

Ishiguro's Japanese-English Identity and His Reception Internationally and in Slovenia

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Abstract

Kazuo Ishiguro is a British author of Japanese descent who has established himself globally as an award-winning writer of bestselling books. This article deals with the hybridity of the author, who is both Japanese and English, a popular writer who stirs reader emotions but is at the same time respected by critics. The article begins by addressing the 'Japaneseness' in Ishiguro's work that is both obvious and skilfully concealed. In the second part, the article examines the reception of Ishiguro's work by Slovenian readers and discusses potential reasons for their seeming lack of response.

Keywords: Kazuo Ishiguro, Slovenian reception, globalisation, national identity

INTRODUCTION

The second half of the 20th century brought a significant change for the British in the character of their literary and national identity: the novel in English superseded the English novel in importance but also in persuasiveness. Once found in the margins of canonical literature, the new literatures in English now enjoys the limelight. Post-colonial English and black British literary works are being read and critically acclaimed. Even though contemporary English novelists are important, those that dictate the parameters of literary debate and attract the most attention are the non-English novelists who write in English (Shaffer 2007: 15). Part of this context is Kazuo Ishiguro, an Englishman from Japan who has seemingly achieved the perfect inclusion of people who immigrate at an early age. He is Japanese, while his speech and etiquette are British. Nevertheless, his accent and manner of speaking reveal his Japanese upbringing. In this article, we will analyse Ishiguro's hybridity and its potential influence on his reception by Slovenian readers.

JAPANESE-ENGLISH ORIGIN

A comprehensive approach to Ishiguro's work cannot afford to overlook the author's hybrid identity. His first novel, *A Pale View of the Hills*, is set in Japan and England, the second one, *An Artist of the Floating World*, in Japan, whereas *The Remains of the Day* takes place in England alone. *The Unconsoled* moves to a central European city, and *When We Were Orphans* is set partly in England and partly in Shanghai. All these novels deal with the themes of self-discovery and disappointment; they are all pensive and concerned with the past. Ihab Hassan (1989: 160) wonders if *The Remains of the Day* is a novel about the Japanese vision of England or, rather inconspicuously, an English version of Japan. Watching Stevens, the butler, and his obsession with dignity and loyalty, we are reminded of a Japanese samurai or ronin. In ancient Japan, a ronin was a free servant who voluntarily remained bound to his master. Gregory Mason (1989: 49) defines this class of people as homeless samurai who hold on to the long-gone code of honour, as people who maintain existential dignity while all around them traditional values are crashing. By serving his feudal lord, Stevens seems a prototype of this, almost completely embodying the "bushido" values, i.e., the rules of samurai life. His approach to fulfilling his duties, his attitude towards his father, and his loyalty to Lord Darlington link him to *Hagakure*, the collection of rules and anecdotes depicting correct samurai behaviour. Stevens can thus be seen as an uptight English butler, a parody of a parody, similar to Wodehouse's Jeeves, or someone

completely different – a covert Japanese samurai (Bay 2010: 23–33). Similarly, in *A Pale View of the Hills*, the protagonist's father is appalled by the lack of respect and blind obedience of his former students after the war because he expects bushido to remain valid.

Several characters in Ishiguro contribute to a broad perspective of 'Japaneseness' with their stereotypical and non-stereotypical behaviour and thinking. They are frequently in conflict with the change in their values, mostly because of the war. These old-fashioned values are often the remains of Japanese ethics, followed by the samurai class. Ishiguro's imaginary Japan leans on the samurai ethics. In his stories "The Summer after the War" and "A Family Supper", the young protagonists deal with the bitter reaction of their older relatives to the decay of traditional Japanese values, replaced by American influence. The latter even depicts a samurai suicide.

In *A Pale View of the Hills*, Etsuko, the narrator, moves to England from Japan. After her daughter's suicide, she recollects the time she spent in Nagasaki. On the one hand, Etsuko represents the post-WWII change, moving to a better place and marrying a businessman, while at the same time, she remains dependent on her husband, keeping the façade of a happy marriage, thus proving the stereotype of Japanese families being patriarchal. The novel features another Japanese stereotype: that working women are to be pitied and despised.

