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## **XXI ASR AYOL OBRAZINING K. ISHIGURONING “NOCTURNES: FIVE STORIES OF MUSIC AND NIGHTFALL” ASARIDA O‘RGANILISHI**

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### **Annotatsiya**

Ushbu tadqiqot Kazuo Ishiguroning *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall* asarida zamonaviy ayol obrazining tasvirlanishini o‘rganadi. “Crooner”, “Come Rain or Come Shine” va “Malvern Hills” kabi hikoyalarga alohida e‘tibor qaratilgan holda, tadqiqotda ayol qahramonlar jinsi, shaxsiyati, musiqa va zamonaviy ijtimoiy qadriyatlar kesishmasida qanday shakllantirilgani tahlil qilinadi. Ishiguro asarlarida ayollar murakkab va ko‘p qirrali obrazlar sifatida tasvirlanib, ular shaxsiy intilishlar, hissiy kechinmalar va o‘zgaruvchan madaniy talablar bilan kurashadi. An‘anaviy uy bekasi roliga cheklanmagan holda, bu qahramonlar mustaqillik, kasbiy faollik va tadbirkorlik salohiyatini namoyon etadi.

**Kalit so‘zlar:** Kazuo Ishiguro, zamonaviy ayol, gender tasviri, musiqa va adabiyot, shaxsiyat, zamonaviy badiiy adabiyot.

## **ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ ОБРАЗА СОВРЕМЕННОЙ ЖЕНЩИНЫ XXI ВЕКА В ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИИ К. ИСИГУРО «NOCTURNES: FIVE STORIES OF MUSIC AND NIGHTFALL»**

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### **Аннотация**

Данное исследование посвящено анализу изображения современной женщины в произведении Кадзуо Исигуро *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall*. Особое внимание уделяется таким рассказам, как «Crooner», «Come Rain or Come Shine» и «Malvern Hills», где рассматривается формирование женских персонажей в контексте пересечения гендера, идентичности, музыки и современных социальных ценностей. Женские образы в произведениях Исигуро представлены как сложные, многогранные личности, которые сталкиваются с личными стремлениями, эмоциональными трудностями и изменяющимися культурными ожиданиями современного общества. Не ограничиваясь традиционной ролью домохозяйки, эти персонажи демонстрируют независимость, профессиональную активность и предпринимательские способности.

**Ключевые слова:** Кадзуо Исигуро, современная женщина, гендерная репрезентация, музыка и литература, идентичность, современная художественная литература.

## **A STUDY OF THE 21ST-CENTURY FEMALE IMAGE IN K. ISHIGURO’S NOCTURNES: FIVE STORIES OF MUSIC AND NIGHTFALL**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the representation of contemporary womanhood in Kazuo Ishiguro’s

*Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall*. Focusing on selected stories such as “Crooner,” “Come Rain or Come Shine,” and “Malvern Hills,” the research analyzes how female characters are constructed within the intersecting frameworks of gender, identity, music, and modern social values. Ishiguro’s women are portrayed as complex, multidimensional figures who navigate personal ambitions, emotional challenges, and shifting cultural expectations in contemporary society. Rather than being confined to traditional domestic roles, these characters demonstrate independence, professional engagement, and entrepreneurial agency.

**Keywords:** Kazuo Ishiguro, contemporary woman, gender representation, music and literature, identity, modern fiction.

The renowned contemporary writer Kazuo Ishiguro has produced a body of work distinguished not only by its profound exploration of human existence, but also by its nuanced portrayal of gender and identity in the twenty-first century. In his works, Ishiguro presents readers with complex and multifaceted female characters who grapple with the challenges and aspirations of women in the modern world. His literary universe offers a rich array of figures who confront societal expectations, navigate the domains of memory and identity, and reflect the lived experiences of women in the contemporary era. In a period marked by profound social and cultural transformations, his works provide a relevant and productive site for examining the multifaceted roles, capabilities, and aspirations of women in the twenty-first century [2, pp. 18–19].

