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What the Butler Recalled

Memory and Self-Deception in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*

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ABSTRACT

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Summary: This essay focuses on the main character, Mr Stevens, in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day* and his recollections of his forty years as a butler at Darlington Hall. The novel, in the form of a diary, describes a six-day travel to visit the former housekeeper, Miss Kenton, and is concentrated on Stevens’s introspection and reflections on his memories.

My intention has been to illustrate the different cognitive aspects of Stevens’s recollections by using the theories of Daniel L. Schacter, explained in *The Seven Sins of Memory*, thus giving examples of different memory imperfections found in Stevens’s narrative. In this essay, I also consider the psychological aspects of Stevens’s memories by focusing on Freudian repression and self-deception. Simon Boag’s *Freudian Repression* has here served as a source of knowledge and inspiration. My aim has also been to show how to use *The Remains of the Day* in an English B course at the upper secondary school and focus on memory and self-deception and emphasize the importance of literature reading in the language classroom. Discussions and reading logs are suggested and I give examples of different didactic methods to use when reading the novel in the language classroom, thus inspiring and emphasizing the analysis of the main character in the novel, Mr Stevens.

My conclusion states that Stevens's narrative reveals a variety of memory imperfections which could be described and categorized with the help of Schacter's theories. I also show how Stevens's memories reveal his self-deceptive and repressed state of mind. Furthermore, I stress the pedagogical benefits achieved by working with the novel in the classroom.

TABLE OF CONTENT

0.1 Introduction.....	5
1.1 Chapter I : Memory and its imperfections.....	7
1.2 Stevens’s memories.....	9
1.3 Memory in the language classroom.....	13
2.1 Chapter II: Repression and self-deception.....	15
2.2 Mr Stevens senior.....	16
2.3 Miss Kenton.....	18
2.4 Lord Darlington.....	21
2.5 Mr Stevens in the language classroom.....	25
3.1 Chapter III: Literature reading in the language classroom.....	27
3.2 Why is reading literature of vital importance?.....	27
3.3 How to work with <i>The Remains of the Day</i> in the language classroom.....	29
4.1 Conclusion.....	31
List of References.....	33

1. INTRODUCTION

The interest in what characterizes and describes the lives in former British mansions, consisting of gentry and servants, has been of great interest in Sweden and also in many other countries, not least last year when *Downton Abbey* was broadcast on television. Already in the 70's a TV-series called *Upstairs-Downstairs* was a success. No wonder then that Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, published in 1989, became an international bestseller and has been translated into twenty-eight different languages (Ishiguro, 1989).

The main character in *The Remains of the Day* is the butler Stevens, whose memories of glorious days at Darlington Hall, Oxfordshire, in the 20's and 30's reveal, below the smooth and proper surface, a loyal servant, always willing to stand up for his master, Lord Darlington, but at heart a miserable and lonely person, who has deceived himself and exaggerated his own influence and importance. In this essay, I will argue, that Stevens, in his return to the past through memories, discloses to what extent he has been self-deceived by repression and I will show how he, at the end of the novel, at least partly, gains self-knowledge.

The first-person narrator, Mr Stevens, takes the reader on a six-day journey in 1956, from Darlington Hall to Cornwall and then back via Weymouth. While on the road, he, for the first time in his life, has the opportunity to brood over and evaluate his adult life as a butler at Darlington Hall. His master, Lord Darlington, has a questionable reputation of having acted for Nazi-influences in Britain during the interwar period. After his death, the proprietor is an American, Mr Farraday, who is anxious to live up to the standards of a grand house. Through all these years, Mr Stevens has been in charge of a large household with the help of a housekeeper, for many years, a woman called Miss Kenton. She is the main reason for his undertaking the journey, a journey, which for Mr Stevens is the first chance in his life to see a bit of the English countryside, locked up as he usually is in a big mansion.

The narrative, resembling the form of a diary, is concentrated upon Stevens's memories from the interwar period when Darlington Hall was in bloom, with an unofficial conference for the cause of the German question in 1936, as its highlight. It is obvious, that Stevens's memories are of a varying kind and a natural question arises whether he remembers correctly or to what extent and why he has forgotten essential parts. In *The Seven Sins of Memory* (2001) Daniel L. Schacter describes how our memories can be categorized into different fields. My claim, in this essay, is that the memories Stevens reveals easily fall into some of Schacter's categories.

This essay also intends to show how Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* can be used for reading and discussions in the English B-course at the upper secondary school. The question of what we remember and what we choose to forget alongside with the fascination for the most English of England, the butler, is no doubt of interest also to young people.

In the following, the essay has been divided into three chapters. The first will, relying on Schacter, analyze and argue for different memories appearing in Stevens's narration. In the second chapter my intention is to investigate some of Stevens's memories, which lead on to the assumption of self-deception. Consequently, Freudian repression will be considered and interpreted in the light of a book titled *Freudian Repression, The Unconscious, and the Dynamics of Inhibition* by Simon Boag (2012). Finally, the third chapter will show how to use the novel *The Remains of the Day* in a B-course of English and how to focus on memory and self-deception.

Chapter I

1.1 Memory and its imperfections.

In its linear structure the novel *The Remains of the Day* is shaped as a diary covering a six-day journey, but its vital base are the recollections of the main character, the butler, Mr Stevens.

Almost every page includes memories of the past and the vocabulary also indicates the elaboration of memory through words such as “recall” and “remember”. However, how trustworthy are the memories of an aging butler, when he recalls events occurring twenty or thirty years ago? From time to time the use of the words “as I recall” insinuate doubt and on several occasions Stevens admits limitations of his memory (Furst 536).

