

Power in the English country house

Inherited genre conventions in modern literature

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A thesis presented to The Department of Literature,
Area Studies and European Languages

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

Spring 2019

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2019

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<http://www.duo.uio.no/>

Printed: Reprosentralen, University of Oslo

Abstract

The English country house is at once a historical reality, an ideal and a trope in literature. Modern novels which incorporate the country house must navigate through the extensive power dynamics that permeate them. This thesis explores the way in which power operates in the country house in literature, as it is implicated with a specific set of genre conventions. Both Kazuo Ishiguro's novel entitled *The Remains of the Day* and Ian McEwan's novel entitled *Atonement* will exemplify this. They invoke a set of relatively traditional and nostalgic genre conventions and ideals, though they do so in order to destabilise them. Close reading and the application of relevant theory from Michel Foucault will help to establish this.

Acknowledgements

My sincerest thanks go first to Matthew Williamson, whose help and encouragement with this thesis has been fantastic. Similarly, to the great lecturers at the University of Oslo. Thank you to my classmates of whom I have spent long hours in the library with, I could not have done it without our shared team spirit, encouragement and endless tea breaks. Last but not least thank you to my family, friends and loved ones.

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1 Introduction

The stately homes of England,

How beautiful they stand,

To prove the upper classes

Have still the upper hand. (Coward, 188).

Authors have been drawn to the English Country house as a focal point for centuries¹. Born out of poetry as early as the seventeenth century, poets such as Ben Jonson² were known to compliment wealthy patrons or friends through pleasing descriptions of their country houses. In contrast the country house has become an element that has been satirised, subverted and questioned in later works such as the above lines of Noël Coward. Born out of a period of aristocratic hierarchical power, the literary houses are ripe with class strife. This literary history points to an interesting complexity within the country house itself. It is at once a historical reality, with buildings such as Chatsworth House and Audley End receiving accolades and prestige for their architecture and intrinsic craftsmanship. Simultaneously, they are also an ideal, a supposed representation of Englishness. As with many ideals, it is permeated with a deep sense of nostalgia, specifically to the British Empire. An element that can be seen to act as a catalyst to negate its own authenticity. Furthermore, it is also a literary construct, a trope in literature that expands and extends the boundaries of the historic reality and inherent ideology. Within Kazuo Ishiguro's novel entitled *The Remains of the Day* (hereafter referred to as *Remains*) Darlington Hall is the country house. Similarly, in Ian McEwan's novel entitled *Atonement* there is the Tallis house. Darlington Hall and the Tallis house are works of fiction, yet the inclusion of them as English country houses inevitably

¹ More specifically, "The late eighteenth through twentieth centuries" are known to have "witnessed the heyday and subsidence of that stone or brick, embarked or embowered phenomenon Henry James memorably called 'the great good place', a cultural icon signifying grace, tradition, hospitality, closeness to nature, and harmonious relations between the social classes"(Graham, 211).

² Ben Jonson's *To Penhurst* published in 1616 flatters the Penhurst property and owner as it reads "They're reared with no man's ruin, no man's groan;/There's none that dwell about them wish them down" (Jonson, 1). By implication other country houses *are* being built on the ruins and groans of poorer society.

crosses these three elements. A commonplace in the nineteenth century, the country house additionally has a place in modern literary fiction. This modern literary aspect is by default a reference back to a previous way of life. Twenty first century texts are not born out of the hierarchical society that placed the aristocracy above others in England. A modern text instead deals with the country house to some extent reflectively, navigating between the inherited expectations that comes with using this outdated entity.

This proliferation of literature surrounding the country house may stem from the sense of community of which it perpetuates. Community is key when considering the interaction between the classes, lovers, servants and guests; an inevitability within the country house walls³. Servants and the aristocracy are naturally able to interact almost daily, thus creating genuine interest and ample possibilities for drama and problematic class interaction. For example, in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, the governess and her master's romantic relationship was scandalous and widely popular as it is replicated in numerous novels by other authors. The community within the country house provides endless possibilities for literature because it is based on people living within in one location of whom are considered a unit. What ties them to this unity however is as a result of common interests, social group or nationality. Thus, we see the servants' community often interacting with the aristocratic community, the local community interacting with the specific house community or different nationalities interacting within the house. By simply disturbing one of these key unifiers; common interest, social group or nationality, one can create endless tantalising and interesting scenarios for fiction.

1.1 The history of the country house

As this thesis explores two modern texts, it is first necessary to distinguish between the English country house at its peak and also at its decline in history. A range of historical accounts have explored the representative function of the English country house when it was in its prime. In *Life in the English Country House* Mark Girouard explains that "They [the country houses] were not originally, whatever they may be now, just large houses in the country in which rich people lived. Essentially, they were power houses of a ruling class" (Girouard, 2). He is drawing attention to how the houses were not only architecturally magnificent structures intended to house the wealthy, they further operated as a representation

³ Community has similarly been read as a discourse in post-war Britain. For instance, Nick Bentley argues that a "powerful discourse of an imagined community" was contrasted with decline of British power (Bentley, 139).

of the owner's power. This is because, until approximately the Reform Act of 1832, the aristocracy to a large extent voted on their tenants behalf. A country house owner also owned the land, of which tenants rented. Girouard further explains that,

The point of land was the tenants and rent that came with it. A landowner could call on his tenants to fight for him, in the early days of the country house, and to vote for him-or his candidate-in its later ones. He could use the money which they paid in as rent to persuade even more people to fight or vote for him. (Girouard, 2)

Therefore, the landed classes and owners of the country houses had power in a very literal sense. They could make decisions on behalf of the non-aristocratic classes. A factor that had come to an end by the twenty first century.

Furthermore, much work has been done in order to exemplify how the country house was originally representative of English power. As Girouard notes, "If the head of an established family was ambitious to raise its status - or simply to keep up with new arrivals - one of the most obvious means towards doing so was to rebuild or improve his house" (Girouard, 5). Therefore, the size and stature of the house worked as a communicator of the owner's power. Henry James can be seen to extend this notion from society to the representation of the English nation. He contends that:

Of all the great things that the English have invented and made part of the credit of the national character, the most perfect, the most characteristic, the only one they have mastered completely in all its details, so that it becomes a compendious illustration of their social genius and their manners, is the well-appointed, well-administered, well-filled country house. (James, 273)

He argues that country houses can be seen as the embodiment of English values and beliefs. Peter W. Graham expands upon this as the "availability or unavailability of a horse or a bedroom fire for guests signals the deeper virtues or failings of the lord- yet more particularly its lady" (Graham, 213). The house reflects its owner therefore the theme of country houses represents the nation as a whole. The failings of the "lady" of the house as expressed by Graham brings to light the issues of gender that are inherent within the history of the country house and any modern text that deals with it (Graham, 213). By the rules of inheritance by primogeniture, women could not inherit, often did not work and operated predominantly in

the private sphere⁴. The English power they represented was decidedly classist and male orientated.

Though the English country house once supported aristocratic power and much work has been done to attribute its representative power on a societal level, it is important to note that many were physically dismantled in the twentieth century. As James Raven notes,

At least one in six of all the great country houses existing in Britain and Ireland in 1900 had been demolished by 2000. Over 1,200 English, 400 Scottish and 300 Irish country houses have been recorded as lost during the twentieth century. (Raven, 2)

This demolition has been attributed many causes. For David Littlejohn, “Houses were torn down because they had ceased to serve any useful domestic function, or had become too costly...” (Littlejohn, 44). Whereas others have noted the war as a contributing factor⁵. Either way, the end of the physical buildings in the twentieth century was often seen as a loss. In 1978, Peter Thornton noted the effort in Britain to save them, as many were being torn down. In what he called the “fight to preserve our country houses”, the efforts to save the physical buildings can be seen to create a discourse of ideology and nostalgia towards the country house (Thornton, 855). He further suggested that Mark Girouard’s text entitled *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* was the most “effective” tool to preserve them (Thornton, 855). As Girouard’s text was one of the most influential of its kind, it shall be used to supply relevant insight into the architectural and social aspects of the country house in history throughout this argument.

1.2 The country house in literature

Nineteenth century literature can be seen to establish a trend for how the English country house trope functions. A modern text must therefore deal with the expectation of the country house trope that has been created in a previous century. In the nineteenth century, Charlotte Brontë’s novel *Jane Eyre* features Thornfield Hall which is resolutely tied to Rochester and his situation, trapping and defining him. It is not until it is in ruins that the societal expectations and restrictions (not to mention his estranged wife Bertha) cease and they can live out their happily ever after. Similarly, the titles of two works by Jane Austen

⁴ As P. W. Graham explains “In a country house world where primogeniture and entailment prevail, there are female attributes more important than hospitality. What are they? Fidelity, fertility, and commitment to the nurture of children” (Graham, 213). Women were relegated to the private sphere and men to the public.

⁵ For William Morys Roberts “The Great War saw the end of the sumptuous lifestyle for which the owners of country houses had been noted in the previous half-century” (Roberts, 3).

including *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey* are fictitious country houses themselves. *Mansfield Park* sees the dramatic escapades of the inhabitants whilst challenging the very foundation of what the meaning of home is for poor, dependent Fanny Price⁶. In *Northanger Abbey*, naïve Catherine Morland challenges the expectation of the gothic in both the physical exploration of the Abbey, and her copious reading on the topic. Moreover, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion* anchor the novels plot to the houses once more. Within these novels, the physical house can be seen to reflect and reveal the situation of the characters and their feelings. Arguably both community and an interconnection of the physical environment and interior affect remains a significant aspect of the country house is more recent fiction.

Though much research has considered the country house in history, it is important to consider how it is also a significant literary feature⁷. This is where the historic reality of the house can be seen to interact with the ideal and literary trope. The historic house was looked at nostalgically, an element that resonates in the literary use of the trope. In what Cynthia Quarrie calls a “heritage-nostalgia industry that is still thriving today” she notes how numerous works of modern fiction as well as TV shows including *Downton Abbey* and *Country House Rescue* are centred on the country house (Quarrie, 196). Though many buildings were knocked down and their place in society changed, they did not fall out of public interest. Physical buildings such as Chatsworth House are National Heritage sites that receive hundreds of thousands of visitors each year between them and are evidence for Quarrie’s assertion. Margaret Thatcher created the “Ministry of Heritage for the purpose of acquiring and reviving, among other things, British country houses” (Quarrie, 195). One reason behind it can be read through a postcolonial perspective, though this was out of the scope of this thesis. The inherent nostalgia towards the end of the country house as it once resided in history is inhibited by its exploitation. As Quarrie contends, “...country houses in post-war Britain were and are caught up in a process of memorialization aimed at representing the prowess of England at the height of empire” (Quarrie, 197). Therefore, modern texts dealing with the English country house in fiction must navigate through this nostalgic

⁶ Moreover, “The patriarchal premise that a country house owner’s estate reflects him holds true. Austen’s readers and her heroines alike learn, in the course of the novels, that to understand and properly value a landed gentleman, we must do more than see him interact in leisured society. We must judge him through his estate” (Graham, 215).

⁷ In examining the literary country house, Gill explains “...the country house is even more than an ancestral home and family seat: it is – or at least has been- a social, economic and cultural institution, inextricably linked with the surrounding landscape and profoundly affecting not only those living under its roof but those within its purview as well” (Gill, 4).

relationship towards them. A relationship or perspective that can be traced to their downfall in British history.

It is clear that the community within the walls of the estate is of great interest in many genres that are linked to the country house. Richard Gill takes this further to add that it is not simply the interest of the community itself but as a combination of two factors. The very act of creating a community by extension excludes others that are not part of said community. Gill claims;

Despite the attention contemporary literary criticism has given to the theme of isolation as a singular and separate obsession of the modern imagination, modern novelists and poets have really been concerned with isolation *and* community as a polarity, so that the significance of one cannot be properly understood without an awareness of its dialectical relationship to the other. (Gill, 11)

Therefore, he is arguing that with community also comes isolation. Consider for example Bertha locked away in the attic in *Jane Eyre* or Jane herself originally excluded as a viable love interest for Rochester because of her class. Gill calls the relationship between the two dialectical because you can only discover what is true by looking at isolation opposed to community and vice versa. With regards to symbolism, literary images of isolation such as enclosures, prisons and islands need to be balanced with images of human interaction or association. In an effort to show how the “house contributes to the formal structure and total meaning of individual novels” he proves that community has been a key factor in literature for centuries, yet can only be fully understood when considered parallel to isolation (Gill, 14-15). Community therefore, must be considered as a key factor in the popularity of the English country house genre.

1.3 Method

It is precisely this interplay between the historic house, once powerful and then later demolished, which led me to choose two decidedly modern texts. Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel *The Remains of the Day* (hereafter referred to as *Remains*), which was published in 1989, centers on the country house of Darlington Hall. As does Ian McEwan’s novel entitled *Atonement* which features the Tallis House and was published in 2001. Their position as modern texts almost necessitate a consideration for this historic element of dominant power, downfall and

nostalgic longing⁸. As to use the country house in modern fiction, one must navigate through the extensive power dynamics that reside in it as a historic reality, a literary trope and an ideal that resonates more broadly than the nineteenth century novel. I shall argue that *Remains* and *Atonement* can be seen to navigate through the extensive power dynamics that permeate them. They can be seen to do so by manipulating, destabilising and undermining expectations of literary functions and genre.

I shall show how the literary country house is implicated within a specific set of genre conventions. This is because it functions as a historic reality, a literary construct and an ideal. It is fair to assume that readers of modern fiction will be at least loosely aware of the country house as it once functioned in history, though this is not vital. Most physical buildings have transformed from homes for aristocrats or to heritage sites or hotels. The way in which the *literary* country house is presented in a text, whether owned by aristocrats or repurposed into a hotel, can in my opinion be seen to speak to the extensive history of the *real* country house, whether intentional or not. As a result, the literary country house is implicated within a specific set of genre conventions. A prevailing sense of nostalgia can be linked to nostalgia for the once powerful country house as it once originally stood. The derelict house can be read as a representation of the downfall of the British Empire, or the sense of ending and so forth. Similarly, the country house genre often overlooks the negative aspects of history. These genre conventions and many more must be navigated through when a modern text deals with this literary trope.

Critics have attributed a variation of genres to *Remains* and *Atonement*. It is interesting that part of what they both draw on is *distinct* from and at other times *related* to, the country house genre. The traditional country house genre which I shall refer to throughout, can be defined as the nineteenth century realist novel which has a keen interest in personal interaction, especially class interactions. Set in the backdrop of a beautiful estate, usually with a long aristocratic heritage, detailed descriptions of beautiful costumes, fine furniture, and table settings are often attributable to this genre. *Remains* challenges and causes complexities to the inherited sense of nostalgia which is attributable to the country house. It also deals with genre conventions and the revival of the estate novel, yet it also uses elements of the journal and the historic retelling with a keener interest in narration itself. A progressive chronology surrounding the six-day driving trip the protagonist Stevens begins, is made secondary to his

⁸ This need to refute or in some way criticise the previous power dynamics can to some extent be seen as a reactionary response. Consider for example William A. McClung's assertion that "...Both the country house and country-house literature have in recent years been chastised as the perpetrators and products of dishonest cultural mythologies" such as aristocratic dominance (McClung, 277).

continuous and temporally fragmented reflections back to his past twenty years of service at Darlington Hall. Furthermore, he operates as both protagonist and narrator, a narration which is overtly unreliable. As a result, the genre undermining is considerably more subtle than in the other text, as *Remains* meanders through several genre conventions attributable to the country house. Similarly, though not identical, *Atonement* can be seen to interweave variations of the country house genre such as the Agatha Christie detective novel (often set in the backdrop of a large country house) and intertextual references to *Northanger Abbey*. At the same time, it uses conventions from other genres too such as the World War Two Story or the neo-historical novel. It more overtly evades the identification as one clear genre. In this manner, the texts modify genre conventions. Few critics have noted this interesting *modification* of genre conventions in both, yet it is evident that in each text they are forging what has previously been distinctive genres.

