

LOVE UNFULFILLED: LOSS AND REGRET IN THE REMAINS OF THE DAY

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Abstract

Hence Stevens has to admit to himself at the end of the narrative that his entire life has been a lie, a deception, a sham- serving a cause which is now viewed derogatively as Nazi collaboration and missing out on his father's death as well as his possible romance with Miss Kenton which is now irretrievably lost as a consequence of his striving for excellence professionally to the suppression of his private persona- only to find at the end of his life that the dignity he strove for is a hollow lie now his master is shown to be a Nazi sympathizer and the people he has overlooked in performing his professional duties to perfection- his father and Miss Kenton are irrevocably lost. *Remains of the Day* is thus a study in loss, pain and regret at not doing the opposite which is to seize the day, *Carpe diem* and make the most of life's opportunities when they are actually present.

Keywords: Ishiguro, Love, Loss, Duty, Professionalism

The *Remains of the Day* is Kazuo Ishiguro's tale of Stevens, a repressed butler, who performs his professional duties to perfection in his entire life at Darlington Hall, only to find at the twilight of his years there that he has served a false idea as Lord Darlington is now notorious as a Nazi sympathizer and the one possibility of romance that Stevens had with Miss Kenton is irrevocably lost because Stevens did not reciprocate when she made advances towards him when they were younger and though she has survived a marriage which was previously unhappy she has come to terms with her life and begun to love her husband eventually. Stevens spends the remainder of the narrative haunted by loss and the idea of what could have been had he not made professional duty such a large priority in his life.

Stevens throughout the narrative has been unable to separate his public persona from his private persona, in fact he has repressed his private persona to the point of no longer possessing any private persona in his efforts to be the very best butler possible and the perfect butler who inhabits his role consummately and shows no trace of a private life or private persona. The consequence is that he lives out a lie, serving a man, Lord Darlington, who is now shamefully derided as a Nazi Sympathizer and Stevens has performed his professional duties to him so consummately that he cannot pretend that he has committed his own mistakes, unlike Lord Darlington. Stevens expresses regret over the fact that Lord Darlington had been allowed to make his own mistakes whereas Stevens cannot say the same for himself, he has led a life of

following Lord Darlington's orders to every consummate detail, including dismissing Jewish members of the staff, and it is with great regret that Stevens now finds that his entire professional excellence has been a lie because he has been serving a Fascist and Nazi sympathizer which Britain now unreservedly condemns.

Steven's entire problem is his over-inhabitation of the professional sphere: Lesser butlers will abandon their professional being for the private one at the least provocation. For such persons, being a butler is playing a pantomime role, a small push, a slight stumble, and the façade will drop off to reveal the actor underneath. The great butlers are great by virtue of their ability to inhabit their professional role and inhabit it to the utmost, they will not be shaken out by external events, however surprising, alarming or vexing. They wear professionalism as a decent gentleman will wear his suit: he will not let ruffians or circumstance tear it off him in a public gaze, he will discard it when, and only when, he wills to do so, and this will be when he is entirely alone. (Ishiguro 1989: 42-43)

Indeed, Stevens has successfully repressed his personal and private self so much that he failed to be by the side of his dying father as he was busy attending to one of Lord Darlington's conferences, and he has forgone all possibility of romance with Miss Kenton because he was too busy attending to one of Darlington's political conferences and ignored her when she made a last ditch attempt to lure him away from his public persona by telling Stevens she was getting married in the hope that Stevens would finally protest and admit his feelings for her.

Lord Darlington wasn't a bad man. He wasn't a bad man at all. And at least he had the privilege of being able to say at the end of his life that he made his own mistakes. His lordship was a courageous man. He chose a certain path in life, it proved to be a misguided one, but there, he chose it, he can say that at least. As for myself, I cannot even claim that. You see, I trusted. I trusted in his lordship's wisdom. All those years I served him, I trusted I was doing something worthwhile, I can't even say I made my own mistakes. Really, one has to ask oneself- what dignity is there in that? (Ishiguro 1989: 243)

Stevens thought that there was dignity in proving oneself to be professionally excellent but finds at the end of his life he has lived out a lie because he has been serving something who is now disregarded and indeed looked upon with contempt because he was a political traitor and a Nazi sympathizer. Hence Stevens' life of professional dignity and performing his butler's role to perfection now proves to be a sham, a lie and a façade. Throughout the narrative Stevens has been lying to himself and rationalizing to himself that his life of professional excellence at the expense of his private life was something to be proud of but towards the end, when he finds that he has irrevocably lost Miss Kenton and there is no redemption for him at the end of his life, he finds that he can only look forward to the remains of the day- to be lived out with regret because he has spent his entire life living out a lie and performing Lord Darlington's whims and fancies including the termination of the Jewish members of the staff but now Stevens has to face the deflating fact that Darlington was a British traitor and a Nazi sympathizer and in no way honored among his fellow countrymen in Britain.

Stevens represses his private persona so perfectly that all attempts at romance with him by Miss Kenton are fought off resolutely during his time at Darlington hall, to the result that she marries a man she does not love and was unhappy for a large part of her life but has come to

terms with it and has come to love the man she married. An example of one of their romantic sparring scenes is this:

She reached forward and began gently to release the volume from my grasp. I judged it best to look away while she did so, but with her person positioned so closely, this could only be achieved by the twisting of my head away at a somewhat unnatural angle. Miss Kenton continued very gently to prise the book away, practically one finger at a time. The process seemed to take a very long time – throughout which I managed to maintain my posture- until I finally heard her say: “Good gracious, Mr Stevens, it isn’t anything scandalous at all. Just a sentimental love story.” (Ishiguro 1989: 167)

Hence Stevens deflects Miss Kenton’s romantic and sexual advances by making the excuse that he was reading the book merely to improve his English language and dismisses Miss Kenton from his sanctuary, but in doing so he also dismisses the one person who could have made his Darlington Hall experience worthwhile – the one woman he truly loved but only comes to admit this feeling to himself towards his twilight years when Miss Kenton has been married for over 20 years and his memory of their romance which could have been is now a faded memory to be swept under the carpet as Miss Kenton admits she has come to love the man she once did not love when she got married. Hence Stevens has to admit to himself at the end of the narrative that his entire life has been a lie, a deception, a sham- serving a cause which is now viewed derogatively as a Nazi sympathizer and missing out on his father’s death as well as his possible romance with Miss Kenton which is now irretrievable lost as a consequence of his striving for excellence professionally to the suppression of his private persona- only to find at the end of his life that the dignity he strove for is a hollow lie now his master is shown to be a Nazi sympathizer and the people he has overlooked in performing his professional duties to perfection- his father and Miss Kenton are irrevocably lost. *Remains of the day* is thus a study in loss, pain and regret at not doing the opposite which is to seize the day, *Carpe diem* and make the most of life’s opportunities when they are actually present.

Workcited:

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