Furthermore, the question arises, to whom Stevens is telling his story, who the addressee is, and what consequences this leads to in his choice of what to depict and how to present his memories. There is a familiar tone in his narrative, and this suggests that the narratee could be another, younger butler with whom Stevens wants to share his experiences and clarify the ideals needed for fulfilling the deeds of what constitutes a great butler (Marcus 140). If so, it is understandable that Stevens ponders in a long discourse about what makes a great butler and what the word dignity represents in the world of butlers.

Yet, the memories revealed to us and the narratee, imply dubiousness and we are left unsure of the truth in Stevens’s recalling. He sometimes remembers even long speeches held at a conference and sometimes he is unsure and vague, especially when it comes to disturbing memories which interfere with his personal life. Noteworthy is also the fact that Stevens’s memory and memory gaps seem to be of a varying kind, that the different memories reveal different aspects of memory and loss of memory. Daniel Schacter argues that our memory

is responsible for various “imperfections” due to the fact that memories are not just bits of data we store in our brains (Furst 530). Schacter also declares that there are several ways of misremembering (Furst 531). In his book *The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers* (2001), Schacter classifies different memories into two categories: Sins of omission and sins of commission (Schacter 4). Transience, absent-mindedness and blocking are all three referred to as sins of omissions. Transience is the loss of memory over time or the fading of memory over time (Schacter 4). Absent-mindedness is categorized by a lack of attention or focus on things we need to remember, such as when we misplace keys or eyeglasses (Schacter 4). Blocking, on the other hand, is when we cannot remember a name or when we desperately try to retrieve information which has not faded from our memory, but is temporarily lost (Schacter 5).

The sins of commission involve some form of incorrectness or something unwanted in our memory (Schacter 5). Misattribution is constituted by the assigning of a memory to the wrong source or when we mistake fantasy for reality or just misremember (Schacter 5). Closely related to misattribution is suggestibility which involves the incorporation of misleading information from external sources into one’s own personal recollections (Schacter 113). Bias is when we edit or rewrite previous experiences, i.e. when current knowledge influences our memory and results in a false account of a specific incident (Schacter 5). There are several types of biases, such as consistency and change bias, which show how our self-deception leads us to reconstruct the past with similar or different aspects from the present. Similarly, hindsight bias involves recollections being filtered by current knowledge (Schacter 138). Finally, the last of Schacter’s sins of memory is persistence, disturbing information we do not want to recall but which repeatedly interferes with our consciousness, things we want to forget but cannot (Schacter 5).

1.2 Stevens's memories.

It becomes apparent when studying Stevens's memories that several of Schacter's classifications of memory are applicable on the butler's recollections. Lilian Furst reflects on his varying memories and loss of memory in "Memory's Fragile Power in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Remains of the Day* and W.G. Sebald's "Max Ferber"" (2007). In this section some of her results will be presented and commented on.

Furst claims that transience is not particularly pronounced in Steven's memory. However, "the interplay of sharp remembering with phases of fuzziness or forgetfulness reflects the oscillation between transience and persistence" (Furst 538), she claims and adds that Stevens's narration jumps from one period to another, which gives the effect of fragmentation, confusing the reader (Furst 538). Furst also states, that the fact that Stevens appears to have a good memory, may be deceptive (Furst 539). In my opinion, his high-flown and stilted language appears to be trustworthy, at least in the beginning of the narration.

My observation is that one of the predominant features in Stevens's memory is suggestibility. According to Schacter the term suggestibility in memory "refers to an individual's tendency to incorporate misleading information from external sources into personal recollections" (Schacter 113) and suggested memories can be apprehended as real as the genuine ones to the victim. Suggestibility is, for instance, shown in Stevens's reflections on what makes a good butler and when he proclaims the importance of dignity which he claims "... has to do crucially with a butler's ability not to abandon the professional being he inhabits" (Ishiguro 43). A great butler will not "... be shaken by external events, however surprising, alarming or vexing" (Ishiguro 43-44). In addition to this he claims him to be an Englishman (Ishiguro 44) and describes his own father as the role model. To Stevens, being a great butler means putting your obligations over personal needs. Lewis summarizes

Stevens's opinion thus, "[to] be English is to be great, like the landscape; to be great, is to possess dignity; and dignity is epitomised by the great butlers" (Lewis 81). Stevens falls victim to stereotyping and Schacter terms this as congruity bias, i.e. we hold strong stereotypes about a specific group of people and we remember what we think is significant for this group (Schacter 156).

As Stevens remembers, the discourse on dignity and on what makes a great butler used to be fervently discussed among temporarily visiting butlers at Darlington Hall, and Stevens reflects on what constitutes the word dignity and the importance of working in a distinguished household. The question of whether a butler must be employed by the newly rich or employed by old wealth is left unanswered, which is maybe due to the fact that in his present situation, Stevens is employed by an American, Mr Farraday, who obviously does not belong to the old British wealth. Among butlers representing the word dignity and also serving as Stevens's role model as a butler is his own father, to whom Stevens has a split relationship. Stevens confesses, that when his father takes up a position as under-butler at Darlington Hall, there is a mutual embarrassment between them and they have difficulty talking to one another (Ishiguro 66). By the way they communicate, no intimate relationship is noticed. My assumption is that they both suffer from self-deception and repress all personal emotions and due to this there have probably never been any close bonds between them.