Furthermore, none have attributed this to the repossession of power. Moreover, limited analytical attention has been given to *Remains* and *Atonement* comparatively, specifically regarding their seemingly united agendas in this respect. This thesis contends that both *Remains* and *Atonement* navigate through the inherent power dynamics of the English country house. By manipulating, destabilising and undermining the genre, this creates an analytical distance and critique of the inherent power dynamics that permeate it. This thesis is not a genre analysis, but rather through theorists such as Michel Foucault, the application of key critics and close reading, it will seek to expose how both texts meander through conventions typical to the English country house novel genres, in order to regain power.

In order to understand the representation of the country house in literature, it is necessary to scrutinise the complex relationship between these institutions and the exertion of power. In order to do so, this thesis often adopts a Foucauldian theoretical perspective, though not exclusively. Michel Foucault's theories can be usefully applied to the hierarchical figure, the surveyed and segmented space, the function of hierarchy and the individual characters within the literary English country houses of this thesis. His concerns lie in the relationship between knowledge and power. He presents his discourse as a type of knowledge that is interior to the person. That knowledge creates what it purports to know, rather than being organic truth that operates outside of itself. In this model, knowledge is a product of power rather than the other way around. He focuses on the Panoptic Prison design and he presents it as a model for culture. He explains, "Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning

of power” (Foucault, 201). The guard tower at the centre of the prison enabled guards to see all inmates at any time. In a term that Foucault dubs “Self-policing”, the knowledge of this visibility made the inmates act as if they were being watched, though at times they may not have (Foucault, 201). Thereby exemplary of the internalisation of power. This aspect of indoctrinated power on the individual can be applied usefully to the English country house, which was originally hierarchical. The aristocratic (male) owner had authority over the house, its guests and the servants that resided there. Though there is no physical guard tower, Stevens in *Remains* can be read in terms of Foucauldian internalised power, an element that in some way assuages his culpability regarding his master’s involvement with Nazis. Darlington Hall operates to some extent as a “complete hierarchy” in this respect (Foucault, 198). This is also evident in the segregation of the country house, where servants’ quarters separate them physically from other guests. The architectural focus is just the beginning for Foucault, his emphasis is rooted in the knowledge, originally inspired by the outbreak of the plague. He explains:

So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary...that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers. (Foucault, 201)

Though the architecture of the country house such as the servant’s quarters can be read as how segregation is inherent in the structure, Foucault emphasises how the power is created in the individual. Even if the surveillance is “discontinuous” the individual’s actions are still dominated by the knowledge of said surveillance (Foucault, 201). These considerations will help to analyse the power dynamics within *Remains* and *Atonement*.

This element of indoctrinated power put forward by Foucault is countered in the chapter that deals with *Atonement*. This is because the power dynamic is made more complex by offering an opportunity for feminist theory. A theory originally created by Laura Mulvey and later considered by John Berger is the idea of women as the objects of the male gaze. The theory argues that “Men act and women appear...Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at” (Berger, 37). Women of society are the passive and men the active, an element certainly attributable to the historical elements of the country house, whereby men only were allowed to inherit the estate. Furthermore, Berger asserts, “From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually...And so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet

always distinct elements of her identity as a woman” (Berger, 37). Women are objectified as sexual objects for the male viewer. This voyeurism and indoctrination of power in Berger’s terms are considered in relation to Cecilia. A feminist perspective that is lacking in *Remains* as women take a secondary position in the plot.

Furthermore, Henri Lefebvre’s theories as detailed in *The Production of Space* will expose how Foucault’s theories can be seen to marginalise the possibility of change. In doing so, the country house is considered as a reflector of society and as a tool in Lefebvre’s sense. He, as a French Marxist philosopher, analysed the function of space, contending that there are different modes of production of space. Simply put, he argues that space is a social product or social construction. He claims, “I shall show how space serves, and how hegemony makes use of it, in the establishment, on the basis of an underlying logic and with the help of knowledge and technical experience of a ‘system’” (Lefebvre, 11). This is usefully applied to Darlington Hall in *Remains*, as we can consider how the country house is not a result of power dynamics, but a tool used to continue the function of power. As exemplified in physical segregation.

In order to demonstrate how *Remains* and *Atonement* can be seen to navigate through the extensive power dynamics that permeate them, one chapter of this thesis shall look at *Remains* in detail, while another chapter shall look at *Atonement*. The *Remains* chapter shall be broken down into three key sections. The first will focus on genre. Through noting other critics’ observations of genre, this chapter will discuss how the text meanders through *many* genre conventions, thus destabilising power. The second chapter will focus on the country house values⁹. Both Stevens’ dependency and culpability will be considered to ascertain how he represents power. Furthermore, the aristocratic hierarchical figure of Lord Darlington is considered in regards to Mr Farraday, his antithesis. The third section covers the country house from a more materialist perspective. The physical construct, the way in which it segregates between classes and how characters are depicted when leaving the house add to the idea of the house as a tool, or at the very least an element of which perpetuates the power dynamics. In addition, through close reading of the stairs symbolism it is established how the text seeks to destabilise the traditional English country house symbolism.

The *Atonement* chapter will follow a similar structure. The first section will again deal with genre, focusing on a slightly different argument. The text can be seen to use several country house genre conventions, never fully committing to one and thus avoiding definition as one concrete genre. In doing so provides an analysis of power. The second section

⁹ Richard Gill even goes as far as to argue that the country house “...is the chosen emblem of what the author considers humane order and enduring values” (Gill, 7).

considers the way in which the text challenges the country house values, by undermining both its inherited patriarchal power and heritage. This is further established in the absenteeism of the patriarchal figure Mr Tallis. Furthermore, an element of which *Remains* does not offer, the text offers a gendered analysis of power in regards to the Victorian aligned Mrs Tallis and Cecilia as an object of the male gaze. In this section I further examine to what extent the text calls for a re-reading, concluding that it does in order to undermine the validity of the country house ideal. The necessity of a re-reading is considered in regards to the symbol of water, which connotes the social concerns and class distinctions of the country house, though this is made more complex by Briony's ability to tell the story as she is revealed in the ending to be both protagonist and narrator who purposefully manipulated the plot.

By considering all of these aspects I will present how two modern novels remaster the power dynamics attributable to the country house by manipulating, destabilising and undermining its expectations of literary functions and genre conventions. In doing so, the country house will be revealed as an entity that is enveloped in power. On a historical level, it was representative of aristocratic hierarchical power, and to some extent this can be enlarged to the power of the British Empire¹⁰. From a materialist perspective, the country house can in one aspect be seen to act as a tool to create and continue the function of power. On a literary level, the contemporary aspect of the two texts almost necessitate a consideration for this historical power thereby critiquing a previous ideal from a modern perspective. The literary country house is implicated within a specific set of genre conventions. *Remains* and *Atonement* invoke a set of relatively traditional and most assuredly nostalgic genre conventions and ideals in order to destabilise them.

¹⁰ Though what is interesting in modern texts, is how the imperial power is dwindling or ended. As one critic asserts, "...the War represents the moment of initiation (or acceleration) of decline in Britain's (and England's) power in the world, planting the seeds of the dismantling of the empire and Britain's fall into the second strata of nations behind the superpowers of the US" (Bentley, 140). Therefore the power represented in the country house is diminished with the fall of the British Empire.

2 The Remains of the Day

Kazuo Ishiguro's contemporary novel *Remains* was published in 1989. The text is told through the unreliable narration of the protagonist and narrator Stevens, a butler at Darlington Hall. Though readers are introduced to the character when the American Mr Farraday owns Darlington Hall, it mainly reflects back to the past subservience of Stevens to Lord Darlington and his twenty years of service. It replaces a traditional progressive chronology surrounding the six-day driving trip Stevens undertakes, instead focusing on the temporally fragmented reflections back to his past. It is through this unreliable and fragmented analepsis that readers discover Lord Darlington's downfall due to his Nazi affiliations, which also negatively impact Stevens in the present. As a modern text dealing with the country house, a decidedly historic reality, ideal and trope in literature, the text offers an acute analysis of the power dynamics that permeate Darlington Hall. It does so by meandering through many expectations of literary functions and genre that are attributable to the country house in fiction and often in history.

In order to exemplify this, the text will be approached in three ways. Firstly, the subtle way in which the text recognises a myriad of different genre conventions that are often attributable to the country house, will be shown. To do so, I shall look at the many different genres that critics have noted in the text, concluding that none have noted that this plethora of genre conventions in fact subtly undermines the power of one country house genre association. This is evident in the text's use of nostalgia, which is undermined and contorted on a historical and plot level. Similarly, the journal convention is present. However, this is clearly used for its unreliability and thus expresses the unreliability of the story and the country house as an ideal, not as a clear defining genre to label *Remains*. This genre consideration will be interlaced throughout this argument. Secondly, how the country house is used in the text with regards to its hierarchical history must be considered. To do so, I shall look at the representation of values, specific to Darlington Hall that are present in the text. The traditional literary trope of the idyllic relationship between master and servant is subtly undermined in *Remains*, though this is not presented very dramatically. Instead Stevens dependency is shown, thus the text questions the fairness of the country house values. The patriarchal power of Lord Darlington is gradually revealed to be damaging to the character. Though new, superior values are presented by Mr Farraday. He is not simply the typical *good* character as opposed to the *bad*. Instead *Remains* clearly considers what it means to be

culpable. Thirdly, it is necessary to consider the physicality of the country house. Darlington hall is considered as a place that perpetuates, and is a result of, unfair hierarchical power. This is established through the way in which the physical building segregates, and how the characters views are represented differently upon leaving the hierarchical site and the stair case symbolism. It critiques the detrimental class distinctions that led to Stevens' emotional repression and acknowledges the unfairness of the traditional order. Therefore, it will be made evident that *Remains* subtly navigates through different genre conventions to undermine the power of the country house as an ideal, trope and historic reality.

2.1 Navigating through genre conventions

Many critics have noted the interesting modification of genre in *Remains*, but few have attributed this to the repossession of power. Perhaps the most detailed analysis of genre in *Remains* is provided by Bo G. Ekelund. He proclaims that there are “Five complicitous [*sic*] genres” that can be identified in *Remains* (Ekelund, 73). He explains, “They can be labelled travelogue, political memoirs, country house romance (which, as we will see, is related to the detective genre), farce, and an essay on values” (Ekelund, 73). Although his argument is far more nuanced than the simple identification of five separate genre patterns present in the text, it does provide essential evidence into the work done by Ishiguro. *Remains* is a text reformatting a specific genre, by navigating through several genre conventions. In a plot that revolves around complicity and inherent power dynamics with the English country house model, it effectively repossesses its power by subtly undermining genre expectation. Though particular genre conventions are certainly apparent in the text, it is fairer to argue that the text actually uses several genre conventions, typically attributed to the English country house, in order to undermine the power of the one genre.

Most of the genres associated with the country house are defined by elements of nostalgia. It is clear that *Remains* uses this element of nostalgia in two ways. The first is historical nostalgia, as the literal country house way of life was coming to an end, an element which is reflected in the text's portrayal of Darlington Hall. Its new owner Mr Farraday is representative of those who would not have previously been allowed to own a country house, an American foreigner of new wealth with no evidence of aristocratic British family heritage. The publication of *Remains* in 1989 almost necessitates a sentimental reflective look at the traditional English country house of which no longer functions. A tribute to the nostalgic

longings to the power of the British Empire. This is evident in the novels start date, 1956. It is the same year of the Suez crisis. As historian Derek Varble makes clear, "...Egypt took control to the Suez Canal in 1956"¹¹ a historical moment that many refer to as the fall of the British Empire (Varble, 10). It signals the text's involvement with this element of nostalgia towards the British Empire, as the text begins with the date of its final demise. John J. Su, questions why *Remains* can in many respects be seen as an "estate novel" that seeks to "revive" a "dying genre" as the English country house is usually found in nineteenth century novels such as that of Jane Austen, not a twenty first century modern texts (Su, 553). Perhaps its revival is driven by people's tendency to look back nostalgically at this time of Empire and tradition. The "nostalgia" Su argues the text is dealing with is evident both in the historic date of the text and as Stevens reflects on his past glory at Darlington Hall (Su, 554). Moreover, it is further elevated past the character and to England. Su explains "Indeed the diminished condition of the estate is taken to be emblematic of the nation as a whole" (Su, 553). This popularity of this nostalgic lamentation and the genres "continuing success" to Su, "implies" that *Remains* "respond[s] to a national longing in post imperial Great Britain" (Su, 554). From this perspective, Ishiguro's decision to anchor his text with the English country house, which brings along with it all of its connotations and genre nuances, can be read as a nostalgic longing for the England as it once was. An imperial Great Britain with mass power on the world stage. As a modern text, it must navigate through this unavoidable sense of nostalgia that is accompanied with the genre.

Remains can be seen to undermine this sense of nostalgia however as it also invokes the genre convention of tragedy. Therefore, the text expands on the nostalgic tendency of the country house genre conventions not just repeat them. Anthony Cunningham argues that *Remains* "is a tragedy, and like any good tragedy, the story invites our interest and sympathy" (Cunningham, 95). This is clear as the plot reveals the downfall of Lord Darlington, a man born to wealth and circumstance as owner of Darlington Hall, though he dies a dismayed man due to his Nazi affiliations in post-war society. This downward trajectory is similarly invoked sympathetically towards Stevens, who once was a butler of the highest stature and now works only with a few staff members under Mr Faraday. Rather than defining the text in tragic

¹¹ Varble further explains that "When the British government changed the Royal Navy's fuel from coal to oil in 1912, the Suez Canal became of truly vital importance to Britain's home security" (Varble, 10). This continued to "Twenty years later, events again thrust the Suez Canal into the forefront of global conflict. Hitler understood the waterway's importance to the British imperial strategy, and knew that cutting this lifeline would isolate Britain from its overseas possessions and allies. After World War II began, Germany therefore attempted to block or even capture the canal" (Varble, 10). Following this, in 1956, the Suez Crisis resulted in Egypt finally taking control over the canal. This turning point is often identified as the final fall of the British Empire.

terms, Su instead argues that the “nostalgia” in the text is “intriguing” as it “invoke[s] a tradition within the English novel that had previously degenerated into satire: the ‘crisis of inheritance’ narrative that reads the fate of the nation through the condition of the English country estate” (Su, 553). Not only can Cunningham and Su be seen to disagree with the genre of *Remains*, they further expose how the text is expanding upon traditional country house elements. The presentation of Darlington Hall in transmission can through this perspective be read as the fate of Britain. The nostalgia towards the once powerful England is reworked as the plot places a flawed individual at the centre. Lord Darlington’s Nazi affiliations create his downfall and also undermine the sense of nostalgia to the time when Stevens once worked with him. A time when Britain was powerful. In this way the text expands on the nostalgic tendencies of the genre with the added twist of tragedy, it does not simply repeat them.