This study encompasses a range of Ishiguro’s works, from the stark dystopia of *Never Let Me Go* to the reflective narrative of *A Pale View of Hills*, as well as the exploration of artificial intelligence in *Klara and the Sun*, the historical introspection found in *The Remains of the Day*, and the short story collection *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall*. Through this analysis, the study aims to identify recurring themes, character archetypes, and broader socio-cultural commentaries emerging from Ishiguro’s narratives [7, pp. 76–77]. Accordingly, this section examines not only representations of women as homemakers or devoted mothers, but also portrays twenty-first-century women as individuals with agency and aspirations beyond the domestic sphere. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how Ishiguro’s works engage with the ongoing discourse surrounding the evolving roles of women in contemporary society.

### Results and Discussion

One such representation of womanhood can be observed in the character of Klara, the artificial intelligence protagonist of *Klara and the Sun*. Although Klara does not embody certain traits traditionally associated with contemporary women, such as resistance to gender roles or a preoccupation with physical appearance, she is depicted as highly knowledgeable, perceptive, and intelligent—qualities that stem from her nature as an artificial construct. Klara thus emerges as a unique symbolic figure of femininity within a technologically advanced society. Her distinct identity as an artificial intelligence opens up compelling avenues for examining the intersections of gender, technology, and identity in contemporary literature.

Another significant figure in the novel is the Manager, as referred to by Klara—a businesswoman who oversees a store in an unnamed American city where she sells artificial intelligences such as Klara, Rosa, and Rex. Representing a modern, entrepreneurial woman, the Manager demonstrates both professional competence and meticulous attention to detail, organizing even the smallest items in her store with precision and consistently instructing her subordinates on appropriate customer interaction. This characteristic is notably captured through Klara’s observation:

“The kitchen was especially difficult to navigate because so many of its elements would change their relationships to one another moment by moment. I now appreciated how in the store—surely out of consideration for us—Manager had carefully kept all the items, even smaller ones like the bracelets or the silver earrings box, in their correct places.” [6, pp. 44–45]

The Manager shows particular interest in Klara, recognizing her as one of the most observant artificial intelligences. Although Klara does not encounter her for a long time after being purchased by Josie and her mother, they are eventually reunited toward the end of Klara's operational life. In this final meeting, the Manager treats Klara with kindness and acknowledges her success as an exemplary Artificial Friend. In this sense, just as Klara assumes a nurturing, almost parental role for Josie, the Manager may be interpreted as a parental figure in relation to Klara herself.

It is widely acknowledged that music has consistently functioned as a driving force within society, serving as a means of expressing emotions indirectly rather than through explicit articulation. In *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall*, Kazuo Ishiguro emphasizes the significance of music through a series of short stories. In particular, "Crooner," "Come Rain or Come Shine," and "Cellists" explore the influence of music on love and human relationships. Within these narratives, relationships are often constructed upon a musical foundation rather than conventional interpersonal interaction, prompting an examination of the nature and limitations of such connections.

Both "Crooner" and "Cellists" revolve around the failure of relationships grounded primarily in admiration shaped by music rather than genuine emotional intimacy. In "Cellists," a young man begins to develop feelings for a woman who guides his musical education; however, his affection is rooted in her perceived artistic authority rather than a true understanding of her as an individual. When it becomes evident that she lacks genuine experience and ability, the relationship collapses. Similarly, in "Crooner," the former superstar Tony Gardner attempts to serenade his wife, who had married him largely for his fame, thereby revealing the superficial basis of their relationship. In both stories, Ishiguro presents relationships founded on appreciation and illusion rather than authentic love, leading ultimately to their dissolution.

In contrast, "Come Rain or Come Shine" foregrounds friendship rather than romantic attachment, illustrating how shared musical taste can serve as a basis for interpersonal connection. The characters Ray and Emily are united by their mutual appreciation of music; however, Emily's husband, Charlie, discourages Ray from discussing music in her presence in order to prevent any potential emotional closeness. In this context, music emerges as a unifying force, yet it is ultimately insufficient to replace genuine human interaction. While music may bring individuals together, love arises from deeper personal engagement and mutual care.

*Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall*, published in 2009 following Ishiguro's six novels, represents his first collection of short fiction and comprises five interconnected stories. The researcher M. Fayziyeva, in her dissertation titled *Types of Short Story Characters in Late 20th – Early 21st Century British Fiction*, analyzes the representation of contemporary characters in this work as a form of cross-cultural identity. The narratives evoke memories of lost love, unfulfilled aspirations, and unattained happiness, while highlighting the convergence of Eastern and Western values through intercultural characterization [1, p. 21].

