

# The Self-Contradictory Narrative of Mr Stevens

In Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*

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## 1. Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* is a tale about the English butler Mr Stevens, who during the prime of his life served Lord Darlington, a man labelled as a traitor to his country following the Second World War. Provided with his new employer's Ford and a couple of days off from his work at Darlington Hall, Stevens starts a motoring trip around the English countryside. The purpose of the journey is to convince his previous co-worker Miss Kenton, and as shall be discussed in the course of this essay also the object of Stevens' affections, to return to Darlington Hall. However, the places he visits and the people he encounters cause Stevens to begin to dwell on his past at Darlington Hall, which has been his only world for the largest part of his life.

The story is told from a first person point of view, narrated by Stevens in the form of a diary in which he interweaves his recollections from the glory days of Darlington Hall in the 1920s and 1930s with his current thoughts and speculations on various encounters during his motoring trip in 1956. In the first part of the novel, Ishiguro portrays Stevens as the archetypal English butler: his language as narrator is refined and sophisticated, and the way in which he in the first pages describes and considers the current staff situation at Darlington Hall tells us about his dedication to his profession. He emphasizes his pride of having served such a gentleman as Lord Darlington, and, considering the influential individuals who visited Darlington Hall during its prime, he sees his employment there as a privilege.

As a part of his narration, Stevens attempts to communicate, or initiate a dialogue with the reader, as exemplified in: "I think you will understand" (5), "But you will no doubt agree" (9), "you will no doubt appreciate" (14), "Perhaps you might be persuaded" (34), "For you must understand" (177). In doing so he attempts to gain a better understanding from the reader, hoping that the reader will share his view on the events he discusses. As Molly Westermann points out: "Often, the second person is used in the formula: "you" will

understand and empathize with “my” perspective”. The success of these attempts of gaining the reader’s empathy is, however, debatable and the purpose of this study is to discuss how Stevens’ own narration leads to quite the opposite. As I will argue in this essay, the further Stevens delves into his past, the more contradictions we see and the less we, as readers, are inclined to draw the same conclusions as are drawn by the protagonist.

Stevens’ way of narrating his life as a butler has received much attention among literary critics. Deborah Guth claims in her article “Submerged Narratives in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day*” that there are two hidden narratives, the first “relating to Stevens’ public self as a butler and to the class he serves, the other to what we may call his unseen love affair with Miss Kenton” (126). However, since Stevens is the superior narrator in this novel, these narratives are, in my view, weaknesses in Stevens’ own narration. They are part of the reason why Stevens’ attempts to make the reader share his view unsuccessful. There are thus instances where Stevens, albeit unintentionally, reveals too much, consequently weakening and deconstructing the point he attempts to make. For instance, his defensive narration around Lord Darlington is contradicted by what he reveals about his previous employer and his political affairs. His attempt to declare that Lord Darlington’s label as a traitor to the country is unfair is ruined by his own narration. Stevens’ narrative of Miss Kenton works in a similar way, where his attempt to conceal his own emotions regarding their relation turns out to do the opposite. We gradually see his struggle between dignity and his own well-being.

Most importantly, regarding Stevens’ self there is the question of, as Guth also argues, the difference between “definition and illustration” (126). Stevens’ definition of, most significantly, dignity and how he then proceeds to illustrate this is probably the most obvious example of why we, as readers, fail to have any empathy with the protagonist, Mr Stevens.

In what follows I have divided the argumentation into three parts where each part covers Stevens' narration concerning the three major characters in the novel: Mr Stevens himself, Miss Kenton and Lord Darlington.

## 2. Mr Stevens

There are two words which signify Stevens both as character and as narrator: *dignity* and *loyalty*. During the story, Stevens repeatedly brings up his thoughts on his definition of dignity. It is first presented as Stevens recalls two stories, one of which his father was “fond of repeating over the years” (36), about an English butler in India who handled a situation, where a tiger was found in the dining room, without flinching. The second concerns his own father’s way of handling two men’s unpleasant remarks about his employer without showing “one hint of discomfort or anger” but with “an expression balanced perfectly between personal dignity and readiness to oblige” (39). In contrast to these anecdotes, Stevens’ account of the moment in which he claims to have reached his own peak of dignity depicts anything but the personification of the notion. His perception of dignity is strikingly different to that displayed by the butler in India and, perhaps more significantly, his father. Instead, he demonstrates his incapacity to express his emotions and the absurd, obsessive mentality of providing good service, despite the extenuating circumstances of the evening in question.