Furthermore, Mr Stevens senior proves to be the perfect reincarnation of the word dignity. This becomes obvious in three episodes. The first one is a story told by Stevens senior about a butler in India, who found a tiger under his master's dining-table and accurately shot it and swept the remains away, in order to reassure the following dinner party (Ishiguro 37). The second one occurs when some guests humiliated Mr Stevens senior's master and he silently

brought the car to a halt, in order to refuse to drive on until the gentlemen regretted their doings (Ishiguro 39). Finally, the third episode depicts Stevens senior's behaviour towards a general who had caused the death of Mr Stevens's brother in the war. Instead of asking to be released from the duty to serve as the general's butler, due to his aversion against him, Stevens senior acted with dignity, not letting any feelings show (Ishiguro 42). According to Stevens, his actions signify the word dignity, an absolute servility and respectfully Stevens is steered by the preconceived notion of how a great butler is supposed to be. Therefore, his own feelings and wishes are suppressed and he has to pretend and fulfill the role implanted deeply into his mind by suggestion (Furst 541).

Suggestibility is also reflected in Stevens's glorification of Lord Darlington, who in Stevens's eyes can do no wrong (Furst 542). The fact that Lord Darlington, a true gentleman according to Stevens, plays an important role in world history, spills over also onto Stevens, who indirectly feels he is part of making history. When visiting Moscombe, on the third day of his journey, he is mistaken for being a gentleman himself and he ponders what his part has been in world history when he claims: "It's a great privilege, after all, to have been given a part to play, however small, on the world's stage." (Ishiguro 198).

Yet another example of suggestibility is when Stevens ruminates over the importance of correctly polished silver and its importance in world affairs. Darlington Hall is visited by Lord Halifax, who is to become a cabinet secretary, and the German Ambassador Herr Ribbentrop. Lord Halifax exclaims: "My goodness, Darlington, the silver in this house is a delight" (Ishiguro 144) whereby Stevens jumps to the conclusion that the silver had made a small but significant contribution in easing relations between the two distinguished gentlemen (Ishiguro 144), an example of how Stevens incorporates misleading information into his thinking.

Blocking, according to Schacter, involves not only the temporary loss of, for instance a name, but can also include the forgetting of a trauma (Schacter 80). Furthermore, Schacter refers to Oregon psychologist Michael Andersson, who states that “whenever we selectively retrieve some memories in response to a particular cue, but not others, inhibition of the nonretrieved information occurs” (Schacter 82). This becomes apparent in Stevens’s wholehearted loyalty to Lord Darlington. Even when Mr Cardinal, Lord Darlington’s godson frankly tells him Lord Darlington is in deep waters and that, “the Nazis are manoeuvring him like a pawn” (Ishiguro 233), Stevens refuses to face the facts and excuses himself claiming that he is fully confident and trusts Lord Darlington’s good judgement (Ishiguro 236). Stevens later on admits Lord Darlington’s failings and condones his political course of actions and his Nazi-sympathies. Stevens, however, feels no guilt. He has just provided the service and it is not up to him to meddle in world affairs (Furst 546). It seems he does not feel any regret or shame, or so he claims, but my opinion is that he obviously does, when denying the acquaintance with Lord Darlington, as he does several times on his journey.

Stevens also falls victim to blocking considering Miss Kenton. He has persuaded himself that his relationship towards her is merely professional and has nothing to do with any personal feelings on his behalf. He selectively only remembers her qualifications as a perfect housekeeper and excludes the personal recollections he has of her. According to Furst, Schacter calls this a stereotypical self-schema, i.e. the support of certain aspects and the exclusion of others (Furst 547). Stevens claims that the reason for his undertaking the journey at all is due to the fact that he wants to restore the excellence of the service at Darlington Hall by enrolling Miss Kenton into the household again. My observation is that to fulfill his mission of being a dignified butler, the personal feelings he shares for her are repressed as he only wants to see her in a professional point of view.

The reason for his undertaking the journey in order to see Miss Kenton turns out to be an example of misattribution (Furst 547). He has received a letter where Mrs Benn (the former Miss Kenton) admits her life has not turned out the way she wanted. Stevens misinterprets the letter and is quite sure about the fact that she wants to return to Darlington Hall (Ishiguro 10). She does not explicitly state in the letter that she wants to return, but as Stevens puts it: “but that is the unmistakable message conveyed by the general nuance of many of the passages” (Ishiguro 50). After having reread the letter in Taunton, on the third day, he is not so sure any more, stating there is nothing specific mentioning that she wants to come back to Darlington Hall (Ishiguro 149) and in the evening that same day he admits to have read more into the letter than there is (Ishiguro 189). His wish for her to return deceives him and he has mistaken fantasy for reality which is a sign of misattribution (Furst 547).

Consequently, as readers we become aware of the fact that Stevens’s recollections and memory gaps reveal and conceal. It becomes significant that many of Stevens’s memories can be described and categorized according to Schacter’s theories about “memory sins” and that they reflect Stevens’s self-deceptive mind.

1.3. Memory in the language classroom.

Memory imperfections is a topic well-worth discussing with students. To be able to speak about topics well-known to students but also to discuss topics they are not familiar with in depth, is one of the national goals in the Swedish National Curriculum. An oral discussion about memory could well start off with an exercise in trying to recall your very first childhood memory. Consequently, the discussion leads on to the question if the memory is really one’s own or if it has been told, or if one refers to a photograph. Schacter’s theories are a natural and logical sequence. There are several interviews and lectures with Schacter on the internet

and some of these could be used as listening comprehensions and could serve as a suitable introduction before moving on to explaining what Schacter's categories of memory imperfections are. The consequence will be an interesting discussion about how our memory works and a conversation about situations students have experienced. Thereafter the introduction of Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* follows.

