

Character Creation from the Perspective of Cognitive Aesthetics in "The Remains of the Day"

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Abstract: Cognitive aesthetics is an interdisciplinary field that has developed with the rise of cognitive science. This article will use cognitive aesthetics as a literary analysis tool to deeply analyze the portrayal of characters through their characteristics, behaviors, and inner activities in *The Remains of the Day*, enabling readers to have a more comprehensive understanding and deep perception of characters. Furthermore, in analyzing the cognition of Stevens, Lord Darlington, and Miss Kenton, it is pointed out that characters are deeply influenced by their social roles, class backgrounds, and personal cognition. This article not only enriches the understanding of the literary work "The Remains of the Day", but also provides new analytical perspectives and research methods for cognitive aesthetics and literary research. By exploring the cognitive processes and characteristics of characters, we can better understand the behavioral motivations and psychological mechanisms of individuals in society, which is of great significance for in-depth research on character images and themes in literary works.

1. Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro, the 2017 Nobel Prize winner in Literature, was born in Nagasaki, Japan in 1954. He spent most of his early years in Japan and later moved to the UK with his family. His cross-border life experiences provided a multicultural perspective for his writing. *The Remains of the Day* is one of Kazuo Ishiguro's representative works, for which he also won the 1989 Booker Prize.

The Remains of the Day is set in post-war British society and unfolds through the first person recollection of male butler Stevens. The novel delves into the themes of professional dignity, personal sacrifice, and unfinished emotions. The protagonist Stevens pursues perfection and efficiency in his career, but at the same time suppresses his personal emotions, leading to loneliness and regret. The work not only reflects the decline of the traditional aristocratic system, but also reveals the protagonist's profound reflection on past choices and inner struggles. Through delicate psychological descriptions and complex character relationships, *The Remains of the Day* portrays the multifaceted and complex nature of human nature, as well as the conflict between personal ideals and social reality.

Cognitive aesthetics is an interdisciplinary field that applies the principles of cognitive science to aesthetic research[1]. It is a paradigm and theoretical form of interdisciplinary comprehensive

research between aesthetics, neuroscience, biology, philosophy, anthropology, and other disciplines. In terms of character shaping in literary works, cognitive aesthetics provides a methodology for a deeper understanding of the complex psychology and behavior of characters. By analyzing how the author utilizes elements such as language, narrative structure, and symbols to construct a cognitive framework for characters, researchers can reveal the motivations and psychological states behind character decision-making, as well as how these elements influence readers' understanding and sympathy for characters.

This article will use cognitive aesthetics as a literary analysis tool to apply to the character analysis of *The Remains of the Day*, focusing on the psychological activities and cognitive processes of characters in literary works, as well as how these elements affect readers' understanding and feelings. By analyzing characters through cognitive aesthetics, it is possible to reveal the complex psychological mechanisms behind their decision-making and their interaction with broader cultural backgrounds.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Concept of Cognitive Aesthetics

Aesthetics is a philosophical branch that studies art, beauty, and aesthetic experience. It explores the essence, origin, and forms of expression of beauty, as well as people's emotional and rational reactions when appreciating art and nature[2]. Cognitive science is a younger discipline that combines multiple fields such as psychology, anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, and computer science to study human thinking and cognitive processes through scientific methods[3]. Although these two fields have different focuses, they both involve the way humans understand the world.

Cognitive aesthetics is an interdisciplinary field that has developed on the basis of these two fields. It attempts to combine philosophical thinking in aesthetics with scientific methods in cognitive science to gain a more comprehensive understanding of psychological activities in aesthetic experience and artistic creation[4]. By applying the theories and techniques of cognitive science, cognitive aesthetics not only explores how artistic works are created and interpreted, but also studies the brain mechanisms, perceptual principles, and emotional factors involved in these processes. This combination enables researchers to explore the relationship between art and the human mind from a new perspective, as well as how works of art affect the cognitive and emotional states of audiences. In short, cognitive aesthetics provides a richer and more detailed perspective for understanding aesthetic phenomena by combining profound insights into aesthetics with precise analysis from cognitive science.

2.2. Character shaping and cognitive association

In literary works, the author mainly shapes character images based on their characteristics, behaviors, and inner activities, and through these descriptions, influences the reader's cognitive process[5].

Character characteristics are the cornerstone of forming a first impression, such as appearance, personality, and social status. These features provide readers with preliminary information, enabling them to quickly classify and predict characters. For example, a character described as cunning and cunning may be immediately marked as untrustworthy by readers, and this automatic judgment is based on people's social experience and cultural background.

The behavior of characters is the key to driving the development of the story plot, and it is also an important window to reveal the inner values and moral values of characters. Readers can further understand the underlying characteristics of a character's motivation and personality by analyzing

their choices and behavioral outcomes. For example, a character who chooses to sacrifice themselves to help others in a crisis will be seen as having heroism and a high sense of morality.