An Artist of the Floating World, Ishiguro's only book set entirely in Japan, depicts a post-war Japan still ruled by old structures and samurai values. The sisters Setsuko and Noriko embody a struggle between different values. Setsuko behaves in the typically Japanese way, respects the elderly and accepts traditional values but at the same successfully manipulates conversation to get what she wants. Noriko openly jokes about their father, while wanting to become the stereotypical Japanese housewife. The protagonist Masuji Ono recognizes this conflict, since he once had to choose between his own path and following bushido. He deals with questions of filial respect, loyalty to his own sensei¹ and in the end even seppuku.²

Ishiguro's penultimate novel *The Buried Giant* is set in fantasy England after the rule of King Arthur. It focuses on forgotten crimes through the parable of a dragon that uses its mist to cloud people's memories. The giant in the title represents repressed ethnic tensions. Again, Ishiguro is concerned with countries and their dark past, whether Britain, Japan or another country.

In some of his interviews, Ishiguro stresses that he is no expert on everything Japanese. He even admits that his Japanese is insufficient to read Japanese newspapers. When asked if he was conscious of his language and tone, since there is something Japanese that always comes across in his style, Ishiguro replied:

1 A teacher (in martial arts).

2 Another term for hara-kiri.

At the beginning of my career it was quite deliberate. *A Pale View of Hills* was set in Japan. My characters were Japanese, so of course they had to speak in a Japanese kind of English. And in *An Artist of the Floating World*, the characters were not only Japanese but they were meant to be speaking in Japanese even though it was written in English, so I spent a great deal of energy there finding an English that suggested there was Japanese being spoken or translated through. Maybe some of that effort has stayed with me. I use a formal, careful kind of English, but to some extent that may just be my natural or preferred way of using the language. For example, the butler in *Remains of the Day* is English, but he often sounds quite Japanese. And I thought that was fine, because he *is* a bit Japanese. (Chang 2015)

On Ishiguro's 'Japaneseness', the critics disagree. Haruki Murakami, a leading Japanese author, says that *The Remains of the Day* "looks like a Japanese novel – in its mentality, its taste, its colour," (cited in Iyer 1994: 58), while Kenzaburo Oe, another Japanese literary legend, mentions that Ishiguro's books make him feel that the power of the characters is not very Japanese, that the books are about people from England (Oe & Ishiguro 1991: 115).

Ishiguro sees the biggest difference between Japan and England in the peace and quiet of the English countryside.

The kind of England that I create in *The Remains of the Day* is not England that I believe ever existed [...] What I'm trying to do there [...] is to actually rework a particular myth about a certain kind of mythical England [...] an England with sleepy, beautiful villages with very polite people and butlers [...] taking tea on the lawn [...]. (Su 2009: 174)

Hunnewell (2008: 184) adds that to Ishiguro, Japan seems dizzily full of images and sounds, whereas England emerges as rural, simple, black and white.

In the early 1980s, Ishiguro was often mentioned alongside Timothy Mo and Salman Rushdie as one of the three writers to whom one had to pay attention because they were adding new layers to the British literary landscape. The critic Bruce King (1991: 192) congratulated them for bringing interculturalism to the general cultural milieu. Since they were bringing new, non-English voices to the literary discussion, their attracting attention was no surprise.

Caryl Phillips, a Kittitian-British novelist, (1997: xv) believes that Ishiguro's early prose creates conditions that provoke genuine intercultural dialogue and exchange. He chose nine pages of *The Remains of the Day* for his anthology *Extravagant Strangers: A Literature of Belonging*. In the preface, he claims that for many British people, to accept the idea that their country has a long, complex history of immigration would be to undermine their basic understanding of what it is to

be British. The excerpt features Stevens pondering the nation's greatness. Phillips explains that even though Ishiguro's life might seem unburdened with the signs of the Empire, his work often expresses a microscopically precise care for the nature of Britishness (see Sim 2009: 125, 126). Despite the importance of the British part of his identity, critics rarely say Ishiguro is a British author, period. He is usually identified as a Japanese-British author, this description serving to stress his interculturality and composite identity.

Identifying potential influences in the contemporary globalized literary cosmos, in which a clear impact of an author or work on another one can rarely be singled out, is a sensitive speculation. Yet in the case of Ishiguro, we can identify a few potential sources of influence. Ishiguro himself claims to have read much Japanese literature, albeit in English translation, especially twentieth-century novelists, such as Natsume Soseki (1867-1916), Junichiro Tanizaki (1886-1965), and Yasunari Kawabata (1899-1972), so certain similarities with the three Japanese authors are unsurprising.