Chapter II

2.1 Repression and self-deception.

What is apparent in *The Remains of the Day*, is that Stevens appears, on the surface, to be the perfect image of a butler, but in performing his job, he acts unselfish and has suppressed all emotions, acting whole-heartedly loyal to Lord Darlington. In doing so, he erases his own identity and turns into "... a blank façade that fools even himself" (Slay 180). In the former chapter, memory and the loss of memory were described in their cognitive aspects. In the following, I will identify, explain and discuss some of the psychological consequences of Stevens's professional and personal behaviour and memory in terms of repression and self-deception.

The easiest way of describing the psychological term repression is, according to Freud that it "lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious" (Boag xi). Freud often refers to the metaphor of the "blindness of the seeing eye" (Boag xiii) in describing repression and considers it a form of defence or protection against instinctual demands (Boag xv). Furthermore, Freud claims that repression is the result of the ego fending off dangers (Boag xv), i.e. preventing the unpleasure (shame, pain or self-reproach) from association in our conscious thinking (Boag 5). Repression works, according to Freud, in dissociating the affect from the idea, to make it weak and thereafter it will not become conscious and will be excluded from association (Boag 16). Boag also states that "[r]epression must be a continuous activity to prevent the repressed from becoming conscious" (Boag 143). It will become apparent, in this chapter, that some of Stevens's recollections mirror the psychological defence mechanism, repression.

Before actually analysing the various ways in which Stevens's memories reflect repression, there is also the need to clarify the term self-deception. In "Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*-The Discourse of Self-Deception", Amit Marcus refers to the philosopher Herbert Fingarette, who claims that "self-deception occurs when the subject has fundamental reason to avoid *spelling out*" (Marcus 129). Fingarette also states that this phenomenon is unstable, provoking both concealment and revelation, which results in contradiction (Marcus 130). In this respect, Stevens's narration could be described as an oscillation between what is reliable and what is unreliable (Marcus 134). Marcus discusses the reason why Stevens narrates the story the way he does and sees two motivational standpoints: either to reinforce self-deception through the story or "... in order to purge himself of guilt and shame" (Marcus 135-136). Furthermore, Marcus claims that, self-deception is evident in the narration of Stevens's relationships to his father, Miss Kenton and Lord Darlington (Marcus 131). In the following, my intention is to analyse in what respect self-deception and repression are detectible in memories concerning these three characters.

2.2 Stevens senior.

As earlier stated, Stevens shares an unmitigated respect towards his father, who in his seventies, takes the position as an under-butler at Darlington Hall. It soon becomes obvious that Stevens senior is unable to carry out the heavy burdens laid upon him and he makes fatal mistakes concerning the household. When Miss Kenton relates to Stevens junior the fact that his father has changed the positions of two Chinamen, Stevens acts very childishly and refuses to accept the fact that his father is capable of committing errors. To Stevens, his father represents the symbol, the true incarnation of a great butler and he has suppressed the very notion, that he is capable of making mistakes. Stevens deceives himself in this respect, also

due to the fact that he himself is deceived by the notion of the infallibility of butlers who represent dignity. Instead of listening to Miss Kenton, Stevens just strides out of the room "... at a furious pace" (Ishiguro 61) like a sulking child. He does not want to hear.

On the one hand, Stevens's actions towards his father indicate respect, but on the other hand, as readers, we also become aware of the fact that the relationship between Steven senior and Stevens junior lacks all signs of emotions. During the conference at Darlington Hall, in 1923, Steven's father suffers from a stroke and is taken to bed and never recovers. Stevens has a busy time coping with the demands of a house full of prominent and demanding guests and sees no possibility in watching over his dying father. Instead, Miss Kenton takes on his role. At one moment, however, Stevens is able to sneak up to his father's room, where an odd conversation takes place between the dying father, who tries to reassure himself that he has been a good father, and Stevens junior. He, however, is incapable of handling a situation as intimate and private as this and his utterances and behaviour towards his father are most remarkable. Instead of feeling sorry, he laughs nervously (which he seems to be doing in all embarrassing situations) and keeps repeating: "I'm so glad you're feeling better now" (Ishiguro 101). This indicates that Stevens has repressed the personal emotions he might have had towards his father. He represses the very thought of being personal at a moment when his father is on his death bed and the reader apprehends Stevens as a callous and insensitive person, unable to feel empathy. However, during this trying evening, when Stevens's father is dying and the conference is held, Stevens appears and acts just as professionally as always, but it is interesting that he is not aware of his crying with actual tears falling down his cheeks. Lord Darlington and Mr Cardinal notice and ask: "I say, Stevens, are you all right?" and "Not feeling unwell, are you" (Ishiguro 109). Stevens is able to uphold a mask of absolute calm and restraint, but he cannot control the natural reflex of crying. In Stevens's way of seeing, it is

not befitting a great butler to show any feelings and in spite of his father's death, the conference, in Stevens's eyes, turns out a success, is considered as one of the turning points in the narrative history and leaves Stevens with " ... a large sense of triumph" (Ishiguro 114-115). Yet, another aspect of this incident is the fact that by acting the way he does, Stevens reveals that he cannot accept the possibility of his father being sick and dying, a most unfitting situation for a "great" butler, also realizing the fact, that if Mr Stevens senior is not immortal, he himself is nearing the age when he, too, will be of no use as a butler. In fact, Slay claims Stevens's relationship to his father "... is the end result of a lifetime of extreme emotional repression" (Slay 182). I agree with Slay when he claims that the emotional vacuum inherited from his father has stripped him of all feelings and also his heart (Slay 182).