Furthermore, there are other conventions that can be found in the text. One critical evaluation of *Remains* is that it can be described as a personal journal, which is in some ways typical to the country house genres, like the bildungsroman *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë. Though this element of singular focus is certainly apparent in the text, it is fairer to argue that this journal element is only superficially applicable, as the text takes elements of many country house genre conventions. The text begins with Stevens’ explanation that, “It seems increasingly likely that I really will undertake the expedition that has been preoccupying my imagination now for some days” (Ishiguro, 3). The first-person narration and the focalisation of Stevens is evidently attributable to the journal style. Ekelund asserts that “...Stevens’ journal incorporates distinguished elements that can be analysed as the carriers of different genre conventions” (Ekelund, 71). In noting the prolific genre conventions that punctuate the narrative, he attributes the main text to that of a “journal” (Ekelund, 71). However, it is not the six-day driving “expedition” to Miss Kenton, an old colleague who Stevens has romantic feelings for, that preoccupies the narrative (Ishiguro, 3). Instead, the majority of the text is based around his reflections to the past twenty years of service as Butler at Darlington Hall, an English country house. Though the text appears to be attributable to the journal style, it is limited as it does not deal, at least in the majority, with the present as most journals often do. Therefore it is again evident that this is just one of many conventions the text uses.

The unreliability of narration, that may lead critics to define the text as a journal style, can instead be seen to disturb the genre of the country house novel immediately and continuously, by questioning the authenticity of the story being told. The journal style is

inherently unreliable as it is unavoidably subjective. This is intensified in *Remains* as Stevens is presented as an unreliable narrator who is in charge of the retelling of the story. He predominantly recalls memories from the past rather than present, thus it is mediated by his memory. Stevens' notably unreliable narration is pressed into the readers mind as he repeatedly states "As I recall" or "I cannot recall precisely the actual words..." (Ishiguro, 71-94). The text is punctuated with continuous references such as this, which undermine the very validity of the story being told. Critics have noted that the style of the narration is designed to draw particular interest into the narration itself, and I would argue that this emphasises the use of these self-conscious interruptions. As Ekelund notes, "In a novel without much of a plot, what goes on in the telling of the story takes on greater measure of the reader's interest" (Ekelund, 71). The very character that can be seen as powerless throughout the narrative, as his subservience to Lord Darlington is regularly made apparent, is in fact the one in charge of the retelling. Readers are privy to information only through his focalisation as narrator-come-protagonist. Therefore, not only does the stylistic dimension draw attention to the telling of the story, the text invites readers to challenge the authenticity of the story being told.

I would further add that the texts unreliability of the journal genre exposes the unreliability of the country house as an ideal. Darlington Hall changes ownership upon its first introduction. The text reveals, "Mr Farraday had commenced the tour at the top of the house... describing with some flourish 'what the English lords used to do' in each room" (Ishiguro, 119). As a character who plays a relatively small role, he draws attention to the disjuncture between past and present. What the "English Lords used to do" in their country houses, it is entirely subjective based on the opinions of the character, though it does draw attention to the fact that the previous way of life had ended (Ishiguro, 119). Mr Faraday can be seen to look at the country house in the same way that society often does in the present day. Heritage Open Days, which are inclusive of English country houses "regularly attract an audience of 800 000 visitors and there is an opportunity to see some properties that might not otherwise be open to the public" (Misiura, 62). There is clearly an interest into the English country houses despite how they no longer operate as intended. However, a visit to a country house does not equate to the communication of how they used to function. This unreliability runs parallel to the text, as it is only through recurrent analepsis¹² focalised through the unreliable narration of Stevens, that readers are privy to this scene alongside his past

¹² Referring to the literary term, a form of anachrony. The *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* explains analepsis is "Commonly referred to as retrospection or flashback, analepsis enables a storyteller to fill in background information about characters and events. A narrative that begins *in medias res* will include analeptic account of events of events preceding the point at which the tale began" (ODLT, 13).

employment at Darlington Hall. The singular perspective is necessarily subjective. Stevens' narration leads critics to deduce that the text operates as a diary. This is because the house is mediated by his memory, it is only through him that readers have any knowledge of the building itself and what has gone on inside. This unreliability places readers in an interesting position where it is possible to question both Stevens' account and additionally the English country house ideal. The subjectivity of the journal is mirrored in the unreliability of the country house system which has ended. Physical English country houses may still stand, yet to look to them for a reliable communication of what once was is subjective. It is therefore clear that the text uses aspects of unreliable narration, including the convention of the journal genre to expose the unreliability of the country house as an ideal.

2.2 Country house values in Darlington Hall

Now that the way in which the text deals with several different genre conventions in order to subtly undermine the power of one country house association has been considered, we must consider the text from another angle. I shall now examine how the representation of values specific to Darlington Hall are presented in the text. This in order to depict how Darlington Hall is used to subtly critique its hierarchical history. From a materialist perspective, the English country house was established in order to appear beneficial for all levels of society, arguably with an inherent hierarchical power structure operating within it. Mark Girouard explains "Landowners were expected to foster their inheritance, look after their dependants, play their part in local government and be loyal to the interests of their own order" (Girouard, 5). The country house was inherited by the eldest male heir as per the rules of primogeniture. The responsibilities of inheriting the property were severe as with the house came power. Firstly politically, as the aristocracy held voting power for the parish. Secondly financially, as they would hire and therefore be responsible for a number of staff members. Not to mention how the house must not fall into disrepair and embarrass the family name. As a result, the presentation of the country house in any text is useful in analysing the power dynamics it communicates. It can help ascertain where the text draws the line between the hierarchical historic house and the ideal of the perfect class system. Michel Foucault has written widely on the relationship between knowledge and power, proposing that human beings internalise the expectations of their society. Foucault's idea of a "complete hierarchy" is initiated effectively when it is internalised by individuals (Foucault, 198). It is no more

apparent than when one considers Lord Darlington and Stevens' relationship, it is the driving force of the whole narrative. Stevens is presented as a subordinate to Lord Darlington. There is no evidence for their relationship to be defined in any other, less hierarchical, way. Nonetheless, it is too simple to deduce from this that the text simply repeats this hierarchical power relationship. Instead it subtly undermines and critiques it.

The traditional values of the country house are critiqued in *Remains* to question its fairness. Rather than a tranquil relationship between the powerful aristocrat and the workers, the narrative slowly reveals that Stevens' dependency to Lord Darlington in fact had a negative impact on him. This *dependency* echoes the once political divide between land owners and tenants. Within the country house ideal is an inbuilt hierarchy based on class. This hierarchy is reflected in Stevens, as he is subjected to the values of Darlington Hall. Stevens' description of Darlington Hall is very illuminating in this regard;

To us, then, the world was a wheel, revolving with these great houses at the hub, their mighty decisions emanating out to all else, rich and poor, who revolved around them. It was the aspiration of all those of us with professional ambition to work our way as close to this hub as we were each of us capable.

(Ishiguro, 115)

The "wheel" description connotes the trapped nature of the individuals (Ishiguro, 115). As a wheel is locked in a fixed position, constantly turning yet never able to break free from its circular shape, so are the individuals in this story. It suggests how an association with "the hub" will only get them so far, they will never, and could never, be part of the inner hub, preferring instead to work alongside it in their relegated position (Ishiguro, 115). Bo G. Ekelund found that the text can be read as an "essay on values", and in the exploration of the fairness of Stevens' situation this is apparent (Ekelund, 73). Though it is important to note that the genre convention is just one of many the text touches upon. The accuracy of the comment "decision emanating out to all else, rich and poor" is evident within the very plot itself, as Stevens' dependency on Darlington Hall causes him numerous problems (Ishiguro, 115). The narrative questions the truth in his estimation that he *chose* to be as close to the hub as possible, as the text unravels, it is clear that his views are entirely irrelevant to the wider political decisions and house values. It further criticises and questions a broader consideration of the problems of aristocratic dominance, as was traditional in the country house model.

The dependent Stevens must trust and adhere to his powerful Lords values. Therefore, a necessary traditional trope an author has to navigate when using English country house is

the figure of the patriarch, Lord Darlington, the powerful owner of the house itself. A traditional beginning, middle and end as is typical of country house genres is replaced with temporal fragmentation through analepsis. The slow reveal of information gradually questions the patriarch. At the beginning of the novel, Lord Darlington's house values are presented in a positive light. For instance, Stevens criticises Mr Farraday's informal conversation with him, claiming "This was a most embarrassing situation, one in which Lord Darlington would never have placed an employee", making his preference to Lord Darlington's values and attributes clear (Ishiguro, 14). However, Lord Darlington's downfall is slowly revealed as he was a Nazi sympathiser during the war. Therefore, his values are negative, which has disastrous effects for the powerless members of the household. Lord Darlington's announcement to Stevens that "We cannot have Jews on the staff here at Darlington Hall" is finally revealed almost midway in the novel (Ishiguro, 146). This is a pivotal scene in the text, which undermines the reader's trust in both the narrator and Lord Darlington. Prior to this Stevens is shown to have lightly referenced the topic, always justifying or dismissing what people have said about him. Interestingly the house itself is cited as a justification for his despicable actions; "It's for the good of this house, Stevens. In the interests of the guests we have staying here" (Ishiguro, 146). He superficially implies that the impeccable Jewish maids are now a threat to the inhabitants. What is more persuasive is the notion that they are a threat to England, as the house functions as the "hub" amidst the backdrop of an ever-present war. This can be considered as what Noémie Nélis believes is Ishiguro's aim to "transcend" past the local, immediate and personal problems to the global issues of the time (Nélis, 2). It is noteworthy that the most important analepsis Stevens has into his past is so saturated with the functioning of power. Lord Darlington has the ability to decide who works for him at his county house. Furthermore, there is a lack of societal protection such as worker's rights or unions to defend the maids. Notably, Lord Darlington directs Stevens to perform the actual task of dismissal. Furthermore, there is evidently an external force that has changed Darlington's perception of Jews so considerably and unfairly. Although Stevens and the fellow inhabitants are presented in the text as though they concur entirely with the values enacted at Darlington Hall, one cannot fail to notice their dependency too it, their complete lack of power to do anything other but leave if they did not agree. Not only is their dependency and entrapment as characters apparent, but it speaks to a broader historic truth of the spread of antisemitism during wartime in England.

The text further provides an antithesis to Lord Darlington's despicable values in the character of Mr Farraday, who serves to represent new values in comparison to the established power dynamics perpetuated by the traditional country house genre. The anti-Semitic values of Lord Darlington are in direct contrast with Mr Farraday's views whereby he states, "You realize, Stevens, I don't expect you to be locked up here in this house all the time I'm away" (Ishiguro, 3). It is a foreigner, an outsider to the hierarchical norms of British society that is able to freshly analyse and correct mistakes of the old ways. Stevens was never previously allowed to leave the house when the Lord wasn't home. This is a small example showing the trapped nature of Stevens and how the superiority of Mr Farraday's values compared to the aristocratic Lord Darlington. Mr Farraday's insistence that he should take a break propels the entire plot and Stevens' self-reflections to the past twenty years of his servitude. Therefore, Mr Farraday is positioned as a character who is symbolic for the new order in Post War Britain whereby the hierarchical servant-Lord dyad is disrupted. Terentowicz-Fotyga has drawn attention to this, arguing that "The House of the disgraced Lord Darlington is bought by Farraday, an American who on the one hand mystifies it as an epitome of Old England and on the other hand radically modifies the rules and codes that define it" (Terentowicz-Fotyga, 82). In her analysis, the country house is a myth whereby Mr Farraday challenges the house as a true English establishment and also changes the rule that can be seen to define it. The country house values are first proved unfairly proportioned hierarchically. It then shows the detrimental effects of this power dynamic by giving the patriarch inferior values. Finally, Mr Farraday, the foreign clear-headed character is presented as the antithesis to this previous power dynamic.

Though Mr Farraday is presented with superior values to Lord Darlington, the text offers no explanation for his decision to purchase Darlington Hall. Therefore, he is subject to contradiction between his evident awareness of the unfair power dynamics that popularised the country houses, an arguable representation of English imperial power. This is in direct contradiction to his drive to be part of it, to purchase such a building that is so intertwined with aristocratic power. Richard Gill proposes that through an "anthropological mask" the "visiting American" is seen to "survey the country house" (Gill, 4). The character is an outsider, bringing a new perspective. In this manner, the text invites the readers to do the same and therefore undermines the codes and conventions that proliferate it. If one agrees with Gill, then the text's use of such a character can be seen to present a paradox, a break between the old and the new. He further notes "If the great house in one moment speaks to

him [an American man] of human possibilities and opportunities, in another it brings back to mind the darker actualities of a hereditary and hierarchical order” (Gill, 4). Gill’s analysis¹³ supports the aforementioned consideration that the hierarchical order of the traditional English country house model has ended. In doing so, it further exposes another layer of contradiction between the “opportunities” for the wealthy and “darker actualities” of the hierarchical order which prevented the lower classes from ascending to the same (Gill, 4). Therefore, Mr Farraday operates as a comparison to his predecessor, whilst also being conflicted between his ability to purchase Darlington Hall and the hierarchal order that permeated it. This paradoxical element is interwoven throughout the text by the native Lord Darlington compared to the new, foreign Mr Farraday who provides more modern, fair perspectives and practices. Secondly, the unfairness of the previous power dynamics is contradicted by the building as it stands in the novel, as a place of significance, beauty and prestige. Mr Farraday’s decision to purchase Darlington Hall is left unanswered and though this creates an opportunity for his contradiction, he also operates as a character who exposes the hypocrisy and contradiction within the realm of the text.

