterbury, and he had responded by shouting a line Biju was to hear many times over, for he repeated it several times a week: Your father came to *my* country and took *my* bread, and now I have come to your country to get *my* bread back. ( *IL*,135)

Apart from registering the deep indignation of the community of subalterns, this 'speaking back' of sorts textually reproduces the rhetoric of postcolonial fiction and aesthetically both sets the tone and makes room for Desai's narrative within the 'writing back' project. Additionally, *IL*'s ambition exceeds being a mere condemnation of the politics of colonialism to that of a reassessment of the global order through which the novel itself has to negotiate its way by traversing the circuits of dissemination and translation. In identifying the insufficiency and inadequacy of postcolonial aesthetics to apprehend global crises, *IL* and *AWF* respectively solicit expansive frameworks and larger geographical and historical horizons, aware, as they stand, of the significance of mobility as a key aspect of the global novel. While the inner mobility of the narratives, particularly *IL*, affiliates with the translinguistic and transcultural vocations of the texts as market commodities trafficking and trotting around the cosmopolitan book circuits, it is only fair to halt at the ambivalent function of the vernacular in both texts and underline the purposeful play between familiarity and unfamiliarity promoted by both narratives. Indeed, *IL* and *AWF* construct a certain extent of untranslatability which manages, in the long run, to engage the reader-admittedly in a superficial way- in the culture-specific 'habitus' of the texts while discursively advertising its resistance to the uniformisation of the literary. This linguistic 'defamiliarization' or intentful estrangement positions both texts within their cultures of origin, which ultimately act not only as agents of resistance but in subtler ways as exotic features exemplifying self-othering strategies so familiar to the international book market. If both Desai and Ishiguro are perfectly cognizant of the stakes involved in writing for a global literary audience located in northern metropolises, they are obviously vigilant not to fall prey to the trap of becoming ' polite works of ethical universal relevance' as critic Tim Parks argues(2010:25). Yet, writing in

English for a global readership means having to deal with highly complex issues, namely audience and linguistic variety, as Rebecca Walkowitz convincingly debates :

To write in English for global audiences, therefore, is to write for a heterogeneous group of readers: those who are proficient in several languages, those who may be proficient in one version of English but not proficient in another. This diversity creates an enormous range of English-language geographies, writers, and audiences. It also means that readers of English-language texts are likely to have very different experiences. The work will be foreign, strange, or difficult to some; it will be familiar to others- Anglophone novelists are thus managing comparative beginnings from the start and must find ways to register internal multilingualism (within English) even as their works travel out into additional national languages ( beyond English). ( Walkowitz,2015 :18)

Pertinently, while *IL* and *AFW* build discursive sites that oscillate between the will to defy the triumphalist discourse of globalization and the need to respond and cater to the demand for exoticism in the Western market, the concern with reaching larger audiences makes 'many English language writers draw attention to the unevenness of the global marketplace and sometimes try to remediate that unevenness by welcoming translation, by devising strategies of multilingualism that can survive global circulation, and by emphasizing translation's crucial role in the development of the English- language novel'(Walkowitz, 2015:19). Pertinently, the category 'Born-Translated' novels championed by Walkowitz, to which *IL* and *AFW* surely affiliate with :

Often focus on geographies in which English is not the principal tongue. These works purposefully break with the unique assignment of languages, geographies, and states in which one place is imagined to correspond to one language and one people, who are the users of that language. Born-translated works articulate this break by extending, sometimes radically, the practice of self translation, a term that translation specialists have often limited to authors who produce both an original work and the translation of that original work. (Walkowitz,2015:19)

If such a portrait calls to mind Elif Shafak and the linguistic journey her texts have to survive, as she 'preempts translation' to borrow from Walkowitz since she originally composes her novels in Turkish, then self-translates them into English, Desai's and Ishiguro's cases are slightly different, for if it is not a case of self-translation per se, there is still collaboration between writer and translator. Originally written in English- the global language par excellence- *IL* and *AFW* are nonetheless meant for larger audiences, conceivable only through translational transfer, which is intrinsic to global literature, and approached 'as medium and origin rather than as afterthought' (Walkowitz,2015:5), for translation is by no means :