2.3 Miss Kenton.

The frame story in *The Remains of the Day* is the journey Stevens undertakes in Mr Farraday's Ford, a journey initiated by Mr Farraday, in order for Stevens to take some days off and see a bit of the English countryside (Ishiguro 4). Although Stevens claims: "It has been my privilege to see the best of England over the years, sir, within these very walls." (Ishiguro 4), he approves of the proposal due to the fact that he has received a letter from a former housekeeper, Mrs Benn (maiden name Kenton), whom he wants to visit. This journey turns out to be Stevens's first opportunity in his working career to spend time on introspection and retrospection (Marcus 138).

In the beginning of the narration, the reader does not suspect that Stevens's relationship towards Miss Kenton is anything but professional, but after the arrival of the letter, Stevens gives away small hints of there being more than a professional interest. After Mrs Benn has

moved to Cornwall in 1936, he admits, from time to time, to have been engrossed in the second volume of Mrs Symon's *The Wonder of England*, looking at the pictures of Devon and Cornwall and clearly been thinking about Miss Kenton (Ishiguro 12). He also detects a sting of nostalgia in her letter which makes him brood over a quite intimate situation when the two of them observe Stevens's father walking up and down the lawn (Ishiguro 50), a memory they share together. Under the pretext of not wanting to understand why the professional relationship between Miss Kenton and Stevens underwent a change in 1356 or 1936, Stevens reveals an incident, occurring in his own pantry. Miss Kenton catches him reading a romantic novel on the sly and he desperately tries to conceal and hide his book. She, however, comes very close and takes the book from his hand. Stevens describes the moment thus: "... suddenly the atmosphere underwent a peculiar change- almost as though the two of us had been suddenly thrust on to some other planet of being altogether" (Ishiguro 175). Miss Kenton is trespassing, coming too close to his heart and now on his third evening of the journey, he explains to the reader the reason why he reads romantic stories. It is a "... way to maintain and develop one's command of the English language" (Ishiguro 176), a not very plausible explanation but a perfect example of how he deludes himself of his repressed feelings. My opinion is that it is obvious that he has romantic feelings but represses them.

In addition to this, Stevens reveals that he and Miss Kenton practised the custom, over a cup of cocoa, of seeing each other at the end of the day in his pantry, in order to contemplate and discuss household matters. After the incident with Stevens's reading, he feels his vocation has been set at risk, since Miss Kenton walked into his domain when he was "off duty", an unacceptable situation for a dignified butler and he decides to take measures in order to re-establish the relationship "... on a more proper basis"(Ishiguro 178). This leads him to end the evening meetings under the pretext that Miss Kenton does not, due to fatigue, seem very

interested in attending them (Ishiguro 183). Stevens has been caught off-guard, a situation he cannot handle and he cannot allow anyone to come too close to his inner self. In Stevens's eyes the decision to end evening meetings appears to be another "turning point" in his career (Ishiguro 185), which soon after will be followed by the third turning point, i.e. when Miss Kenton's aunt passes away. Stevens now finds himself in a complicated situation. He must express condolences, but by doing so, he has to address her with comforting and emotional words, which he is unable to. Instead he scolds her for being neglectful and cannot bring himself to saying anything nice (Ishiguro 187).

Not until the last pages of the novel, does Stevens reveal his feelings towards Miss Kenton. They finally meet, on the fourth day, have tea and talk about old times at Darlington Hall. From the narration, the reader understands that Miss Kenton has no intentions at all of changing her positions. On the contrary, she is very much looking forward to the future, becoming a grandmother. However, she tries to sound Stevens out, by questioning what her life would have been together with him (Ishiguro 251), though realizing and saying that there is no possibility of turning back the clock now. It seems from Stevens's narration that he hesitates but then agrees with her. To us, the readers, he is more open-hearted saying what for the first time in the narration reveals, his true inner feelings for her: "... at that moment my heart was breaking" (Ishiguro 252).

Apparent throughout the novel is the fact that Stevens has difficulty in realizing that Miss Kenton married in 1936 and thereafter is Mrs Benn. Whenever Stevens thinks of her, he thinks of her in terms of Miss Kenton. He confesses so after receiving the letter from her and apologizes to the reader for his impropriety in calling her by her maiden name, but he sees a reason. He misinterprets the letter regarding Mrs Benn's married position and even describes

her married time as a waste (Ishiguro 51), clearly indicating she might be in the position of wanting to return as a housekeeper to Darlington Hall. In his self-deceptive and repressed state of mind he believes he can regain the past and re-establish the professional relationship he used to have with Miss Kenton, not admitting his true inner feelings of love for her.