A further element that the text navigates through is the subservient characters’ ability to challenge the overarching values within the hierarchical structure of the country house. There is no simple division between good and bad characters as is typical of the country house genre. Instead the text asks an ethical question; to what extent is Stevens *culpable* for his lack of action regarding Lord Darlington and his Nazi affiliations? As has been shown, he actively admits to wanting to be close to “the hub” (Ishiguro, 115). Moreover, Lord Darlington’s decision that “We cannot have Jews on the staff here at Darlington Hall” is carried out by Stevens himself (Ishiguro, 146). He is the one who actually dismisses them. It encourages the question, should Stevens have intervened? In this respect the text can be seen to use “the appeasement fable” genre convention as considered by Sandford F. Borins (Borins, 129). He analyses the ways in which the text seeks to satisfy, allay or relieve Lord Darlington’s sympathies towards the Nazi regime and the class social structure. However, this can be seen to overlook how the text additionally reveals that *Stevens* does nothing to stop Lord Darlington. The values of the country house are interspersed here as to somewhat allay Stevens’ blame. This is because the idea of the servant could be seen as a wider social metaphor. Sandford F. Borins states that he “...might also be a perfect metaphor for the

¹³ Richard Gill examines the country house as a recurring motif in English literature and does not focus on the historical house to do so. In his chapter ‘A Quest for Community’, he notes “And nowhere else does the American himself display so revealingly his own long-simmering ambivalence toward the Old World, toward England and the ancient ways” (Gill, 4).

relationship between servants and politicians, whereby the former are constrained to obey and implement the decisions of the latter, even if they think them misguided” (Borins, 129). Thus, Borins is expanding the narrative relationship between Stevens and Lord Darlington to a wider social reality of servant and politician. Not only is Stevens the epitome of the servant and therefore powerless, but Lord Darlington the epitome of politician and therefore powerful. The need to allay the culpability of the characters can be read as a grander social historical reality of the politician and servant. It is interesting that the text shows Lord Darlington as a fool, a Nazi sympathiser and who only has an “amateur” involvement in politics (Ishiguro, 102). This can be seen as criticism of the political hierarchy as a whole. Furthermore, the text involves real historic events of the World War and the date of the Suez crisis within a fictional narrative. However, it is not fair to assert that the text can be read as purely in line with the appeasement fable, instead it can be seen to use aspects of many. Borins’ assertions that there is constraint is evident in the amalgamation of servitude, uneven power dynamics and lack of options available to the characters. If the options in society are so few that one becomes dependent for house, board and income then it complicates the scenario whereby a servant disagrees with the house values. There is too much at stake for Stevens, and by implication servants in general, to simply disagree.

Instead of a lack of power to challenge the overarching ethos, it could be argued that Stevens is presented as a character who ultimately concurs with it. That instead of disagreeing with the values of the house as directed by the patriarch, he acquiesces. From this perspective, the power of the country house is diminished as the character is solely responsible. Alice Ferrebe looks into this through the perspective of masculinity in Ishiguro’s fiction. To her, “He repeatedly conceals his own motives...” rather than being unable to articulate or act on them (Ferrebe, 158). Superficially the text positions Stevens as a character that does not oppose. He obeys his employer and unjustly fires two maids for being Jewish, expresses denial about Lord Darlington’s Nazi associations until analepsis awards the reader insight, denies ever knowing Lord Darlington to Mr Farraday’s guests and so forth. These plot elements justify the conclusion that the character is positioned as one who agrees with the values of his Lordship. However, to simply look at the facts of plot is to overlook the ever-growing and ever-present sense of doubt and regret afforded to the reader through the focalisation of Stevens. Ferrebe looks into the ending to validate her argument. For her, the “...stilted conclusion in the politics of his former employer, Stevens is unrepentant (almost) until the end” (Ferrebe, 158). This “unrepentant” summary of Stevens’ actions ties in

beautifully with Borins analysis of the appeasement fable. Both look into the *culpability* of the characters, yet both come to different conclusions. Borins's argument is more convincing, as it does not focus only on the plot circumstances in a vacuum. Although Stevens does not explicitly state his disagreement with some of the negative political values in Darlington Hall, this does not necessarily equate to his complicity with them. I agree with Borins who believes that the narrative is asking in a "... subtle and searching way our relationship to the leaders we choose and the heroes we venerate and the stories we tell of them" (Borins, 129-30). It also draws attention to the problematic act of storytelling, as Stevens, the reader's only source of information, is made pointedly unreliable. Although in some places Stevens' lack of action is indeed unwarranted, it does not fully assign him as a collaborator in all of the house values. As Borins notes, the narrative asks readers to analyse the relationship to leaders, perhaps even displaying the negative consequences if one does not know when to quit. This demonstrates the extent to which another's power must certainly be a dominating factor in his actions. A precedent, which had been initiated and popularised in the English country house values.

By analysing the values of Darlington Hall, it has been made clear that the text offers a critique of this traditional aspect of the country house. The hierarchical power of the historic country house is compounded in Darlington Hall as a precedent to be questioned. Moreover, new values are presented in the character Mr Farraday thereby relegating this hierarchical power to the past. Finally, Stevens is not simply the *good* character and Lord Darlington the *bad*, instead the text navigates through the complexities of what it is to be culpable. To what extent a characters actions are affected by the values of the country house is brought into focus.

2.3 The physical house

From an architectural and social perspective, there is evidence to suggest the country house changes *with* society as well as reflecting it. Therefore, the values of the owner are not the only factor to influence the country house. In this way, Foucault's theories on the panoptic prison model marginalises the possibilities for change. Its analysis, that the panoptic prison represents a model of society suggests that this society is in no way adaptable, that there is no room for improvement. Girouard uses Petworth House in Somerset, Bath, as an example to explain how "The social pattern of bath was echoed by its architecture", as the lack of the "central" features created a more fluid space, where guests could roam around as they pleased

(Girouard, 182). The very architecture of this country house was adapted to suit the needs of the society it entertained. Furthermore, he emphasises “focal points”, which differ from that of neighbouring European countries, can be seen to reflect the English society specifically (Girouard, 182). He explains, “The great could no longer win the support of such people by taking them [the middle strata] into their households as upper servants, or inviting them to dinner once a year and putting them at a separate table or even in a separate room for themselves” (Girouard, 184). To maintain political power, the upper classes were forced to adapt to the social change that was happening. As the “middle strata” increased in numbers, their voting power depended upon it (Girouard, 184). The resulting effects were the adaptation to the very building itself. This proves that the English country house is seen to represent or to some extent adapt to, the society of its time. This means the values of it are not solely dependent on the owner, or architecture, but also wider society. An adaptability for change that Foucault does not provide much room for in his panoptic model of society, and an element that must be considered in *Remains*.

In this respect, Girouard has provided evidence for how the country house represents power. As the hierarchical society dissipated, the country house adapted to facilitate this. It is possible to take this argument one step further. To consider the country house not as a *result* of power dynamics (simultaneously a reflector of society), but a tool used to create and continue the function of power. Henri Lefebvre’s theories as detailed in *The Production of Space* will enable this consideration. He explains that space is not simply “a passive locus of social regulations” instead it is “active” in the “existing mode of production” (Lefebvre, 11). He further claims,

I shall show how space serves, and how hegemony makes use of it, in the establishment, on the basis of an underlying logic and with the help of knowledge and technical experience of a ‘system’. (Lefebvre, 11)

Evidently presenting his argument through a Marxist perspective, Lefebvre¹⁴ focuses on hegemony, “the position of being the strongest and most powerful and therefore able to control others” (CED). Although looking at cities, we can consider his argument in relation to the country house. In Marxist theory, hegemony can be understood as a situation, a goal and a tool. In arguing that space is not “passive” but instead “active” as it can be used as a tool by

¹⁴ Looking into cities, Lefebvre devised a triad of spatial concepts which included physical space, mental space and social space. The physical space refers to space as is usual; the building one can see or touch. The mental space is the more technical side such as zoning plans created by bureaucrats. The third, and most conducive to this argument, is the social space which draws on the first two but symbolism and meaning is more important. (Lefebvre, 11-15).

the establishment to continue hegemonic power (Lefebvre, 11). In this way, space is not passive but instead an enforcing power. The country house could be viewed not only as a symbol of the overarching power but as tool to continue it. Let us look at Girouard's considerations once again from this perspective. He noted that the landed classes used to take the lower classes "into their households as upper servants" or by "inviting them to dinner once a year and putting them... in a separate room" (Girouard, 184). Through the perspective of Lefebvre, the house operates as a tool. The separate rooms of the country house are used to ensure the smooth relationships between classes. In this instance it is a commodity, both as accommodation and as a dinner venue used in order to continue the function of hierarchical aristocratic power. This worked because of the high status and prestige that came with being invited to the grand house itself, thus the house is an apparatus and it is used as a tool to continue power. Not only is it adaptable to change, but it also creates change in the people by its use as a tool to enforce power.

Darlington Hall is segregated to ensure division between classes, a remnant of the country house social order. *Remains* presents this traditional aspect of segregation as an ideal to be questioned. It can be further read in the Lefebvre sense, as the country house operating as a tool. The building is physically segregated to ensure that "the extensive servants' quarters" and the "servants' hall" are cut off from the main buildings, out of the way of the guest rooms (Ishiguro, 8). Therefore it physically divides the two social groups. The regimented space of Darlington Hall functions in the text to reinforce hierarchical division, a remnant of hierarchical aristocratic power. The separation can be seen to perpetuate the strict class divides that resonate within the historic country house from its early inception and the literary country house genre which tends to overlook this negative aspect. This is exemplified in the texts revelations that many politicians visited the house, even the Prime Minister on one occasion. At all times the servants were put to work and not involved. Borins can be seen to concur as he notes the "fictional conferences" are "another version of closed politics" whereby only Lord Darlington and his aristocratic guests are seen to have access to the political situation of the country (although later undermined), as they invite politicians to the house (Borins, 124). The servants however, are completely separated from this as they must remain in their quarters which functions as a tool in Lefebvre's sense. This is exemplified when Stevens is quizzed by Mr Spencer as to the political situation of England and the impact of this on "levels of trade" (Ishiguro, 195). One of many targeted questions designed to exemplify why he, a gentleman, was supposedly better suited to the position of politics than a

servant. Mr Spencer's rude remarks are presented as ironic, as readers have been made aware of Stevens' devotion to the house, his situation as a live-in servant, and how he scarcely leaves his position and surrounds himself with characters who do the same. Therefore, the text points towards the unfairness of the social situation in a literary work. Although Stevens physically lives in the building where political decisions are being made, his position as Butler prevents societal ascendance whilst also relegating him to other parts of the house physically. The physical segregation built into the English country house is presented disparagingly as one aspect that perpetuates the strict class divisions.

This critical view point of the traditional segregated architecture of the country house is further compounded in the staircase symbolism. *Remains* can be seen to undermine the traditional symbolism of the country house novel. Instead of grand romantic gestures held at the foot of a staircase, or the simple symbol of decadence, the staircase in Ishiguro's novel is emblematic of recognisable class distinctions, and are particularly revealing when considering Stevens' relationship to his father. Almost immediately before the death of Stevens' father, readers are told;

She began to climb the staircase, but I stopped her, saying: 'Miss Kenton, please don't think me unduly improper in not ascending to see my father in his deceased condition just at this moment. You see, I know my father would have wished me to carry on just now. (Ishiguro, 106)

This scene epitomises the use of the staircase and ladder symbol throughout the novel. Stevens' relationships, especially between him and his father, is affected heavily by the class distinctions. Firstly, Miss Kenton is symbolically above him on the staircase. Superficially this places her just out of reach, mimicking how she is to him in a romantic sense. Furthermore, she has the ability to ascend both literally up the staircase and emotionally to communicate her feelings. The text allows for the deduction that Stevens could have ascended the stairs with her. He could have gone after her to his father's room. Thus, the physical aspects of the building are at once a symbolic communication between text and reader, and a physical construction that reinforces power. The staircase creates a physical separation that places a choice on the character; ascension or descend. It can be effectively read as part of a tool as proposed by Lefebvre which divides and separates workers from the upper echelons of society. Stevens has to choose between performing his role downstairs for his employer or remain with his father in the servant's quarters. Furthermore, the choice the character makes is mediated through "the automatic functioning of power" as proposed by Foucault, a sense of

duty to his role” (Foucault, 201). The staircase, a traditional symbol of decadence, is reworked in *Remains* to communicate class distinctions.

In the traditional ideal of the country house, the servant and master dyad works beautifully, as does the relationships between the classes. This element is undermined in *Remains* as the symbolism of the staircase reveals Stevens’ emotional repression, the source of which is the country house model. Though he works without complaint, repression serves as a reminder of the problems with the ideal of the country house and its hierarchical power. The text reveals that Stevens makes a choice not to be with him as he explains that is how his father would have “wished” it (Ishiguro, 106). This severe emotional repression is linked repeatedly throughout the text to a desire for Stevens to live up to his father’s expectations. Jack Slay Jr. analyses this scene, where Stevens chooses to ease the blisters of Mr Dupont instead of be with his dying father. He explains, “The act establishes him as the quintessential butler and, more important, as proper heir to his father's name; further, it is through this act of quelled emotion and staunch repression that Stevens indeed earns his father's name” (Slay, 181). It is apparent that Stevens indeed displays some kind of indebtedness, a helplessness under the power of his father’s expectations and seeming un-rivalled displays of dignity. Where I draw pause however, is his over-emphasis on his father’s name. Referring to “Mr Stevens senior” in order to “distinguish” him from Stevens as they hold the same name of William is often a matter of formality and cordiality in Britain (Ishiguro, 53). Slay’s argument would be more convincing if the protagonist was suddenly referred to as William for the remainder of the text after he acquired what he believes to be ‘dignity’ (which many acknowledge more accurately as emotional repression and subordination). Furthermore, it is interesting that the text uses the symbol of the staircase as a means to convey it. Stevens is below whilst his father is above in the attic. It is fair to conclude that the staircase is used in order to communicate the incorrectness of his decision. The staircase physically divides them as his father dies slowly in the “attic room” that resembles a “prison cell” (Ishiguro, 75). Ultimately however, staircases can be used for both ascension and to descend, it can connect and divide them. The decision is placed purely upon the individual as to what the stair is used for. Thus, both father and son are making the choice to repress and allow the division to form between them. Their identity as Butlers often prohibits them from forming emotional relationships, just as it prevents them from using their shared first names. They are completely dependent on the house as servants, but also as people who have made the decision to be submissive, to repress themselves in order to support the master of the house.

Interestingly, the very act of leaving the house in *Remains* is further evidence for the negative and restricting power the house has over its inhabitants. As has been made clear, the physicality of the country house is used to segregate social classes, an element that is questioned in the text. Similarly, the traditional symbolism of the staircase is reformatted to reinforce the sense of unfair class division. Both of these aspects rely on the building to do so. By considering how the characters are presented when leaving this structure, as Stevens does at the very beginning of the novel in his trip to Ms. Kenton, will provide evidence for the restricting power the house has over its inhabitants. Terentowicz-Fotyga argues that isolation is a vital part of the manorial order¹⁵. To her, “The narrator’s view of the manorial order results from and depends on the isolation of his microcosm, which precludes both the opportunity and the need of questioning the principles he has lived by” (Terentowicz-Fotyga, 84). In order for the unfair power dynamic to function, for the manorial order to prevail, Stevens must be detached from life outside of the house and relegated to the miniature world inside of it. This curbs the ability to challenge the overarching principles or in this case, house values as enforced by the patriarch. She explains that “Since his existence is tightly interwoven with the self-contained world he inhabits, the rules, habits and principles of the workplace are shown as the limits of his world” (Terentowicz-Fotyga, 84). On this level, the house itself becomes Stevens’ world with all of its limitations and allowances. Therefore the use of Stevens’ “expedition” is a poignant one (Ishiguro, 3). As Ekelund notes, his journey is like a “travelogue” (Ekelund, 73). The inclusion of this genre convention reformats the limits of his “self-contained world”, therefore providing an escape from his hierarchical indoctrination (Terentowicz-Fotyga, 84). At the same time that I believe Terentowicz-Fotyga’s assessment of this as effecting the identity of the character, I also believe that it reveals the power of the country house model. The text can be seen to contrast community with isolation, suggesting the trapped nature of the individual. This is apparent in the very trajectory of the plot which begins with Stevens driving trip away from the confines of Darlington Hall. Within the house, though a community, he is isolated from anything and anyone else as his role restrains him. His subservience to Lord Darlington is all he knows. Therefore, his journey away from the house slowly reveals this previous power dynamic.