The occasion, a night in 1923 when Stevens’ father is lying on his deathbed, is also the same night as the significant international conference is taking place at Darlington Hall, with participants from all over Europe and the United States. Determined, or perhaps unable, to let the ill state of his father affect his work, Stevens acts in an almost robot-like manner upon receiving updates from other staff members about his father’s current condition. His replies and statements when confronted with his father’s state are telling: “I only have a moment. The gentlemen are liable to retire to the smoking room at any moment” (108); “This is most distressing. Nevertheless, I must now return downstairs” (108); “I’m very busy just now, Miss Kenton. In a little while perhaps” (111). These statements demonstrate Stevens’ determination to avoid losing control.

Having returned downstairs to the smoking room, Stevens expresses the satisfaction he gets by his role as the perfect butler by declaring that “The footmen looked relieved to see me, and I immediately signalled them to get to their positions” (109). Ironically, the person most likely to be relieved is probably Stevens himself: he is able to avoid dealing with the rush of emotions felt when someone close is struggling in their last hours. However, Stevens’ attempt to conceal his grief, both to the reader and to the people he serves port, is exposed by the young Mr Cardinal: “I say, Stevens, are you sure you’re all right there? . . . Not feeling unwell, are you?” (109) and Lord Darlington: “Stevens, are you all right? . . . You look as though you’re crying” (109-110). It is presented as if Stevens’ narrative in this scene unintentionally reveals his grief and the tears in his eyes, as Cynthia F. Wong observes: “[E]ven though the narrative is constructed through Stevens’s eyes, the reader sees the protagonist’s grief only indirectly, in the words and actions of others” (497).

Ultimately, when his father has passed away, and Stevens’ receives the doctor’s condolences, he immediately attends to another professional matter and requests the doctor to before his departure attend to the French gentleman Dupont’s sore feet downstairs. Essentially, Stevens ignores both the doctor’s condolences and his father’s recent death in his narration, only to keep up his facade of dignity to the reader.

Summarising the night, Stevens states that he “display[ed], in the face of everything, at least in some modest degree a ‘dignity’ worthy of someone like Mr Marshall – or come to that, my father” and even though he admits the evening had its “sad associations” he feels, upon recalling it, “a large sense of triumph” (115). This statement, together with the way he handled the evening, provides a clear example of the difference between definition and illustration, as dignity becomes indignity: “Ultimately, dignity is the capacity to accept indignity without flinching, to serve drinks with a smile as one’s father lies dying, to see one’s idol exposed and one’s world collapse without batting an eyelid” (Guth 130).

Along with his thoughts on dignity Stevens also regards the question “what is a ‘great’ butler” (119) important. His expressed disturbance with the snobbery of the Hayes Society, an exclusive society of butlers with challenging member criteria, leads him into discussing the differences between his and the previous generation of the profession. He asserts that one apparent contrast lies in their choice of household to serve in. Whereas his father’s generation were more concerned with their employers’ title, Stevens claims that: “we tended to concern ourselves much more with the *moral* status of an employer . . . I think it fair to say, professional prestige lay most significantly in the moral worth of one’s employer . . . For we were, as I say, an idealistic generation for whom the question was not simply one of how well one practised one’s skills but *to what end* one did so” (120-122). Thus, Stevens underlines the importance of his own moral values in why he remained Lord Darlington’s servant for several decades.

