Document A
Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day* (1989), London: Faber and Faber, 1996 (47-49)

Strange beds have rarely agreed with me, and after only a short spell of somewhat troubled slumber, I awoke an hour or so ago. It was then still dark, and knowing I had a full day's motoring ahead of me, I made an attempt to return to sleep. This proved futile, and when I decided eventually to rise, it was still so dark that I was obliged to turn on the electric light in order to shave at the sink in the corner. But when having finished I switched it off again, I could see early daylight at the edges of the curtains.

When I parted them just a moment ago, the light outside was still very pale and something of a mist was affecting my view of the baker's shop and chemist's shop opposite. Indeed, following the street further along to where it runs over the little round-backed bridge, I could see the mist rising from the river, obscuring almost entirely one of the bridge-posts. There was not a soul to be seen, and apart from a hammering noise echoing from somewhere distant, and an occasional coughing in a room to the back of the house, there is still no sound to be heard. The landlady is clearly not yet up and about, suggesting there is little chance of her serving breakfast earlier than her declared time of seven thirty.

Now, in these quiet moments as I wait for the world about to awake, I find myself going over in my mind again passages from Miss Kenton's letter. Incidentally, I should before now have explained myself as regards my referring to 'Miss Kenton'. 'Miss Kenton' is properly speaking 'Mrs Benn' and has been for twenty years. However, because I knew her at close quarters only during her maiden years and I have not seen her once since she went to the West Country to become 'Mrs Benn', you will perhaps excuse my impropriety in referring to her as I knew her, and in my mind have continued to call her throughout these years. Of course, her letter has given me extra cause to continue thinking of her as 'Miss Kenton', since it would seem, sadly, that her marriage is finally to come to an end. The letter does not make specific the details of the matter, as one would hardly expect it to do, but Miss Kenton states unambiguously that she has now, in fact, taken the step of moving out of Mr Benn's house in Helston and is presently lodging with an acquaintance in the nearby village of Little Compton.

It is of course tragic that her marriage is now ending in failure. At this very moment, no doubt, she is pondering with regret decisions made in the far-off past that have now left her, deep in middle age, so alone and desolate. And it is easy to see how in such a frame of mind, the thought of returning to Darlington Hall would be a great comfort to her. Admittedly, she does not at any point in her letter state explicitly her desire to return; but that is the unmistakable message conveyed by the general nuance of many of the passages, imbued as they are with a deep nostalgia for her days at Darlington

Hall. Of course, Miss Kenton cannot hope by returning at this stage ever to retrieve those lost years, and it will be my first duty to impress this upon her when we meet. I will have to point out how different things are now—that the days of working with a grand staff at one's beck and call will probably never return within our lifetime. But 40 then Miss Kenton is an intelligent woman and she will have already realized these things. Indeed, all in all, I cannot see why the option of her returning to Darlington Hall and seeing out her working years there should not offer a very genuine consolation to a life that has come to be so dominated by a sense of waste.

And of course, from my own professional viewpoint, it is clear that even after a 45 break of so many years, Miss Kenton would prove the perfect solution to the problem at present besetting us at Darlington Hall. In fact, by terming it a 'problem', I perhaps overstate the matter. I am referring, after all, to a series of very minor errors on my part and the course I am now pursuing is merely a means of pre-empting any 'problems' before one arises. It is true, these same trivial problems did cause me some anxiety at 50 first, but once I had had time to diagnose them correctly as symptoms of nothing more than a straightforward staff shortage, I have refrained from giving them much thought. Miss Kenton's arrival, as I say, will put a permanent end to them.

But to return to her letter. It does at time reveal a certain despair over her present situation—a fact that is rather concerning. She begins one sentence: 'Although I have 55 no idea how I shall usefully fill the remainder of my life...' And again, elsewhere, she writes: 'The rest of my life stretches out as an emptiness before me.' For the most part, though, as I have said, the tone is one of nostalgia. At one point, for instance, she writes:

'This whole incident put me in mind of Alice White. Do you remember her? In fact, I 60 hardly imagine you could forget her. For myself, I am still haunted by those vowel sounds and those uniquely ungrammatical sentences only she could dream up! Have you any idea what became of her?'

Document B

Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (1997), London/New York: Continuum, 2004 (40-42)

1 The foregoing considerations apply to cultural production generally and to the apparatus of literature. Literary culture has been produced and consumed mainly within the middle class, but it should not be assumed that individuals or groups in positions of (apparent) cultural power simply or necessarily promote the dominant viewpoint. 5 Classes in modern societies, because of the specialization of occupational roles, throw off class fractions, which develop distinctive cultural formations. Raymond Williams instances the Godwin circle, the Pre-Raphaelites, and Bloomsbury. I relate literature, in Chapter 4, to a dissident middle-class fraction, arguing that this generates a certain radical potential.