2.4 Conclusion, The Remains of the Day

¹⁵ This idea of “manorial order” is similar to what I refer to as the house values (Terentowicz-Fotyga, 84). She analyses specifically the order of the manor house and how it affects its inhabitants. Notably, her term puts the emphasis on the house itself.

Though *Remains* uses the English country house to anchor the novel, it actively seeks to destabilise the conventions that come with this literary trope. At the same time, the country house also functions as a historic reality, bringing with it nostalgic expectations and limitations, and further as an ideal in and of itself. *Remains*' use of many genres is well founded. However, the way in which the text adopts several different genre conventions in order to undermine the power of one country house genre association, is often overlooked. The sense of nostalgia is reworked in regards to the history and ideal of the house. The journal aspect is used to reveal the unreliability of the story and the country house as an ideal.

Through an analysis of the country house values, which shall be similarly explored in *Atonement*, it is evident that *Remains* exposes and challenges these values. The text presents the historic, hierarchical power dynamic as an element that needs to be critiqued in the country house genre. An element of culpability challenges this consideration, as the text can be seen to explore if Stevens had the power to disagree. Through the temporal fragmentation and use of analepsis, Lord Darlington, the patriarchal figure of the text, is presented as questionable. This is further compounded in the addition of his antithesis, Mr Farraday, the foreigner who exposes the hypocrisy within these values and offers new ones. This does not mean the text simply presents the traditional aspects of the *good* and the *bad* characters. Instead, Mr Farraday's values are also complex, as the "darker actualities of a hereditary and hierarchical order" that permeated the country house are not remedied by a convincing argument as to *why* he would choose to purchase such a property (Gill, 4). Similarly, Stevens' culpability and his lack of action challenges the way in which he is seen as wholly dependent on the house. Though it is clear that his dependency is an element that can further be enlarged to wider society to critique the hierarchical structure of the country house model. Therefore, the Darlington Hall house values are clearly presented as traditional, though criticised and reformatted in the text.

Furthermore, through a materialist perspective it was determined that the physical house is segregated and organised to ensure division between the classes. The constraints of Foucault's theories are examined with the help of Henri Lefebvre, whose Marxist perspective helps to analyse the country house not simply as a result of power dynamics but as a tool used to create and perpetuate the established function of power. A traditional symbol of prestige and wealth, the staircase is remastered in his text to reveal the restricting class distinctions that permeate it. This is further compounded in the use of the psychological element of Stevens' emotional repression. Though not specifically a psychoanalytic reading I instead

consider emotional repression as a modern element of psychology, which fits in well with the modern novel. This symbolism disallows the text to incorporate the element of nostalgia to a more prestigious Britain in line with the ideal of Englishness, instead it maintains an analytical distance throughout. Finally, the act of leaving the house, the element which acts as a catalyst for the entire plot of the novel, is evidence for the restriction imposed upon the country house inhabitants. By considering the navigation of genre conventions, analysing the country house values and evaluating the physical structure, it is clear that *Remains* manoeuvres through the extensive power dynamics that permeate the country house as a historic reality, ideal and a trope in literature.

3 Atonement

Ian McEwan's modern novel entitled *Atonement* was published in 2001. Therefore, McEwan's choice to anchor his novel to the English country house, the Tallis house in this case, is an interesting one. *Atonement* also deals with the three topics we have considered in *Remains* including genre, country house values and symbolism. However, it also navigates through a further power dynamic which is the role of women, offering room for a feminist critique. Similarly, the text necessitates a re-reading, thus taking back power over the reader. It is clear that *Atonement* navigates through the extensive power dynamics that permeate the country house as a historical reality, ideal and a literary trope in literature. It does this in a more overt way than has been shown in *Remains*, as it actively undermines these dynamics too.

This will be made apparent by considering the text's use of several genre conventions. *Atonement* withholds information, failing to reveal that Briony is actually narrator in addition to protagonist until the end of the story. This creates a distrust in the story that has already been told, reveals that she is the character who has the power to tell the story, and later requires a re-reading of the text itself. It is only through her eyes that readers are presented with the descriptions of the house. Power is not simply reflected in the descriptions of the house itself, the power is in the hands of the writer who depicts the house and its inhabitants. It therefore questions the very validity of the English country house ideal. Secondly, the way in which the text seeks to undermine the country house values is examined. As has been made clear in the previous chapter, the power of the English country House values is represented in three key factors. It is first presented as the magnificent, decadent structure that symbolises power on a very materialist level. Secondly as the embodiment of heritage, the past and its core values and power dynamics. Finally, the building is often owned by the powerful patriarch who ideally seeks to serve the community's best interests. How *Atonement* approaches these three concepts is very different to *Remains*. Instead of a slow disillusionment away from the unfairness inherent within the structure as we see in Stevens' journey away from Darlington Hall, the Tallis house is instead presented as an ideal that does not quite meet expectations from the very beginning. It is introduced as ugly and falsified as shall be made apparent. Thirdly, the role of women in the country house model is considered. Not only is Mrs Tallis aligned with the Victorian ideal and can be seen as a relic from the past of the historic country house, Cecilia can be read as an object of the male gaze. In this

manner, *Atonement* provides an additional consideration for the unfair power dynamics that permeate the country house genre and historic reality.

An interesting parallel to this is how Briony's delayed reveal as narrator, also necessitates a re-reading of the text. She is placed in a position of power and can be seen to create distrust in the very story that has just been told. This is further compounded in symbolism in the text. Through close reading the water symbolism it is clear that it communicates both the need for atonement by Briony and the horrors of war which are typically not touched upon in the country house genre. This symbolism is alluded to throughout though its impact is even more intense upon Briony's revelation as narrator. Therefore, it will be made evident that *Atonement* challenges different genre conventions to undermine the power of the country house as an ideal, trope and historic reality.

3.1 Undermining genre conventions

Atonement's recurrent use of intertextuality, the relationship between texts, can be seen as an adjunct stemming from the novels interest in writing itself. However, it is fairer to argue that *Atonement* actively uses intertextuality to break away from the conventions of the established genre, to create a new power dynamic and a new place for the fictitious English country house in modern literature. Brian Finney argues "the novel's epigraph, a quotation from Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, serves as both a warning and a guide to how the reader should view this narrative", and therefore to read it as a realist narration "entails a radical misreading of the book" (Finney, 70). To read the text as strictly realist is to misread it. Instead, the text invites an evaluation of how the English country house functions on a literary level to expose wider societal power discriminations. He is citing intertextuality as evidence for the authorial manipulation that prevails within the text. Intertextuality is not a by-product of the plot but an influencing factor. His reference to *Northanger Abbey* is well founded, as many critics¹⁶ have cited its use. The plot follows Catherine Morland "failing to make a distinction between the fictive and the real" just as Briony fails to do so at the fountain scene (Finney, 70). Finney's argument that the epilogue warns the reader of what *Atonement* shall do is valid. One consequence of this is how the text can be seen to break away from the established country house genre convention.

¹⁶ For example, Cynthia Quarrie notes the link between the country house novel genres "within which *Northanger Abbey* participates". (Quarrie, 195). Whereas Urszula Terentowicz-Fotyga notes the "intertextual evocation of *Northanger Abbey*" (Terentowicz-Fotyga, 225).

Furthermore, subtle references are interwoven throughout the text that allude to Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. The text actively makes intertextual references rather than inviting criticism as a diluted version of an alternative genre of the country house. This includes the pointed name change of the Tallis house when it was introduced as a hotel. It is then called the "Tilney's Hotel", a direct reference to a key character entitled Mr Tilney in *Northanger Abbey* (McEwan, 342). Finney attributes this reference "as a sly tribute to this fictional precedent", yet does not express why this is so important, instead he can be seen to over focus on the interviews with the historical author than the text itself. Similarly, he successfully argues that, "In the case of the novel, intertextuality relates an individual work to others that constitute the genre of fiction and that have contributed to the conventions that produce meaning in fictional narrative", however he fails to conclude *why* this is done (Finney, 74). Evidently it interacts with key elements of the country house genre and more specifically the novel of manners through intertextuality. By using an incredibly popular novel in its epilogue and throughout, the text is driving the references to the genre rather than conforming to its precedent. It is an interesting way to recondition the expected genre conventions that are unavoidable when anchoring a text to an English country house.

Not only does the text use intertextuality to control the genre expectations rather than being defined by them, it interweaves two significant genres. This enables it to evade a single definition as one genre. In doing so, it takes power back as a text. It creates a dynamic interplay between a detective story and country house novel, rather than adhering to strict genre conventions. This becomes apparent even in criticism, whereby two critics who argue for the similarities between *Atonement* and the detective novel, present contradictory evidence to prove it. In what Urszula Terentowicz-Fotyga dubs a "moment of genre rebalancing" she focuses on the rape as a pivotal moment where the two genres meet (Terentowicz-Fotyga, 221). For her, "The rape intervenes into the languid atmosphere of the weekend interrupts the formal dinner; the Austenian genteel scene is disrupted but the motif of crime belonging to the more 'hallowed' tradition of the detective story" (Terentowicz-Fotyga, 221). Indeed, as will be considered in detail shortly, the opening of the novel builds the image of the community of the country house only to unsettle it with the rape scene. Many critics have noted the inclusion of the detective story genre specifically in relation to Agatha Christie's incredibly popular detective novels¹⁷. Set in pastoral England and often with the inclusion of

¹⁷ For example Urszula Terentowicz-Fotyga compares *Atonement* to "Agatha Christie; the morality of the country-house ethos and the monstrosity of the gothic" (Terentowicz-Fotyga, 231). Richard Robinson analyses the scene of "Emily in her bedroom" finding that it is "derived from *Northanger Abbey* and even Agatha Christie" (Robinson, 492).

country houses, retired Miss Marple exposes what the police cannot. H. Porter Abbott goes as far as to draw comparisons between this text and Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* which was published in 1926 specifically. He argues that the similarity lies in how both texts can be viewed as a "garden path" narrative, a popular English idiom originating from the expression 'to lead someone down the garden path', meaning to mislead (Abbott, 217). This is turned into narrative assessment which purposefully leads readers to believe one story only to dismantle it later. This is emphasised in the texts delayed reveal of Briony as narrator and Mr Marshall as rapist. The two interwoven genres exemplify the texts avoidance of one clear genre.

However, Terentowicz-Fotyga's argument for *Atonement's* characterisation as a detective novel differs from Abbott's. Although arguing for the same genre she does not note the "garden path" technique and instead she cites how the "novel leaves enough clues for the reader to believe Robbie's innocence right from the start" (Terentowicz-Fotyga, 221). These clues can be seen in the recurrent references to the "Amo bar", reminding readers that Mr Marshall is a war profiteer and therefore disparaging his trustworthiness (McEwan, 44). The consequence of this is that readers are made to "doubt the restorative logic of the detective story that the conclusion of the first part seems to offer" (Terentowicz-Fotyga, 221). Both Abbot's and Terentowicz-Fotyga's arguments are valid. A point that needs emphasising is how this difference of opinion depicts the inability to define the text to one specific genre. Therefore, the genre presented is designed to be questioned. The text interacts with the detective story and the country house novel, yet it evades consolidation as one genre in itself.

The text further navigates through genres without completing them. This echoes the inability for closure that proliferates the novel. This is exemplified in Briony's ability to rewrite the narrative, hide her status as narrator and the plots migration from country house, to war at Dunkirk, and finally to the Tilney hotel. For Terentowicz-Fotyga, "Although McEwan evokes the convention of the detective story, he does not allow it to settle in either" (Terentowicz-Fotyga, 221). This can be further extrapolated to the other genres which are interwoven in the text. Nick Bentley argues that both *Atonement* and *Remains* can be seen as "neo-historical novels" in the sense that they "romanticise the war by placing it at a safe distance and within the boundaries of recognisable and perhaps comfortable literary modes" whilst still resisting "formal containment" (Bentley, 154). At the same time however, he notes that both can be read in a sense of "trauma narratives", whereby a momentous event ruptures the narrative resulting in the inability for the narrator to move on from it (Bentley, 154). What

is often called Briony's inability to atone for her involvement in the unjust arrest of Robbie, can be seen in light of this. Stevens' narration however is somewhat more unclear, and Bentley does not enlighten on this point. What he is inadvertently noticing is the inability to define the text as one specific genre. Finally, Cynthia Quarrie from her perspective of heritage in the novel, only identifies "country house novel (part one) and the World War Two story (parts two and three)" as the genres that emanates from the text (Quarrie, 194). All of these critics employ examples of when the text seems to align with their specified genre, yet none can be seen to fully agree with one another. The text not only interweaves between the expected genres of the country house, but it actually picks up and drops many tropes of various genres. By doing so, it avoids concrete definition.

3.2 Country house values in the Tallis house

Now the way in which *Atonement* uses several different genre conventions has been established, it is necessary to consider it from another angle. From a materialist perspective, the creation of the physical English country house was intended as a microcosm of power. Throughout literature both fictitious and otherwise, the country houses are beautifully described with their enormity and grandeur in key focus. The power of a structure was metaphorically built into it brick by brick. As Mark Girouard explains, "The size and pretensions of such houses were an accurate index of the ambitions-or lack of them- of their owners... When a new man brought an estate and built on it, the kind of house which he built showed exactly what level of power he was aiming at" (Girouard, 3). The country house itself was a space of representation, a structure that communicated, and almost helped to initiate, the power of the household. Therefore, what the text does with the country house is an effective way to analyse the power dynamics it communicates. I shall now consider this interplay of presentation and meaning in regards to the country house values which are attached to the Tallis House.

In *Atonement* it is not a magnificent structure connoting power and prestige when the Tallis house is first introduced, instead it is an ugly, falsified space. This presentation is a key indicator for the continuous undermining of the inherited power of the literary trope that the text seeks to debunk. Consider for example,

Morning sunlight, or any light, could not conceal the ugliness of the Tallis home – barely forty years old, bright orange brick, squat...to be condemned one day in an article by Pevsner...as a tragedy of wasted chances, and by a younger writer of the modern school as ‘charmless to a fault’. An Adam-style house had stood here until destroyed by fire in the late 1880s... Cecilia’s grandfather, who grew up over an ironmonger’s shop and made the family fortune with a series of patents on padlocks, bolts, latches and hasps, had imposed on the new house his taste for all things solid, secure and functional. (McEwan, 18)

The “ugliness” of the building challenges the reader’s preconceptions of the country house as a literary trope¹⁸, alongside the introduction of the non-aristocratic, recently wealthy Tallis family (McEwan, 18). The impact of this description reverberates through the narrative, as in the end Briony uses the same adjective claiming, “it was always an ugly place”, both uses effectively undermine the power of the country house (McEwan, 343). The text presents the house not as a structure emblematic of the history of power and authority, instead as a recent “barely forty years old” building only meekly attempting to replicate the potential power and heritage of a true country house in literature (McEwan, 18). Therefore, this choice of representation can be seen to draw comparisons between expectations and reality. The ideal of the country house and Englishness by extent, is compared to the reality of the buildings themselves. In *Remains*, this undermining occurs only at the end of the novel, where two guests of Mr Farraday walk through Darlington Hall and assume the real architectural design is “probably a kind of mock period piece done only a few years ago”, thus diminishing the power and prestige of the historical site as only a “mock” of the original (Ishiguro, 123). In *Atonement* this erosion occurs at the very beginning, thus readers are never fully indoctrinated into the magnificence of the structure as they are in *Remains*. Its power is never fully allowed to be expressed, nor to dominate the text. This is further compounded by the original “Adam-style” structure, which was destroyed, thus the house readers are introduced to it as a fragment of what once was. The house itself is said to be written about in “an article by Pevsner”, though its presence in the community was of importance, although instead of being revered it was critiqued for its lack of charm (McEwan, 18). At every opportunity, the text undermines the potential for the Tallis house to communicate the power of the country house,

¹⁸ For example, Mansfield Park is immediately described as a “handsome house” (Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 41). In *Pride and Prejudice* Pemberley Hall is what all other houses should be modelled on: “I wish it may be half as delightful as Pemberley.” (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 26).

thus creating an analytical distance between reader and text. It invites criticism of the Tallis House, and by extension the country house ideal, as an incarnation of rightful power.