However, after an unfortunate incident where Stevens runs out of gas on his trip, he is invited to spend the night in the home of some locals in Moscombe, and here his view of dignity clashes with the view of Harry Smith. The local politician Smith claims that dignity is to be free, and that everybody, no matter what class or political status one has, has the opportunity to “express your opinion freely, and vote in your member of parliament or vote him out” (196). As a response to this in Stevens’ narration, he recalls an event at Darlington Hall when one of Lord Darlington’s guests, Mr Spencer, wishes to ask Stevens a couple of questions regarding international political affairs. Stevens’ reply to all three questions: “I’m very sorry sir, but I am unable to be of assistance on this matter” (205) is evidently enough to prove Mr Spencer’s point being that international political affairs is not for common people. Here it is easy to see that Stevens is being made a fool of by Mr Spencer in front of the other gentlemen, but of course Stevens, on the other hand, “was only too happy to be of service” when Lord Darlington apologizes for the “dreadful . . . ordeal” (206) they put him through the



previous evening. However, Lord Darlington also claims that Mr Spencer had a point in his argument, that high political affairs should not involve common people. Considering the significant influence Lord Darlington had over Stevens during his lifetime, and still in present time, this statement seemingly makes Stevens take a whole different approach to the matter without acknowledging what he claimed earlier:

Indeed, Mr Harry Smith's words tonight remind me very much of the sort of misguided idealism which beset significant sections of our generation throughout the twenties and thirties. I refer to that strand of opinion in the profession which suggested that any butler with serious aspirations should make it his business to be forever reappraising his employer – scrutinizing the latter's motives, analysing the implications of his views. Only in this way, so the argument ran, could one be sure one's skills were being employed to a desirable end. Although one sympathizes to some extent with the idealism contained in such an argument, there can be little doubt that it is the result, like Mr Smith's sentiments tonight, of misguided thinking (209-210).

Thus, after recalling Lord Darlington's words, Stevens obviously has changed his view on the matter of butlers striving to work for an employer who shares the same opinions as themselves. He continues by referring to "the butlers who attempted to put such an approach into practise" and whose careers "came to nothing as a direct consequence" (210).

One incident which demonstrates the ambiguousness as to whether Stevens actually is aware of the significance of what he discusses is during his recollection of Lord Halifax's praise of the well polished silver at Darlington Hall. Lord Halifax had "arrived in a mood of great wariness" (143) and appeared very anxious before the upcoming evening and the meeting with Herr Ribbentrop. Stevens admits that "it is, of course, generally accepted today that Herr Ribbentrop was a trickster: that it was Hitler's plan throughout those years to

deceive England for as long as possible concerning his true intentions, and that Herr Ribbentrop's sole mission in our country was to orchestrate this deception" (144). However, Stevens soon goes back to focus on the silver instead of the implications of the German ambassador's visit. The silver "Lord Darlington himself suggested . . . might have been at least a small factor in the change of his guest's mood that evening" (146) and by that eased Lord Halifax's anxiety towards the meeting with Herr Ribbentrop. Ultimately, Stevens' satisfaction from Lord Halifax's enjoyment of the extraordinary well polished silver overshadows the significance of the participants in the meeting, and instead Stevens cannot but enjoy that "one has had the privilege of practising one's profession at the very fulcrum of great affairs" (147). Consequently, he ignores or forgets that these particular "great affairs" of this evening might have had hazardous implications to the nation's security regarding the Nazi's movement in the thirties. He is only able to think to his amusement that "one's efforts, in however modest a way, comprise a contribution to the course of history" (147).

### 3. Miss Kenton

Before Stevens undertakes his trip in Mr Farraday's Ford, he claims that his relationship with the previous housekeeper Miss Kenton has been and still is strictly professional, and that the reason why he undertakes his trip is to try to get her back to Darlington Hall because Miss Kenton's "exemplary professionalism" would enable him "to complete a fully satisfactory staff plan for Darlington Hall" (10). Further on in the novel, whilst enjoying a marvellous view of the English countryside he emphasizes that it is "a professional task" he has entrusted himself with, "regarding Miss Kenton and [the] present staffing problems" (26). However, as Stevens' narration continues, it appears that there is more to this statement than just professional reasons, as Lilian R. Furst points out: "Stevens's ardent desire – almost a fixation – to have Miss Kenton back working with him suggests that more may be at stake than the need for a reliable housekeeper. Yet he adamantly represses any other way of thinking of her" (548).