The inner activities of characters are the bridge connecting readers and their emotions. Through direct inner monologues or indirect psychological descriptions, readers can understand the thoughts and emotional fluctuations of the characters, and the disclosure of this information enhances readers' understanding and sympathy for the characters. For example, a character who appears tough on the outside but is fragile on the inside can resonate with readers and pay attention to their fate once their conflicting inner activities are exposed.

The characteristics, behaviors, and inner activities of characters are closely intertwined, forming a comprehensive cognitive aesthetic framework. Through the reader's cognitive processing, including perception, memory, and emotional reactions, readers have a more comprehensive understanding and deep perception of characters. This understanding and perception determine the reader's emotional engagement in the story and their level of concern for the fate of the characters, thereby deepening the reading experience and the overall infectiousness of literary works.

3. Cognitive Aesthetic Analysis of the Characters in *The Remains of the Day*

3.1. Stevens

The protagonist Stevens of *The Remains of the Day* is the Grand Butler of the Duke of Darlington, England. He devoted his whole life to work. He is dedicated, cautious, restrained, and remains calm in any situation, earning the trust of the castle owner stay.

Stevens is extremely focused on his work, almost devoting all his energy to the role of butler. On the occasion of his father's death and the passing of love, he chose to work, and this ultimate pursuit of career reflects his understanding of "greatness". However, this focus also exposes his limitations, namely sacrificing the richness of personal life and the satisfaction of emotional needs while pursuing career perfection.

Stevens' actions are usually carefully considered and aimed at maintaining their professional image and dignity. He appears particularly cautious when facing direct emotional communication with Miss Kenton, choosing to maintain distance rather than delve deeper into the possibility of this relationship. This not only reflects his respect for professional responsibility, but also reveals his fear and avoidance of complex interpersonal relationships.

Despite appearing calm and restrained on the outside, Stevens' inner world is full of turbulence and conflict. As the story unfolds, especially as the days in Darlington House begin to come to an end, Stevens deeply reflects on his past choices, especially key decisions in his career that often make him feel conflicted and uneasy. These descriptions of inner activities not only deepen readers' understanding of his personality, but also trigger resonance with similar experiences in their own lives.

Stevens questions whether some of his choices and sacrifices are truly worth it, and this self-reflection points to how individuals face the crisis of self-identity under the class system, as well as how they try to find the possibility of transcending class boundaries. Kazuo Ishiguro shapes the character image of Stevens by describing his character characteristics, behavior, and inner activities, allowing the author to conduct aesthetic cognitive analysis of the characters in reading, gain a deeper understanding of Stevens and the struggles and helplessness of small figures in the social environment at that time, and reflect on the complex relationships between individuals and society, emotions, and responsibilities.

3.2. Lord Darlington

In *The Remains of the Day*, Lord Darlington, as an important supporting role, is described as an influential but controversial aristocrat whose political position and personal behavior often lead to conflicts between society and personal morality. As a character deeply trapped between traditional aristocratic values and emerging political turmoil, he embodies a nostalgia for the past and a sense of uncertainty about the future. His political decisions and social activities showcase typical characteristics of a person attempting to maintain influence in turbulent times.

Lord Darlington's actions are usually aimed at maintaining or restoring the social status and influence of his family, especially in the rapidly changing environment of post-war British society. Some of his decisions in the novel, such as supporting extreme political views and organizing controversial social events, superficially demonstrate a firm political belief and resistance to social change. However, these actions also revealed his fear of losing aristocratic privileges and his inability to let go of the glorious past.

Although Lord Darlington often appears confident and decisive in public, his inner activities show a deep sense of unease and fragility. His persistence in honor and responsibility, as well as his constant self confirmation of the correctness of his political decisions, partially overshadowed his anxiety and powerlessness as a marginalized aristocrat in the post-war world. His interaction with Stevens further reveals his desire for loyalty and stability, which reflects the loneliness and confusion he feels in the face of enormous social changes.

The cognitive aesthetic analysis at the three levels of character characteristics, behavior, and inner activities not only reveals the complexity and multidimensional nature of Lord Darlington as a literary character, but also reflects the author's exploration of broader social and cultural themes through this role, such as the decline of aristocratic identity, conflicts of political responsibility, and the tension between personal beliefs and social morality.

3.3. Miss Kenton

Although Miss Kenton in *The Remains of the Day* is not the center of the story, her presence has a significant impact on driving the plot and deepening the theme. Miss Kenton, as the housekeeper of Darlington House, is very dedicated to her work and demonstrates high efficiency and responsibility in managing the daily affairs of the mansion. But these abilities are often seen as support for Stevens' work, rather than a reflection of her personal professional abilities. As a female butler, she is already on the edge of a male dominated society and professional environment.

The interaction between Miss Kenton and Stevens is complex and subtle, displaying an emotional connection beyond the workplace. She has a deep level of care and emotion towards Stevens, which can be seen from her repeated attempts to break his cold shell and establish deeper interpersonal relationships. Although Miss Kenton appears professional and restrained most of the time, her occasional concern for Stevens reveals her inner tenderness and desire for deeper relationships.