Moreover, the power of the country house ideal is made particularly clear through the erosion of the Tallis house heritage. As Terentowicz-Fotyga notes, “Rather than as an embodiment of continuity and heritage, the house functions as a cover for their lack” (Terentowicz-Fotyga, 228). Aristocratic family lineage is replaced with a brief and dubious history; it therefore reworks the expectation of “continuity and heritage” which is traditionally attributed to the country house, operating as a mere shell of what it could be (Terentowicz-Fotyga, 228). Terentowicz-Fotyga looks specifically at the Tallis “family fortune” that comes from “patents...on padlocks” as evidence for her assertions (McEwan, 18). She argues that “the association with iron monger gives the idea of security a twisted, paradoxical meaning, as the lofty values are literalized in images of bolts, padlocks, latches and clasps” (Terentowicz-Fotyga, 228). The symbolism of the padlock heritage is certainly evident if one considers the lack of narrative security, which is undermined by Briony’s admittance to falsifying a happy end for Robbie and Cecilia. The Tallis house is in fact relatively new though made to look old and their family history of prosperity is likewise new and hollow. By immediately eroding the Tallis house heritage, it reworks an established literary convention of the country house as a site of inherited power.

As has been made clear, the Tallis house does not adhere to the ideal of the English country house in literature, as it lacks the traditional power that a long heritage affords. This power is further undermined if we consider it as a remnant of a historic reality. Katherine C. Henderson, believes that “Throughout the entire narrative, then, *Atonement* draws on the history of the country house as a site of domestic and class strife” and focuses on heritage to legitimise this assertion (Henderson, 717). From this unique perspective, she is drawing on the country house not only as a place of inherited prestige and power as we have seen in *Remains*, but attributes part of the heritage to conflict. This is reflected in the very history of the Tallis house. She uses the text’s description of the “Adam-style house” as evidence for this (McEwan, 18). She argues, “The original house was not built by the Adam brothers but in imitation of their style; moreover, the descriptor [*sic*] suggests neoclassicism, a type of architecture that attempts to replicate the ruins of ancient buildings” (Henderson, 718). Therefore, the very foundations of the house are false, a structure attempting to replicate the

style of an architectural design without ever being able to accomplish the authenticity¹⁹. She concludes,

The description thus draws attention to the foregone authenticity of this space as an imposed, belated idealization rather than as something innate to the historical site.

Looking back nostalgically on the house's history here actually undermines present-tense idealization of the past, since all one finds is earlier ruin. (Henderson, 71)

Therefore, by drawing attention to the inauthenticity of the Tallis house, looking back on its past actually undermines its authority as a site with a powerful heritage. Henderson is intertwining the two ways in which the country house functions in literature as a historical reality. On the one hand it can be an “idealization” the incarnation of the English empire and Englishness, on the other, it could have been presented as an authentic space “innate to the historical site” (Henderson, 71). An important point that Henderson is noting, is the potential power of the house is applied *to* it, unconvincingly, rather than emanating *from* it. Thus, the potential for power through the country house heritage is dually impaired. The text provides few opportunities to look back “nostalgically” (Henderson, 71). Instead any characters attempt to do so through the heritage of the house actually “undermines present-tense idealization of the past”, thus the heritage of country house ideal is questionable from its very introduction (Henderson, 71). The Tallis house itself, though powerful in its magnitude, is undercut by its inability to bring with it the strength of the English country house heritage. Instead it offers the alternative and still honest reality of the often-overlooked class strife that it incorporates. Traditionally, novels present the strength of the country house heritage then undermine it as we have seen in *Remains*. Instead *Atonement*'s immediate erosion presents the house as something other: as a space to be questioned.

Another necessary traditional trope an author has to deal with in an English country house novel is the figure of the patriarch, the owner of the house itself. In *Remains* the hierarchical figure is Lord Darlington, his values are reflected in the house and affected its inhabitants. Furthermore, the servant and master dyad brought the hierarchical power distribution to the foreground. Mr Tallis in *Atonement* is in the same way a powerful figure over the Tallis house, yet his frequent absence positions his power as gradually rescinding and not as compounded. One might draw comparisons here to the country house as it functions in society, as contemporary readers are similarly introduced to it when its power was receding and the tradition of it ending. Mr Tallis is introduced, referenced and acknowledged only by

¹⁹ Henderson also draws attention to the fact that the Adam style was in itself a dilution, as the style allowed for changes to be made on the original architectural structure (Henderson, 71).

other characters and is not present at the pivotal moment where he was needed in the plot; the rape of Lola Quincey and the subsequent arrest of Robbie Turner. Although the figure of power, his absenteeism positions his power as gradually reducing and not as compounded. Through the focalisation of Cecilia, readers are first introduced to his control over the actions of his family. The narrator states:

She lit up as she descended the stairs to the hall, knowing that she would not have dared had her father been at home. He had precise ideas about where and when a woman should be seen smoking: not in the street, or any other public place, not on entering a room, not standing up, and only when as natural justice offered, never from her own supply – notions as self-evident to him. (McEwan, 43)

Firstly, the text's explanation that she "would not have dared" to smoke if her father was in the house is presented as a meagre rebellion to fatherly authority. At the same time, it is also evidence for the power Mr Jack Tallis has over the inhabitants of the Tallis house. She may follow his rules if he were home, but in order for his house values to be enforced he has to be physically present. Furthermore, the description of his values is so detailed they appear ironic and almost archaic. The way to act in different spaces is restricted as no smoking in a "public place" or in when "entering a room" or "standing up" and is emphatically precise (McEwan, 43). Each restriction is reliant on the physical structure to identify the boundaries a woman should instil in herself. This formality and over-emphasised, unfairly-gendered, restrictions are more fitting to the Victorian era, thus appearing decidedly archaic in the backdrop of 1935. The anachronistic behaviour consequently mirrors the inauthenticity inherent in the "Adam-style house" (McEwan, 18).

In the traditional country house model, Mr Tallis, as owner of the building, is able to exert power over the inhabitants through his own values. In *Atonement*, his political affiliations are mysterious, his values shallow and ultimately class based (consider for example how the lower-class Robbie is arrested). Urszula Terentowicz-Fotyga can be seen to concur with this, as she considers the manorial space a site of contradiction, with Mr Tallis a feature of it rather than a dominating figure over the space. She explains, "The image of the manorial space is constructed through a subtle interweaving of contrastive meanings, in the complex process of signifying and erasing, mythologizing and demythologizing" (Terentowicz-Fotyga, 226). This contrast is evident in the genre manipulation. The text can at once be read as an English country house novel and later a war novel in part two when considering Robbie's time evacuating Dunkirk. Terentowicz-Fotyga explains, "At first the

Tallis house appears as a happy rural seat, offering a safe haven not only to the immediate family and the working staff but also to the Quincey cousins disturbed by their parents' divorce" and "Mr Tallis is shown to have the qualities of a respectable benevolent landlord" (Terentowicz-Fotyga, 226). From this perspective, the role of the male patriarch is diminished. He no longer has a place in the country house ideal. His status as "landlord" connotes the idea that he maintains only the vital aspects of responsibility from a distance, rather than an overarching, unanimous position (Terentowicz-Fotyga, 226). Although not directly mentioned, that she is borrowing Richard Gill's term "happy rural seat" whereby his text entitled *Happy Rural Seat*, considers the country house as it functions in modern literature. He too proposes the house is a place of isolation, and "Community is a counter theme to the isolation" (Gill, 11). Therefore, not only is Terentowicz-Fotyga noting the lack or manipulation of the strong hierarchical figure, but further enlarging this to the broader themes of isolation and community which are polarised in the novel.

This is not to dismiss the power of Mr Tallis entirely. His power is simply diluted, and as the plot develops, it eventually disintegrates as Cecilia, Robbie, then finally Briony break themselves from the household and cut all family ties. He too is said to later remarry and move away. Although not as extremely patriarchal as in *Remains*, "The subtly patriarchal rules of the house rely largely on his authority" as has previously been made clear with Cecilia's smoking (Terentowicz-Fotyga, 225). This is undermined however as "he is an ambivalent character" and the "household permeated by a sense of distance and loneliness. All members of the household disassociate themselves from home either physically or emotionally" (Terentowicz-Fotyga, 227). It is possible to expand upon her assertion that the characters *need* to "disassociate" themselves from the house (Terentowicz-Fotyga, 227). By noting the need of disassociation, she unwittingly provides evidence for the power the house itself holds over the characters. If the characters leave it physically or separate themselves from it mentally, the authority over them is reduced. In Michel Foucault's theories however, the "surveillance is permanent in its effects even if it is discontinuous in its action" and therefore leaving the space of authority and surveillance should not hinder the practice of power (Foucault, 497-498). One could therefore deduce, that Mr Tallis' failure to reside continuously in the house undermines his authority, if he is to be considered the hierarchical figure at the helm of the household. In this model, Mr Tallis' values may be the overarching dogma, but the removal from the house could be the antidote.

3.3 The subordination of women

Now that Mr Tallis as the head of the household has been considered, it is important to note that *Atonement* provides an interesting addition to this dynamic in comparison to *Remains*. The out-dated Victorian ideals of country house values are subtly linked to Mrs Emily Tallis in the text. In *Remains* it is fair to assert that women provide more of a secondary position. The narrative is told entirely through the narrator and protagonist Stevens, and Miss Kenton is only one of a select few female characters. Comparatively, Briony, Cecilia and Mrs Tallis play pivotal roles in *Atonement*. These Victorian values can be contextualised through a bestselling text for Victorian women, Sarah Stickney Ellis's handbook *The Woman of England* originally published in 1839. It encouraged women to take their role in the household as moral overseers in the private sphere²⁰. Ellis proclaims, "You have deep responsibilities, you have urgent claims, a nation's moral wealth is in your keeping" and therefore illuminates the limited independence, expectation and opportunity of the women of the Victorian era (Ellis, 13). A woman's role was in the home, especially evident in the wives of the country house owners. Their duty was to morally educate her family, the husband's was to provide for the family. It is therefore interesting that Mrs Tallis is presented as an ineffectual character, aligned with this Victorian ideal. Her Victorian alignment incorporates the notion of nostalgia, a longing for historic Britain and a reluctance for change. Her powerlessness and uselessness provide a startling contrast to the other female characters in the book such as Cecilia and Briony who are far more powerful by comparison.

The text links Mrs Tallis to the country house in a unique way to the other characters, presenting her as a symbolic relic of the hierarchical past that no longer functions. The Tallis house allows for change from house, to evacuee accommodation and hotel, yet she does not change or develop. Instead she is linked to Victorian ideals both inadvertently and overtly. Consider,

These were awesome occasions worthy of the ancient silver service; the venerable great-uncles and aunts and grandparents were Victorians, from their mother's side of the family, a baffled and severe folk, a lost tribe who arrived at the house in black cloaks having wandered peevishly for two decades in an alien, frivolous century.

(McEwan, 47)

²⁰ Many historians have designated two spheres, one public for men and one private for women with the Victorian way of life. As historian Thomas William Heyck explains, "... the conviction that men and women differed not only biologically but also in intellect, psychologically, and emotions, supported a belief in the 'separate spheres' - the public for men and the private for women...", the public incorporated politics and work whereas the private relegated women only to the household as mothers (Heyck, 195).

The inherited cutlery used only on grand occasions, is the first link the text offers between Mrs Tallis and her Victorian heritage, an association that resonates throughout the plot. The pointed choice of the adjective “venerable”, meaning “deserving respect because of age, high position, or religious or historical importance” communicates exactly the heritage that the country house has moved away from, an era of primogeniture and inherited power through birth right (CED). The description of them as a “lost tribe” is well fitting with the inadequacy displayed by Mrs Tallis and her constant migraines (McEwan, 47). On two occasions in the narrative Mrs Tallis’ bed is referred to as a “daybed” due to her continuous time spent in it during the day though it is actually a normal bed (McEwan, 96-138). The neologism communicates the continuation of her lack of action and time preferred spent in bed due to migraines, as the text provides a new word for the piece of furniture. The neologism hyperbolises her ineffectuality as a woman whose only influence is in the private sphere of the Tallis house, and this influence is completely redundant. The “alien” description of the past century emphasises the separation between then and now, mirroring the presentation of Mrs Tallis as an obsolete character herself (McEwan, 47).

The idea of a surveyed space as envisioned by Michel Foucault’s Panoptic prison is interestingly countered in the Tallis house. It is instead from Mr Tallis’ daybed that she attempts to survey her entire household and its occupants. Power is absently enforced by Mr Tallis and inadequately maintained by Mrs Tallis. The omniscient (though not always) third-person narrator explains,

The indistinct murmur of voices heard through a carpeted floor surpassed in clarity a typed-up transcript; a conversation that penetrated a wall or, better, two walls, came stripped of all but its essential twists and nuances. (McEwan, 63)

Her inadequacy to fulfil the role of mother is compounded with her inability to successfully watch over her children. Her aforementioned alignment with the Victorian realm of the private sphere, intensifies her failure. The text offers her as the person who tries to watch over the household, yet instantly ironizes this as her information is sourced through “carpeted floor” and “penetrated walls” and therefore is rendered unfeasible (McEwan, 63).

Instead of justly surveyed and protected by her Victorian-aligned mother, it is clear that Cecilia can be seen through a feminist perspective as a surveyed being inside the English country house. The text does not offer one established power dynamic but instead challenges each. In this case, educated and independent Cecilia is juxtaposed to her Victorian aligned mother, thus making her the more powerful of the two. However, to identify this binary

relationship without looking further is to overlook the complexity of the text. On many occasions Cecilia is described to act differently as though being surveyed, thus diminishing her power. For example, “Cecilia was aware that Paul Marshall was staring at her, but before she could look at him she needed to prepare something to say” (McEwan, 45). She describes the feeling of being watched without consciously seeing it. Furthermore, it works in an alternative way where she surveys herself, conscious of how she appears to others. Readers are told “Many seconds had passed, and it was no longer plausible to be staring fixedly at the sheet of paper” as she reads a love note from Robbie passed to her by Briony (McEwan, 105). In these instances, it is possible to look at power as depicted in Michel Foucault’s theories. After all, Cecilia is indeed inside the “enclosed, segmented space” of the Tallis house which can be read as a space of surveillance (Foucault, 197). She has knowledge of this surveillance from guests, her mother, though poorly enacted, which results in her adjusting her behaviour accordingly. Although more independent than her mother, she still must survey herself and her behaviour as a woman. This power complexity is fitting for the modern aspect of which the text operates in. It is not simply a repeat of the English country house genre, it offers a modern reading of both genre and hierarchical power dynamics.

