

**Coming to Terms—
Literary Configurations of the Past in
Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating
World* and Timothy Mo's *An Insular
Possession***

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Abstract

Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) and Timothy Mo's *An Insular Possession* (1986) are fictional works with a combined structural and thematic emphasis on dynamics of the past, one in terms of the personal memory, in the other in terms of colonial history. Ishiguro's fiction foregrounds the main character's reluctance to face and be held morally responsible for earlier acts—or lack of acts—with publicly momentous consequences. In Ishiguro's case the past assumes threatening proportions and must be held at bay by enforced memory-failure and displacement. If there is understatement in relation to the past in Ishiguro's fictional universe, the opposite is the case in Mo's *An Insular Possession*. This is a text pressing on its reader a discourse saturated with factual details, with the apparent aim of rendering the past as accurate and authentic as possible, but with a disrupting ironic lightness. In both works the past appears hazy, in one through the lack of certainty, in the

other by a saturation of detail. Both works make clear the sifting, ordering, and fictionalizing negotiations that constitute private as well as public recuperations of the past.

Key Words: Kazuo Ishiguro, Timothy Mo, fictional construction, fiction and historiography, metafiction