An obvious similarity between Soseki and Ishiguro is their mixed origin. The gap between Soseki's Eastern roots and Western cultural integration was a predicament with which he was obsessed his whole life. As a child, he focused on Chinese fiction and poetry and rejected learning English, despite the new wave of enthusiasm for everything Western. At sixteen, he changed his mind only to become the second student ever to graduate in English from Tokyo University. While remaining reserved about his knowledge of the language and believing that he would never truly master it, in 1900 the Japanese government chose him for a fully funded pilot study programme in England (Gessel 1993: 45, 46). Later in his career, Soseki used his writing to oppose the Japanese tendency to mimic all that is Western, in which he saw the suppression of national pride and a serious threat to Japanese values and morals. Ishiguro fought this battle in the opposite direction as a Japanese writing in English, and he is constantly reminded of his Japanese heritage, even though he sees himself primarily as an Englishman.

Coping with change is a motif that connects Ishiguro to Junichiro Tanizaki, who began writing as a result of his enthusiasm for the West. He is popular among Japanophiles in the US, while according to Gessel (1993: 48), most Japanese readers resent this controversial author, who in his early novels touches on the delicate subject of incest, fantasizing about his own mother, and other erotic and sexual extremes, which inspires controversy in contemporary Japanese society. His themes differ from Ishiguro's, but similarities can be found in Tanizaki's 1944 novel *Makioka Sisters*, where a family struggles to keep their integrity during the war. Social changes and their influence on individuals are a frequent theme with Ishiguro, but the stability and integrity of his families and individuals are seriously disturbed and have none of the permanence and stability shown in *Makioka Sisters*.

Yasunari Kawabata, the first Japanese recipient of the Nobel Prize for literature, also shares characteristics with Ishiguro, particularly the isolation of his characters, one of Kawabata's most typical, possibly autobiographical features. Ishiguro (1986: 2) believes that Kawabata strove for traditional Japanese prose under the influence of European realism, a tradition that valued lyricism, mood, and reflection, not just plot and characters. The influence of this style can be seen throughout Ishiguro's work, particularly in *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World*, where the mood is created by thoughts and words that are never uttered.

Kawabata's passivity during the war, war propaganda and support for the army are reflected in Ishiguro's novels, but he never stresses exterior events. He too focuses on the individual's inner struggle, not the struggle of a group of people or a nation. Kawabata's observation about war can be linked to Ishiguro's third novel:

I consider that my life after the war consists of 'remaining years' and that these remaining years are not mine but a manifestation of the tradition of beauty in Japan. (cited in Gessel 1993: 180)

This reminds us of Stevens's reflection on the pier at the end of *The Remains of the Day*:

Perhaps, then, there is something to his advice that I should cease looking back so much, that I should adopt a more positive outlook and try to make the best of what remains of my day. After all, what can we ever gain in forever looking back and blaming ourselves if our lives have not turned out quite as we might have wished? (Ishiguro 1990: 244)

In Ishiguro's novels, the plot moves smoothly back and forth through events stretching across decades of the protagonist's life, through different worlds, the past, the present or dreams, spinning a huge web of personal and historical trauma. This is true whether the protagonist is a grieving mother, an aging artist, a professional butler, or a world-renowned pianist. Ishiguro admits that moving to England was what made him want to write about Japan, because the memories had started to fade (Sim 2009: 10). Later, this feeling of alienation and removal became one of his trademarks:

There was a part of me that wanted to find out if my acceptance was conditioned on the fact that I was acting as mediator to Japanese culture. I wanted to see if people could appreciate me purely as a novelist as opposed to a Japanese novelist. (Su 2009: 159)

Sim (2009: 19–21) summarizes Ishiguro's claim that he does not see himself as a Japanese writer but as a writer about common topics. His multicultural

background makes him a writer without a home. Ishiguro says that the realisation that he has never belonged to either country or society gave him the opportunity to become an international writer, but at the same time he felt enormous relief once he moved his story environment from Japan to England.