Furthermore, the collection explores themes such as inner emotional experience, loneliness, choice, and moral responsibility. Through the medium of music, Ishiguro illuminates the psychological depth of his characters, who are often depicted as musicians—melancholic, searching, and isolated individuals. They struggle against societal pressures, mass culture, and prevailing standards of success and beauty. Through these figures, Ishiguro conveys elements of a Japanese philosophical outlook, emphasizing simplicity, naturalness, and profound meaning. Ultimately, each character is engaged in a personal quest for identity, authentic happiness, and truth.

In his interviews, Kazuo Ishiguro has noted that he conceived the book as a unified work, almost like a piece of music composed of five movements. *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall* thus consists of five interconnected stories that explore the themes of love, music, and the passage of time. Each narrative is delivered by a narrator who is, in some way, a musician.

The opening story, “Crooner,” establishes a subdued and melancholic tone. An aging American singer, Tony Gardner, arrives in Venice with his wife, Lindy. There, he hires a guitarist named Jan from a group performing in Piazza San Marco to accompany him as he serenades his wife from a gondola beneath her hotel window. The narrator, Jan, is deeply pleased to spend time with Gardner, as the latter had been his mother’s favorite singer. Reflecting on his childhood, Jan recalls episodes in which his solitary mother in Poland would lovingly hum Gardner’s songs. As a narrator, Jan exemplifies a characteristic Ishiguro figure—one who recounts episodes from his life with a candor that ultimately reveals more than he consciously intends.

Indeed, all narrators in *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall* share similar qualities. Recurring motifs and images—such as hotels, transitional spaces, and open windows—reappear across the stories, creating a sense of thematic cohesion. As one character describes Tony Gardner’s musical style, it is “that kind of nostalgic music.” The bittersweet memories evoked by such music align closely with Ishiguro’s broader literary aesthetic, characterized by an atmosphere of quiet restraint, regret, and missed opportunities. At times, this mood is subtly offset by moments of surrealism.

Each of these stories is, in its own way, deeply poignant; yet some also contain elements of gentle comedy. Taken together, they exemplify Ishiguro’s refined narrative craftsmanship and his ability to balance emotional depth with stylistic precision.

We now turn to an analysis of the first story in *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall*, titled “Crooner.” This narrative portrays the music-loving narrator Jan, as well as the character of an attractive American woman named Lindy. Lindy is the wife of the famous singer Tony Gardner and is depicted as a modern twenty-first-century woman in her fifties—articulate, self-assured, and capable of expressing her opinions openly and assertively. In her youth, she was an admirer of film stars, a detail that Gardner recounts to Jan in the following passage:

“His wife, he told me, had come from a small town in Minnesota, in the middle of America, where her schoolteachers gave her a hard time because she was always looking at magazines of movie stars instead of studying. ‘What these ladies never realised was that Lindy had big plans. And look at her now. Rich, beautiful, travelled all over the world. And those schoolteachers, where are they today?’” [4, p. 17]

Having set ambitious goals for herself, Lindy initially works as a waitress in a small luncheonette in Los Angeles at the age of nineteen. She is employed under a woman named Meg, who is portrayed as a perceptive and experienced figure deeply interested in contemporary life and celebrity culture—discussing fashion, relationships, and the private lives of famous individuals. For Lindy, this workplace becomes a formative environment, comparable to a “Harvard of life,” where she acquires essential social and practical knowledge. Meg, in this context, is represented as a wise mentor who teaches Lindy and other young women how to achieve success and navigate life effectively.

Drawing on these experiences, Lindy eventually marries the renowned singer Tony Gardner, becomes the object of his affection, and attains a life of happiness and material comfort. Through the character of Lindy, Kazuo Ishiguro seeks to represent the lifestyle, aspirations, and value systems of Western women in the twenty-first century, particularly their ambitions, cultural interests, and motivations for living.

The second story in *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall* is “Come Rain or Come Shine,” which features the character Emily, a jazz enthusiast. It is widely acknowledged that contemporary women place significant emphasis on their physical appearance, and Ishiguro similarly portrays his female characters as attractive, well-composed, and self-aware. Emily is the university classmate of Ray, an English language teacher. Ray, Emily, and her husband Charlie studied together in London, and years later Emily and Charlie marry, while Ray works in Spain. At the beginning of the summer, Ray returns to London to visit his former classmates, and the events of the story primarily take place in Charlie and Emily’s apartment.