This can further be analysed from the perspective of a feminist critique of surveillance in a segmented space. It is important that it is only within the Tallis household that the aforementioned descriptions of Cecilia’s surveillance occur. It is communicating the house’s domination over the individuals, as once Cecilia leaves, these instances do not occur. It is possible that Cecilia can be seen as an object of the male gaze, a theory originally presented by Laura Mulvey and later considered by John Berger. Berger takes the idea of society dominating over individuals but specifies men as the dominators and women as the dominated. He explains, “A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself” this surveillance is an internalised entity similar to that of Foucault’s theories, but it is specifically attributed to the female (Berger, 37). Furthermore, Foucault focuses on buildings and society, whereas Berger focuses on society more generally. Cecilia’s lamentations on Marshall “staring” at her or the plausibility of her pretending to read a note can be seen in light of Berger’s views (McEwan, 45). She is adjusting her actions based on how it appears to the gaze of a male. Berger explains how this comes to pass as, “To be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men. The social presence of women has developed as a result of their ingenuity in living under such tutelage within such a limited space” (Berger, 37). For

Berger, the power dynamic has been created and encouraged from birth and initiated in the home and wider society. Thus, it is particularly interesting that *Atonement* describes these instances when she is in the country house itself. Although Berger presented the gaze as an indoctrinated circumstance that a woman carries with her, the text warps this to be a presence encouraged by the Tallis house itself. She is more powerful once she leaves the Tallis house. *Atonement* can be seen to offer a more dynamic approach to power as it offers a gendered dimension more clearly than in *Remains*. This is similar to the way in which Stevens becomes more disillusioned with his unrelenting subservience to Lord Darlington, when he leaves the house to partake on a journey.

3.4 Requiring a re-reading

Many critics have noted that the texts delayed reveal of Briony as narrator necessitates a re-reading of the text. This re-reading functions to undermine the power and validity of the country house ideal by forcing the readers to re-assess the story they have just been told. Katherine Henderson argues Briony's "dual descriptions stage a narrative double take for the reader", as she oscillates between her memories of her country house home and present day (Henderson, 720). The memory of true events is put into focus as Briony's dementia and delayed reveal as narrator both diminish the validity of the story. It is conducive to apply this to notions of country house in the English imagination. Its status as a prestigious and grand relic from a bygone era is somewhat questionable when its history is only passed down generationally.

Considering this, the text can be read as critiquing the nostalgic lamentations of the country house ideal. Cynthia Quarrie approaches this element through the perspective of nostalgia. She considers how the text can be seen to diminish the end of an empire and interact with the melancholic nostalgic longing for the lost imperialistic prestige. For her, "the country house, which provides the setting for the novel's first half as well as its pivotal coda, is such a culturally privileged icon of post-imperial nostalgia, and has been variously politically exploited as such" (Quarrie, 193). The country house is often used as a political emblem of prestige from post-imperial Britain. Furthermore, "Beyond being 'disturbed by' or symptomatic of post-imperial melancholia, *Atonement* can productively be read as a self-reflexive performance of and comment on this same condition" (Quarrie, 193-4). Therefore, although the text must mitigate its way through the English country house status and

affiliations with a more prestigious and powerful time period for Britain, it does so successfully by necessitating a re-read. The text's "self-reflexive performance" shows the reader the way in which this condition of longing for the past functions, and by doing so undermines it (Quarrie, 193-4).

Finally, this re-reading will inevitably lead to a narrative distrust, thus undermining the validity. Nick Bentley argues that both *Atonement* and *Remains* force the reader to "...filter the whole of the narrative through the perspectives, experiences and prejudices of one of its main characters..." thus creating a narrative distrust in both novels (Bentley, 150). Moreover, it is only within *Atonement* that the text reveals Briony as narrator, thus it is "a move that necessitates a re-evaluation of all that has gone before" (Bentley, 150). Again, the power is placed in the reader, they must re-assess the story and in addition the validity of the country house ideal. Considering the views of Henderson, Quarrie and Bentley, it is very clear that the text demands a re-reading as a direct result of Briony's delayed reveal as narrator. Through analysing symbolism, I shall now argue how this narrative technique is designed to undermine the power and the validity of the country house ideal on wider scale, by forcing the readers to reassess the story that has just been convincingly asserted.

This element of re-reading can be seen in the symbolism. With the knowledge that Briony has been the narrator of the story just told, readers can discern a deeper meaning from the water symbolism that proliferates the text. It communicates her need to atone for her crime that led to Robbie's arrest. A factor that was only undone by his decision to enlist, and made more apparent once it is clear that Briony is the narrator. Even the Tallis house can be read symbolically as we trace the transition from country house to hotel. The text encourages a re-reading and therefore facilitates a reflective, analytical view of the story that has just been told and the meaning behind the symbolism.

In *Remains* we analysed the symbolic use of the stair to portray social concerns, emotional repression and class distinctions within the country house. *Atonement* presents the symbol of water in a similar way, yet Briony's ability to tell the story adds another layer of meaning to it. After the reveal of Briony as the narrator, readers are encouraged to look back at the text at this symbolism and determine a deeper meaning from it. Key moments in the novel occur at the fountain. Its early introduction in the novel hints towards its significance:

Once through the iron kissing gate, and past the rhododendrons beneath the ha-ha, she crossed the open parkland – sold off to a local farmer to graze his cows on – and came

up behind the fountain and its retaining wall and the half-scale reproduction of Bernini's Triton in the Piazza Barberini in Rome. (McEwan, 17)

The intricate descriptions of the country house and its decadence is helped by the fountain symbolically. It is an object meant purely for pleasure rather than use. The "retaining wall" is shown to physically incarcerate the fountain, symbolic of the tradition of the country house which partitions the rich landowners from those who rent the land from them, just as the fountain is portioned (McEwan, 17). At the same time, the destabilisation of this previous way of life is referenced as some land was "sold off to a local farmer" (McEwan, 17). As Girouard has made clear, previously "power was based on the ownership of land. But land was not important to the country-house owners because they were farmers... The point of land was the tenants and rent that came with it" (Girouard, 2). Rather than renting, the farmers in this passage are able to purchase the land, thus removing themselves from a previously established continuous transactional relationship between landowner and renter. Finally, the "half-scale reproduction of Bernini's Triton in the Piazza Barberini" connotes the inauthentic, hollow and apparent lack of heritage as has been previously noted in the "ugliness of the Tallis home" (McEwan, 17-18). The fake Bernini's Triton fountain is at the centre of many pivotal moments in the plot. It is where Cecilia and Robbie fight over a vase, a family heirloom. It is also where Briony witnesses this fight and misunderstands it eventually leading to Robbie's arrest. Upon the second reading of this symbolism, one can view the fountain's inauthenticity as a warning for the inauthenticity of the characters who later falsely accuse Robbie. This is fitting of the wider consideration of the text's use of genre conventions such as detective novels, as was discussed previously.

The fountain is a symbol connoting decadence, meanwhile its status as a replica serves as a reminder in the text of the shallowness of the Tallis house, an English country house with no true heritage, presented at a time when this way of life was coming to an end. The house itself goes through a transformation in the story from country house, to accommodation for evacuated families during the war, to a hotel. Mrs Tallis writes to Briony that, "The oldest of the children, a thirteen year-old boy who looked no bigger than eight, had got into the fountain, climbed on the statue and snapped off the Triton's horn and his arm, right down to the elbow" (McEwan, 262). The water fountain evokes the sense of ending. On the literal level, the fact that the horn could be "snapped" off so easily by a child, echoes its inauthenticity, its weakness and is therefore connected to the weakness of the Tallis family at the time (McEwan, 262). Furthermore, the fountain can be seen to allude to a wider historical

trajectory, whereby the country house is no longer a space only for the rich and wealthy. Instead the war had become an equalising factor as the “destruction of great houses accelerated after the First World War” (Raven, 2). The Tallis house became home to families who evacuated London and fled to the countryside. Suddenly the power of the country house to divide and separate between people, those who were in and those who were out, was demolished. Just like the Tallis house, the owners no longer had a choice in its occupancy, as war rules overpowered all else. The text uses the country house scenery, its architecture like the water fountain, to deepen the symbolism of the issues the plot reveals.

Perhaps most convincingly, the symbol of water also connotes the idea of cleansing. This is a vital theme in the text, as Briony actively tries to atone for her past. By re-reading the water symbolism as conative of cleansing, readers can then deduce this deeper meaning. As a student nurse at the hospital, the text often refers to Briony “scrubbing” the hospital clean which was an “everyday practice” (McEwan, 256). She chose to become a student nurse rather than accept her place at Cambridge. Overtly she is attempting to atone for her involvement in Robbie’s arrest. Covertly the symbolism compounds this through the constant references to washing and cleaning.

Furthermore, this need for atonement which is facilitated by the re-reading, can be enlarged to the need to atone for the England. This is apparent as the country house functions as a British ideology, arguably representing the British Empire and Englishness. Cynthia Quarrie provides an interesting analysis that is relevant here. She argues that, “By presenting in Briony a novelist-protagonist who chooses to atone for her crime through the most English of novelistic forms... *Atonement* suggests the need to atone for the English novel itself, and for the history or inheritance that it represents” (Quarrie, 194). She is linking Briony’s position as novelist and protagonist and her need to atone for the lie she told resulted in Robbie’s arrest, to the English novel, and by extension the country house novel specifically. This is because any author using it, is forced to navigate the complex and unfair power dynamics that perpetrate it both historically and in literature. She goes further to state, “If the novel is about the problematics of establishing authorial legitimacy, it is also about the difficulty of wielding that legitimacy in the face of historical guilt” (Quarrie, 194). The war destabilised the prevailing societal organisation and saw the downfall of the British Empire. Furthermore, almost an entire generation of men were called to fight in the war, leaving home behind. This historical element resonates in the plot of *Atonement*. The war compounded Briony’s guilt as Robbie was killed at Dunkirk (although another ending is also provided then

undermined), and Briony was therefore prevented from atoning. It is therefore possible to link Quarrie's assertion to the water symbolism throughout the novel, which is symbolic of cleansing. Briony must wash away her guilt over the past just as Quarrie asserts that she must atone or wash away the issues of the English novel's history of dominance which it represents.

Not only does the water symbolism resonate with the Tallis house and Briony's need to atone, it further communicates the negative aspects of war. Often the country house novel overlooks the gloomier sides of British history, whereas *Atonement* undermines and questions the powerful narrative of the British war agenda. Rather than cleansing, the symbolism in part two deals with Robbie's experiences at Dunkirk, describing the thirst and hunger of the soldiers. Constant cries of "Water, I want water!" is repeated by the soldiers, a basic necessity that the war initiative has failed to provide them (McEwan, 228). The soldiers are not presented as organised and well supported but instead starving and abandoned. It is therefore evident that the water symbolism is of vital importance to the communication of power in the text. The symbolism communicates the struggle of the British troops, which is in direct opposition to the expectation of a well-organised, strategic and successful military exercise.

Rather than avoiding or apologising for the negative aspects of the country house in history, the Dunkirk section can be read as attempting to actively *correct* a representation of the success of the Dunkirk retreat. Nick Bentley develops on this consideration as he believes that this section "debunks the Dunkirk myth" (Bentley, 151). He explains, "Firstly, the heroism of a strategic and ordered retreat is replaced by a description of the harsh realities of the death of both the British soldiers and French civilians and of the chaotic scenes on the beach at Dunkirk" (Bentley, 151). Indeed, many "harsh realities" punctuate the section, not only thirst, though it does help to compound the severity of the situation²¹ (Bentley, 151). Section one, where the water symbolism begins, depicts a romantic fountain scene, which is in direct contrast to the thirst of the British troops at Dunkirk in part two. Bentley is correct to argue that the section debunks the story told of Dunkirk as well as how these issues are constructed in the literary tradition, though he overlooks how this provides an analysis of power within the text. The idea that "Allies pulled together" is undercut according to him, and on occasions it "offers a powerful corrective to the heroic myth" (Bentley, 151). The symbolic

²¹ Consider for example "...disembodied human leg" that hung in a tree at Dunkirk (McEwan, 151). Or the infighting between the soldiers whereby "...he was in the RAF and the tommies held him accountable" nearly resulting in the death of an allied RAF soldier by fellow allies (McEwan, 236).

use of water throughout the text can be used in conjunction with his assertions to identify how the text seeks to take power back and correct an untrue narrative. Briony's late reveal as narrator challenges the legitimacy of the story that has just been told, a re-reading of the water symbolism can be reviewed as Briony's attempt to wash away her past and atone for her sins. The sins that led to Robbie only being allowed out of prison if he enlisted in the war. This unreliability in narration is mirrored in the text's ability to challenge overarching narratives regarding the heroism and success of the war.

As the decline of the English country house owned by the rich and wealthy finally ruptures with the inevitable modification of house into a hotel in the text, the power of the reliable narrator is simultaneously ruptured by the reveal of Briony as narrator. The Tallis house transforms in the text from English country house, to lodgings for evacuees and finally to hotel. Therefore, it is not only symbolism that requires a re-reading but the Tallis house itself. Its trajectory from powerful country house (though initially undermined) to hotel is inscribed upon it to mirror the trajectory of the country house and its diminishing power in English society. Upon her return to her old home, now hotel, she notes "...the fact that all the books were gone from the library, and all the shelves too....The only reading matter was the country magazines in racks by the fireplace" (McEwan, 346). The lack of books symbolises the emptiness and shallowness of the space that readers were given initially in the opening of the novel. Furthermore, the magazines offer a poor substitute for the breadth of knowledge the room was intended to contain with its endless space for books. However, this presentation of lack is in contrast with the reader's previous indoctrination to the house as a place meant to separate between classes, as evident in the aforementioned water fountain symbolism. Only the wealthy could live in the English country houses. At least its status as a hotel allows all members of society access for short time and small fee, thus diminishing its power to segregate.

The text's inclusion of the country house at its end, as a hotel, has been widely considered by critics. Henderson has considered the aforementioned library scene specifically, concluding that the nostalgic reflection Briony seems to long for, is purposefully undercut. She explains, "Briony's mourning for the lost, unread books and the past they represent falls flat when we realize that the space for which she is nostalgic—both the library and the estate itself—only ever housed an aestheticization [*sic*] of history, a commodification of the national literary past" (Henderson, 721). The aesthetic, false and shallow history that Henderson references can be seen in the earlier considerations of the Tallis house as ugly and the

fountain as a replica of the original. From the very beginning of the novel, the text sought to undermine the power of the country house, thus a nostalgic reflection to it is similarly undercut. The Tallis house was too new, too ugly to bring with it the conative power of older, well established beautiful country houses once had. She is noting that one must look elsewhere for a view of history than the Tallis library.