2.4 Lord Darlington.

A theme throughout the novel *The Remains of the Day* is the theme of guilt (Ekelund 1). This is especially accentuated in Stevens's relationship with and reasoning concerning his employer, Lord Darlington. Much of the novel also consists of the justifications of the political actions undertaken by Lord Darlington (Westerman 6). The journey undertaken by Stevens is set in the same month in 1956 as the Suez Canal crisis (Ekelund 5), which according to Lang was seen by many British as a "symbol and official collapse of Britain's imperial powers..." (Lang 5) and cannot be understood as a mere coincidence, but rather a suitable background for the reflections of the political events, which take place at Darlington Hall during the interwar period. A substantial part of Stevens's narration "... consists of his attempts to justify or explain his blind submission to this man, Lord Darlington" (Lang 2). All through the novel Stevens tries to reconcile the memories he has of his employer (Lang 2). At length, this working through the past causes Stevens to a profound insight into what has led him to self-deception and what harm this has caused to his self-image.

The journey through the English countryside offers Stevens some frightful insights of himself. On the one hand, he now has the time to contemplate and devote himself to memories of the glorious days when Darlington Hall was at its peak. On the other hand, he, to his own surprise, acts and says things he did not think himself capable of. Already on day two, we find out that there have been rumours about Lord Darlington's doings during the

interwar period. Stevens describes these rumours as “utterly ignorant reports” (Ishiguro 64) and abhors the implication that Lord Darlington has been motivated by egoism and arrogance. Nothing could be more wrong, in Stevens’s eyes. Instead, he considers Lord Darlington as a “shy and modest nature” (Ishiguro 63) and “a truly good man at heart, a gentleman through and through” (Ishiguro 64) and a person Stevens feels proud of having served for many years.

Furthermore, the novel describes, at length, an unofficial conference, which takes place at Darlington Hall in 1923. Lord Darlington, by Lang considered an idealist, advocates a greater understanding for the sufferers of the Weimar Republic (Lang 8) and takes on a role as an unofficial diplomat trying to, through informal diplomatic channels “... to negotiate and normalize political relationships between the British and the Nazi governments” (Lang 8). Stevens’s narration stresses the compassion Lord Darlington feels for the defeated foe (Ishiguro 74) and he himself is evasive in his defence of his lordship. Herr Ribentrop is one of the guests at Darlington Hall, a well-known Nazi, and Stevens wants to convince us that he was on the guest list in many of the distinguished houses during the period (Ishiguro 145). That the British leader of the “blackshirts”, Sir Oswald Mosley, visited Darlington Hall, is excused with the declaration that he only visited a few times (Ishiguro 146). Even the fact, that Lord Darlington has been accused of being an anti-Semite is minimized, in Stevens’s eyes, due to the fact that there were Jewish people present at Darlington Hall from time to time (Ishiguro 145). In fact, Stevens has repressed the very idea that his master could be anything but a true English gentleman with noble intentions. In his self-deceptive manner Stevens has to make up all these excuses for him.

Stevens, though, testifies that there was an embarrassing incident at Darlington Hall during the thirties. Two Jewish maids worked for a period at Darlington Hall, but were on Lord Darlington’s request dismissed. Stevens, accordingly, did not oppose the dismissal (Ishiguro

155), but Miss Kenton was very upset. A year later, Lord Darlington regrets his decision and feels sorry for what occurred. In relating the conversation with Lord Darlington to Miss Kenton, Stevens claims to have been just as upset as she over the incident (Ishiguro 161) and to her surprise he seems to feel regret, too. The reader, however, recognizes his regrets as yet another attempt to justify his lordship.

More than thirty years after the conference, on the road to Cornwall, Stevens tries to sort the memories out, trying to reconcile himself with the past and finding excuses for not having understood to what extent Lord Darlington's naiveté played the Nazis into their hands. What is obvious is, that Lord Darlington and Stevens both deceive and are deceived. Stevens is deceived in so far as he has repressed every notion of doubt about the questionable political actions of Lord Darlington. Moreover, to Stevens, it would be devastating to realize that he has been employed by a man, who lacks noble intentions. In doing so, his whole world of ideas would crack and he would be left disillusioned. To avoid this he excuses himself with the thought that it is not in his place to judge. He is just a servant obeying orders.

However, it does not take long before Stevens reverses, well aware of the embarrassing rumours of Lord Darlington and he denies any acquaintance with him. He does so twice, the second time when having trouble with the car. He stops at a mansion and is assisted by a chauffeur, who understands him to be a "top-notch butler" (Ishiguro 125), not least by the stilted and old-fashioned language Stevens uses. When Stevens reveals that he works at Darlington Hall, the chauffeur questions him about Lord Darlington. Stevens, however, claims to be employed by Mr Farraday and so avoids the awkward question (Ishiguro 126). It turns out that Stevens has denied working for Lord Darlington some time earlier, to the embarrassment of Mr Farraday. When having some American guests at Darlington Hall, clearly impressed by the English ways in which the house is run, Stevens deliberately lies and

says that he has not worked for Lord Darlington (Ishiguro 130). He then, after some hesitation, throws the blame on British customs, declaring it is not customary to discuss past employers (Ishiguro 131). After the second denial he reasons why he acted the way he did and explains it: "It could simply be that a meaningless whim had suddenly overtaken me at that moment" (Ishiguro 128). My observation is that he desperately avoids this embarrassing hidden area in his consciousness.

To his own surprise, but not to readers, Stevens later, in Moscombe, on day three, contradicts again, this time obviously flattered by being mistaken for a gentleman and he impersonates Lord Darlington, or at least someone of noble descent. He is questioned by some of the villagers and willingly lets them understand that he has been consorting with, not just prominent men like Mr Churchill, but also many other leaders and people of influence. He also proclaims having been involved in great affairs before the war (Ishiguro 198-199), which, however, is seen through by the doctor, who is present (Ishiguro 218). Obviously, in the evening, Stevens suffers from a guilty conscience, but fails to see how his doings could have been prevented. His notion of being someone of importance and dignity demands him to deceive and, in so doing he deceives himself, too.