Stevens first hesitates on Mr Farraday's suggestion that he should take a vacation around the English countryside, but during the following days his "attitude to this same suggestion underwent a change . . . no doubt substantially attributable to – *and why should I hide it?* – the arrival of Miss Kenton's letter" (4-5, emphasis added). In other words, Stevens immediately attempts to downplay that the importance of the motoring trip, and his sudden change of mind towards undertaking it, has to do with Miss Kenton.

Considering Stevens' ambition of always addressing other people correctly and properly, it is somewhat self-contradictory of him to refer to Miss Kenton by her maiden name instead of her married name Mrs Benn. This is especially so since he, in one of his recollections, declares his disturbance when Miss Kenton addresses his father by his first name, William, instead of Mr Stevens. However, servile to the reader as he is, he wants to give an explanation as to why he prefers to call her Miss Kenton: "because I knew her at close

quarters only during her maiden years . . . you will perhaps excuse my impropriety in referring to her as I knew her” (50). By referring to her as Miss Kenton, Stevens avoids the otherwise constant reminder of her marriage in his narration, which the name Mrs Benn would have caused. He then sees further reason to refer to her using her maiden name, since his interpretation of Miss Kenton’s letter suggests “that her marriage is finally to come to an end” (50). This interpretation of her letter also suggests his desire and hopefulness in meeting her again, as it holds the possibility to recapture lost love.

The relationship between Stevens and Miss Kenton being an unseen love affair between the two is widely argued. Stevens rarely describes Miss Kenton, other than through his praise for her working proficiency. The reader only sees Miss Kenton’s character through the events which Stevens chooses to discuss and the conversations between them. These events show that it was Miss Kenton who exhibited the first sign of interest when she brought flowers to Stevens’ parlour (54), and from then on attempted to get closer to him. This proved to be an impossible task for her, but not because her feelings for him were not reciprocated, but rather because of Stevens’ inability of showing that they actually were.

Stevens explains early on in the novel his disturbance regarding that “[marriages] amongst more senior employees can have an extremely disruptive effect on work” (53). Moreover, he expresses his “major irritation” over persons “who have no genuine commitment to their profession and who are essentially going from post to post looking for romance. This sort of person is a blight on good professionalism” (53). Stevens’ ambition of being the ultimate professional is one reason which prevents his and Miss Kenton’s possible love affair, as Jack Slay points out: “[Stevens’] extreme professionalism prevents him from responding emotionally to Miss Kenton on any level” (182). Stevens is also restrained by his professionalism from sharing his true inner feelings of Miss Kenton with the reader; he sees the impropriety of such a discussion. A further reason for Stevens’ inability to respond to

Miss Kenton emotionally is caused by his difficulties with his emotional side. The most obvious example of this is displayed when Stevens' father on his deathbed attempts to confide in his son, declaring to Stevens that he hopes he has been a good father and that he is proud of him, but Stevens' repeated answers are only: "I'm so glad you're feeling better now" (101). Then again Stevens' view of dignity could be considered in this context. His view of dignity is not compatible with admitting that he "allow[ed] the one possible love of his life to escape" (Slay 182). Dignity would rather be to conceal to the reader that his chance of a life with Miss Kenton was wasted. This concealment is what Stevens struggles to achieve as narrator in the events he discusses regarding him and Miss Kenton.