Secondary or incidental to these works. It is a condition of their production. Globalization bears on all writers working in English today. However, it bears on them differently. Some works of fiction are sure to be translated. Others hope to achieve it. Some novelists are closely tied to the mass market, some to prestige cultures, and others to avant-garde communities. But even those novelists who won't plan on translation participate in a literary system attuned to multiple formats, media, or languages. Born-translated novels approach this system opportunistically. ( Walkowitz,2015:5)

## 5. Conclusion

This literary opportunism, inherent to the contemporary global condition, locates works such as *IL* and *AFW* at the heart of market dynamics, based as it stands, on commercial demand and astutely handled by international publishing conglomerates. Accordingly, for both works to be in the pipeline of multilingual/multinational networks, translation is a prerequisite for circulation and international recognition. In this respect, Walkowitz persuasively underscores the essential function operated by translation in disseminating born-translated fiction :

Born-translated works are notable because they highlight the effects of circulation on production. Not only are they quickly and widely translated, they are also engaged in thinking about that process. They increase translation's visibility, both historically and proleptically: they are trying to be translated, but in important ways, they are also trying to keep being translated. They find a way to register their debts to translation even as they travel into additional languages. (Walkowitz,2015:6)

This debt to the field transcends the unquestionable aesthetic value of translation as a praxis to its material conditions as quintessentially part of a transaction governed by market logics. Significantly, the immediate access to wider markets and, by the same token, to a larger readership is augmented by the sensitiveness to cultural specificity displayed in the different multilingual versions. In truth, the cover politics instrumentalized in *IL* and *AFW* disclose the unequivocal mobilization of paratextual marketing strategies that capitalize on cultural particularities, such is the case with *IL* in its various translations in French, Spanish, German, and Russia. These two latter advertise the suitcase iconography, which emphasizes transcontinental movement and unambiguously

stresses the centrality of mobility to the global spirit; on the other hand, the French and Spanish covers capitalize more overtly on Oriental signifiers which actually do not refer to any true textual anchor. Accordingly, the packaging politics of Desai's text reveal a genuine concern with audience sensibilities and seem to avail itself of the supply of clichés and stereotypes related to Eastern culture. Similarly, the way *AFW* is packaged for a multilingual readership singles out different aspects related to the narrative, stretching from the theme of floatingness to Japanese imagery, referring the reader to Japanese arts acting, as mentioned earlier, as narrative thresholds to the novel. Thus, the circulation of global narratives is in large part indebted to the confluence of exertions by different agents such as publishers, translators, reviewers, critics, or what John Hall calls 'the gatekeepers of the global literary system.' A central issue in the debate on World literature is what happens to literary works when they move to new literary systems. Are they 'lost' or 'found' in translational transfer, and do they gain in border-crossing and transnational mobility? If circulation stands as a mainstay parameter for gauging worldliness in literature and if translation heightens a work's status as World literature, as Damrosch adamantly maintains, it is noteworthy that literary artefacts have the tendency to obliquely summon the global reader 'to experience the text as a delayed or detoured object, a book that began somewhere else' (Walkowitz,2015:25). In this light, the global literary 'ecology,' for all its ebbs and flows, seems to be regimented along 'the imperial forces of literary globalization' which envisions World Literature along two distinctive paradigms: as an 'a container for various national literatures, it privileges source: distinct geographies, countable languages, individual genius, designated readers and the principle of positive collectivism. When World literature seems instead to be a series of emerging works, not a product but a process, it privileges target: the analysis of convergences and divergences across literary histories' (Walkowitz,2015:25).

Ultimately, if this paper has cogently argued that Desai's and Ishiguro's textualities are caught between marketability and authorial integrity, they nonetheless manage to build visible structures of the World while preserving a margin of resistance, be it aesthetic, cultural, or linguistic. The article has admittedly failed to apprehend all the aspects of any potential textual resistance on the part of Desai or Ishiguro and thus invites for more enlightening research in that particular respect.

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