Still, self-deception is to some extent ruptured; the further Stevens travels the further he interrogates his inner self and comes to terms with the opinion that Lord Darlington's doings were misfortunate, "... even foolish" (Ishiguro 211), but he still judges himself in the light of justice and claims: "It is hardly my fault if his lordship's life and work have turned out today to look, at best, a sad waste-and it is quite illogical that I should feel any regret or shame from my own account." (Ishiguro 211).

Eventually, Stevens gains insight on the last day of his journey. We find him sitting on the pier in Weymouth disheartened after the meeting with Miss Kenton, conversing with a

gentleman, a former footman. Stevens cannot help telling him a little about his service to Lord Darlington. Relentlessly, he now lets his feelings go and crying admits: "I gave my best to Lord Darlington. I gave him the very best I had to give, and now –well –I find I do not have a great deal more left to give" (Ishiguro 255). He then continues, in his justification of Lord Darlington, and excuses his self-deception by saying: "You see, I *trusted*. I trusted in his lordship's wisdom. All those years I served him, I trusted I was doing something worthwhile... what dignity is there in that?" (Ishiguro 256). Stevens finally realizes he has deceived himself all along and his self-image is torn. Doubts, which have been repressed through the years and the hardships in keeping up appearances, suddenly become evident and questioned. The struggle to personify dignity and to act in the cause of humanity in Lord Darlington's service, seem a waste. However complex and difficult the situation for Stevens now is and despite the disillusionment he feels, he somehow finds the strength to look ahead towards his last years in Mr Farraday's service.

2.5 Mr Stevens in the language classroom.

The characterization of the narrator, Mr Stevens, in *The Remains of the Day*, invites a variety of interpretations. Students, reading the novel, will observe Mr Stevens's role in history, as a professional, as part of a specific cultural setting and as an individual human being. To be able to discuss with students to what extent self-deception and repression are evident in the narration, it is important to introduce the Freudian theory of repression and explain the main aspects of self-deception. Furthermore, some parts of the novel could be subjected to intensive reading, i.e. reading with some questions in mind, searching the text, observing the language and reading between lines. The following sections of the novel would prove rewarding for an intensive reading situation:

The conference and the death of Mr Stevens's father.

The changed relationship towards Miss Kenton.

The dismissal of the Jewish maids.

The following questions to bear in mind, while reading, would be appropriate:

1. Describe Mr Stevens's actions considering a) his father b) Miss Kenton c) Lord Darlington.
2. Choose lines and sentences where Mr Stevens shows contradictory or self-deceiving ideas. Also find support for the assertion that he is deliberately lying.
3. Try to analyse the reason for his behaviour.
4. Try to trace underlying ideology and value system in the extracts.
5. Characterize the outer appearance of Mr Stevens (as you imagine him) and also his inner state of mind in the various situations.
6. What in the extracts indicates that he suffers from repression?

After having studied the extracts and discussed the questions in small groups with the teacher as support and as an inspirer, a minor written assignment is requested where each student writes down the characteristics of Mr Stevens. This could be formulated as a witness report. It goes without saying, that the appearance, Mr Stevens's looks, must be imaginative due to the fact that there is no such description of him in the novel.

Chapter III

3.1 Literature reading in the language classroom.

The Swedish National Agency for Education has in the syllabus for the English B-course (English 1202) stated the importance of reading literature for foreign language learners. The aims include, among others, that students should be able to read, summarize and comment on fictional literature and gain knowledge of literature from different epochs. Furthermore, students should be able to take part in discussions concerning various topics and be able to express themselves with clarity in both oral-and written language (Skolverket, 2000).

In this chapter my intention is to show the importance of reading literature in the language classroom, to refer to pedagogical literature and also to suggest how to work with Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* with students at the upper secondary school.

3.2 Why is reading literature of vital importance?

In the overall goals for the three English (A, B and C) courses on the upper secondary school, reading literature is considered essential (Skolverket, 2000). Owing to this, the language teacher of English has no option other than working with literature. In my experience, this is very rewarding for students in many ways.

There are considerable benefits of using fiction in the language classroom, not solely to improve the knowledge of English but also to contribute to the understanding of other cultures and epochs. Above all, reading literature enriches each and every one of us as human beings. Collie and Slater reason in *Literature in the Language Classroom* (1987) about beneficial aspects of reading literature. The first one, they claim, is the authenticity of reading fiction, intended for native speakers (Collie & Slater 3). This is without a doubt true. Students often

find their English material of little interest, due to the fact that ordinary textbooks filled with extracts from different literary texts are specially designed for the purpose of language learning. The reading of an authentic novel ensures a genuine text, not primarily designated for students but for native speakers. Secondly, Collie and Slater claim that, using literature is an adequate complement to film, the internet, newspapers and so on, in order to provide students with a cultural enrichment, which is otherwise only acquired on an actual visit to an English-speaking country (Collie & Slater 4). The third aspect, is the enrichment of language. Focusing on the context contributes to an increase in receptive vocabulary and grammar, and is easier to remember than grammar rules or exercises. The awareness of style, form and narrative are additional benefits when reading literature (Collie & Slater 4-5). Finally, Collie and Slater refer to the personal involvement considering literature reading (Collie & Slater 4-5). When the reader gets drawn into the plot, and feels excitement in reading "...the reader begins to inhabit the text" (Collie & Slater 5). People used to reading fiction are familiar with the significance of reading a novel so interesting that it is hard to let it go.