In a 1991 TV interview with Clive Sinclair, Ishiguro enumerated his most influential Western literary influences as George Eliot, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and others, claiming that his work originates from the Western realistic tradition. Mason (1989: 48) explains that with his ironic distance, Ishiguro evidently shows his deviation from the Japanese experience and identification as a Western writer. The distance between the past and the present and all the unspoken that lies between comprise the golden thread of all his novels.

Ishiguro displays a more pensive and indifferent attitude than the previously mentioned Japanese authors. His novels show the necessity to face the past, although this can be a difficult and complex process. He does not only focus on after-war changes but also the broader transitions: he researches psychological dilemmas of Western and Japanese culture because he feels close to them both. Etsuko from *A Pale View of the Hills*, Ono from *An Artist of the Floating World* and Stevens from *The Remains of the Day* are all representatives of individuals that have faced their past.

In his conversations with Kenzaburo Oe, Ishiguro explains that he was forced to write more internationally because of his lack of knowledge about Japan. In Oe's opinion, Ishiguro's style has a double structure with two or more intertwined elements, which Oe finds more English than Japanese (Ishiguro & Oe 1991: 115-118). Furthermore, Oe believes that a real novelist should be international: "My conclusion is that, rather than being an English author or European author, you are an author who writes in English ..." (ibid.).

Ishiguro was also influenced by Japanese films, especially by Ozu Yasujiro, which shows in many of his novels, especially in *An Artist of the Floating World*. Just like young people in Ozu's films from the same time, Masui Ono's grandson is excited about American pop culture. Ono's daughter Noriko, who has difficulty finding a life partner, is reminiscent of Ozu's films *Late Spring* and *Early Summer*, which focus on finding husbands for unrelated characters named Noriko. In the films, Noriko is played by the Japanese actress Hara Setsuko. Masui Ono's daughter is called Setsuko, which might suggest the source of inspiration (Medhurst 2015).

Kawabata's succinct point that despite his Japanese origins, he is not a Japanese writer and despite writing in English, he is not an English writer is indeed an essential part of Ishiguro's artistic identity. However, Slovenian readers still see Ishiguro mainly through this prism of double nationality, which might present an obstacle for relating to his work.

CRITICISM AND AWARDS

Moreover, the critical image of Ishiguro often centres on the fallacy reducing him to his cultural background. After his first two novels, critics described him as “an English writer with Japanese influences”, and later turned the definition around by characterizing him as “a Japanese who writes in English in a style that is more English than the English” (Patey 1991: 135). This focus on the influence of Japanese philosophy and culture on Ishiguro’s work often leaves Ishiguro speechless. When critics insist that his novels are firmly set in the British literary tradition, that is equally erroneous. In reality, Ishiguro should be viewed simply as one of the new international writers who offer readers formerly unknown worlds.

If critics initially praised Ishiguro’s taciturnity, his refined sense of time, and the quiet tones of his Japanese heritage, later novels seem to trigger mixed reviews. *The Unconsoled* was lauded by many for its ambition, excitement, and humour, while others claimed the novel was too long and did not appeal to the reader. James Wood even wrote in *The New Yorker*:

His previous novel, *Never Let Me Go* (2005), contained passages that appeared to have been entered in a competition called The Ten Most Boring Fictional Scenes. [...] But in his new novel [*The Buried Giant*] Ishiguro runs the great risk of making literal and general what is implicit and personal in his best fiction. [...] The problem is not fantasy but allegory, which exists to literalize and simplify. The giant is not buried deeply enough. (Wood 2015)

The London Review of Books went the other way:

In *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ishiguro’s most accomplished and moving book, and one of the best novels published in the Eighties, the cinematic effect is used with even greater sensitivity, leading to the creation of a world of subtle perceptual richness unsurpassed by either Ishiguro’s other work or the works of most of his contemporaries. (Chaudhuri 1995)

Ishiguro has received many awards for his literary work. His first novel *A Pale View of the Hills* won the Winifred Holtby Prize from the Royal Society of Literature. For his second novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ishiguro was awarded the Whitbread Prize, and for his third, *The Remains of the Day*, he received the prestigious Booker Prize in 1989. He was also awarded an OBE as well as the French title of Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. In 2008, *The Times* placed him on the list of the 50 best British writers since 1945. In fact, most of his works were nominated for prestigious literary awards. In 2017, Ishiguro was the recipient of both the American Academy of Achievement Award, and the Nobel Prize for Literature. A year later, he received the gold and silver star of the Order

of the Rising Sun and was appointed Knight Bachelor for services to literature. Such an abundance of awards should normally guarantee an enthusiastic response among foreign-language readers; however, the reception in Slovenia, dealt with in the following section, failed, at least partly, to meet this expectation.