Stevens' recollections of Miss Kenton are "mainly . . . a series of 'clues'," as Guth points out (131), and it is not until relatively late in the novel that Miss Kenton's love for Stevens truly emerges to the reader. The incident in question regards an evening when Stevens is reading a romance novel in his pantry. Miss Kenton's attempt to gently wrestle the book out of his hands shows us his discomfort with the intimacy she is trying to establish and his dread of the embarrassment when she sees what he is reading. Although Miss Kenton asserts that "it isn't anything so scandalous at all. Simply a sentimental love story" (176), Stevens' unease of the situation is apparent when he firmly shows Miss Kenton out of his pantry. Interestingly, the tension awakened to the reader here is hastily withdrawn by Stevens' sudden transition to the book he was reading, that it was "an extremely efficient way to maintain and develop one's command of the English language" (176). By this he draws the attention away from the intimacy of the incident, and his discomfort when discussing it. The reader sees the romantic tension in his pantry and Stevens' inability of responding to Miss Kenton's move. Stevens, however, relates his behaviour that evening to a matter of principle and dignity, and that it had not been any different if someone other than Miss Kenton had come marching into his pantry. He explains that a "butler ... should never allow himself to be

‘off duty’ in the presence of others ... You will appreciate then that in the event of Miss Kenton bursting in at a time when I had presumed, not unreasonably, that I was to be alone, it came to be a crucial matter of principle, a matter indeed of dignity, that I did not appear in anything less than my full and proper role” (177-178). As this event makes clear, Stevens stubbornly remains true to his beliefs about dignity and professionalism at the expense of his own emotional well-being. Miss Kenton puts it very well when she exclaims: “Why, Mr Stevens, why, why, why do you always have to *pretend*?” (162).

Stevens’ admittance that the relation between him and Miss Kenton eventually had reached “an inappropriate footing” (178) tells us about the arising tension between the two, which eventually leads Stevens to jealousy when Miss Kenton shows interest in another man. Recalling one of their meetings over a cup of cocoa, Stevens expresses his irritation at Miss Kenton’s insufficient contribution to their conversation regarding the upcoming weekend’s meeting at Darlington Hall. His conviction that it has to do with her new acquaintance causes him to put an abrupt end to their cocoa meetings, which he previously claims having enjoyed.

The probably most striking scene concerning Stevens’ emotional restraints towards Miss Kenton is when he is about to give her his condolences for her aunt’s death, but is unable to accomplish anything else than point out mistakes in her work (187-188). However, looking back on this particular incident, Stevens seems regretful: “But what is the sense in forever speculating what might have happened had such and such a moment turned out differently? ... There was surely nothing to indicate at the time that such evidently small incidents would render whole dreams forever irredeemable” (188-189). Looking back and speculating is however precisely what he does. This also triggers his painful admittance near the end of the novel when Miss Kenton has explained to Stevens her thoughts about the life she might have had with him: “why should I not admit it? - at that moment, my heart was breaking” (252). This revelation by Stevens is the first explicit indication of his true feelings

for Miss Kenton and the moment in which his emotions finally surface. However, as has been argued, this revelation does not come as a surprise in this sense, but it is rather unexpected in terms of Stevens' previous defensive narration regarding his relation to Miss Kenton.

#### 4. Lord Darlington

Stevens' employer is apparently a sensitive subject for him to discuss, but it is obvious that Lord Darlington played an important part in Stevens' life in terms of what he considers a gentleman. Thus, Stevens expresses concern with his new American employer Mr Farraday's habit of bantering with him, something completely contradictory to Lord Darlington's way of communicating.

One question which the novel never really explains is whether Lord Darlington actually shared sympathies with the Nazi regime, or if he was just manipulated and utilized by the Germans to their gain because of his noble and naive nature. Stevens does not possess full knowledge regarding the political affairs being discussed in Darlington Hall during the pre-war years. He mentions for instance that Darlington Hall on several occasions was visited by guests "off the record" (77). This along with what Stevens' actually discusses concerning Lord Darlington and his political motives "have the effect of casting a shadow" (Furst 536) over Lord Darlington's intentions, and increases the suspicions around his employer. There are, however, several of Stevens' recollections which at least substantiate the significant influence the Nazis had over Lord Darlington.