This setting highlights Emily as a modern woman who does not personally engage in domestic chores, instead relying on hired help for household management, as illustrated in the following passage:

“I’ll leave a note for Emily. We can have a long leisurely lunch and by the time we come back, your room—the whole flat—will be sorted out.”

“But we can’t ask Emily to tidy everything.”

“Oh, she won’t do it herself. She’ll get on to the cleaners. She knows how to harass them.”

[4, p. 31]

Emily is also portrayed as an office worker who carefully organizes her daily life through written schedules and notes. Whereas in Ishiguro’s earlier novel *A Pale View of Hills* the character Etsuko represents a respectful and traditionally composed housewife, in “Come Rain or Come Shine” Ishiguro instead presents a more assertive twenty-first-century Western woman who acts independently and expresses her opinions openly:

“Raymond, don’t you ever stop and ask yourself who you are?” Emily asked. “When you think of all your potential, aren’t you ashamed? Look at how you lead your life! It’s... it’s simply infuriating! One gets so exasperated!” [4, p. 31]

The third story, “Malvern Hills,” presents another melancholic narrative of a young musician struggling to establish himself in the rock music scene. He retreats to the Malvern Hills in order to write love songs, where he encounters an older Swiss couple, Sonja and Tilo, both folk musicians whose relationship is undergoing a critical turning point.

The narrator, a struggling musician in London, escapes to the Malvern Hills to stay with his sister, where he continues songwriting and assists in a café. The Swiss couple, initially mistaken for Germans, are later revealed to be professional musicians attending performances at the café. Tilo is characterized as an optimistically inclined figure who expresses constant appreciation, whereas Sonja becomes increasingly irritated by his attitude. The couple has a son, but due to their professional commitments they are unable to live with him permanently.

Within this story, three female figures are prominently depicted. The first is Maggie, the narrator’s sister, who co-manages the café with her husband during the summer months. She is portrayed as a kind, efficient, and hospitable woman, closely resembling the character Mrs. Fujiwara from *A Pale View of Hills* in her professionalism and warmth.

The second is Sonja, the Swiss musician, who initially appears physically attractive but is later revealed to have a temperamental and emotionally volatile nature. During her visit to the café, Maggie’s polite and composed behavior effectively balances Sonja’s hostility, as shown in the passage:

“Maggie apologised and left her with her piece of roll which I noticed the woman made no move to touch. Maggie looked at me as she came past and I gave her a shrug. Then a few moments later, my sister asked the woman, very nicely, if there was anything else she’d like.” [4, p. 69]

In later scenes, however, Sonja’s more humane and emotional side emerges as she appreciates the young narrator’s guitar performance and expresses genuine concern for his future.

The third female character is Mrs. Fraser, the narrator’s former schoolteacher, known for her strict and intimidating demeanor. Although initially disliked by the narrator because of her harsh teaching methods, she is later revealed to be an entrepreneurial woman who owns and manages a hotel, representing another example of a professionally independent woman in Ishiguro’s fiction.

Overall, despite being centered on musicians and music enthusiasts, Ishiguro’s stories also portray modern women who possess autonomy, careers, and entrepreneurial identities. These characters contribute significantly to the thematic depth of the narratives, enabling a more vivid and comprehensive interpretation of the events and their underlying meanings.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall* offers a nuanced portrayal of modern womanhood shaped by cultural, emotional, and professional complexities. Across the selected stories, female characters are depicted not as passive figures confined to domestic spaces, but as active individuals with distinct identities, ambitions, and worldviews. Whether through Lindy's determined pursuit of success in "Crooner," Emily's assertive independence in "Come Rain or Come Shine," or the diverse female figures in "Malvern Hills," Ishiguro consistently challenges traditional gender representations.

Moreover, the study demonstrates that music functions as a central narrative and symbolic device, reflecting emotional states and shaping interpersonal relationships. While music connects characters and evokes nostalgia, it is ultimately human agency, communication, and emotional depth that define relationships in Ishiguro's fiction.

Thus, *Nocturnes* not only explores themes of love, memory, and time, but also contributes to broader discussions on gender roles in twenty-first-century literature. Ishiguro's portrayal of women reflects the evolving realities of contemporary society, where identity is fluid, roles are multidimensional, and personal aspirations extend beyond conventional boundaries.

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