RECEPTION IN SLOVENIA

Only three of Ishiguro's novels have been translated into Slovene: *The Remains of the Day*, *When We Were Orphans*, and *Never Let Me Go*. *The Remains of the Day* was published by Cankarjeva založba in 1995, six years after it was written. The translator Srečko Fišer was awarded the Sovre Award for the translation. *When We Were Orphans* (*Ko smo bili sirote*, translated by Ingrid Kovač Brus) was published in 2005 by Celjska Mohorjeva družba, five years after its original publication. On the Mohorjeva website, the novel is classified as "Japanese literature" and is accompanied by Samo Rugelj's (2005) review from *Bukla* magazine, in which he explains that the novel was short-listed for the Booker Prize and that it offers literature lovers a magical journey into the time between the wars. In his review in *Včer*, Matej Bogataj finds the novel very British, very English, meticulous, bitter, and a little cynical. Ishiguro's sixth novel, *Never Let Me Go* (*Ne zapusti me nikdar*), was translated by Katarina Jerin and published by Učila International in 2006, the same year that the novel was first published in the UK. The novel was also reprinted once. *Joker* magazine says that the novel is futuristic and triggers in readers a scary awareness of something that could actually happen or may already be happening. The *Portal* based community categorize it as science-fiction but stress the importance of the characters' feeling and emotions, their thoughts, experiences, and hopes. They also believe there are inconsistencies in the manner of narration. The novel is also mentioned on the web page of RTV Slovenia, but not before 2009, that is four years after it was published. The article was prompted by the premiere of the film based on the book and was scheduled for 2010. The article mentions Ishiguro's numerous literary awards, the success of *The Remains of the Day*, a short summary of the novel and an interesting contemplation about the characters in *Never Let Me Go*:

What probably surprises us most as the observers of the fate of the three friends is their resigned and calm acceptance of their own destiny, of which the world is in denial because it is too big a burden to be accepted without the feeling of guilt. But guilt is something that the world cannot allow, because there is no way back to the dark ages where spouses, partners, and friends were dying from cancer or heart disease. It is thus easier to see Hailsham students as expendable 'freaks', just the opposite from what the reader sees in them. (M.K. 2009, translated by P.R.)

Despite numerous awards and the broad success of Ishiguro's novels and films, Slovenian readers remain lukewarm towards his prose. Comparing the Slovenian reception of his work in 2016 and four years later, after he received the Nobel Prize, there is almost no difference in the enthusiasm of Slovenian readers, at least judging from book loan numbers in Slovenian libraries and the supply of his works in Slovenian bookshops. In 2016, EMKA, the online bookshop with the largest stock in Slovenia, yielded fifteen hits for "Ishiguro". That same year, some Ishiguro novels were available in Slovene, English, Croatian, Hungarian, Italian, Serbian, and French; there were also two volumes of his short stories in English and three films on DVD. In 2000, Radio Slovenia produced a short radio play *Maestro* by Draga Puc that included the translation of a short excerpt from *The Unconsoled*. In 2002, Ingrid Kovač Brus made a literary portrait of Ishiguro for RTV Slovenija, which was aired again in 2014 when the writer celebrated his 60th birthday. The newspaper *Delo* published an article in 2016 about Ishiguro's latest novel *The Buried Giant*, explaining that Ishiguro seemingly got the idea for the novel from the crumbling of ex-Yugoslavia and the Rwandan genocide.

After receiving the Nobel Prize in 2017, Ishiguro briefly appeared in the Slovenian media. The newspaper *Dnevnik* called him "a careful investigator of the depths of human emotions", referring to the motivation of the Nobel Prize Jury which saw Ishiguro as someone "who, in novels of great emotional force, has uncovered the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world" (Šučur 2017, translated by P. R.). Laura Paukovič (2018) of *Mladina* believes that in Slovenia, Ishiguro is still best known as the Japanese who received the Nobel Prize for literature. He does not, however, enjoy the same recognition as Haruki Murakami, who is generally better appreciated and more widely read. This seems quite unjust, firstly because Ishiguro's works can not only contend with Murakami's but surpass them in bravura, and secondly because Ishiguro is not primarily Japanese.