Kazuo Ishiguro deepened his criticism of the upper echelons of British society and its values, particularly gender roles and class systems, by delicately depicting the cognitive marginalization of Miss Kenton's task in his novel. Her storyline is also an important means of showcasing the theme and driving the development of the plot.

4. The influence of cognition on characters

The Remains of the Day is set during a period of social and political upheaval before and after World War II. The character cognition in *The Remains of the Day* is significantly influenced by the

cultural traditions and class system of the upper echelons of British society. Characters from different social backgrounds exhibit different values, behavioral patterns, and understanding of the world.

At the beginning of the story, Stevens, as a butler, his self-identity is entirely based on his professional role. He believes that by fulfilling his duties perfectly, one can reach the noble realm of life. He sacrificed his personal happiness for his career, including his potential romantic relationship with Miss Kenton. Stevens highlighted that individuals in class structures often need to give up personal interests to meet their social role expectations, reflecting the acceptance and internalization of higher-order values by lower order individuals, and demonstrating how the class system can be maintained through individual self-identity. As the story developed and time passed, the fate of the aristocratic class began to change, and the lower class also began to examine their social status and roles. The changes in the external world have had a significant impact on Darlington House. However, Stevens found it difficult to adapt to this change and attempted to maintain and restore the glory of the aristocratic mansion through his own work. His adherence to past values and lifestyle reveals how class status limits an individual's perspective and choices. At the end of the novel, Stevens deeply reflects on the uncertainty of the future and his career choices. Stevens finally realized the true meaning of life, learned to live for himself, and released his inner troubles and doubts. This self reflection points to how individuals face the crisis of self-identity under the class system, and how they attempt to find the possibility of transcending class boundaries.

As a representative of the aristocratic class, Lord Darlington firmly believes that he bears the responsibility of maintaining family glory and the status of the upper echelons of British society. This deep-rooted sense of class responsibility drove him to engage in political activities, attempting to strengthen his social status by influencing national politics. However, it was this pursuit that led to his social and political isolation, ultimately ending in tragedy. Lord Darlington's political ambitions were not realized, which instead damaged his reputation and deepened his sense of defeat in personal life. His failure is not only a personal loss, but also a symbol of the decline of the entire aristocratic class. As the story progressed, Lord Darlington gradually realized that his actions did not achieve the expected results, which triggered a profound reflection on his own value and behavior. From this, it can be seen that the influence of self-awareness on Lord Darlington is comprehensive, from his political participation to his understanding of family responsibilities, and then to his self-awareness of personal identity. These factors are intertwined and together shape his life trajectory and ultimate destiny.

Although Miss Kenton is located in a lower social class, her behavior and choices demonstrate challenges to traditional gender roles and lower social status. She bravely expressed her emotional needs and career aspirations through interaction and dialogue with Stevens, reflecting her desire for more equal and respected interpersonal relationships. Miss Kenton is unwilling to confine herself to an unknown, command only maid role, but instead attempts to explore the possibilities of self-worth and personal happiness, demonstrating the awakening of subordinate class individuals under traditional constraints. Her story reveals how individuals at the bottom of society find space for self-identity and personal aspirations in a restricted social structure, reflecting a certain sense of self-awareness and resistance spirit.

5. Conclusions

Cognitive aesthetics, as a relatively new interdisciplinary field, focuses on exploring the cognitive processes in art and literature. This field has developed with the rise of cognitive science, aiming to explain and understand the cognitive structures in artistic works and their impact on human cognition. Cognitive aesthetics provides a unique perspective for analyzing literary works, in

order to delve deeper into the inner world of characters and their behavioral patterns.

This article provides an in-depth analysis of the main characters in *The Remains of the Day* - Stevens, Lord Darlington, and Miss Kenton. The traits, behaviors, and inner activities of a character are the core elements that shape their image. These elements work together to give the character a unique personality and life, making it vivid in the story and providing readers with profound emotional experiences and psychological identification.

Meanwhile, this article also analyzes and reveals how these characters are deeply influenced by their social roles, class backgrounds, and personal experiences. For example, Stevens' self-identity and values are almost entirely based on his professional responsibility, and this extreme career engagement is rooted in the social class and corresponding expectations he is in. Similarly, Lord Darlington's political choices and social behavior also reflect the specific sense of responsibility and fear of decline of the aristocratic class. For Miss Kenton, her character breaks through traditional gender and class limitations, portraying a complex personality attempting to fight for personal freedom and happiness in a limited environment.

In summary, the application of cognitive aesthetics as a literary analysis tool in this study not only enriches the understanding of the literary work "*The Remains of the Day*", but also provides new analytical perspectives and research methods for cognitive aesthetics and literary research. By exploring the cognitive processes and characteristics of characters, we can better understand the behavioral motivations and psychological mechanisms of individuals in society, which is of great significance for in-depth research on character images and themes in literary works.

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