Before the suspiciousness regarding Lord Darlington truly emerges in Stevens' narration he defends his previous employer. At the same time, with Lord Darlington's bad reputation taken into account, this also seems to be an attempt of Stevens to justify himself and his employment at Darlington Hall, and for having trusted Lord Darlington's intentions: "A great deal of nonsense has been spoken and written in recent years concerning his lordship and the prominent role he came to play in great affairs, and some utterly ignorant reports have had it that he was motivated by egotism or else arrogance" (63-64). Of course, Stevens' statement gives the reader a sympathetic first impression of Lord Darlington, suggesting that his bad reputation is totally unfair and based on false accusations. However, as Stevens'



narration continues, this picture of Lord Darlington is gradually broken down without Stevens, seemingly, being aware of it. It is first presented as Stevens' mentions the reason for Lord Darlington's commitment in political affairs regarding Germany. As a reader it is easy to start questioning Lord Darlington's motives, since Stevens presents them as a form of personal matter to his employer, caused by Lord Darlington's friendship with a German soldier, whom he battled against in the Great War: "As I recall, [Lord Darlington] had not been initially so preoccupied with the peace treaty of the Great War, and I think it is fair to say that his interest was prompted not so much by an analysis of the treaty, but by his friendship with Herr Karl-Heinz Bremann" (74). Lord Darlington obviously believed that the treaty at Versailles had had an unfair outcome for the Germans and that this was "a complete break with the traditions of [the English] country" (74). Another clue is given when Stevens tells how he overheard the American senator Mr Lewis calling Lord Darlington a "naïve dreamer" and "*amateur*" (106), thus emphasizing that the Germans should not be trusted.

The dismissal of the two Jewish housemaids is an occurrence whose significance Stevens essentially ignores, and additionally once again displays Stevens' peculiar view of dignity. Lord Darlington asserts that he cannot have Jews on the staff at Darlington Hall because he has the "safety and well-being of [his] guests to consider" (155). Even though Stevens admits that his "every instinct opposed the idea of their dismissal" he sees this task as one which has to be "carried out with dignity" (156). Thus, dignity for Stevens in this context is to fulfil Lord Darlington's orders by dismissing two housemaids only to satisfy Lord Darlington's guests, instead of displaying dignity in questioning such a motive. This of course also contributes to the reader's changing view of Lord Darlington as we can see a connection to the Nazis' anti-Semitism. Stevens complains that he "really cannot guess the reason for [the] absurd allegations" (153) regarding Lord Darlington's alleged anti-Semitism, but why

his employer came to be labelled by such allegations is exactly what he is demonstrating in this passage.

The full extent of Lord Darlington's sympathy for the Nazi regime is not revealed by Stevens until the final stages of his narrative. Although the story is told in 1956, eleven years after the end of World War II, Stevens yet dissociates his narrative from the consequences of Lord Darlington's involvement with the Germans. Stevens has already demonstrated the true intentions of Herr Ribbentrop in Britain, and how Lord Darlington endeavoured his guests to see the Germans in a different light after expressing his regret of their unfair treatment at the Treaty of Versailles. In spite of this, Stevens apparently ignores the significance of what Lord Darlington suggests when he claims: "Democracy is something for a bygone era . . . Look at Germany and Italy, Stevens. See what strong leadership can do if it's allowed to act" (208). Although Stevens admits that "many of Lord Darlington's ideas will seem today rather odd – even, at times, unattractive" (209), he apparently has his mind on something completely different than the reader has at this stage. The reader distinctly sees the extent of the influence which the Nazis have had on Lord Darlington. In contrast, Stevens' own thoughts circle around the idea that high political affairs are not something for common people, but best handled by and among true gentlemen. His statement is telling: "Let us establish this quite clearly: a butler's duty is to provide good service. It is not to meddle in the great affairs of the nation. The fact is, such great affairs will always be beyond the understanding of those such as you and me" (209). Stevens cannot see, or does not want to see, how the Nazis have manipulated his employer.