10 The literary text may be understood as an intervention: an attempt to render certain stories convincing. Orwell asked: "How is it that books ever come to be written? Above quite a low level, literature is an attempt to influence the viewpoint of one's contemporaries by recording experience" *(Essays,* IV, p. 87). The word "recording" is not right: writing inevitably arranges and interprets, and the impression of fidelity to 15 experience is part of the reality-effect through which authors seek to be persuasive. However, by making representations of plausible reality, literary texts intervene in the world.

In my view, major academic theories to the contrary [sic], writers' intentions may be inferred from their writing. We do this through the same kinds of understanding 20 that we use to infer people's intentions all the time in diverse activities—previous experience, knowledge of registers, codes, forms and genres, internal coherence, the opinions of other people. Of course, we may get it wrong; that is always a condition of communication. This entirely normal process of understanding seems improper only when we're under the sway of the notion of the autonomous genius-author who 25 transcends ordinary mortal conditions to create meaning as if out of nothing. Once that has faded, both the discursive positioning of the writer and the direction of his or her intervention in the self-understanding of that society may be appreciated. To be sure, writing is constructed socially but, also, writing is one of the constructing agencies: it influences discursive processes as well as being influenced by them. Otherwise how 30 could the sequence ever begin, continue or change? In this process, we are made, and we make. Pierre Macherey says: "The *act* of the writer is fundamental: he realises a particular crystallisation, a restructuration, and even a structuration of the data upon which he works."

Even so, the kind of intervention intended by the writer is not usefully 35 considered as merely personal inspiration; it occurs within a framework of socially constructed possibilities (as speech and writing use the lexicon and grammar of the language). Nor need it dominate serious study, for once the text gets out into the world the conditions of reception are quite beyond the writer's control. Literary texts are certainly read, all the time, in ways the writer did not mean—that is the condition, no 40 less, of continuing attention. The study of cultural meaning has to consider how texts are "constituted as objects-to-be-read within the different reading formations which

have modulated their existence as historically active, culturally received texts." So I shall be concerned with what Orwell's *1984* and Osborne's *Look Back in Anger,* and jazz and rock-'n'-roll, were taken to mean and by whom; more than with what we,
45 today, think might have been intended, or take to be the most satisfactory readings. My quest is for the effects of the text in the world.

The contribution of literary texts to the contest over signs and meanings is not necessarily either conservative or radical. Those texts nominated "literary" are chosen because they seem plausible, and therefore the main effect must be to reinforce
50 prevailing understandings. Raymond Williams observes: "The 'persons' are 'created' to show that people are 'like this' and their relations 'like this'"*(Marxism,* p. 209): by appealing to a known model, the text tends to confirm the validity of that model. However, Williams goes on, literature, like other cultural practices, can break towards new understanding. There can be "new articulations, new formations of
55 'character' and 'relationship'". Whether this happens will depend on general circumstances, and particularly on the current state of literary institutions. In principle it's all open to contest, though in practice there are massive vested interests. The apparatus of literature has been made by people, and we can remake it. Texts may be read in different ways, different texts may be read (the Women's Movement
60 has shown this), we may alter the boundaries between literature and other discourses, or cease to use the category.

So literary and other texts may be understood as powerful stories working in and beyond their initial historical moment, in our own lives and those of others. Notice how literary texts of any period return repeatedly to certain complex and demanding
65 themes. This is because the stories that require most attention—most assiduous and continuous reworking—are the awkward, unresolved ones. They are what people want to write and read about. When a part of our world view threatens disruption by manifestly failing to cohere with the rest, then we must reorganize and retell its story again and again, trying to get it into shape—back into the old shape if we are
70 conservative-minded, or into a new shape that we can develop and apply if we are more adventurous. The literary text, like all cultural production, is involved in these processes.

To repudiate liberal-idealist notions of literature is not, therefore, to diminish its consequence. On the contrary, it is to see just where its importance lies: not in the
75 magical evocation of unreal worlds of merely formal significance, but as a discourse of authority in the dispute about how to extend our sense of the possibilities of human lives.

Document C
Joseph Wright of Derby, *A Young Girl Reading a Letter, with an Old Man Reading over her Shoulder* (c.1767-1770), oil on canvas, 91.5 x 71.2 cm