The newspaper *Delo* offered a few excerpts from translated interviews with Ishiguro after the award, dealing with the writing of *The Remains of the Day*, the reasons for writing through memories, his origin as an author and his attitude to England and Japan. Alenka Koron (2019) included Ishiguro in her book *Razgledi na tuje*, comprising nine discussions about important world literature works or authors of the 20th and 21st centuries that stimulate reflection on the state and dilemmas of contemporary Slovenian prose. Radio Slovenia 1 prepared an insight into the "surprising Nobel award winner" with Nejc Gazvoda, the director and author of the play *Ljudje kot smo mi* that was based on *The Remains of the Day* and staged in the Anton Podbevšek Teater in 2017.

By January 2021, Ishiguro's recognition in Slovenia had somewhat improved. EMKA has twenty-one hits for "Ishiguro". The Slovenian translation of *The Remains of the Day* is unavailable, indicating either the enthusiasm of Slovenian

readers to keep a copy in their private libraries or a lack of interest from publishers who do not see Ishiguro as a source of revenue.

The same is true for the other two Slovenian translations: apart from his other novels and two volumes of short stories in English, which can be bought, four volumes presenting Ishiguro in a literary-historical and genre context are available. Holdings in Slovenian libraries are slightly better in 2021 than in 2016. Ishiguro's novels are now available in Korean, German, and Spanish, and in a Slovenian Braille edition. The loan numbers, however, are not in the thousands, as is the case with more popular authors and titles. *Never Let Me Go* was loaned 955 times in the last two years, *When We Were Orphans* 456 times and *The Remains of the Day* 1116 times. Other Ishiguro novels in English rarely leave the libraries – each fewer than 50 times in the last two years. The question looms whether the Nobel Prize for literature is relevant at all to the average reader and to what extent it influences the popularity of an author. A glance at comparable reception studies shows that there is no identifiable rule regarding the popularity of internationally acclaimed authors with the Slovenian readership. The 2013 Canadian Nobel Prize winner Alice Munro, for example, was first translated into Slovene about four decades into her writing career (2 short story collections), and the Nobel Prize stimulated three more volumes in three consecutive years; her popularity in Slovenia, however, is still not huge (Mohar 2016: 134–136). The contemporary British playwright and 2005 Nobel Laureate Harold Pinter is, on the other hand, one of the modern playwrights most frequently translated into (and staged in) Slovene (Onič 2016b: 167); however, most of his opus was translated before the Nobel Prize, with only few re-translations after that. The translations and stage productions suggest his popularity with theatre professionals, since his style allows for great creativity (see Onič 2016a), while this is – despite a slight growth after 1999 – still not fully reflected in performance numbers (Gavez 2016: 58). The situation is different with earlier Nobel Prize winners, whose popularity was established over the decades and now often provides too strong competition for more recent authors like Ishiguro or Munro. Such an example is Hemingway, whose celebrity status and associations with the Isonzo front in *A Farewell to Arms* contributed to his popularity in Slovenia (see Maver 1990). According to Zupan (2020: 144–145), the total loans of Hemingway's 40 Slovene editions, averaging around 1000 per year, increased by 20% in the last two decades. This figure is almost 3 times higher than the Ishiguro average, and even though Hemingway partly owes the high numbers to the inclusion of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in the Slovene *Matura* examination in the early 2000s, his popularity is still high; it will be interesting to follow the same phenomenon with Ishiguro, whose *Never Let Me Go* has just entered the *Matura* this year. Such reception unpredictability can further be shown through the popularity of authors who are not major award winners but commercially extremely

successful, like Karl May, who was – similar to Ishiguro – the author of bestsellers and popular in Slovenia in the past but much less so in recent decades (Trupej 2020), or Edgar Allan Poe, increasingly popular in Slovenia in the inter-war period, with a peak in the 1960s, despite his extraordinarily low popularity in the USA, his home country (Zupan 2015: 121).