This is further emphasized later upon his recollection of the evening of Mr Cardinal's unexpected visit. Stevens explains how Lord Darlington sounded worried about his nephew, Mr Cardinal, visiting Darlington Hall this particular night, and how Stevens overheard them quarrel after dinner. Later, Stevens encounters Mr Cardinal in the library and the latter wants

to have a chat with Stevens as “friends” (231). Thus, Mr Cardinal declares his desire that Stevens disregards his role as butler for a moment and to attend to their conversation on a personal level. Stevens is, however, incapable to adapt such a manner and the reader can only see how uncomfortable he is when his employer is criticized. Mr Cardinal asserts that “His lordship is in deep waters . . . [Lord Darlington] is out of his depth. He is being manoeuvred. The Nazis are manoeuvring him like a pawn” (232-233). However, Stevens stubbornly maintains his true belief that Lord Darlington cannot do anything wrong: “I’m sorry, sir, I’m afraid I have not noticed any such development” (234).

Mr Cardinal’s following claim that Herr Ribbentrop’s mission the evening in question is to organize a meeting between the English Prime Minister and Hitler is also unsuccessful concerning a reaction from Stevens. Stevens does not see the gravity of such a proposal and his only reply is: “I’m sorry, sir, but I cannot see that his lordship is doing anything than that which is highest and noblest . . . I have to say that I have every trust in his lordship’s good judgement” (236). Interestingly, Stevens continues his narrative around what happened later that evening when he met Miss Kenton in the corridor. He does not even in present time reflect over what Mr Cardinal attempted to prove to him. The causes of the bad reputation with which Lord Darlington came to be labelled are thus clearly demonstrated to the reader in Stevens’ own recollections. Consequently, his defence of Lord Darlington and the “utter nonsense” (64) spoken about him is contradicted by Stevens himself in his narrative. As the story progresses, the sympathetic portrait of Lord Darlington is broken down right in front of Stevens’ eyes, but he cannot allow himself to utter anything negative about him, as Furst points out: “He believes that it is not proper for him to criticize or to query Lord Darlington’s decisions even in the privacy of his thoughts” (546).

However, Stevens’ true feelings regarding Lord Darlington are exposed during his trip in 1956 and in front of Mr Farraday’s guests, The Wakefields, during which he tell “white

lies” (132) that he has not at all worked for Darlington. Stevens thus clearly feels shame and discomfort being associated with him, although he claims that the reason for this behaviour can be explained in terms of his wish to “avoid any possibility of hearing any further such nonsense concerning his lordship” and also to avoid “unpleasantness” (132). Moreover, being taken for a gentleman on his trip, he realizes such a confession would unmask his disguise which he apparently enjoys. Hence, Stevens can easily defend Lord Darlington in front of the reader, because the reader cannot question him, but he does his utmost to avoid discussions regarding Lord Darlington with people he encounters in person. Not only to avoid the “unpleasantness”, but also because he does not want to be reminded of the negative concerning Lord Darlington, since this is what he is trying to suppress.

## 5. Conclusion

Despite the difficulties the reader has in sharing the same perspective as Stevens regarding his life, we cannot help but feel sympathy for him. In Stevens' dwelling on his past, we see a man in his later years who attempts to look back on his life with dignity and a sense of fulfilment. However, his attempt at keeping dignity although his one chance of love was wasted turns out to be unsuccessful. The painful admittance in the end that his heart was breaking rather reveals the suffering he has lived with since Miss Kenton left Darlington Hall some 20 years before Stevens' story begins. Stevens' almost desperate defence of Lord Darlington, in order to convince us that he was not a bad man, feels as much as an attempt from Stevens to convince himself that his trust in his employer was not in vain. Regarding Stevens' self as a butler, we clearly see his strikingly peculiar view on the personification of dignity, which results in "an ever-widening gap between definition and illustration" (Guth 126).

In conclusion, the purpose of this investigation has been to explore Stevens' own deconstruction of the points he has attempted to make. Comparing Stevens' current thoughts and speculations regarding the events he discusses with how these recollections are actually described, the reader perceives them from a different perspective than our narrator. Hence, "*The Remains of the Day* is a fascinating novel, both for it says and for what it whispers" as Guth points out (126). Ishiguro has successfully hidden the real context in Stevens' narrative with a method in which the narrator, seemingly, is not aware of how much he reveals and thus he contradicts himself repeatedly.

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