Bo Lundahl, a university professor in Malmö, Sweden also stresses the importance of reading fiction in the language classroom. He, too, finds four main beneficial aspects for literature reading (Lundahl 323) and emphasizes the inter-cultural learning aspects, the importance of understanding how texts function and the progress of linguistic and reading processes (Lundahl 326-327).

Although working with literature could be considered a time-consuming activity, my conviction is that when we expose students to literature we also help them develop and strengthen their wish to continue improving language abilities by reading literature. We often talk about "the life-long learning procedure" and as teachers we are able to provide students

with tools to improve their knowledge and understanding of English by reading literature.

3.3 How to work with *The Remains of the Day* in the language classroom.

Kazuo Ishiguro once commented on his choice of using a butler as a main character in *The Remains of the Day*: “I chose the figure deliberately because that’s what I think I am, and I think most of us are: We’re just butlers” (Wong 76). This quote could be an inspiring introduction to the reading of Ishiguro’s novel and the following questions could start the discussion:

What does Ishiguro mean by this?

To what extent are we all butlers?

Do you agree with Ishiguro?

Another way of introducing the novel is to relate to memories as stated in chapter 1.3. Many students, among others, took great interest in the tv-series *Downton Abbey*, broadcast on Swedish television in 2010-2011 and have some previous knowledge of the gentry and the servants in former British mansions. An introduction to the role of the class system in general and in the British society, in particular, could form a conversation comparing Swedish equivalents.

As mentioned earlier, reading a whole novel is time-consuming but well worth the time spent. Still, a lot of reading has to be done outside the classroom, at home, as homework. There are different ways of letting students read a whole novel. One way is to let students read at their own pace just stating a final date. It is also possible to divide the reading into special sections and work with each section at certain intervals. My suggestion is to let the students keep a “reading-log”, i.e. after an appropriate number of pages or chapters, students

have to reflect over different questions or statements and present their thoughts in the log. In the case of *The Remains of the Day*, it would be natural to divide the novel into six parts, one for each chapter or part of the novel. Examples of questions to reflect on during the reading of the pages concerning the first evening on the journey could well be: What does Mr Stevens mean by dignity and what according to him makes a great butler? Students have to write down their reflections and the teacher is able to share their thoughts. This is, however, not necessary to do after each section. The main purpose with writing a log is to reflect on the text, but it also becomes an excellent writing exercise.

In reading literature, the conversations and discussions of the text are of utmost importance. Here, students are able to share and compare their opinions with other students and the teacher. Doing so, they improve their speaking abilities and learn to use different language strategies to express themselves clearly and in a well-structured manner.

After having worked with the six different sections of the book my opinion is that it would be rewarding for students to enter deeper into some parts of the novel, as stated in chapter 2.5. The purpose of this is to be able to understand the main character, Mr Stevens, better in order to perform well on the final assignment of the novel.

Traditionally, teachers in foreign languages work with book reports, oral performances or group discussions after reading novels. I have no objections to such assignments, but, in this case, I would prefer the students to write a reflection, indicating how they see the main character, Mr Stevens, and trace his development throughout the novel, thus taking into account the thoughts they have considering repression and self-deception.

Finally, I think it is relevant to show the film *The Remains of the Day* from 1991. A rewarding discussion could afterwards include questions about the differences between the film and the novel and also to what extent the film gives a true picture of the main characters.

4.1 Conclusion

This essay has its focus on the butler, Mr Stevens and his memories. It becomes clear that he is narrating his recollections in the language of self-deception. He remembers and forgets at his own convenience and particularly practises, what Schacter terms blocking and suggestibility. Although, we as readers, are able to see through the self-deceptive narration, we cannot but feel pity for the butler, even feel sympathy. Stevens has built his whole professional life upon an ideal based on dignity. In this sense, his father and his employer, Lord Darlington have served as role-models to him. What Stevens has tried, throughout his working life, is to live up to a standard which in reality turns out to be an illusion. In addition to this, he has misinterpreted the word dignity, so that he believes that it has to do with not showing any feelings. Therefore, he sometimes acts and speaks in a callous manner, repressing all personal feelings. In his desperate defence of his employer and in his relationship towards his father and Miss Kenton, he has deluded himself by his struggle to achieve what he characterizes as dignity. Instead of speaking out, he has succeeded in performing all his duties, repressing his inner feelings. At the end of the novel, Stevens realizes that the consequences of his actions are that he has lost the opportunity to love and he questions whether all his efforts to obtain dignity and do something good for the world have been in vain.

Although disillusioned and heartbroken, Stevens in a way achieves a new sort of dignity. He now sees through himself and is, at least partly, aware of the self-deceit he suffers from. Moreover, he realizes that there is still time to start anew as Mr Farraday's butler, making the best of the remains of the day.

This essay has also considered the benefits of reading literature in the language classroom and I have shown how to use *The Remains of the Day* in an English B-course by giving

examples of teaching methods which I find inspiring. Reading literature in the language classroom inspires students to keep on improving their language abilities and reading enriches us as human beings. *The Remains of the Day* by Ishiguro is a novel full of nuances and the interest in “the most English of England”, the butler, intrigues students and opens up a new world to them, describing a class system no longer prevalent. Moreover, for students to realize how much one can read into the main character in the novel and the conclusions to be drawn from analysing his recollections provide students with new understanding and fascination for literature.

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