In Slovenia, most Nobel Prize wins for literature from 2000 to 2021 meant at least one new translation, possibly a newer piece of the laureate's work. Among few exceptions in the last twenty years, is the 2012 Chinese Nobel Prize winner Mo Yan, who received no attention from Slovenian booksellers. Ishiguro, too, almost went unnoticed. In the year after the award, the old translation of *The Remains of the Day* was reprinted, but his twenty-eight-year opus following that was overlooked.

E-mail correspondence with the publisher and editor Samo Rugelj (2021) reveals that he is not surprised by the weak response to Ishiguro in Slovenia. He believes that a foreign author only stays alive if adopted by a strong publishing house with an interested editor and a constant translator. Otherwise, s/he will slowly fall into oblivion. Ishiguro was shared by three publishers, yet nobody "took him under their wing". Andrej Ilc (2021), the editor at Mladinska knjiga, agrees with Rugelj and adds that the lack of Slovenian interest in Ishiguro, even after the Nobel Prize, could be attributed to sparse and irregular translations as well as a lack of advertising for authors of his type. Again, there are exceptions, like the Canadian multi-genre author Margaret Atwood, whose world-wide popularity needs no advertising, and whose positive reception is guaranteed even without a Nobel Prize in Literature (Mohar et. al. 2021, Onič et al. 2020).

Another possible reason for Ishiguro's lower popularity could be the "Japaneseness" of his works; however, it would be a challenge to measure how much Japanese culture *per se* appeals to Slovenian people and to what extent a Slovenian reader recognizes the Japanese touch in Ishiguro's work. Even when blended with the geographically, historically and culturally more familiar English culture, it still has an air of remoteness and alienness, particularly if elements of futurism and science-fiction are added to the mix.

CONCLUSION

Ishiguro's global success can be attributed to his immense range of themes and his biculturalism, which appeals not only to the Japanese but also to the global reader. He is among the handful of authors who have both sold millions of books and received heaps of critical praise. His books have been translated into 40 languages, and his BookScan records show more than 1.4 million copies from 1998

to 2017. Critics first focused mostly on the influence of Japanese philosophy and culture on his work and praised the quiet tones of his Japanese heritage blended with quintessential Englishness, while his later works received mixed reviews, *The Buried Giant* even facing an accusation of being written only to capture wider audiences. But his last novel *Klara and the Sun* leads the 'Booker Dozen' as by far the standout bestseller of the 2021 longlist. It has been called brilliant by the critics, although it feels quite similar to *Never Let Me Go*, again exploring what it means to be not quite human. Then again, Ishiguro did reveal 'his dirty little secret' in a 2015 interview – that he tends to write the same book over and over (Preston 2021).

Despite his world-wide fame, Slovenians remain relatively cold towards Ishiguro. Only three of his novels have so far been translated into Slovenian, and judging by the library statistics, only the first of the three made even a moderate impression on Slovenian readers. After receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2017, Ishiguro was briefly in the Slovenian media limelight. He is still often mistaken for Haruki Murakami, who is the more widely known author of Japanese origin. This is surprising in the time of globalisation, since his cosmopolitan, international work appeals to global readers. The reason for this lukewarm reception in Slovenia cannot be pinpointed, but there are several possible factors that might contribute to this. It could be the Japanese traits in literature that at first glance seem British or perhaps the lack of interest in or understanding of Japanese culture in Slovenia. More likely it is just the lack of interest from Slovenian publishing houses who have not seen Ishiguro as someone worth investing in.

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Ishigurova japonsko-angleška identiteta ter njegov mednarodni in slovenski sprejem

Kazuo Ishiguro je britanski pisatelj z japonskimi koreninami, ki se je po vsem svetu uveljavil s svojimi romani, črticami in scenariji ter postal eden izmed najbolj nagrajenih pisateljev knjižnih uspešnic. Prispevek obravnava pisateljevo hibridno poreklo, ki je hkrati angleško in japonsko, in sposobnost, da s svojim delom vznemirja bralce, istočasno pa ga kritiki spoštujejo. Poleg vpogleda v sprejemanje njegovih del v Sloveniji se članek ukvarja tudi z vprašanjem, zakaj je tukajšnja njegova branost nižja od pričakovane.

Ključne besede: novi britanski roman, slovenska recepcija, globalizacija, narodna identita