Briony's trip to the library archives, the source of historical facts, is in direct contradiction with the recent revelation that she has been the narrator of the story that is being told. She breaks the narrative trust by using the library, a traditional aspect of the country house as well as a supposed place of truth, as a tool to do so. Readers are first informed of Briony as narrator by the descriptions of her as an old widow going to visit another library. In a temporal jump to her "seventy-seventh birthday" she "decided to make one last visit to the Imperial War Museum library in Lambeth" (McEwan, 333). This effectively nods to society's ability to transcribe history, to write it down and capture it and the problems with doing so. The empty shelves in the library are replaced only with selected magazines. This is presented as a poor substitution for the vast expanse of books, and therefore knowledge, which was once held there. At the same time this is contrasted with the second "Imperial War Museum library" which Briony has used to falsify her account of the history of Robbie and Cecilia and their fictional happy ending (McEwan, 333). Both libraries destabilise their traditional symbolism of knowledge attributable to the country house. Instead, the Tallis library, though a further diluted version than the already undermined country house readers are first introduced to, is now readily accessible to the general public. However, this is not simply presented as a place of progress. Something has been removed, with something lesser in its place. The power of the country house is placed into the readers hands, as they can decide to what extent they agree or disagree with this change in the face of progress.

3.5 Conclusion, Atonement

Atonement is a text concerned with the English country house in fiction, seeking to destabilise the power dynamics that permeate it. It has used this literary trope to anchor the novel, and in doing so, must navigate between how it once functioned hierarchically as a historic reality, the ideal and as an established trope in literature. The text seeks to destabilise the expected power dynamics of the country house subtly through undermining genre

conventions, house values, offering an opportunity for feminist analysis, necessitating a reread and the recodification of the physical house.

The country house genre is undermined in several ways. The recurrent use of intertextuality is used to expose power discrimination, placing the readers in an analytical disposition right from the offset. This is further made apparent with the use of *Northanger Abbey* a text used in the preface by McEwan, and a novel that critics have linked to the way one is intended to read it. In this manner it drives the references to other texts rather than being a reproduction or diluted version of the English country house genre. Furthermore, both the detective story and country house genre conventions can be traced in contrast to one another. This combination can be seen to challenge the identification of *Atonement* as one clear genre.

It is clear that *Atonement* sought to undermine the country house values to produce a questionable space. From a material level, the Tallis house had the opportunity to function as a microcosm of power, a place of prestige and powerful heritage that commodifies into a physical structure. In many ways its stature and dominance is aligned with the typical expectation of the English country house in both literature and history. However, the text initially and continuously undermines the full force of this communication. Instead the “ugliness” of the building erodes the opportunity as powerful (McEwan, 17). This is further compounded in the evidence for it being a space that is somewhat lacking in substance. The refusal to link an aristocratic lineage to the Tallis’ erodes the expectation of prestige and power, creating an analytical distance between the implied author and implied reader. Historically speaking, the country house also has a negative history that is often overlooked in literature. Hence why the country house in this text, is presented as a space to be questioned.

In comparison to *Remains*, the text adds an additional element to the power dynamics within the text. The role of women is interestingly juxtaposed as is evident in the Victorian aligned Mrs Tallis, and the independent Cecilia. Mrs Tallis can be seen as symbol, a warning, a relic of the old Victorian values that once occupied the country house, a hierarchical past that no longer functions in modern society. Both Darlington Hall and the Tallis house can be read in line with Michel Foucault’s views regarding the panoptic prison, a space of surveillance. Similarly, Cecilia can be read as a subject of John Berger’s feminist criticism the male gaze. Once again, the text is complicating power dynamics and opening up for a gender dynamic. An element that is not as present in *Remains*.

By tracing the transition of *Atonement's* presentation of the Tallis house from country house, to accommodation for city evacuees, to hotel, it is evident that the text is also actively undermining the unfair hierarchical power distribution that originated in the inception of the country house historically. Moreover, further in line with the argument that genre is destabilised in the text, it calls for a re-reading once Briony is revealed as both protagonist and narrator. This enlarges the power dynamic extensively, as the story that has been told can no longer be trusted, just as the story told of the English country house ideal could similarly be distrusted. An extensive analysis of the symbol of water in the text demonstrates this. Briony's need for atonement is exemplified in the water symbolism, just as the validity of the war narratives of the expertise of the military operations at Dunkirk are undermined with the thirst of the soldiers. *Atonement* navigates through and undermines the power dynamics that are attributable and unavoidable when using the English country house, this is particularly evident in regards to genre.

4 Conclusion

When using the country house to anchor a novel, modern texts are hampered with a specific set of genre conventions. The country house in history once stood as a representation of English aristocratic power and to some extent the British Empire. However, their downfall in history affects the literary house. They are interwoven as modern texts would by default deal with an element of history that has come to an end. Therefore, they are permeated by a sense of nostalgia, loss and unfair power distribution depending on how the text presents these issues. As an ideal, the negative aspects are often overlooked, though as with any ideal, this can be criticised. This thesis has sought to expose how power in the English country house is represented in fiction, using *Remains* and *Atonement* in order to do so. As it is a historic reality, an ideal and a trope in literature, the texts must navigate through the extensive power dynamics that permeate these three elements. Both do so through the use of genres that are typically attributable to the country house. In using several different genre conventions they take back power, an element of which many critics seem to overlook. Though both texts do this in different ways and to different extents.

Remains and *Atonement* invoke a set of relatively traditional and nostalgic genre conventions and ideals, but they do so in order to destabilise them. These conventions are used differently in the two texts. *Remains* subtly meanders through them whereas *Atonement* more overtly undermines them.

Many genres were noted in *Remains*. This established the precedent that the text does indeed meander through many. These genres were particularly attributable to the country house, especially when this was considered in regards to nostalgia. I evaluated how *Remains* presented the almost inevitable nostalgia to the British Empire, which revealed one aspect of how it sought to undermine it. An element of tragedy in Lord Darlington and Stevens' situation is intertwined with nostalgic lamentations in order to undercut the nostalgia. A further use of the unreliable narrator, an aspect that led critics to conclude the text adheres to the journal genre, actively questioned the very validity of the story being told by Stevens. As his narration is mediated by his memory, his retelling of his personal history is questionable. This is mirrored in the text to include the unreliability of the country house as an ideal. To look back at one's own past is just as unreliable as to look back at a supposedly superior time in history.

Atonement in comparison takes a more active approach to the genre destabilisation. Its use of intertextuality drives the references outwards to other country house genres and novels, rather than being defined by the precedent. At the same time, it uses two significant genres; the detective novel and the traditional country house novel and leads a trail of breadcrumbs for the reader to follow in regards to the protagonist who is in fact also the narrator. In using these two common genre conventions it also evades designation to one specific genre. This is further compounded in how it navigates through genres without fulfilling them completely.

Notably, *Remains* immediately and continuously undermines the validity of the story being told whereas *Atonement* leads the reader to believe the story first before revealing Briony as the narrator. This is because *Remains* invokes the genre of the journal which is inherently subjective, whereas *Atonement* invokes the detective story and arguably the garden path narrative. Regardless of the way in which both texts do this, it is clear that they both challenge the very validity of the country house narrative and its presentation of a harmonious, aristocratic-led society. Similarly, *Atonement* uses intertextuality to reveal its intentions, to hint towards the unreliability of looking at the country house as a communicator of the past, whereas *Remains* instead uses both analepsis and expands on the sense of nostalgia inherent within the genres connected to the country house. Therefore, both texts convey a new role of the country house in modern literature. It deals with a historic reality of a power dynamic which no longer serves, and therefore is necessarily critiqued.

The numerous works of literature that surround the English country house stems in part from the way in which they once functioned in history. Any modern text dealing with the country house must consider a myriad of opportunities and restraints that come from this historical reality. Should a text present it in a positive light? Or should it critique the society that maintained power hierarchically? In order to consider how *Remains* and *Atonement* dealt with the historical aspects of the country house that are often in stark contrast with its ideal, I considered the values of the fictitious country houses that are present in both. Evidently, the values of the country house are undermined in both texts. Though in *Remains* this is more subtly done and they both approach this in different ways.

Remains takes the traditional values of the country house and critiques them. The idyllic servant and master dyad is complexified to reveal Stevens' dependency, which echoes the political exile created in a time period of aristocratic dominance. The temporal fragmentation created through analepsis also reveals the figure of the patriarch Lord Darlington, as a flawed individual. This therefore criticises the forced dependency of servants

and workers in the country house model. Though complex, Mr Farraday's clearer, fairer and less hierarchical values draw attention to the inadequacy of Lord Darlington's values. Moreover, the culpability of Stevens', his guilt and responsibility are questioned in the text. He is representative of a class of powerless people; his culpability is somewhat assuaged whilst at the same time the hierarchical model is critiqued further.

The contradiction of the traditional country house values is more directly and overtly undermined in *Atonement* than in *Remains*. The Tallis house is promptly presented in a negative, derogatory way rather than the typical grand and prestigious country house. It invited criticism of the house and creates an analytical distance from the offset, which further compounds the later undermining. Its non-aristocratic heritage draws attention to the historic class strife that is often overlooked in the traditional genre. The absentee patriarch, Mr Tallis, has anachronistic values that effect Cecilia, contradicting the validity of his power. Rather than a strong affiliation with political beliefs like those of Lord Darlington, Mr Tallis is instead mysterious and ambivalent. Though to some extent his power over his family can be read through a Foucauldian perspective, his diluted power is gradually receding and is presented as his choosing. He too is flawed like Lord Darlington. Therefore, both texts undermine the once idealised patriarchal figure attributable to the country house ideal.

Whilst Darlington Hall and its traditional hierarchical values are subtly critiqued in regards to its fairness, the Tallis House is presented as an ugly place thereby undermining its power and prestige immediately and continuously. *Atonement* more clearly criticises the historical values of the country house through its presentation of the Tallis household as a space to be questioned. However, one aspect where *Remains* more overtly draws attention to the issues of power is in the role of the patriarch. Lord Darlington is the epitome of the patriarchal country house figure, therefore his actions, though not explicitly stated, clearly negatively impact the inhabitants of the household. Whereas Mr Tallis in *Atonement* is an absent figure thus his power over the house can be read as a comment on the power of the country house rescinding in society. Furthermore, *Remains* presents another character as representative of newer more enlightened values, whereas *Atonement* does not. What the two texts can be seen to align with is the element of culpability though this is broached in different ways. The culpability of Stevens has drawn the criticism that the text functions to some extent as an appeasement fable, to allay his guilt of inaction. Though not in the values section, the re-reading of the water symbolism in *Atonement* can also be read as Briony's attempt to atone for her past. Therefore, the role of the country house in modern literature needs to apologise

or assuage a hierarchical history, as both elements of appeasement and atonement were enlarged to the history of the country house itself.

In regards to the representation of women within the country house the two texts diverge in their focus. *Atonement* provides ample opportunity for a feminist critique of the power accessible to women in the country house model, whereas *Remains* provides no such opportunity. Mrs Tallis is aligned with Victorian ideals as a relic from the past. Her character exposes how obsolete these values are, whilst simultaneously facilitating her contrast with the character Cecilia. Within the country house, Cecilia can be read in line with John Berger's theory of the male gaze. Outside of the house however, this feminist critique is no longer evident. An element which is similar to the way in which Lord Darlington's power over Stevens is diluted when Stevens leaves Darlington Hall. Therefore, the country house plays a role in the subordination of women in modern literature, though only brought to the foreground in *Atonement*.

As the two texts are different in format, style and plot, it was necessary to consider two separate elements in the last section of both chapters. In the chapter on *Remains*, I explored how the country house changes with society as well as reflecting it. Through applying Henri Lefebvre's theories, it is clear that the Tallis house can be read as a tool used to create and continue the function of power that rather than just a result of the power dynamics are propagated by society. The physical segregation built into the country house is presented negatively as one aspect that perpetuates strict class divisions. This was further made apparent through close reading of the staircase symbolism. The emotional repression of Stevens' is the consequence of the hierarchical structure, an element only undone when the character leaves.

Comparatively, *Atonement's* use of Briony as a hidden narrator, an element only revealed in the third section necessitates a re-reading of the text. This is a narrative aspect that is not used in *Remains*. Though the narrative of *Remains* is clearly told by the unreliable narration of the protagonist Stevens, it is a retelling of his version of events but does not necessitate a re-reading. *Atonement's* re-reading functions to undermine the power and validity of the country house ideal by forcing the readers to re-assess the story they have just been told. It critiques the tendency to look at the country house nostalgically, by undermining the presentation of it that has gone before. The resulting loss of trust in the narration solidifies the reader's necessity to re-consider both the story and the validity of the country house ideal. Somewhat similar to the symbolism in *Remains* which critiqued the class distinctions,

Atonement's use of the symbol of water also does the same to some extent. In addition, its connotations of cleansing is linked to Briony's need to atone for her past, a link that has not yet been made by critics. Upon a second read of the text, one can note more clearly this symbolism as it acts as a trail of breadcrumbs are left for the reader which hint towards Briony's role as narrator. Moreover, the text undoes the tendency of the country house which often overlooks the more negative aspects of history. Instead it chooses to provide many detailed examples of the horrors of war, which is also shown to some extent in the symbol of water. Finally, the transition of the house is more clearly displayed in *Atonement* as it turns to hotel, whereas in *Remains* it only passes over to Mr Farraday.

In addition, there is an area open for further research into the values of the country house as presented in both texts. They could both be read through a postcolonial and race studies perspective, as the history of the country house is born out of the British Empire, which was predicated upon colonialism. This exploitation of other cultures and people offer an element of unfair power dynamics that many critics have traced in the novels. The very element of Englishness of which the house represents, creates by default a sense of "otherness" as can be read in line with Edward Said's *Orientalism*, alongside colonial sins of the British Empire in history (Said, 97). As Katherine Henderson astutely point out of *Atonement* "Their characters, though some of them are servants or are in other ways denied power and historical attention, are nonetheless largely white and English, as are most of the authors" (Henderson, 729). Power can be traced through a postcolonial perspective in the texts. However, this is a vast historical political and cultural discussion which is outside of the scope of this paper. I have instead focused on the county house in isolation of England, then further study would do well to explore the other historical element further.

The interplay between the historic houses, once powerful and then later deteriorating, led me to choose two decidedly modern texts. Both *Remains* and *Atonement* have exemplified how modern literature must navigate through the extensive power dynamics that permeate them. An element which is inherited from British aristocratic power and to some extent the British Empire. Their position as modern texts almost necessitate a consideration for this historic element of dominant power, downfall and nostalgic longing. It is with this consideration that I have argued that both texts navigate through the extensive power dynamics that permeate the English country house on a historic level, as an ideal and a literary trope. They do so in order to undermine and critique the inherent power dynamics predominantly through genre manipulation. The literary country house is implicated within a

specific set of genre conventions, of which often overlooks the negative aspects of history. Therefore, using several genre conventions which are both distinct from and at other times related to the country house genre, undermines the power of one conclusive genre definition. Few critics have noted this interesting *modification* of genre conventions in both, yet it is evident that in each text they are forging what has previously been distinctive genres. Moreover, none have attributed this modification to the repossession of power, though this has been made evident in the consideration of the two texts of this thesis. Both invoke a set of relatively traditional and nostalgic genre conventions, though they do this in order to destabilise them.

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